

RBI opens Rs 50,000 cr liquidity window for mutual funds

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

SOOTHING THE frayed nerves of the investor community, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Monday announced a special liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore to bail out mutual funds hit by the turmoil in the debt fund segment, that led to the closure of six credit risk funds by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund.

Under the special liquidity facility for mutual funds (SLF-MF), the RBI will conduct repo (repurchase agreement) operations of 90 days tenor at the fixed repo rate of 4.40 per cent for banks. Funds availed under the SLF-MF will be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs.

A repurchase agreement (repo) is a short-term agreement to sell securities to buy them back at a later date. The one selling the repo (banks) is effectively borrowing and the other party (the RBI) is lending.

The RBI's liquidity offer is expected to bring some degree of comfort in the debt market which has been under huge redemption pressure, especially in the credit risk fund category which has assets of over Rs 55,000 crore. Faced with huge redemptions, Franklin Templeton had closed six credit schemes, effectively locking up Rs 28,000 crore of investors' money last week.

The whole debt segment had witnessed outflows of Rs 1.94 lakh crore in March.

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EXPLAINED MFs get liquidity, confidence

THE LIQUIDITY window will help MFs meet any redemption pressure on debt schemes in a troubled market situation that is devoid of liquidity and investor confidence after the Franklin Templeton abrupt closure of schemes. The liquidity window can create buyers for lower rated debt securities and help fund houses honour redemptions avoiding a spill over.

POST-MAY 3 ROADMAP

PM underlines the twin challenge: restarting economy, fighting Covid



Migrant workers wait for their medical check-up at a quarantine centre in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, Monday. Ritesh Shukla

'Lockdown has saved thousands of lives... have to be brave and bring in reforms... danger of virus far from over'

LIZ MATHEW, ABANTIKA GHOSH & DIPANKAR GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

THE LOCKDOWN is set to continue in red zones and other areas of concern beyond May 3. Curbs would be stricter in states with a big spike in cases. And, with infections likely to peak again in June-July, a balance should be struck between restarting the economy and containing the COVID-19 spread.

With a week left in the second phase of the extended lockdown, these are some of the key takeaways from Monday's videoconference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Ministers, sources told



At the videoconference with CMs, Monday. PTI

The *Indian Express*. It was the fourth such meeting since March 22, two days before the lockdown was first imposed.

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attending the conference for the first time, sources said the Prime Minister

assured that the state of the economy is good and there is no need to panic. "We have to give importance to the economy as well as continue the fight against COVID-19... We have to be brave and bring in reforms that touch

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Bengal wants Centre to clear air on lockdown, states guarded on lifting it

ATRI MITRA, MANOJ CG & SANTOSH SINGH
KOLKATA, NEW DELHI, PATNA, APRIL 27

MOST STATES on Monday indicated at the videoconference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that they wanted the lockdown to continue in some form post-May 3, while adding that they would follow the Centre's lead on the matter.

West Bengal accused the Centre of sending mixed signals with the relaxation of some curbs, while Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, facing the prospect of hundreds of migrant labour-



ers returning, asked it to specify guidelines in this regard.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee hit out at the Central government for "conflicting statements" on reopening of shops and enforcement of the stay-home order.

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Amid Covid uncertainty, Arvind Subramanian at Express e-Adda today

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27



Former Chief Economic Advisor



AS COVID-19 pushes the economy into a recession, policy makers are struggling to balance the imperatives of public health and economic well-being. To discuss the contours of a prudent yet compassionate macro-economic policy framework, *The Indian Express* will host its first online Express Adda on Tuesday, with former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian.

He will be in conversation with Harish Damodaran, National Editor, and P Vaidyanathan Iyer, Executive Editor (National Affairs).

Subramanian would likely reflect on the immediate and

medium-term challenges facing the economy, the policy options before leaders, and the trade-offs there in. He has had first-hand experience with ideating and

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Probe against 3 I-T officers for report 'contrary to policies'

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

TERMING A report titled FORCE (Fiscal Options & Response to COVID-19 Epidemic) prepared by 50 young IRS officers as a position "contrary to current policies of government", the Centre on Monday initiated a formal inquiry against three senior Income Tax officers.

Among other measures, the report had advocated a hike in income tax rate to 40 per cent for those earning over Rs 1 crore a year for a limited period of time, levy of a 4 per cent COVID-19 cess on taxable income over Rs 10 lakh, and re-introduction

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Not hostage to Govt, says SC, seeks its response on migrant workers in a week

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

MAKING CLEAR that "this institution is not hostage to the government", the Supreme Court Monday gave the Centre a week to respond to a prayer for inter-state movement of migrant workers stranded due to the nationwide lockdown.

The bench of Justices N V Ramana, S K Kaul and B R Gavai asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to inform it about the steps being taken in this regard.

"We are only asking if there is any proposal regarding this," Justice Kaul observed after the Solicitor General said the government was seized of the emerging situation and would examine

concerns raised in the plea.

Mehta said the Centre was consulting the states on the issues being faced by the migrant workers. He urged the court to record his statement instead of issuing any direction.

The bench objected to a tweet by advocate Prashant Bhusan — he was appearing for petitioner Jagdeep Chhokar — in which he targeted the functioning of the court.

"You don't have faith in us. How can we hear you?... An order can always be criticised... You say that you are with this institution for more than 30 years. You know some orders are favourable, some are not. You should not have said such things... This institution is not

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY UNNY



THE WORLD

BORIS BACK AT WORK, WARNS AGAINST EASING CURBS TOO SOON

IN US, CONFLICTING MESSAGES STOKED CONFUSION PAGE 8

Justice can be done without robes or congregation: CJI on lockdown lesson

Decision on summer vacation after a panel submits report: Justice Bobde

SEEMA CHISHTI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

THE SUPREME Court was hoping to start tapping artificial intelligence to reform its processes in March but then came COVID-19 and, as it has done across the board, the outbreak pushed all plans to the backburner and has forced a rethink in the judiciary as well. In an interview at his office in his residence, Chief Justice of India Justice S A Bobde spoke to *The Indian Express* on his vision for the Court in the post-COVID world.



THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW

WITH
JUSTICE S A BOBDE
CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

This is the time of webcasts and hearings... Could this have been the opportunity for making the Court much more open?

That is a wider issue, whether to televise Court proceedings or not. That needs to be seen as to which case should be televised, and those important hearings are not taking place, we are not dealing with it, we are currently in fire-fighting mode, new technology — that is, old actions in a new way.

To what extent has the COVID effect led to a decline in Court activity?

In January this year, there were up to 205 filings per day and a total of 4,108 for the month. In April, the e-filing is just

305 so far (until April 26). That gives you some idea of the extent of the impact of COVID.

What is the Supreme Court doing at a time when there are major challenges to right to livelihood, migrant populations, medical care as well as threats to right to life, Article 21, which the Court has so well-defined?

It is a huge challenge and I am not sure we can do it only by reading opposing affidavits in Court.

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Delhi Police report on migrant camps: Fans not working, bad food



Food being distributed to children of migrant labourers at a flyover construction site in East Delhi Monday. Abhinav Saha

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

"FANS NOT working and no power back-up; sanitisation of toilets rarely done; most migrants want to leave as their families cannot survive; rude behaviour of civil defence staff; food quality not good; no hand wash and sanitisers; foul smell in toilets; water supply in the toilets only between 7 am and 11 am; one soap for bathing and no detergent for washing clothes; mosquito bites."

These are among key observations made by 10 Delhi Police station house officers (SHOs), who were tasked to prepare a report on shelter homes for migrants in Central Delhi. The problems were

flagged by personnel from Civil Lines police station, which surveyed two shelters at Majnu ka Tilla and the posh Civil Lines. More than 15 shelter homes were assessed by the police.

The report was forwarded by DCP (North) Monika Bhardwaj to Deputy Commissioner (Central) Nidhi Shrivastava on April 22. The Central District administration directed officials to take remedial action based on the report within 24 hours.

DCP Bharadwaj said that after police observed a few problems at the centres, SHOs in the district were asked to file reports from their jurisdiction. Bharadwaj then compiled the analysis and sent it to the DM so the government could take necessary action.

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'WE CAN GIVE EMPLOYMENT TO 15 LAKH PEOPLE'

YOGI ADITYANATH
CHIEF MINISTER OF UTTAR PRADESH

WEST BENGAL

NEW CABINET PANEL TO DEAL WITH CRISIS
PAGE 3

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

IN NIRMAN Bhawan, which houses the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a lounge on the first floor, where joint secretary-level and above officers would gather to celebrate birthdays, has been functioning as a COVID-19 "war room" for about a month-and-a-half now.

This is where about 30-odd people — including doctors, data analysts, information communication technology specialists and

public health professionals from various agencies — have been collecting and analysing granular data from the states to identify the gaps, or forecast a sudden surge in cases and warn the states to take action accordingly.

They have been divided into five teams, each tracking different sets of data, all projected onto five giant screens in the war room. One team tracks the growth of cases and deaths, doubling time and identifies hotspots.

Another team keeps a watch on the availability of infrastructure, down to the district level.

A third team looks at future



A Central team at a control room in Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune. Express

projections to assess the state-level preparedness, and shares this data with the states every day. "For example if there is a facility or a district where there is no assigned ventilator, we flag that to the state. We take inputs from states, analyse them and give them feedback," said a team member.

A fourth group looks at the projections to see where the numbers are headed; and the last team tracks global trends vis-a-vis India, and sets deliverable goals for the states.

There is also a dashboard tracking social media, identify-

ing fake news and information that needs to be relayed to the states among other things.

Explaining their work, a member of the team that tracks hotspots said: "Our job is basically to look at data and give inputs to the states or the ministry, as the case may be, so that they are prepared for the future. That is why we work with doubling time, rather than looking at the number of fresh cases each day, to detect a trend. When you work on doubling time, you can foretell a surge before it happens."

A screen shows all the emerging hotspots like

Ahmedabad and Indore as well as the existing ones like Mumbai, Pune and Delhi. And at the click of a mouse, all the relevant data, including the number of cases, deaths and doubling time, come up on the screen. "All the inputs go straight to the secretary," said an official.

This was where the list of hotspots, that Health Secretary Preeti Sudan shared with states earlier this month, originated.

A committee room on the second floor has been converted into a second war room for Health Ministry officials, to relay feedback to states on a daily,

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CLASSICAL DANCERS BRINGING AWARENESS THROUGH ONLINE PERFORMANCES
Several Indian classical dance exponents are attempting to use the current times as their theme while creating choreographic movements.



VIDEO OF THE DAY
DELHI COPS DEPLOY 'CORONA MEN'
Volunteers on roads donning corona helmets to scare people



FULL COVERAGE
MANIPUR SHOWS THE WAY TO DISTRIBUTE
People walk past stalls taking what they need at a safe distance

EXPRESS AUDIO

Why Franklin Templeton shut multiple funds

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode 3 Things, we look at why a major mutual fund house shut a bunch of schemes and why the RBI has got involved

FROM PAGE ONE

Bengal

Calling on the Central government to clarify the nature of lockdown exemptions, she said the state would decide the next course within a couple of days, after taking into account various factors. The soon-to-be-announced strategy will be applicable till May 21, according to her.

"The Centre is making conflicting statements on lockdown. There is no clarity. We are in favour of the lockdown. But the Centre, on one hand, emphasises enforcement of the lockdown, and on the other, orders shops to reopen. If you reopen shops, how would you enforce lockdown? I think the Centre should come out with a clarification," Banerjee said during a press conference after attending meeting via video-conferencing with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and her counterparts from other states. The meeting was aimed to reach a consensus over the next course of action against the country's fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"Going by prime minister's speech, it was clear that this (the lockdown) will continue. So, we have decided to give some relaxations to green and orange zones after 48 hours. In red zones, strict enforcement of lockdown will continue." The Central government has divided areas into three zones - red, orange and green - in the order of high to less COVID-19 vulnerability.

The chief minister said the relaxations policy would be dynamic depending on the ever-changing nature of zones. "An orange zone may turn into red zone or red into green zone. We will decide accordingly."

She alleged that many chief ministers, like her, were not allowed to speak in the meeting. "Amra boba hoe tin ghonta boshe chhilaam. (We were sitting there silent for three hours)," the chief minister said.

"We are getting bhashan (speech) in ration. We are spending so much on fighting COVID-19. Where will this money come from? It involves expenses and we are a poor government," said she, whose ties with the Central government have been frosty over several issues, said. The latest dispute is over the Centre's decision to send two Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCTs) to the state for reviewing its COVID-19 preparedness.

Banerjee said had she been given a chance she would have raised several questions, including the need to send two central teams to Bengal.

"Should our officers do their job or appear in front of the central team? You may come here to give us suggestion but don't come here to criticise us. Sorry, this is not the time to do that," she said.

The chief minister said the government would allow home delivery of all non-essential goods with immediate effect. On quarantine facilities, she said people with coronavirus symptoms can stay home if they can adhere to isolation rules. In the evening, the state government in a notification said, "Primary/secondary contacts who have reasonable living spaces... with necessary advice on social and physical distancing." It also said such people's health would be regularly checked.

The PM, one Chief Minister said, did not respond to demands

for an economic package.

"The mood was in favour of continuing the lockdown with concessions," Puducherry CM V Narayanasamy said, while telling The Indian Express that Modi praised Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot for his handling of the coronavirus issue.

Again, Andhra Pradesh was among the few states to seek relaxation. Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy said that with 80% of the state a virus-free "green zone", this may be considered. However, Jagan did not say if the state would lift restrictions after May 3. In a televised address later in the day, the CM said that with a vaccine not likely for a year, developing herd immunity was the only option.

Maharashtra, the state with the most coronavirus numbers, indicated that it could continue the lockdown.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar sought directions on the issue of its students stuck in Kota and other places, as well as on migrant labourers, while leaving a decision on extension of the lockdown to the Centre. Facing flak for not bringing back students from Kota, he said unless there was a direction from the Centre, it amounted to violation of the curbs.

On whether the lockdown should go on after May 3, Nitish said, "Experts should be consulted. Bihar will abide by whatever decision the Centre takes." It also expressed concern over people returning to the state without screening.

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik sought framing of a national SOP for movement of people stranded across the country. The state estimates that over five lakh of its workers are stranded in different parts of the country.

Narayanasamy, who raised the issue of students stuck abroad, said the PM made a "passing remark" saying the migrant labour issue has to be considered, but did not offer any solution.

"The Chief Ministers were unanimous in telling the PM that the way in which the coronavirus cases are increasing, there should be a cautious approach and the PM has to take a call on the basis of observations by CMs. Most of the BJP-ruled CMs said the lockdown should continue and economic activity should be slowly started," he said.

Narayanasamy said he was among the CMs who sought an economic package, as well as the states' share of GST revenues. "The PM did not respond to that directly. He praised state governments for doing a Herculean task."

He praised the Rajasthan CM for his handling of the coronavirus issue. "The CM said,

According to him, the PM said, "Every state has some party in power, which realises that it has a chance to take the country forward. Hamein reform bhi karna hai. Agar reform karne ki disha mein rajya initiative leta hai, aap dekhiye yeh sanka ko hum bohot bad aave main palat sakte hain. Main Ashok Gehlotji ko badhai dunga. Unhone kai initiative liye. Unhone labour ke liye samay seema ki bi badotri ki hai. Theek hai alochana thodi hue hogi, lekin Rajasthan ne disha dikhai hai (We have to carry out reforms. If a state takes an initiative for reform, we can turn this crisis into a big opportunity. I want to congratulate Ashok Gehlot. He has taken many initiatives. He has increased the time limit for labourers as well. There must have some criticism, but Rajasthan has shown the way)"

(With inputs from Kolkata, Ranchi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, Guwahati, Bhopal, Mumbai)

CJI Bobde

We have asked the government to report to us on the actions they are taking in all this: medical, nutritional, regarding shelter and

PM underlines the twin challenges

the lives of common citizens," Modi said. On their part, many states suggested that the lockdown should continue with curbs being eased in green zones.

Gujarat, which has recorded 3,548 cases so far, sought a gradual and phased exit from the lockdown. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik proposed an extension by another month from May 3, and Meghalaya's Conrad Sangma wanted the curbs "to continue with relaxation on activities in green zones or non-COVID-affected districts".

Sources said almost all the states were of the opinion that restrictions on inter-state transportation, including by air and rail, should continue. Kerala submitted that it wanted to continue restrictions on inter-district and inter-state transport till May 15.

"Bihar made the point strongly that while the Disaster Management Act does not allow travelling from one place to another, one state is getting children from Kota, another is moving its migrant labour," a senior state functionary, who attended the meeting, said in a reference to UP and MP.

Highlighting the importance of strictly enforcing guidelines in hotspots or red zone areas, the Prime Minister asked the states to work to-

wards converting the red zones into orange zones and thereafter to green zones. Sources said the modalities of an exit strategy for green zones would be announced closer to May 3.

Modi underlined that the lockdown has yielded positive results as the country has managed to save thousands of lives in the past one-and-a-half months. Pointing out that India's population is comparable to that of the combined population of several countries, Modi said the country has been able to protect its people because of timely measures taken.

"He, however, forewarned that the danger of the virus is far from over and constant vigilance is of paramount importance," an official note released after the videoconference stated.

Sources quoted the Prime Minister as saying that he has learnt from experts that COVID-19 cases could peak again in June-July. "They feel that with the lockdown, the spike may be avoided for April-May, but when the lockdown is lifted in some places, it may spike in June," sources said.

Referring to the Prime Minister's remarks, the official note said: "He said that as per experts, the impact of coronavirus will remain visible in the coming months. Reiterating

the mantra of do gaz ki doori (maintaining a 2-metre distance), he said that masks and face covers will become part of our lives in the days ahead."

Modi also signalled that restrictions could be voluntary, too. "...Under the circumstances, everyone's aim must be rapid responses. He pointed out that many people are self-declaring whether they have cough and cold or symptoms, and that this is a welcome sign," the note said.

According to sources, states with a number of COVID-free districts, including from the Northeast, wanted some restrictions to be eased so that economic activities could be revived. Most states also favoured opening up zero-case districts (283 so far), limited relaxations in orange zones, and strict curbs in red zones with containment areas.

They suggested that whenever there is a fresh case in a green zone, or when an orange zone slips into red, there should be a swift crackdown in terms of restrictions and contact-tracing operations. According to the Health Ministry, orange zones are areas that have reported no case in 14 days and while green refers to those with no fresh case in 28 days.

The videoconference came on a day when 1,463 new cases were recorded in the last 24

hours, taking the total count to 28,380. The country, however, also recorded 60 deaths, the highest toll so far in a single day, taking the total number of fatalities to 886.

In Monday's meeting, the chief ministers of nine states - Meghalaya, Mizoram, Puducherry, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana - got a chance to speak. Others were given the option of either attending the meeting themselves or assigning the respective chief secretary or a state minister. Kerala, for instance, deputed its chief secretary while submitting its suggestions in writing.

On the other issues that came up, sources said while Kerala wanted Indians from overseas to be brought back, Modi said it has to be done keeping in mind that their families are not under any risk.

Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga told The Indian Express that he raised concerns about the porous international borders that the state shares with Myanmar and Bangladesh. "We only have one COVID-19 patient who is recovering... But we are concerned about sharing our borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, both of which are hotspots," he said.

(With Esha Roy)

RBI opens Rs 50,000 cr liquidity window

Mutual fund experts said the RBI move on pumping liquidity will boost investor confidence in the sector. "It's a good confidence building measure taken by the RBI. To ensure continued confidence of the investors in the MF industry as also normal functioning of the markets. The MF industry continues to be on sound footing both on portfolio

quality as also on the liquidity front despite an isolated incident in these challenging times," said Nilesh Shah, Chairman, Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

This is the third time the RBI is opening the liquidity window for the financial sector players in the last 15 years. The RBI had opened special liquidity repo window for mutual

funds in October 2008 (at the time of the global financial crisis) and again in July 2013, when returns on debt mutual funds dropped sharply after the rupee fell significantly against dollar and mutual funds feared redemption pressure. However, when the IL&FS fiasco hit the financial sector two years ago, the RBI did not approve a Finance Ministry

proposal to open up a special liquidity window for NBFCs.

On Monday, the RBI said banks can extend loans to mutual funds and undertake outright purchase of and repo against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial papers (CPs), debentures and certificates of Deposit (CDs) held by MFs.

transportation and whether transportation is consistent with social distancing norms. We have made provisions for states for the release of prisoners, enabled the freeing of those held in detention centres in Assam.

A monitoring committee or oversight by the Supreme Court could help?

Officers, by the very nature of their jobs are present in each of the 700 plus districts. The Court cannot monitor activities of all officers in districts. We can certainly ask and have asked government what is being done and they have reported steps they are taking, there is no reason to find fault.

There are a large number of important cases of habeas corpus in Jammu and Kashmir, electoral bonds, digital privacy and other rights and other Constitutional matters. When will they be heard?

These and so many other matters are there. I cannot say when they will be heard but we will certainly hear them.

Habeas Corpus should be the most urgent petition?

On Habeas and others, we are conscious of the nature of these petitions and they will be decided.

Will there be a summer vacation this year?

That is yet to be decided. The Committee in the Court that is looking at this (consisting of Justices R Nariman, UU Lalit, AM Khanwilkar and L Nageswara Rao) will submit its report to me at the end of the lockdown and in

any case the full court has to decide on this. We are mandated to work 210 days in every calendar year.

What is your vision of the Judiciary in the post-Covid world?

The entire fraternity of judges and lawyers would have realised what is essential to the judicial process and what is not. There would have been the realisation that there needs to be a different emphasis for a more just society and that problems can be addressed in many ways other than the traditional ones.

Justice can be equally done without robes or congregation. This was always so but now people would have experienced it. The older generation of lawyers and judges would undoubtedly feel a little uncomfortable with the new introductions of features like video-conferencing, e-filing and the absence of the usual kind of an "audience." One senior advocate has remarked that "we will have learnt not to interrupt our opponents" which is how it should be in any way.

I think the litigating public, judges and lawyers would have realised that such large congregations are not necessary in the administration of justice. Maybe the importance of the brief, precise argument, oral or written, would have been established.

So also, the pleadings. The transmission of records from one court to another would be far more efficient.

In January 2020, from district and taluka courts to high courts, there were 26.84 lakh pages that were transmitted! Then there is

paper work from high courts to the Supreme Court. So that is the volume currently, then is the matter of speed. With digital keeping, that is also speeded up, as the moment an appeal is filed, from a district court, the judgment to a high court, the entire record can be transmitted by the High Court over the Net.

The digitisation of records, though we are some distance from achieving it as this crisis of Covid erupted, but if this happens in each of the 17,500 district courts, of course, the problem of authentication of these digital records is there, to prevent tampering. We are looking at that but, hopefully, this digital culture would strike roots. Then this would be the basis for the Artificial Intelligence (AI) which we can then introduce. It will be most effective when it has electronic data to work on. We were meant to launch AI in March but could not do so. An algorithm has enormous speed. 10 lakh words per second!

The most important thing is that there is a shift in consciousness, the legal community during the lockdown has been forced to deal with the electronic medium and it is conscious of the importance of electronic transmission, making submissions, records can also be transmitted by advocates via emails and WhatsApp to the Registry. If email fails then WhatsApp is the 'stand-by' mode.

What is the relationship between the Judiciary and the Executive, and other pillars in a democracy, as this has been discussed recently.

It is a Constitutional relation-

ship, defined by the Constitution of India. The Judiciary has primacy in the judicial field, the Legislature in its field and the Executive in its field.

So you do not think it is important for the Judiciary to 'ease' the path of the Executive?

There is a well-known term called "judicial review" which is a power the Courts have, as it is the Judiciary which has to decide if their (Executive's) actions are in accordance with the Constitution.

Anything else you may wish to say?

(Smiles) - Stay Safe.

Adda today

framing key structural reforms - from introduction of Goods and Services Tax to the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme - during his term as CEA in the Ministry of Finance.

A non-resident Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and a Visiting Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Subramanian's presence couldn't have been more timely as the government discusses a fresh fiscal relief package for the economy and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) continues with a series of measures to inject liquidity into the financial system.

The Express Adda is a series of informal interactions organised by The Indian Express Group and features those at the centre of change. Among the recent guests were Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman, Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, and Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian.

SC on migrants

Justice Kaul told Bhusan after Mehta drew the bench's attention to the tweet.

Bhusan said: "I understand, Sir. This is not lack of faith in the institution."

"Don't try to project that you are the only concerned person in the country," Mehta intervened.

"I have never said that I have no faith in this institution," Bhusan said, adding "if the objection is to me, I will withdraw. Some other lawyer will appear".

"Why should we ask you to withdraw?" Justice Kaul asked.

"I only expressed my views. Some retired judges are also saying the same thing," Bhusan said.

"We also have some views. So what?" countered Justice Kaul.

Bhusan said the migrant workers have only a day's ration and are in a desperate situation. "Why people who have tested negative can't go to their respective homes, I don't understand," he said, adding that this violates their fundamental right.

The court then pointed to reports about some states taking steps to address this.

Bhusan replied that the steps were only for students. He also cited news reports which said 96% of the workers are not getting wages, and have very little food. Mehta said the report was wrong.

Bhusan said the government was not enforcing the fundamental rights of the people and, therefore, he was pleading to this court to enforce their fundamental rights. "This is the institution in which one has a lot of faith," he said.

Justice Gavi pointed out that he had come across reports that the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister was saying he will bring back 15 lakh labourers.

Bhusan replied that this will clash with the Centre's orders. He said it seemed as if the Centre had shut its eyes.

Intervening, Mehta said the government was very concerned and was helping the migrant workers. He said the government was consulting states on how many have to be transported to their states and how many have to be given help and what kind of help. "We are taking all kind of steps," he said.

Justice Kaul asked Mehta "are you ready to examine this".

The SG replied that the government was examining everything. "Brilliant ideas of the petitioner are not required," he said.

"So, you are in consultation with states?" Justice Kaul asked. "Many things are being discussed," Mehta said, assuring the court all points raised by the petitioner will be examined by the government.

Taking a dig at Bhusan, Mehta said, "every time Mr Bhusan loses, he goes to the lawns and says this is a black day. You cannot run government as a PIL petitioner."

He also raised questions on the data cited by Bhusan to make his claim about migrant workers not being paid. He sought two weeks to reply, but the court granted him one week.

Delhi camps

When contacted, District Magistrate, Central, Nidhi Shrivastava said a copy of the report "has been sent to all the sub-divisional magistrates to rectify the shortcomings".

According to the report, a survey of three shelter homes by the staff of Lahori Gate police station in their area revealed that there were "no proper arrangements of drinking water" and no facilities such as reverse osmosis (RO) to serve treated water to the inmates. "No proper arrangement for food was noticed. It was found

that food was being served twice a day but quality was not satisfactory. Therefore people roam around for better food. No gap, social distance is found between the beds/mattresses fixed for homeless persons. No arrangement for sanitisation or hand wash," the report states.

It also emerged during the police survey that many homeless persons have moved out of the shelters after the lockdown was announced. "They were forced to leave the homes and that is creating a lot of chaos in the adjoining areas," states the police report.

There are 223 permanent shelter homes for the homeless in Delhi. Additionally, 111 government facilities, mostly school buildings, have been notified as shelter homes to house migrants stuck in the city due to the lockdown. These additional spaces are housing over 10,000 people, while the daily occupancy of the permanent ones stands at around 7,000. For instance, the report states that in shelter number 11, near Old Delhi Railway Station, around 350 homeless persons used to stay. After the lockdown, the number has come down to 156. According to official data, on April 26, 172 people stayed in the shelter.

The Kotwali and Kashmir Gate police stations submitted that there are no shortcomings in shelters falling under their jurisdiction. The report from Sadar Bazar police station states that at the shelter home at Motia Khan, "social distancing is not being maintained due to overcrowding as 412 persons are staying. It needs sanitisation and cleaning".

3 I-T officers

of wealth tax for individuals with net worth of Rs 5 crore and more.

Officials in the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) officials said the Board issued chargesheets to the three officers under Rule 14 of Central Civil Services (Classification, Control & Appeal) Rules, 1965 for violation of conduct rules. The three senior I-T officers have been divested of their current responsibilities. No action was, however, taken against the young officers who had written the report, they said.

The three officers against whom action has been initiated, with the approval of the President of India, are: Prashant Bhusan (1988 batch), General Secretary of IRS Association, Sanjay Bahadur (1989 batch), Principal Director (Investigation), North East Region and Prakash Dubey (2001 batch), Director, DoPT and Joint Secretary, IRS Association.

The statement of articles of charges framed against these officers said the officers had "without any authority guided preparation of document titled FORCE in which a position contrary to current policies of government on various matters related to income tax, like tax slabs, incidence of tax, administration and collection of tax has been taken."

"This document, having been unauthorisedly released in the public domain, has created confusion and uncertainty with respect to the policy of government with respect to income tax which can have an adverse impact on economy, especially during this time when country is battling a pandemic and the government is keen to ensure a stable tax regime," it said.

It further said that unauthorised preparation and release of such a document for wide dissemination also "amounts to criticism of government policies" by senior tax officers thereby "causing avoidable embarrassment to the government".

In a statement earlier in the day, CBDT said it had never asked the IRS Association to prepare such a report and that "necessary inquiry" would be conducted.

FULL REPORTS ON www.indianexpress.com

3 THE OUTBREAK WEST BENGAL

CORONA WATCH



A doctor donates blood at Dr R Ahmed Dental College and Hospital in Kolkata on Monday. Around 30 doctors and students took part in the drive.
Partha Paul

KOLKATA 2nd doctor who tested +ve dies

Kolkata: A day after a coronavirus positive doctor, posted as Assistant Director of Health Services in the state government, passed away, another COVID infected doctor died on Monday. Sixty-nine-year-old Sisir Mondol was a senior orthopaedic surgeon of a private hospital of south Kolkata. A resident of Ballygunge, the doctor died in a private hospital at Salt Lake around 9.15 pm. He was admitted to the hospital with breathlessness and cough on April 14 and put on ventilator three days later. After he tested positive, one floor of a private hospital and a nursing home - where he used to practise - were closed.

ENS

Govt forms Cabinet panel to deal with crisis

Move comes after Centre's dim view of state's handling of outbreak; 47 cases in last 24 hours, active cases rise to 504

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 27

FOLLOWING REPEATED criticism from the Centre about its handling of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the state government on Monday set up a Cabinet Committee under the leadership of Finance Minister Amit Mitra to deal with the crisis.

This is the third high-level committee formed by the government to deal with the crisis. The government had earlier formed a death audit committee headed by former Director of Health Services Biswa Ranjan Satpathy, and a Global Advisory Committee, one of whose members is economist and Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee.

Kolkata Mayor and Urban Development Minister Firhad Hakim, Education Minister Partha Chatterjee, Minister of State for Health Chandrima Bhattacharya are the other ministers in the Cabinet panel. The administrative officials in the committee are Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha, Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay, Health Secretary Bibek Kumar, and IAS officer PB Salim.

"I will look after this committee from time to time, but I also have other responsibilities, and we now understand that this [crisis] will go on for long. So, to divide responsibility we constituted this committee. They will decide what we should do to fight against coronavirus."

The government also announced the formation of three task forces. The one looking into

THREE BENGAL ZONES

RED ZONE DISTRICTS

1. Kolkata
2. North 24 Parganas
3. Howrah
4. Purba Medinipur

GREEN ZONE DISTRICTS

1. Alipurduar
2. Cooch Behar
3. Uttar Dinajpur
4. Dakshin Dinajpur
5. Birbhum
6. Bankura
7. Purulia
8. Jhargram

ORANGE ZONE DISTRICTS

1. South 24 Parganas
2. Hooghly
3. Paschim Medinipur
4. Nadia
5. Purba Bardhaman
6. Kalimpong
7. Paschim Bardhaman
8. Jalpaiguri
9. Darjeeling
10. Murshidabad
11. Malda



the overall lockdown situation will be led by Rajiva Sinha. Alapan Bandyopadhyay will lead the enforcement task force, while Finance Secretary HK Dwivedi will head the group that will deal with the financial implications of the restrictions.

These latest steps from the government came on a day 47 new positive COVID-19 cases were reported. Counting the four people discharged after recovering, the number of active cases at present is 504.

"Yesterday [Sunday], total active cases was 461. Today this tally jumped to 504, and total discharged persons jumped to 109," said Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha, adding the death toll was 20. According to the latest data on the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website, West Bengal has reported 649 confirmed cases till date, and 105 patients have been discharged. This takes the number of active

cases to 544.

Among the people who have tested positive in the last three days are five employees of the School of Tropical Medicine, which is one of the centres testing samples for COVID-19. One of the staffers is a pharmacist, two are technicians, and the other two are housekeepers.

The Chief Secretary said health authorities had tested 1,150 samples since Sunday, taking the total number of specimens examined to 12,043. Till date, 18,629 have been placed in home surveillance, while 5,447 people have been isolated in hospitals, Sinha added.

The Chief Secretary said the situation in many of the contaminated areas, categorised as red zones, had improved over the fortnight.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh High Commission said it has arranged flights for its citizens stuck in India.

STATE COUNT

504 ACTIVE CASES
20 DEATHS

109 RECOVERED

12,043 SAMPLES TESTED TILL APRIL 27

Four families in Nadia put under home quarantine

Haringhata (Nadia): Authorities of Nadia district on Monday put members of four families of a village here in "home quarantine" as they came in contact with a COVID-19 patient, and sealed three local markets surrounding the rural hamlet, an official said.

The family members, including a civic volunteer of the local police station, came in contact with a person from neighbouring North 24 Parganas district, when he had visited the Dhansara village to meet his in-laws before he tested positive for coronavirus.

The patient, a resident of Ashoknagar area in North 24 Parganas, is undergoing treatment in a hospital.



KEEPING HOUSE IN ORDER: People kept at a quarantine centre at New Town in Kolkata. Partha Paul

CM has habit of complaining: BJP after Modi meet

Kolkata: Hours after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she was not allowed to speak in the video conference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and her counterparts from other states, the state BJP said she had a "habit of complaining" instead of working for people.

State BJP general secretary Raju Banerjee told The Indian Express: "This is nothing new. Mamata Banerjee has a habit of complaining. It was a video conference between Modi ji and other chief ministers. If all of them want to speak then the Centre's directives cannot be communicated. If Mamata Banerjee wanted to speak to Modi ji then she can talk to him over phone on any given day. She can also write a letter to him. Modi ji is available 24 hours. This is nothing but unnecessary drama," said Banerjee.

Earlier, the chief minister alleged that many CMs, including her, were not allowed to speak. "We were sitting there silent for three hours," she claimed.

ENS

CLASS APART

Students open heart and purse strings to assist distressed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 27

STUDENTS AND alumni of three iconic educational institutions in the city have come forward to help people in distress because of the lockdown imposed to contain the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

The students, alumni and teachers of Presidency University have started a crowdfunding initiative to raise money for university workers not directly on the institution's payroll. They are sending canteen workers, gardeners, vendors, and other staff Rs 1,000 every week.

"It is a collective effort which has been started by current students, teachers and university alumni. We have raised money to help these daily wage earners who are not getting any money because of no work due to the lockdown. So far, about 15 such workers have received the weekly money," said Sayan Chakraborty, a second-year postgraduate student. The money has been distributed for the last three weeks. Boarders at the university's Eden Hindu Hostel have raised Rs 24,000 for eight hostel staff.

Meanwhile, students, research scholars and alumni of Jadavpur University, under the initiative of Jadavpur University Commune, have been distributing sanitisers, masks, and food to people for the last one month.

"We started this initiative on March 22. Since then we have distributed sanitisers and food among the people who needed



Jadavpur University students distribute food to the needy in Kolkata on Monday. Partha Paul

it the most. We later started a kitchen inside the campus to prepare food for workers and homeless people in and around JU campus. Today is the 36th day of our initiative," said Sourav Sahoo, a third-year student.

The students have so far given out hand sanitisers, which were made in a laboratory on the campus, to MR Bangur Hospital, NRS Hospital, various police stations, local markets, ATM guards, security guards of housing complexes, delivery personnel, contractual municipal workers, bank employees, and local residents.

Daily we are providing food to around 500 to 600 people in Jadavpur, Dhakuria and Gariahat areas. We also sent food to medical staff and family members of patients at MR Bangur Hospital. Besides we are also providing free ration to about 150 people in a week," Sahoo added.

Around 40 alumni of South

Point School have also been doing their bit for their former teachers, delivering life-saving drugs and essentials to them since the lockdown came in force on March 25. The alumni group is working under the banner of "Pointers Who Care", a legal entity registered in 2009.

"We formed this organisation to extend care for our mentors who shaped the lives of innumerable students during their formative years. The group ensures medical, financial and emotional needs among others. This has been our way of expressing gratitude to our loving mentors. They had made the school our second home where learning was a joyful experience. Pointers Who Care has been supported by several well-wishers and supporters, mostly former students of the schools," said Anupam Sen, a member of the group.

Bus operators seeks Nitin Gadkari's help

Kolkata: Two bus operators' associations in West Bengal on Monday said they had written to Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, seeking a financial package for the passenger transport industry that has taken a severe hit due to COVID-19.

They said the industry would suffer an irreparable loss without any aid from the government.

PTI

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Date: 28/04/2020

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Rabindranagar, LIC More,
Dist: Paschim Midnapore,
State: West Bengal, Pin: 721101,
E Mail: sbi.00132@sbi.co.in
Date: 28.04.2020

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Assistant General Manager
State Bank of India,
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Six migrant workers leave for UP from Surat on bicycles

ADITIRAJA VADODARA, APRIL 27

THE BLISTERING sun beats down on the concrete surface of the Vadodara-Halol highway on Sunday afternoon as 24-year-old Vikram Rai stops to take a break near Jarod village in Vadodara district after cycling a distance of 173 km from Surat.

The journey began at 2 am Saturday, when Vikram and five others packed their belongings in grain stocking bags, securing them to their brand new cycles purchased from a local dealer for Rs 4,500. The cycle is their only mode of covering the 1,400-odd km distance to reach their homes in Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh.

"We are homesick... There is no work in Surat and we have run out of money. Our families are worried. At least we can be together at this time," Vikram says.

By late Monday evening they crossed over to Madhya Pradesh. Vikram and his group of friends worked for a wholesale saree dealer, who, according to them, has "stopped answering calls", knowing they will demand money.

Sumair, another one from the group, says, "Our money is finished. We had our last couple of thousands and we heard from other migrant friends about this person who was selling cycles... Many of our acquaintances bought cycles to go back to Rajasthan, Orissa and MP."

When asked, why the group could not wait for the Uttar Pradesh state government to fetch them as announced by UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, they say, "Kab lena aayenge? Hum mar jayein uske baad? Ek mahine se toh kisi ne haal bhi nahi poocha... (When will they come to fetch us? After we die? None has enquired about us for over a month)... But if they do send the



The migrants reached MP by Monday evening, Bhupendra Rana

buses to take us, we will take the ride midway from wherever we are at that point."

Vikram says, "I will fill water from petrol pumps on the way. We have faith that we will meet good people on the way who will give us food. Even one meal can help us through the day. We are also trying to charge our phones at petrol pumps for a few minutes to keep it going."

The group is aware that the journey ahead — if they are allowed to cross state borders — is very long. "We think it will take us about nine days to reach home. We haven't informed our families because they will be worried. They have watched in the news that some migrant workers died out of exhaustion from all the walking last month. My mother was pleading with me not to walk, so I decided to buy the cycle," Vikram says.

The group has decided not to return to Surat for work again. "I am not coming back to work here or anywhere else. This crisis has taught me that there is nothing like being close to your family. We live in cities in deplorable conditions... If something like this happens, we will die and be cremated without even our family seeing us. It is not worth it. So, I am definitely going to find some work around my house and stay close to my family," says Sumair.

'No dearth of possibilities in UP, we can give immediate employment to 15 lakh people'

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister YOGI ADITYANATH speaks to LIZ MATHEW about the steps taken by the state government to contain the spread of coronavirus, protect health workers and help stranded migrant labourers. Excerpts:

UP, the most populous state, has so far been able to contain the spread of the virus to an extent. How did you manage it?

I am grateful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had warned the country against this danger. Also, a comprehensive action plan was implemented in India. UP followed the PM's guidance in letter and spirit. Being the most populous state, the danger was highest here. But a time-bound action plan and its effective implementation led to considerable success. My cabinet colleagues worked with me to formulate an action plan. Whether it is paying maintenance allowance to street vendors or providing food grains to weaker sections, the Team 11 of senior officials effectively implemented the plan. Each of these teams has responsibility and accountability. As a result, today there are 10,000 isolation beds, 20,000 quarantine beds, 1,000 ventilators and 17 testing labs in the state. More than 60,000 samples have been tested. When the corona threat was sounded, we had only one lab where 50 tests could be conducted. Today, 4,000 tests are being conducted daily in 17 labs. Not only Team 11, I too communicate continuously with officials working in the

field. I hold review meetings with Team 11 every day.

Is the state able to conduct adequate number of tests?

We have 24 state medical colleges. We established testing labs in 10 of them. The other seven labs are established in other institutions. Now, new laboratories are being set up in four government medical colleges and six divisional headquarters. COVID sample collection centres have been set up in each district. Our government has created a COVID Care Fund which will be used to increase testing facility. Besides, UP is the first state to conduct pool testing.

Has the government taken adequate steps to protect health workers?

Firstly, I thank all health workers, doctors and nurses who are working to serve humanity. Our topmost priority is to protect them. We have given full protection to Corona Warriors. If anyone violates rules, strict action is taken under law. We have adequate PPE kits, N95 masks and sanitisers to protect them. Secondly, I keep appealing to people that we should respect and encourage doctors, nurses, police personnel and health and sanitation workers. Incidents of stone-pelting against health workers were reported at some places. Soon after, clear instructions were given to take stringent action against such persons, including under NSA. In order to protect health workers, police team will accompany Health Department



teams for sample testing or screening in hotspot areas.

Is the government taking steps to stop community spread of the virus?

Lockdown rules, social distancing and sealing of hotspot areas are the steps being taken. The government will take further steps if needed. We will not allow community spread. An order has been issued for not keeping people together in quarantine centres and shelter homes. I have given instructions that no public gathering should be allowed till June 30. No one is allowed to enter a hotspot except police, medical teams and those associated with doorstep delivery. The result of such strictness is evident. In UP, 19 districts are

free from corona.

Migrant workers returning to the state may lead to rise in unemployment. Does the state have programmes for them? What measures have you taken to check the virus spread?

The state government has taken the responsibility of migrant labourers who are in UP or stranded in other states. We deployed nodal officers in every state so that labourers living there do not face any problem. We have sent letters to CMs regarding this. Regarding workers from other states, we have kept them in quarantine and made arrangements for food. We are also making efforts to provide employment to them here.

UP was reeling under unemployment before 2017. But when we made efforts after forming the government, there was a lot of employment generation. The workers, who you are saying will lead to increase in unemployment, will also get employment here. There is no dearth of possibilities. There are challenges but we also have opportunities. During lockdown, the government has provided direct and indirect employment to more than 1.5 lakh people through doorstep delivery. We are in a position to provide immediate employment to 15 lakh people. There is opportunity in government construction work, MNREGA, MSME enterprises and work done through voluntary organisations. Instructions have been given to prepare an action plan for the post-lockdown period. I

want to assure everyone that no labourer in UP will have employment problems.

Concern was raised about fear created among Muslim minorities regarding communal profiling of corona patients. This seems to have made tracing patients tougher. Your comment?

Team-11 is monitoring every activity in the state. At a time when the government was almost successful in controlling corona, the Tablighi Jamaat brought new concerns because most of the cases were related to Tablighis. But our government resolved this matter very well. We have a better system, from hospitalisation to quarantine facilities, so that there is no atmosphere of fear. The work of identifying patients is being done at every level, in which all departments are working jointly. Some people of the Tablighi Jamaat tried to remain in hiding, but after the government's appeal and strictness of police, they came forward.

The CAA protests and Tablighi-related COVID-19 cases appear to have created a communally charged situation. Do you think this could threaten the state's development?

Coronavirus is a global disease. It is totally unfair to associate the CAA issue with it. Disease does not differentiate on the basis of caste or religion. It is a different matter that due to the Tablighi Jamaat, the disease spread rapidly among many

people. The WHO advisory is to maintain social distance so that the chain can be broken. The same appeal is being made by the central and state government to all citizens. The law is doing its job to protect people. There is no communal discrimination in UP.

Fake news and rumours have led to fatal incidents like lynching in some parts of the country. Has your government taken steps to contain this?

A team of 30 police officers is working round the clock to check the spread of fake news. This team tracks the geographic origin of accounts of those posting fake news and creates a database. The social media team identifies the case and gives it to the district cyber cell. This includes cases of hate speech or fake news. FIR is being registered in such cases. Accounts on Twitter and Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok which are spreading fake news are being blocked.

The state police's move to travel to Delhi to summon a senior journalist booked over a tweet has drawn criticism. Your comment?

The law is taking its course against anyone spreading false news, fake news or rumour, no matter who they are. In the time of crisis, journalists should give correct information to the public. Criticism on fake facts intended to mislead people is not good.

FULL INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com

Revamped facilities, early screening help Karnataka keep numbers down

JOHNSON T A BENGALURU, APRIL 27

EARLY response, aggressive contact tracing plus quarantining and good medical infrastructure have helped Karnataka, that saw the country's first death due to coronavirus, keep down its COVID-19 numbers. Over No. 3 in the country, it is now at No. 11 in terms of tally.

On Monday, its numbers stood at 512 cases and 19 deaths. This includes 193 who have recovered, 294 who are still in hospital isolation and five in ICU. While over 7,000 beds have been set aside for COVID-19 care

in government and private care facilities, only 324 beds are occupied at present. "We have not added a large number of cases and the credit goes to health workers," State Health Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Pandey said. Health Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary Jawad Akhtar said they are not letting their guard drop. "Our preparedness by way of infrastructure, materials required and human resources is to tackle even the worst-case scenarios," he said.

As early as February 4, more than a month before the state got its first case, the Karnataka Department of Health and Family Welfare cited the WHO to declare coronavirus a public

health emergency, and kicked into motion its disease surveillance systems across districts. The state's system has been honed over the SARS outbreak in 2003, bird flu and swine flu in 2009, MERS in 2011, and Zika and Nipah viruses recently.

"The healthcare system in Kerala gets a lot of credit but the system has worked quite effectively in Karnataka as well. This is because we began work very early. In early March we were sending nurses every night to the airport to screen international passengers," said Dr H D R Radhakrishna, the Superintendent of the 250-bed C V Raman General Hospital in east Bengaluru.

ICMR tells states to return rapid test kits

ABANTIKA GHOSH NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

THE INDIAN Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has asked all states and Union territories (UTs) to return the rapid test kits procured from two companies in China as they have shown "wide variations in sensitivity".

The kits were to be used only for surveillance and not for diagnosis, but that too stands suspended now. Facing questions on the pricing of these kits, the ICMR also issued a clarification stating that it has "not made any payment whatsoever", and the "Government of India does not stand to lose a single rupee".

Meanwhile, in the highest single-day toll so far, 60 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total toll to 886. With 1,463 new COVID-19 cases being reported on Monday, the tally has gone up to 28,380 (6,361 recovered).

In a letter to chief secretaries of states and UTs on Monday, the ICMR said some states had raised issues regarding the performance of the rapid test kits. "The ICMR, thereafter, has also evaluated the kits of Guangzhou Wondfo Biotech and Zhuhai Livzon Diagnostics in field conditions. The results have shown wide variation in their sensitivity, despite early promise of good performance for surveillance purposes. In view of this, states are advised to stop using these kits procured from the above-mentioned companies and return them, to be sent back to the suppliers."

It reiterated that the RT-PCR throat/nasal swab test "detects the virus early and is the best strategy to identify and isolate the individual."

At the daily briefing, Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said: "Rapid diagnostic kits have a limited role to play. We have

been highlighting their role in epidemiological investigation or surveillance. We have followed the full process in their procurement and no payment has been made to these companies. Required action has also been taken for non-adherence to quality standards."

Sixteen districts, which earlier had positive cases, have not reported any fresh case in the last 28 days. While three new districts — Gondia in Maharashtra, Dhanuwaneri in Karnataka and Lakhisarai in Bihar — have been added to this list, two other districts — Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar in Punjab — have dropped out.

A total of 85 districts have not reported any new case in the last 14 days.

The ICMR said 6,65,819 samples had been tested till Monday morning. The inter-ministerial central team that went to Pune has found that the city currently has a doubling time of seven days (the national doubling time is 10 days), and one out of nine samples tests positive (the national average is one out of 23 samples).

Responding to a question on the high case load and death rates in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, Agarwal said: "These are very densely populated areas — places like Mumbai and Pune. So it is important to adhere to the containment strategy, whether it is a cluster or an outbreak, deploy sufficient manpower for a house-to-house survey, identify those with acute respiratory diseases or influenza like illnesses."

Parameswaran Iyer, Secretary, Drinking Water and Sanitation, who heads the empowered group on logistics and supply chain, outlined the steps being taken by the government to tackle challenges in four critical sectors — agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and feeding vulnerable groups.

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1	PFMM32-e-13/2020	220V, 100AH Battery Chargers	25

Tenders can have further details and download the tender schedule from e-procurement market place i.e., www.tender.aperecurement.gov.in

Contact Nos: Chief Engineer/Transmission -0866-2429230, Extns: 2014, 2034, 2042

Sd/-
R. O. No. 15PP/CL/ADVT/11/2020-21 **CHIEF ENGINEER, TRANSMISSION**

CORRIGENDUM

Tender Id :- 2020_MAD_278788_1 to 7. Dated. 12.03.2020 **Memo No- MED/ SE(W)/ 14/ W-211/15 Pt-III** Dated. 20.04.2020 **Name of work:** Construction of Three Storied Shelter for Urban Homeless under National Urban Livelihood Mission in different Municipalities within West Circle, M.E.Dte, Govt of West Bengal. **Last date of Bid submission date:- 27.05.2020.** Details can be had in the official web site of e-tenders of Govt. of West Bengal <https://wb-tenders.gov.in>

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer (West Circle)
Municipal Engineering Directorate

भारतीय कंटेनर निगम लिमिटेड
Container Corporation of India Ltd.
(भारत सरकार का उपकरण) (A Govt. of India Undertaking)
ICD, Tughlakabad, New Delhi - 110 020

TENDER NOTICE (E-Tendering Mode Only)

CONCOR invites Online Open E-Tender in two bid system for Point to Point Road transportation and Movement of Double Door Containers (MMLP/Kathwas, CMLK, Rajshahi). The bid document may be downloaded from the website (www.tenderwizard.com/CCIL) on Payment of Rs.1000/-online.

Tender No.	CONNR/CT/TC/CM/K/2020
Estimated Cost	Rs. 4,07,47,067/- (incl. GST) per annum
Period of the contract	2+2+1 years
Earnest Money/Deposit	Rs. 5,00,000/- through e-payment.
Cost of Document	Rs. 1,000/- inclusive of all taxes & duties through e-payment.
Tender Processing Fee	Rs. 5,310/- inclusive of all taxes & duties through e-payment.
(Non-refundable)	
Date of Sale (On Line)	From 28.04.2020 at 15:00 hrs. to 18.05.2020 upto 16:00 hrs.
Prebid meeting	On 08.05.2020 at 15:00 hrs. at Northern Region, ICD/Tughlakabad.
Issue of Corrigendum (if any)	On or after 11.05.2020 on www.tenderwizard.com/CCIL only
Date & Time of submission of tender	19.05.2020 upto 15:30 Hrs.
Date & Time of Opening of tender	On 20.05.2020 at 15:30 Hrs.

For eligibility criteria and other details please log on to www.concoronline.com or eprocure.gov.in or tenderwizard.com/CCIL. Bidders are requested to visit the websites regularly. CONCOR reserves the right to reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.

Group General Manager (CKO) Northern Region

Tender Notice No. 01/2020/FC

Sealed tender are invited from recognized and reputed firm/contractors having registered trade license for "Supplying of Miscellaneous articles for this district in c/w COVID-19 outbreak at S.P. Office Purba Bardhaman" with sufficient experience for the similar nature of work for at least last 01 years in Govt. Department for the financial year 2020-2021.

The tender papers including valid PAN Card issued by the IT Dept. Govt. of India, Trade License, Professional Tax receipts challan for the year 2019-2020, valid 15-digit Goods & Service Tax Payers Identity Number (GSTIN) under GST Act 2017 in sealed cover super scribing "Supplying of Miscellaneous articles for this district in c/w COVID-19 outbreak" at S.P. Office Purba Bardhaman" be placed to the undersigned. The tender should be submitted by 06.05.2020 at 12:00 hours which will be opened on 06.05.2020 at 14:00 hours. All tenderer should remain present at the time of opening of Tender, with samples or graphic presentation of desired items.

The Tender form/schedule should be obtained from the office of the undersigned on 27.04.2020 onwards. If the office remains closed for any unavoidable reasons on the dates fixing for supply of schedule or dropping of tender next working day shall be treated for supply of schedule or dropping of tender.

Correction of the rate of the tender, if any, should be authenticated by the full signature of the Tenderer.

An earnest money Rs. 5,000.00 should be furnished in the form of BRC/CDR/NSC along with tender otherwise the tender will be treated as cancelled as per tender Rule.

Right of acceptance of the tender will rest with the undersigned that also reverse the right to reject or review or divide amongst the Tender without assigning any reasons thereof.

Sd/-
Superintendent of Police
Purba Bardhaman

TAMIL NADU SLUM CLEARANCE BOARD
SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (CHENNAI CIRCLE-II)

NOTICE INVITING SHORT- TENDER Tender Notice No. SCB/331/DI/SE/CC-II/2019 Date: 27.04.2020

For and on behalf of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, one sealed tender consisting of two separate sealed covers one for Pre-qualification with EMD and other one for Price Bid with name of work duly superscribed in both covers are invited from eligible Contractors who are in the field of Construction Industry and are registered contractors of TNSCB under Class-I and above or Government Departments / Government undertakings / Government / Semi Government Bodies / Quasi Government / Public Sector Undertakings / Housing Boards / Corporation Undertakings / CPWD and registered as a legal entity in India, by the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai- 600 005 upto 3.00 PM on 13.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on the same day in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents

Sl. No.	Name of work/Estimate No.	Approximate Tender Value (Including GST @12%) (Rs. in lakhs)	EMD (In Rs.)	To whom EMD / Tender Schedule cost to be Drawn
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Construction of 384 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-A & 3T-F (2019) (G+7 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-IV Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 03/HFA/2020-21.	3757.00 15 Months	18,89,000/-	Executive Engineer Special Chennai-119.
2	Construction of 256 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-C/2019 (G+7 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-V Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 02/HFA/2020-21.	2414.00 15 Months	12,17,000/-	
3	Construction of 256 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-E/2019 (G+7 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-VI Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 03/HFA/2020-21.	2414.00 15 Months	12,19,000/-	
4	Construction of 384 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-A & 3T-C/2019 (G+5 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-IV Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 04/HFA/2020-21.	3700.00 15 Months	18,60,000/-	
5	Construction of 144 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-A/2019 (G+5 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-VII Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 05/HFA/2020-21.	1387.00 12 Months	7,04,000/-	
6	Construction of 156 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-C & 3T-G/2019 (G+5 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Perumbakkam Phase-IX Scheme in Chengalpattu District under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 06/HFA/2020-21.	1504.00 12 Months	7,62,000/-	
7	Construction of 144 Nos of Tenements adopting type design 3T-A/2019 (G+5 Storeys) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Semmambakkam Scheme in Greater Chennai Corporation Division No. 200 under HFA of PMAY (AHP). Estimate CER No. 07/HFA/2020-21.	1462.00 12 Months	7,41,000/-	

The EMD should be drawn as Demand Draft or Banker's cheque or FDR or Irrevocable Bank Guarantee from any Nationalised / Scheduled Banks, payable at Chennai in the prescribed form in favour of the Executive Engineer mentioned in Column (5). The tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, TNSCB, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai-600 005 upto 3.00 PM on 13.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on 13.05.2020 in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents.

For and on behalf of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, one sealed tender consisting of two separate sealed covers one for Pre-qualification with EMD and other one for Price Bid with name of work duly superscribed in both covers are invited from eligible Contractors who are in the field of Construction Industry and are registered contractors of TNSCB under Class-I and above or Government Departments / Government undertakings / Government / Semi Government Bodies / Quasi Government / Public Sector Undertakings / Housing Boards / Corporation Undertakings / CPWD and registered as a legal entity in India, by the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai- 600 005 upto 3.00 PM on 13.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on the same day in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents

Sl. No.	Name of work/Estimate No.	Approximate Tender Value (Including GST @12%) (Rs. in lakhs)	EMD (In Rs.)	To whom EMD / Tender Schedule cost to be Drawn
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Construction of 700 tenements (G+4 storied) adopting T.D.09C, 09D & 09E/2020 including internal water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangement with development works at Pakkam A Village in Thiruvallur Taluk at Thiruvallur District under Housing For All (PMAY). Estimate CER No.16/HFA/2020-21.	6969.00 18 Months	34,95,000/-	Executive Engineer / Reconstruction Division / TNSCB / Chennai-10
2	Construction of 920 tenements (G+4 storied) adopting T.D.09A, 09B, 09C, 09D & 09F/2020 including internal water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangement with development works at Nathamedu Pakkam B Village in Thiruvallur Taluk at Thiruvallur District under Housing For All (PMAY). Estimate CER No.17/HFA/2020-21.	9770.00 18 Months	48,95,000/-	

The EMD should be drawn as Demand Draft or Banker's cheque or FDR / Bank Guarantee from any Nationalised / Scheduled Banks, payable at Chennai in favour of Executive Engineer, mentioned in Column (5). The tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II TNSCB, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai- 600 005 on written requisition along with cost of the tender documents to a value of 16,900/- (Non-Refundable) in the form of Demand Draft or Banker's Cheque upto 3.00 PM on 12.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on 13.05.2020 in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents.

Note:

- Detailed tender notice, conditions for participating in the tender can be had from the Office of the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II Circle, TNSCB, Chennai-600 005.
- Detailed tender notice, conditions for participating in the tender and the tender documents are also available at www.tenders.in.gov.in which can be downloaded at free of cost. The tender shall keep a watch over the web site till the preceding date of tender for any notifications.

The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.

No.5,Kamarajar salai, Chennai-600 005 **DIPR/1698/TENDER/2020** **SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER CHENNAI CIRCLE-II**

TAMIL NADU SLUM CLEARANCE BOARD
CHENNAI CIRCLE-III

NOTICE INVITING SHORT- TENDER Tender Notice No. SCB / 195 / HD / SE / CC-III / 2020 Date: 27.04.2020

For and on behalf of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, one sealed tender consisting of two separate sealed covers one for Pre-qualification with EMD and other one for Price Bid with name of work duly superscribed in both covers are invited from eligible Contractors who are in the field of Construction Industry and are registered contractors of TNSCB under Class-I and above or Government Departments / Government undertakings / Government / Semi Government Bodies / Quasi Government / Public Sector Undertakings / Housing Boards / Corporation Undertakings / CPWD and registered as a legal entity in India, by the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-III, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai- 600 005 upto 3.00 PM on 13.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on the same day in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents

Sl. No.	Name of work/Estimate No.	Approximate Tender Value (Including GST @12%) (Rs. in lakhs)	EMD (In Rs.)	To whom EMD / Tender Schedule cost to be Drawn
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
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2	Construction of 920 tenements (G+4 storied) adopting T.D.09A, 09B, 09C, 09D & 09F/2020 including internal water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangement with development works at Nathamedu Pakkam B Village in Thiruvallur Taluk at Thiruvallur District under Housing For All (PMAY). Estimate CER No.17/HFA/2020-21.	9770.00 18 Months	48,95,000/-	

The EMD should be drawn as Demand Draft or Banker's cheque or FDR / Bank Guarantee from any Nationalised / Scheduled Banks, payable at Chennai in favour of Executive Engineer, mentioned in Column (5). The tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle-II TNSCB, No.5, Kamarajar Salai, Chennai- 600 005 on written requisition along with cost of the tender documents to a value of 16,900/- (Non-Refundable) in the form of Demand Draft or Banker's Cheque upto 3.00 PM on 12.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on 13.05.2020 in the presence of the Tender Scrutiny Committee and bidders/ their authorized agents.

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The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.

No.5,Kamarajar salai, Chennai-600 005 **DIPR/1698/TENDER/2020** **SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER CHENNAI CIRCLE-II**

Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd.
(A Govt. of India Undertaking, Ministry of Defence)
Regd. Office: 43/46, Garden Reach Road, Kolkata 700 024

E-TENDER NOTICE FOR ONLINE BIDDING

(1) NIT NO. SCC/AJK/OT(Press)/CanteenService/HR/025/N/ET-1067
NAME OF JOB: BIENNIAL RATE CONTRACT FOR PROVIDING LUNCH AND OTHER ALLIED SERVICES IN GRSE CONTRACTOR'S WORKMEN CANTEENS

(2) NIT NO. SCC/AS/OT(PRESS)/CAR.HIRE/012/N/ET-1121
NAME OF JOB: BIENNIAL RATE CONTRACT FOR HIRING OF DIESEL CARS AT GRSE KOLKATA

Due date for NIT No. 1 & 2: 21 days from date of publication

1. Details will be available in e-tendering portal [https://eproc](https://eprocuregrse.co.in)



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why rapid tests are off, again

After allowing rapid tests in certain zones, ICMR has asked states to return test kits to suppliers. A look at how such tests work, why states have been demanding it, and how their debate with ICMR has unfolded

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

ON MONDAY, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) put an end to the question of rapid tests when it told the states that the newly procured kits for such tests had failed quality checks and should be returned to the suppliers.

This effectively brings the curtains down on a long conversation on rapid testing between the states and the ICMR, at least for the time being. A look at the tests, how the conversation started and where it stands internationally.

What is a rapid test?

A rapid test essentially is a test that takes less time than the 8-9 hours that the standard RT-PCR test result takes. In the Indian context, a rapid test means the serological tests with kits that India had imported from China, which have now failed quality tests.

The difference between the two procedures is that the RT-PCR test looks to find the virus in nasal or throat swabs of the patient, while the serological test usually looks for antibodies in the blood, which the body develops to fight the virus. Blood has two components, a matrix called plasma and the blood cells. The plasma minus the components of whole blood that cause it to clot, known as serum, is examined in a serological test.

According to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, "Serology tests are blood-based tests that can be used to identify whether people have been exposed to a particular pathogen. Serology-based tests analyze the serum component of whole blood. The serum includes antibodies to specific components of pathogens, called antigens. These antigens are recognized by the immune system as foreign and are targeted by the immune response."

The serological test is faster, taking less than 30 minutes, while the PCR-based test takes up to nine hours. The long wait time is also because the nasal or throat swab is first subjected to a screening test to decide the family of the virus; if that test confirms that it is a coronavirus, then a second test is done to ascertain if it is indeed the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2.



Blood sample taken in a slum area in Kolkata last week. Since then, ICMR has said newly imported rapid testing kits have failed quality checks. Partha Paul

The Health Ministry as well as the ICMR have reiterated several times that the "gold standard" for diagnosis is RT-PCR, and the serological tests should be used only for the purpose of generating epidemiological data or for surveillance in hotspots.

Are there different kinds of rapid tests?

While these commonly look for antibodies developed against the virus, rapid tests (also known as point of care immunodiagnostic tests) can also seek to detect the presence of the virus itself. More specifically, the latter kind of rapid test looks for viral proteins expressed by the SARS-CoV2 virus in a sample taken from the respiratory tract of a person. If the presence of the protein is detected, it is inferred that the virus is present too.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO): "There is another, more common type of rapid diagnostic test marketed for COVID-19; a test that detects the presence of antibodies in the blood of people believed to have been infected with COVID-19. Antibodies are produced over days to weeks after infection with the virus."

The strength of antibody response depends on several factors, including age, nutritional status, severity of disease, and certain medications or infections like HIV that suppress the immune system. In some people with COVID-19, disease confirmed by molecular testing (e.g. reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction: RT-PCR), weak, late or absent antibody responses have been reported. This is the test kit that India had imported.

What has India's stand on rapid tests been, and how has it evolved?

Kerala was one of the earliest states to announce rapid tests. States like Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh too pushed the ICMR for a direction to follow the "South Korea-China model" of rapid tests, until the ICMR gave in earlier this month. On April 4, the ICMR said rapid tests could be used in areas reporting clusters (containment zones) and in large migration gatherings/evacuees centres.

However, after the kits rolled in from China, complaints started pouring in from the states. On April 21, while asking the states to suspend the tests for a few days pending

field testing, Dr R R Gangakhedkar, head of epidemiology and infectious diseases at the ICMR, said: "We have been getting complaints that when the serological tests are being done on the blood samples of people who have already tested positive in the RT-PCR test, the accuracy ranges from 6% to 71%. This needs to be investigated."

He added: "This is a first generation test developed in just three-and-a-half months and needs refinement, yet the variations cannot be ignored. We will send personnel from eight institutes to the field to validate the kits. Meanwhile, we have advised the states not to use the tests for the next two days till we come out with an advisory."

What has been the global experience for rapid tests?

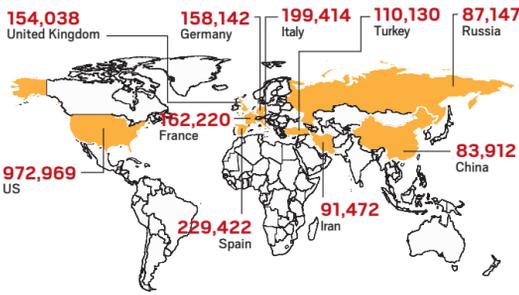
Singapore was the first country to use rapid tests, while South Korea has been the standout example. In its containment strategy, South Korea aggressively used mass testing, including with serological kits, to reduce the number of cases. Experts say they used their experience of SARS and MERS to take quick and decisive action. While it is testing that has earned it global praise, it is also a fact that South Korea's success was as much because of its hospital infrastructure that was already ramped up during the earlier outbreaks. Even in Daegu, where the country's 31st patient became an index for some 1,100 contacts, hospitals were clogged but hospitalisation rates remained high.

The WHO has been cautious about rapid testing. In a scientific brief on April 8, it said: "However, before these tests can be recommended, they must be validated in the appropriate populations and settings. Inadequate tests may miss patients with active infection or falsely categorize patients as having the disease when they do not, further hampering disease control efforts. At present, based on current evidence, WHO recommends the use of these new point-of-care immunodiagnostic tests only in research settings. They should not be used in any other setting, including for clinical decision-making, until evidence supporting use for specific indications is available."

The WHO brief covers rapid tests that detect both the virus and the antibodies developed against it.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED DAILY



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 3,002,303 DEATH COUNT: 208,131

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11:00 pm on April 27

Why is the death rate higher in some countries than others?

ONE OF the ways in which the burden of any disease is measured is by seeing how many deaths it is causing. In the case of COVID-19, which has now infected over 30 lakh people in 185 countries and regions and killed close to 2.1 lakh, this burden has varied widely — countries have reported very different case fatality ratios (CFR), which is the number of deaths divided by the number of confirmed cases.

While many things about the novel coronavirus remain unknown, broadly speaking, CFR depends on three broad factors:

First is the number of people tested. Testing rates have been different in different countries — India continues to be among the countries where testing is widely seen to be inadequate. More aggressive testing identifies more asymptomatic infected persons, and people with milder, less noticeable symptoms. Since CFR relies on the number of confirmed cases (which is a specific number) and not the total number of cases (which can only be an estimate), more testing lowers the ratio.

The second factor is demography. As a general principle, any virus poses a greater threat to those with weaker

immunities, and a vast majority of deaths from COVID-19 have been of people with co-morbid conditions. Older people are more vulnerable; indeed, the virus has wreaked the greatest havoc in populations that are older.

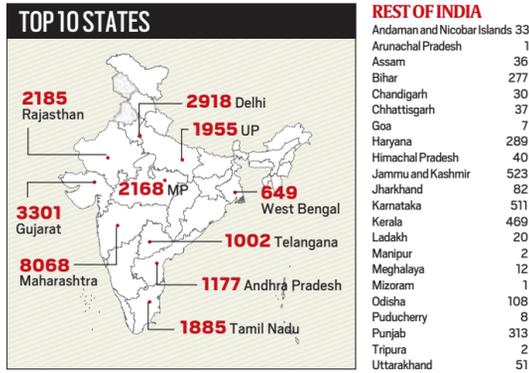
Finally, the strength and capacity of healthcare systems matter greatly. Countries like Italy or Spain saw their hospitals overwhelmed, and unable to adequately care for the flood of patients. In India, where resources are limited and critical care capacities constrained, the danger from an uncontrolled spread is that much greater.

In absolute numbers, the US carries the greatest burden of COVID-19, accounting for nearly a third of all cases. Spain and Italy follow, together accounting for over 14% of global cases.

In terms of observed CFR, a different set of countries leads the chart. According to the Johns Hopkins University coronavirus resource centre dashboard, the highest mortality is in Belgium (15.4%), followed by France (14.1%) and the UK and Italy (13.5% each). The CFR of the US is 5.7%.

Belgium's deaths per 1 lakh population are 62.11, the highest in the world, followed by Spain (49.63), Italy (44.09) and France (34.17).

INDIA COUNT: 28,380 (886 DEATHS)



Union Health Ministry update as of 11 pm, April 27. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states/UTs with at least one case listed above. 6362 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 30 STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

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

In homemade masks, two fabrics better than one

KABIR FIRAQUE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

WITH SURGICAL and N95 masks in short supply, the Health Ministry recently published an advisory on how you can make your own face cover at home. For material, the Indian advisory recommends cotton, while the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend "cloth face coverings" without specifying the fabric.

Now, a study has examined the ability of various materials to keep out respiratory particles — and by extension the novel coronavirus — and identified a combination of two fabrics as possibly the best: either cotton plus natural silk, or cotton plus chiffon. If the fit is good, such homemade masks can effectively keep out aerosol particles, the researchers report in the American Chemical Society's journal *ACS Nano*.

Why size matters

An aerosol is a suspension of particles or droplets in the air. The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through respiratory droplets, particularly

when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

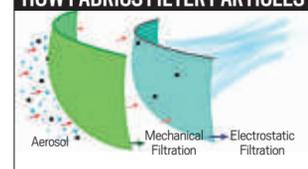
The World Health Organization (WHO) defines two size ranges for droplets through which respiratory infections can be transmitted — 5-10 microns in diameter (respiratory droplets) and less than 5 microns in diameter (droplet nuclei). One micron is a millionth part of a metre.

It is respiratory droplets (the larger size range) that are thought to be the primary route of COVID-19 infection. Airborne transmission, which is through droplet nuclei (the smaller size range), was not reported in a large study in China, the WHO notes. It says airborne transmission may be possible "in specific circumstances and settings in which procedures... that generate aerosols are performed". The bottom line is that while infection through the smaller droplet nuclei has not been ruled out, the evidence so far is that this virus spreads mainly by latching on to the larger respiratory particles.

Testing the fabrics

At the University of Chicago, molecular engineer Supratik Guha and colleagues tested common fabrics, alone and in combination, for their ability to filter out aerosols that are simi-

HOW FABRICS FILTER PARTICLES



Cotton acts as a mechanical barrier to particles; silk or chiffon act as an electrostatic barrier. *ACS Nano*

lar in size to respiratory droplets. They used an aerosol mixing chamber, which produced particles ranging from 10 nanometres to 6 microns in diameter. One nanometre is a billionth part of a metre. For context, 10 nanometres would fall within the WHO definition of droplet nuclei, while 6 microns would qualify a particle as a respiratory droplet.

A fan blew the aerosol across various cloth samples, at an airflow rate corresponding to a person's respiration at rest, the American Chemical Society said in a state-

ment. The researchers measured the number and size of particles in the air before and after passing through the fabric.

The best performance was by one layer of a tightly woven cotton sheet combined with two layers of chiffon (90 per cent polyester and 10 per cent Spandex). The cotton-chiffon combination filtered out 80-99% of the particles, depending on particle size. This is close to the performance of an N95 mask material, the researchers said.

When the chiffon in the combination was replaced with natural silk or flannel, or when the experiments simply used a cotton quilt (*rajai/razaai*) with cotton-polyester filling, the results were similar, they said.

Why it works

Tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton, can act as a mechanical barrier to particles, the researchers explained. Fabrics that hold a static charge, like certain types of chiffon and natural silk, serve as an electrostatic barrier.

The researchers, however, stressed the importance of a properly fitted mask. Even a 1% gap between the face contours and the mask reduced the filtering efficiency of all masks by half or more.

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

The number of tests required per day cannot be the same across India



LEE HILBORNE

We constantly hear in every country, bar South Korea, that it is not testing enough. What does it really mean?

Testing in this context is generally driven by the need for data to make public health determinations and provide some guidance to individuals wondering if they had immunity. We need to have enough testing as communities — same in US and India — to, with reasonable certainty, understand how many people at any one time are acutely infected, whether or not they have symptoms. Since people without symptoms can spread the infection, it's important to have this insight.

It doesn't mean we need to test everybody all the time, but we need to have a big enough sample to have a reasonable degree of certainty that the numbers are correct. Knowing who is infected will give us better information on the R0 (rate of spread), understand the risk at present, and also look at infection as efforts are made to ease social restrictions.

Then we need to know how many people have antibodies, and presumed immunity. This is important to determine when "herd immunity" exists and how far we are from that goal. That number needs to be informed by the R0 and rate of transmission because you need a greater number of people immune if the R0 is higher. I don't think we will have approached herd immunity until there is an effective vaccine given that the numbers we are seeing now vary from under 10% to just over 20% in the US, depending on the location. Because there is variation by location, that's the reason having the data by geographic area is important.

Are the number of tests per day linked

to determining the date of the opening of the lockdown?

Not the number per se, but the extent to which the number informs us with good probability that there is a reduced risk of continuing to spread the virus. The number of tests per day would be determined by ascertaining statistically the number of people with active infection in a region. In areas where there is more social crowding, the number of people with active infection would need to be lower because each one has a greater risk of transmitting disease due to proximity to others.

So what is that requisite number of tests per day for a country like India with a population of 1.3 billion to decide on opening the lockdown?

As discussed earlier, I don't think it's by India as a whole, but numbers would be different in Mumbai, Delhi, and other large cities. Probably fewer in smaller areas, and those with less risk. I am working with some colleagues now to try and determine

this with greater precision.

RT-PCR and the antibody tests — which of these two is more important for containing the spread of COVID-19?

As I mentioned, both are important because they provide different information. Long term, the antibody test may be more important but during an acute infection, the most important thing to know is who has active disease, and that's the question the RT-PCR test answers. The need to know who has the infection in the population, even if asymptomatic, means we should be examining presumed healthy individuals, not just those that are sick.

Based on the test results that you have seen and analysed, what are the big things that have registered with you?

We know that the positivity rates we see underestimate the true infection because what is reported are those that test positive — and negative. But because many who might have mild symptoms don't get tested,

that information is very biased. Similarly, the mortality rate is overstated because the denominator includes just those tested. Also, because collection is not perfect, there are some people with the infection who may have a negative RT-PCR test. For the antibody test, I think it supports the notion mentioned above — because the prevalence of antibodies is considerably greater, even though still low, than would be suggested by those who have positive results.

What is the problem with antibody test kits? There seem to be all kinds of reports about the unreliability of these tests.

This is a Buyer Beware situation. There are reliable tests on the market and there are unreliable or "junk" tests. I don't want to speculate on the motivation for putting out lousy tests. Normally when we bring a test to market, there are strict evaluations that come first. Because of the emergency there was a relaxation of those requirements. It does suggest that a reasonable amount of oversight is in the best interest of the public

to protect us all from dangerous tests, the same as for drugs and medical devices.

Is the problem with the test kits imported from China?

Again, it's not that the products are made in China — but rather whether they are made properly with the right amount of quality control, production standards and consistency. Because many of the initial tests were developed in China, some were good and some were bad. Purchasers should make sure that their vendors have recognised good manufacturing practices.

(Dr Lee Hilborne is Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California-Los Angeles, and Medical Director of Quest Diagnostics at Southern California. He was formerly president of the American Society for Clinical Pathology, and a member of US CDC's Clinical Laboratory Improvement Advisory Committee. He spoke to Sushant Singh.)



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WAYS OF OPENING UP

As economic costs rise, prime minister's meeting with chief ministers signals cautious shift in lockdown strategy

ON MONDAY, PRIME Minister Narendra Modi held another video conference with state chief ministers to discuss the ongoing battle against the coronavirus, and to plan ahead. This, the fourth such interaction, was held amid growing signals of the government preparing for a gradual easing of the national lockdown as economic concerns begin to loom larger — with the prime minister himself noting that “we have to give importance to the economy as well as continue the fight against COVID-19”. This signals a cautious shift in strategy. As the lockdown has progressed, with the disruption in economic activity intensifying, its toll becoming more visible, the stark debate of lives vs livelihoods is being steadily recast and reframed. Among several state governments too, as the fiscal strain is beginning to show, the mood seems to be shifting from unqualified support for a nation-wide lockdown to a push towards a gradual and calibrated exit.

To be sure, as states are on different infection trajectories, each one will have to firm up separate plans for easing and exit. States with lesser number of infections, or with a better grip over the spread of the virus, are likely to press for easing more restrictions so as to allow economic activities to resume, at least in the green zones. Yet even the modalities of the exit from the lockdown in the green zones will have to be worked out carefully. One thing is clear: Both Centre and states must work together to figure out ways to allow economic activities to resume while minimising the health fallout — even as any such joint strategy will need to take into account, and make space for, the differences across states and the varied emphases of state governments. As the number of cases mounts — during a meeting of state chief secretaries, the central government projected the number of infected in the country to reach 65,000 cases by May 15 — and the capacity of the healthcare system of the country comes under more strain, coordinated action at various levels of government will become more urgent to ensure continued expansion of the institutional capacity — setting up of containment wards, production of ventilators, ensuring adequacy of testing equipment.

During the course of the interaction on Monday, the prime minister also spoke of the need to usher in reforms that touch the lives of common citizens. While fiscal and monetary support will be needed to nurse the economy back to health, given the collapse in economic activities, the need to push through contentious but required factor market reforms that address the long-standing structural issues that plague the economy, cannot be overstated.

WITH DIGNITY

Video clip from Agra quarantine facility drives home urgent need for training and monitoring healthcare workers

A VIDEO CLIP that went viral on social media on Sunday framed the indignities meted out to people at a quarantine facility in Agra. The 25-second clip shows a PPE-clad (personal protective equipment) person tossing water bottles and food packets outside a locked gate and dozens of people stretching out their hands through the iron grille for these essential supplies. The woman shooting the video can be heard saying that she was brought to the centre for a check-up, which wasn't conducted. Agra's district magistrate has confirmed that this shocking incident “happened a few days ago”, ordered an inquiry into the incident, and claimed that “everything is fine now”. However, the visuals raise serious questions over the methods used in dealing with the pandemic in a city, which, only two weeks ago, was being lauded by the Centre for developing a model strategy against the novel coronavirus.

On April 5, the Centre issued guidelines for quarantine facilities in the country: “Disposable and pre-packed food needs to be served to quarantined people and they are to be kept on separate beds with distance of 1-2 metres with no bed facing opposite to each other”. The document emphasises a humane approach towards quarantined people, including providing them “counselling and psycho-social support”. It also talks of providing “regular training to all the staff” at the quarantine centres. The incident at the Agra facility reflects poorly on the sensitivity, and also the training and monitoring, of healthcare workers at such facilities. The according of human dignity is a constitutional necessity — in several verdicts, the Supreme Court has underlined that the assurance of dignity is central to the Right to Life under Article 21. But a compassionate approach in the country's battle against the coronavirus is also needed to enhance the prospects of its success — humiliation of the kind meted out at the Agra facility could deter people from self-reporting their symptoms or cooperating with officials involved in contact tracing efforts.

UP's Additional Chief Secretary (home) Awanish Kumar Awasthi has described the Agra incident as an “isolated” one. However, last month, health officials in Bareilly provoked outrage when they sprayed disinfectants on migrants returning from Delhi. The state government would do well to recognise that most of the country's successes so far in the battle against the pandemic have come when administrations and officials have reached out to the people — to give a helping hand and also to enlist their trust and support.

A HOME IN ART

Zarina Hashmi's works reflected on the idea of displacement and exile — the leitmotif of the times

ZARINA HASHMI WAS just 10 when India was partitioned. Growing up in Aligarh, where her father taught history at the university, the Partition was an intense experience as the violence unleashed by it set in motion a gigantic process of displacement. Her immediate family had stayed on in India. But in the late 1950s, just after Zarina had completed her degree in Mathematics and got married, they migrated to Pakistan. It marked the beginning of exile for Zarina, who travelled with her diplomat husband on his postings. She studied print-making with Stanley William Hayter in Paris and learnt woodblock printing in Japan. In the Sixties, she returned to India and worked with papermakers in Jaipur. In the early '70s, she left for New York, which became her home in exile for over four decades.

Home, exile and memory were the tropes she leaned on to create art. Over the years, the idea of home became an abstraction for her, appearing in her minimalist works as mere lines on grey sheets, or in shades of black and white. The idea of home became inseparable from the idea of exile, both embedded in memory. Her works recall the deep humanist anguish and sense of loss that distinguish Partition literature and art. In fact, she spoke about discovering a home in literature, especially Urdu poetry, and that seems to have provided a reference point to her exile.

Since displacement and exile are a leitmotif for the 20th century, Zarina's work has a certain universality, which also makes her more than just a reflective chronicler of the Partition. An unusual 1991 bronze work, “I went on a journey III”, is of a crumbling house without windows on four wheels, each pointed in different directions, indicating the impossibility of movement. In the atlas of her world, exile seems to have been the only permanent state of existence, especially when the nation state and its cities are experienced as cartographic prisons, something that eloquently showed in her works.

Costly to bypass MPC framework

In unpredictable times, RBI should preserve its inflation credibility. This requires making MPC more enduring



URJIT R PATEL

FOLLOWING THE GLOBAL financial crisis of 2007-08, India, like many other countries, embarked on a stimulus. The pump-priming did not end too well. By 2013, India crossed or approached double-digit figures in inflation and the national fiscal deficit, in addition to looming bad loans. In summer 2013, when the Federal Reserve indicated a possible reversal of its ultra-accommodative policy, macroeconomic parameters for India were so weak that it got caught up in the “tapertantrum” and experienced external sector fragility. While fiscal excesses and financial sector stress remain issues today, India has improved significantly on at least one dimension — namely, inflation — which has also stabilised the external sector.

How was this beneficial progress achieved? Starting in September 2013, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) initiated an effort to build credibility with domestic savers and international investors on maintaining inflation at prudent levels. Three years later, the RBI Act was amended to put in place a flexible inflation targeting framework. A Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), comprising of RBI representatives and external members appointed by the Government of India, was enjoined with the legal mandate of managing the policy (repo) rate so as to keep consumer price inflation at a target level of 4 per cent, while keeping in mind economic growth.

By objective measures, the MPC framework until recently worked well. It lent transparency and democratic accountability to the process of interest-rate setting; combined with efforts on managing food inflation, it has brought inflation closer to the target; it has contributed to tempering household inflation expectations and has kept borrowing costs at reasonable levels in spite of the high level of government borrowing and several other distortions. Indeed, rating agencies and multilateral institutions repeatedly mention the MPC and the inflation targeting framework as a landmark structural reform towards sound macroeconomic management.

Yet, since last year, somewhat inexplicably, a series of monetary actions by the RBI have left the MPC's decision on the policy rate partly redundant, diluted the accountable process of monetary decision-making, and put at stake the sanctity of the framework. Let me elaborate.

The MPC framework until recently worked rather well. It lent transparency and democratic accountability to the process of interest-rate setting; combined with efforts on managing food inflation, it has brought inflation closer to the target; it has contributed to tempering household inflation expectations; and, it has kept borrowing costs in the economy at reasonable levels in spite of the high level of government borrowing and several other distortions. Indeed, rating agencies and multilateral institutions repeatedly mention the MPC and the inflation targeting framework as a landmark structural reform towards sound macroeconomic management.

With a stated intention to improve the transmission of monetary policy to households and corporations, the RBI has pumped unprecedented levels of money (close to Rs 7 trillion) into the banking system. It has done so mostly by purchasing government bonds but partly also by purchasing dollars. Given impaired financial sector balance-sheets, transmission to economic growth has been at best muted; liquidity is no silver bullet to durably address financial sector stress. The primary effect of excessive liquidity has, instead, been to monetise the government's expenditures and keep its borrowing costs low. With its declared aim not being met satisfactorily, the RBI has doubled down on liquidity supply, with the same outcome.

An important casualty has been the MPC framework.

At times, even when the MPC has kept the policy rate unchanged, the RBI has injected yet more liquidity to move medium-term interest rates down; the two actions have been noted to be in direct contradiction of each other. If the objective is to move medium-term rates, why not build consensus within the MPC to cut the policy rate more aggressively and communicate the rationale?

Further, given the enormous liquidity glut, every night banks park liquidity with the RBI at a (reverse repo) rate lower than the policy rate and which is not set by the MPC; nevertheless, this rate used to be changed only as part of the MPC Resolution. Lately, the RBI has moved this rate progressively lower than the policy rate; recently, it has done so outside of the MPC meeting cycle and not as part of the MPC Resolution. There are straightforward tools in liquidity management to ensure that in surplus conditions also, the central bank transacts with banks at the policy rate — technically, by switching from “deficit” to “floor” system of liquidity management. Such a switch is routinely adopted by central banks when they provide excess liquidity; the RBI has chosen not to do so.

The net effect is that market interest rates are being increasingly controlled by the RBI rather than the MPC. Indeed, there is a proposal that the rate at which the RBI absorbs liquidity be still lower, likely divorced from the policy rate set by the MPC. The spirit of the MPC framework enshrined in the RBI Act is

being violated. It is unclear how the MPC can be expected to satisfy its legal mandate if what it seeks to achieve via setting of the policy rate is in conflict with, or compromised by, the RBI's liquidity management.

These developments have the potential to pose risks for India's macroeconomic stability going forward: The implicit monetisation of fiscal expenditures through government bond purchases by the RBI in the secondary market has postponed the recognition of the untenable fiscal reality. The delay has meant the government has had limited policy space since the onset of COVID.

Supply-chain disruptions due to measures taken to contain the pandemic raise the possibility of cost-push inflationary pressures, especially given the excessively easy fiscal and monetary conditions. This can abruptly raise economy-wide borrowing rates, inflict losses on banks, and imperil financial stability.

If the gains in inflation credibility built by the MPC framework are dissipated by ineffective policies and operations, both household and investor expectations for inflation could unhinge. It is disturbing that while referring to desirable levels of inflation, analysts appear to have already stopped referring to MPCs mandated target inflation rate of 4 per cent and the focus has instead shifted to the upper tolerance limit of 6 per cent. Worse, it could instigate turmoil in the external sector. Excessively low bank deposit rates may induce some non-resident deposits to exit India.

In a highly unpredictable time such as this, the RBI should preserve its inflation credibility. This requires making the institution of MPC more enduring, not bypassing it. Decision on monetary policy actions based on voting by committee members, provision of inflation and growth forecasts in the resolution statement, and coordination of rate-setting and liquidity management, need to be adhered to.

Even in desperate times, we need to follow due processes and justify with substance the extraordinary actions so that commitment is provided as to how these actions will be unwound when necessary.

The writer is former Governor, Reserve Bank of India

AN UNPARALLELED ACT

It was theatre that defined and consumed Usha Ganguly



NEELAM MANSINGH CHOWDHRY

DO WE CELEBRATE a life or mourn a death is a question that assails me as I reflect on the passing away of theatre director Usha Ganguly in Kolkata last Thursday. Her plays, among them *Court Martial* and *Rudali*, enacted by her theatre group Rangkarmee, founded in 1976, conveyed her single minded obsession and commitment to her work that can loosely be classified as representational realism.

Within this vast framework, she injected flashes of experimentation, taking risks with dramatic flourishes that added a freshness and verve to her work. With her distinct way of dealing with social narratives, storytelling, and structures, Usha effectively and dramatically wove all these strands together. Her theatrical generosity was visible in the way she accepted and admired other directors' way of working with alternative sensibilities.

Usha was a friend and confidant of decades, someone I deeply admired. An enduring memory I have of her — one that is indicative of her indomitable and infectious spirit — dates back to our trip to Lahore in 2005 for a theatre festival organised by Madeeha Gauhar of the Ajoka Theatre group. As part of our hosts' *mehman nawazi*, we were taken to the famous food street in Lahore's Anarkali Bazaar. The atmosphere in this delightful labyrinth of streets was carnivalesque. Anarkali Bazaar's food street is well known for its varied cuisine, but more so for

the fact that it is part of the city's centuries-old red light area. We were enjoying the festive atmosphere and eating the delicious food when, without notice, Usha jumped up and, with vivacious abandonment, began dancing as if she were in a trance. She swirled, gyrated and pirouetted, singing all the while along with the minstrels. One of the Pakistani actors accompanying us somewhat inappropriately remarked that, “*raaj badnam basti mai ek sifzaidi ka nacch dekha*” (in a disreputable locality a respectable woman is dancing), but he did so with secret awe and admiration. Other patrons at surrounding tables and cafes too were captivated by Usha's unprompted performance and gravitated towards her clapping, singing and swaying with the music.

Whenever we met, our conversation was never personal and began and ended with the new plays she was scripting, the shows she was participating in, and the pressures of operating a big theatre company. It was theatre that defined and consumed her. Once she told me that she managed 38 shows in a month — one in the morning in a school courtyard followed by another in a bank, and yet another in the evening in a posh Kolkata theatre. The latter were part of the folklore and history of Bengali theatre, where stalwarts including Nati Binodini, Utpal Dutt and Shambhu Mitra had performed. Usha's capacity to spread her-

self across so many theatrical milieus and coalesce them into a cohesive whole was a rare talent. What impressed me the most was that her work cut through multiple social strata.

I always looked upon Usha as a movement, comprising students and theatre professionals. Even stragglers were welcome and some ended up gradually becoming an intrinsic part of her journey as a director. Compassion and the ability to make an immediate connect with her players and audiences were the intangible thread that kept her theatre company together for so many years.

The most amazing and mysterious improbable, however, was that most of her productions were in Hindi. Her working in Hindi in Kolkata, the heart of Bengali theatre, and being wholly accepted there, has never ceased to amaze me.

But I do have one regret. Whenever we met, she always expressed a desire for me to direct her. She often said that she was even willing to come for an extended period to Chandigarh to make this happen. Regrettably, I allowed that moment to pass, thereby missing the opportunity to work with an actor with incredible talent, charisma and an insatiable urge to explore, investigate and tread new theatrical paths.

The writer is a Sangeet Natak Akademi winner and professor emerita at Panjab University

APRIL 28, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM SOS

THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT has sent an urgent message to the Centre for supply of essential petroleum products, including aviation fuel, as it has failed to lift the available stock at the Gauhati refinery following workers' non-cooperation. The state government said air services to Assam and other parts of the north-eastern region were going to be affected as aviation fuel with the Indian Oil Corporation was not allowed to reach the Borjhar airport for refuelling aircraft. The message said, besides this, transport services, including transportation of essential commodities for the region, had been seriously affected.

AMERICAN WARNING

PRESIDENT CARTER'S NATIONAL security adviser, Brzezinski, said that he would not rule out another mission or any other option to free the hostages in Iran while still hoping for a peaceful solution. Defence secretary Harold Brown declared that the United States would refuse to engage in any barter for the return of the eight dead men left behind when the rescue mission was aborted. Brzezinski warned Iran: “Do not scoff at American power. Do not scoff at American reach. It is in Iran's interest to resolve it peacefully. It is our preference to resolve it peacefully if possible, but the United States is prepared to do all that is necessary to obtain the release”.

EMBASSY SIEGE ENDS

THE 61-DAY HOSTAGE standoff at the Dominican Republic embassy ended when a Cuban jetliner left Bogota for Havana with an estimated 15 leftist guerillas and an undetermined number of hostage diplomats abroad. Several diplomats apparently were freed just before the Soviet-built Ilyushin jet departed at 8.20 am local time, approximately 90 minutes after the guerillas left the embassy with their hostages in two Red Cross buses. It was believed that five diplomats were on the flight and that 11 were freed. Those freed were taken from the plane and driven in a speeding bus across the airfield.



7 THE IDEAS PAGE

Let's fill up the tank

Sharp fall in oil prices is opportunity for Union government to increase stockpile, achieve a degree of energy security



SHASHI THAROOR

OIL PRICES CONTINUE to decline globally, with crude hitting multi-decade lows, as global demand evaporates. Earlier last week, in unprecedented price action, the near-month contract for West Texas Intermediate (WTI) sweet crude oil dropped to -\$37.63 a bbl. A negative price has never before been registered for a major global crude oil benchmark. The extreme price action is a signal that there is a global oil glut with few places to store oil. Global oil markets have been severely disrupted. While WTI does not feature in India's basket, Brent Crude Oil, which does, is trading around \$25 a barrel, the lowest in 18 years.

The economic consequences of COVID-19 are going to be drastic for India and the world. It is hard to say what kind of recovery the economy and markets will undergo when this is over, though there is much glib talk of it being "V", "U" or "L" shaped. But whichever letter of the alphabet wins the race, one opportunity is clear: Even as India suffers from a lockdown, a silver lining for future recovery and reconstruction is the price of oil.

Given India's growth aspirations and lack of self-sustaining oil production, a sharp reduction in oil prices is a bonanza. Normally, reduced oil prices would translate into surplus for the consumers and a fiscal bonus for the government through increased tax collections. However, given that the demand for petrol has slumped, those gains will not accrue right away. But India should look at this as an opportunity to strengthen its energy security by buying oil and filling up our Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR). Considering that India was the third-largest consumer of energy in the world, as well as the third-largest importer of oil in 2018, we are particularly vulnerable to oil price fluctuations. The dramatic reduction in oil prices offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us to fill up our reserves in an extremely cost-effective way.

Currently, we do maintain an emergency stockpile of oil reserves: Under the existing Strategic Petroleum Reserves programme, India claims to have 87 days of reserves. Out of this, refiners maintain 65 days of oil storage and the rest of the reserves are held in underground salt caverns maintained by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPR). The existing and planned capacity for the underground reserves is 10 and 12 days of import cover for crude oil respectively.

There are a couple of issues to be highlighted here. First, capacity does not directly translate into utilisation, which is partly because oil is an expensive commodity most days of the year. In 2019, the average closing price of a barrel of crude was \$57.05. In 2018, it was \$64.90, and in 2017, US\$50.84. Of the existing 10 days of capacity, only about 50 per cent is utilised.

The second issue is with regard to the refinery holdings. In India, the SPR arrangement between the oil refineries and the Union or state governments is not specified well, though most of the refineries that hold stock are publicly-owned companies. In fact, a breakdown of which refineries hold SPR and in what form (crude or refined) or infor-



C R Sasikumar

mation about where they are located is not publicly available.

The first step, therefore, should be to introduce transparency and accountability in relation to the SPR. The procedures, protocols and facts about Indian SPR storage require greater public and parliamentary scrutiny, just like India's other strategic reserves (for instance, foreign exchange). For this, there should be timely and reliable dissemination of information. Instead, it is now shrouded in secrecy.

The lack of transparency around our SPR holdings is compounded by the ambiguity surrounding the mobilisation process. SPR reserves are meant to be used in emergencies, where time is likely to be of the essence. The SPR mobilisation process could be made more efficient by laying out designated roles for different agencies to avoid redundancies in times of crisis. There should be role and process clarity regarding SPR mobilisation. For instance, to begin with, there should be clarity on who (or which agency) can define an emergency and therefore order a mobilisation.

Further, in order to mitigate risks better, India should look to diversify its SPR holdings. Diversification can be based on geographical location (storing oil either domestically or abroad), storage location (underground or overground) and product type (oil can be held in either crude or refined form). Storage and transportation costs could be saved by diversifying geographically. With oil dirt-cheap, if we can purchase more than we can store in our existing facilities, why not go abroad for more storage space?

For instance, one option could be to operationalise, modernise, and add to the oil tanking facilities at Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. Another opportunity would be to enter into a strategic partnership with Oman (Ras Markaz) for oil storage, which would also help India avoid the potential bottleneck of the straits of Hormuz. However, since many of these places could potentially be vulnerable to geopolitical risks, only a small part of India's overall SPR strategy should involve

To mitigate risks better, India should look to diversify its SPR holdings.

Diversification can be based on geographical location (storing oil either domestically or abroad), storage location (underground or overground) and product type (oil can be held in either crude or refined form). Storage and transportation costs could be saved by diversifying geographically. With oil dirt-cheap, if we can purchase more than we can store in our existing facilities, why not go abroad for more storage space?

storing abroad.

Diversification could also be in the form of ownership — either publicly owned through ISPR or by private oil companies, such as ADNOC of Abu Dhabi, which could fill up the SPR when prices are low and take advantage of price arbitrage. This could achieve a degree of price stability and reduce the cost for India to buy such large quantities of oil. The only requirement for this to work is to have a clear contract with the private companies about the mandatory minimum level of stock that they should preserve for use in emergency times. The Takshashila Institution, an independent think-tank, has raised several of these issues in a recent white paper. It serves as a timely reminder for policymakers to take action.

To ensure that SPR and oil security remain a priority in the near future, ISPR should consider filling up the SPR reserves right now — and each time the price of Brent crude oil falls below a certain price, say \$35 per barrel. Buying crude on the forward market is another option, but oil prices are in "contango" — which means that, contrary to normal times, future prices are higher than spot prices.

Energy is and will remain vital to India's aspirations for growth. The sharp fall in the price of oil presents an opportunity for the Union government to increase its SPR stockpile and achieve a degree of energy security. This is especially important at this time when every rupee needs to be conserved to get back on a positive economic track and lift the most vulnerable segments of our population.

The message is clear: While prices are low, we should fill up our reserve tanks and rent space abroad. The oil will come in handy when prices have gone up — and more importantly, when we need it.

Tharoor is the Lok Sabha MP from Thiruvananthapuram. The author is grateful for substantive and technical inputs from Anupam Mamur and Rohan Seth, researchers at the Takshashila Institution

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"A country's public image is ultimately earned by its efforts, rather than empty talk or lies. Chinese people should keep calm and maintain confidence and patience."

— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Proving the pessimists right

Corona crisis delivers yet another blow to wilting political fortunes of Pak PM



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

REPORTS FROM Pakistan claiming that premier Imran Khan's days are numbered are probably just speculation, informed or otherwise. But there is no doubt that the shine has long gone from Khan's government that came to power less than two years ago amid much popular expectations. His indecisive leadership in handling the corona crisis may have tipped the scales for Pakistan's deep state that has always treated the civilian leaders with disdain.

Khan's critics call him the "selected" prime minister. His party did emerge as the largest single party in the July 2018 elections. The army was widely seen as stitching up a majority for Khan in the national assembly and installing him as the prime minister. That does not, however, take away the high personal standing of Khan.

Khan is a genuine national hero in Pakistan. He has much good will around the world, including India. His call to cleanse Pakistan of corruption did find some resonance amongst the Pakistani people. The partnership between Khan and the army seemed a mutually beneficial one. Khan needed the army's support to come to power. And the army could do with a credible face that could confront and delegitimise the old political class, and create the basis for an overhaul of the Pakistani system.

Optimists hoped that Khan's special stature with the people would give him room to bargain with the army that has steadily gained ground against the elected leaders in recent decades. Pessimists, however, were convinced that Khan will find it hard to find wiggle room, and that he will be dumped once his political utility is over.

Historical record certainly rests with the pessimists. There was a time, a little over three decades ago, when Benazir Bhutto came to power after the death of General Zia-ul-Haq in a mysterious air crash in 1988. The arrangements that followed the decade-long rule of General Zia were decimated as a "troika" — an elected PM, a civilian president and the army chief.

In the years before and after General Pervez Musharraf's military rule (1999-2008), the civilians struggled to hold their own against the army. Nawaz Sharif, who rose to prominence with the support of the army, sought to create space for himself on all the three occasions he became the PM. But each time, the deep state humiliated

him.

The civilian president Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked him in 1993 and Musharraf's coup ousted him in 1999. The current army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, got the judiciary to remove him from the office on charges of corruption in 2017.

Asif Ali Zardari, who led the Pakistan Peoples Party to power in the 2008 general elections, tried to assert himself when the US forces raided Abbottabad to kill Osama Bin Laden much to the embarrassment of the Pakistani army. But that weak attempt failed and Zardari is now serving out a 15-year prison sentence.

By the time Khan came to power, the PM's office had, largely, been hollowed out. None of Benazir's successors have had much say in running national security policies. They are the preserve of the army. The defence ministry was always run by the army. The key foreign policy accounts — India, Afghanistan, China, Saudi Arabia, and the US — were closely supervised by the army. And, as difficult domestic security challenges became serious in the last decade, the army took direct control of law and order in many areas.

After Musharraf, the army learnt to run the system without being formally in charge. That left the civilian leaders with the job of running a competent front office for the army and managing the economy with some effectiveness. Khan, who inherited an economy that was in a bad state, has struggled to put it back on the rails. And the army chief was quickly inserted into the economic decision-making space.

Because Khan had no power, does not mean that he would be spared of criticism. His government has been widely blamed for the "weak responses" of Islamabad to the Balakot attack by the Indian Air Force in February 2019. The Modi government's move to change the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir last August, and Delhi's pressure campaign at the international Financial Action Task Force that is monitoring Pakistan's commitments to curb terrorism on its soil.

The corona crisis was, arguably, an opportunity for Khan to rise to the occasion and demonstrate his leadership in tackling a grave challenge to Pakistan's economy and security. But, as Khan fumbled, the army moved to quickly sideline him and take charge. This does not necessarily mean General Bajwa has decided that Khan is no longer a useful political asset. That might happen only when the General concludes that the post-corona geopolitical environment, including in Afghanistan, has turned more conducive to direct rule by the Army.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express



PAYAL CHAWLA

A judicious balance

Judiciary has set an example on how to combine social distancing and work

WHILE THE lockdown has been extended, it is unlikely to continue indefinitely. A phase-wise opening of the economy is anticipated. But the crisis is neither over nor is the virus disappearing. Not until a vaccine is developed and accessible to all.

The lockdown by the government was timely to ensure the virus's containment. It also bought the government time to organise the much-needed resources to fight the virus. Be it importing or manufacturing PPE kits, including N95 masks, coveralls, goggles, nitrile gloves, ventilators; enhancing testing facilities, permitting door-to-door sample pick-up services by private laboratories or innovations such as AgVa portable ventilators and splinter ventilators — it is all happening and is much-needed. But this is not the sound of the pandemic ending. It is only the beginning.

Despite this reality, it is also not possible to have an indefinite lockdown. The economy simply cannot sustain it. And the success of how we keep this virus at bay will depend on how we balance two antithetical interests — social distancing on the one hand and the continuance of work on the other.

In a surprising but pleasant move, it is the judiciary that has shown us how this antipodal balance can be achieved. No, not by way of a judgment, but by swiftly adapting itself to technology. Long perceived as the mono-

lith reluctant to change, the judiciary has acted with uncharacteristic speed and led by example.

In the run-up to the days of the lockdown, the courts had realised that its corridors would be a breeding ground for the pandemic. They quickly organised themselves to hear only matters of extreme urgency. As the lockdown ensued, courts adopted various technology platforms such as WhatsApp calls, video-mobile, Zoom.us and video conferencing to hear matters. Listing of matters could be done over a phone call to the designated registrar. "While the system is yet not perfect, but it is indeed heartening that even in these difficult times, justice can be accessed," says Jaideep Gupta, senior advocate, who has appeared before the Supreme Court (SC) in hearings conducted through WhatsApp and video-mobile calls. Things are not perfect and there is much to be done. But in all fairness, the system is evolving every day.

Taking cognisance of a letter sent by Vikas Singh, the former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that technology "has enabled courts to enhance quality and effectiveness of the administration of justice". The apex court authorised high courts to take such measures as necessary for their continued functioning through video-conferencing and

adopt the requisite modalities suitable for their transition, and also for district courts in each state to adopt this model. The SC observed that while "scaling down of conventional operations within the precincts of courts, was a necessity to reduce transmission of the virus", at the same time "access to justice is fundamental to preserve the rule of law".

In recent days, the SC began hearing what it categorised as "short matters", which include tenancy disputes, compensation matters, transfer petitions, bail and anticipatory bail matters. The Delhi High Court and certain tribunals have also further streamlined the process of e-filing and listing of urgent matters.

In the days to come, we anticipate and hope that the courts will expand on the as-yet-unwritten definition of "urgency" to permit access to virtual courts to a larger number of litigants. Also, judges must seriously consider operating from their home offices. The process of notarisation and oath commissioners must be dispensed with and filings need to be permitted under the attestation of the concerned lawyer. Such a model is already in place in certain courts such as the Madras High Court. The courts should also consider dispensing with oral hearings, except in urgent or exceptional matters and decide matters based on pleadings/written submissions, at the very least in those cases where both parties are agreeable and regard-

ing more routine matters. Justice D Y Chandrachud has propagated the institutionalisation of technology even after the lockdown is lifted.

It is hoped that this transition in the judicial model will be an inspiration to other sectors. Of course, there will be sectors, such as manufacturing and construction, where the work-from-home model will not be possible and yet their commencement may be imminent to keep the economy afloat. For them, strict protocols for social distancing, to the extent possible, are already underway and will need to be strictly enforced. The ban on large gatherings, including religious and social ones, must continue.

However, sectors where work-from-home is an option, such as the services and educational sectors, must take a leaf out of the judiciary's book and mandatorily continue to operate within the confines of the lockdown guidelines. They must recognise their unique place in this moment of crisis and use their skills in confinement — not merely as a duty but as an obligation — for the development and continuance of the economy, while allowing the necessary space for the social distancing of those who have no option but to leave the safety of their homes.

Chawla is a practising advocate and founder of JusContractus, a Delhi-based law firm

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DON'T BICKER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Finding the cure' (IE, April 27). While the tearing hurry for discovering a vaccine to COVID-19 is understandable, countries must be wary of ignoring the standard testing protocol. Also, misgivings among countries since the time the pandemic broke out need to be set aside. This is not a time to blame each other and widen faultlines. Cooperation, especially in terms of scientific and medical research, is the need of the hour. Finding a cure and making it available worldwide is imperative.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

PROTECT DOCTORS

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Safety of healers' (IE, April 27). Mindless attacks on doctors and paramedical staff by COVID patients and their families are beyond comprehension. The government has done the right thing by stipulating seven years of imprisonment for offenders. Doctors and medical staff on the frontline deserve respect. Such attacks happened in the past as well. Malpractice by a few doctors and profiteering by some private hospitals should not cast a shadow over the entire medical fraternity. Those engaging in violence against healthcare professionals must be held to account.

Bholey Bhardwaj, Mumbai

PROVIDE RELIEF

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Humanitarian emergency' (IE, April 27). Providing universal free rations and doorstep delivery of foodgrains in tamperproof packets are both within the capacity of the state machinery. This will ensure nobody is deprived of food in the ongoing crisis. The govern-

ment can use technological solutions like geotagging to ensure accountability on the ground. Universalising this scheme would make the pilferage in the supply chain redundant, as the abundance of supply with the people would mean no demand for the grade of foodgrain distributed by the PDS in the black market.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

INTERNET RIGHTS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'I tweet therefore I'm heard' (IE, April 27). The digital divide makes the state distant from those who need it. Education is the best tool for social and economic mobility. During the lockdown, middle and upper-class child are getting online education but the poor who need it the most are excluded. Likewise in health, the Aarogya Setu app and Google maps provide information regarding corona but those without internet find it difficult to access this basic information.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

US President Donald Trump has nominated senior Indian-American diplomat Manisha Singh as America's next envoy to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Singh, 49, is currently Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs at the State Department

PANDEMIC WATCH



Imran Khan

PAKISTAN
Imran changes media team amid criticism

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday changed his media team for the second time since coming to power in 2018 amid mounting criticism of his government for failing to address the key issues of the country. Prime Minister Khan appointed Senator Shibli Faraz as the new information minister of the country. Faraz is the son of eminent Urdu poet late Ahmad Faraz. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) for information and broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan was also removed and was replaced by former military spokesman Lt Gen (retired) Asim Saleem Bajwa.

THAILAND
Lowest number of cases in past six weeks

Bangkok: Thai health authorities on Monday reported the country's lowest number of new cases of the coronavirus in more than six weeks, as the government considers easing some restrictions imposed to control the spread of the virus. Nine new confirmed cases were reported, the smallest single-day increase since March 14. Thailand has confirmed 2,931 cases, including 52 deaths. Officials said a proposal will be submitted to the Cabinet on Tuesday for easing restrictions.

SINGAPORE
Tally crosses 14,000 after 799 new cases

Singapore: Singapore's coronavirus tally reached 14,423 on Monday after 799 new cases were reported with majority of them being foreign workers, including Indians, residing in dormitories, which have emerged as the hotspots for the transmission of the disease in the country. Releasing the latest figures, the Ministry of Health said that the vast majority of cases are work permit holders residing in foreign workers' dormitories. Fourteen of the latest cases are Singaporeans or permanent residents (foreigners).

Boris back at work, warns against relaxing virus restrictions too soon

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, APRIL 27

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson on Monday warned against relaxing the coronavirus restrictions too soon as the country was still facing a moment of "maximum risk", in his first remarks since returning to work after contracting the disease that has killed over 20,000 in the UK.

While declaring that the tide is being turned on the coronavirus pandemic in the country, he urged the British public to contain their impatience against the crippling lockdown.

"We are beginning to turn the tide... There are real signs we are passing through the peak," said Johnson, in an upbeat address to the nation on the steps of 10 Downing Street.

"I ask you to contain your impatience because I believe now we are coming to the end of the first phase of this conflict," he said, promising "maximum transparency" on the decisions to be taken as the UK enters phase two of the Covid-19 fight-back, which will involve one by one firing up the "economic engines" of the UK economy.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks outside 10 Downing Street on Monday. Reuters

Johnson said the UK has "so far collectively shielded our National Health Service" and "flattened the peak" - but he could not yet say when or which restrictions would be lifted.

Johnson wanted to send out a clear message that this is the moment of "maximum risk", making it imperative that no steps can be taken to ease up restrictions that could lead to a risk of a "second spike" of

infections. And comparing the fight to someone being attacked, he noted: "If this virus were a physical assailant, an unexpected and invisible mugger - which I can tell you from personal experience, it is - then this is the moment when we have begun together to wrestle it to the floor."

"And so it follows that this is the moment of opportunity, this is the moment when we

can press home our advantage, it is also the moment of maximum risk.

"I know there will be many people looking at our apparent success, and beginning to wonder whether now is the time to go easy on those social distancing measures... I entirely share your urgency, it's the government's urgency and yet we must also recognise the risk of a second spike." PTI

U.K. SAYS IT WON'T EXTEND E.U. TALKS DESPITE OUTBREAK

THE BRITISH govt insisted Monday it won't extend the deadline for striking a post-Brexit deal with the European Union, despite the upheaval due to Covid

CABINET OFFICE Minister Michael Gove said 'it is still entirely possible' to seal an agreement by the December 31 deadline

THE EU is considerably more pessimistic. Michel Barnier, chief negotiator, called a round of talks last week 'disappointing'

BARNIER ACCUSED the UK of refusing to 'engage seriously' on fundamental issues. Trade, security and a host of other issues have to be covered

In US, conflicting messages stoke confusion in states

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, APRIL 27

AS SEVERAL states moved ahead with plans to tentatively restart their economies, many Americans were confronted with yet another new calculation on Monday. After weeks of being told to simply stay home, they would now have to decide how to make sense of conflicting messages from local politicians and public health officials.

Dr Deborah L. Birk, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, cautioned that Americans should expect some form of social-distancing guidelines to continue for months.

"Social distancing will be with us through the summer," she said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." Her comments came after Vice President Mike Pence suggested that the coronavirus epidemic would be under control by the end of May.

"I think by Memorial Day Weekend we will largely have this coronavirus epidemic behind us," he said late last week.

While states and localities face different challenges across the country, the pressure to ease restrictions will only grow as the economic pain deepens,

China targets US response

Beijing: China is fighting back against calls for an investigation into its role in the global pandemic, citing faults with the US response to the outbreak and calling for Washington itself to admit error.

"We hope the U.S. will respond to people's concern from the U.S. and the international community. Perhaps the World Health Organisation can also be invited in to assist in the investigation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said on Monday.

The Xinhua News Agency also ran a commentary accusing US Republicans of seeking to gain political points by attacking China. AP

restlessness grows and spring turns to summer.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo of New York laid out a broad outline on Sunday for a gradual restart of the state that would allow some "low risk" businesses upstate to reopen as soon as mid-May.



CHINA TO FOCUS ON HIGH-RISK GROUPS

Medical workers collect swabs from high school teachers for tests at a school in Hubei province, China, on Monday. China will focus testing on high-risk groups such as people from infected areas or with symptoms, a top official said. Reuters

NZ has won battle against transmission: PM

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WELLINGTON, APRIL 27

PRIME MINISTER Jacinda Ardern on Monday claimed New Zealand had scored a significant victory against the spread of the coronavirus, as the country began a phased exit from lockdown.

"There is no widespread, undetected community transmission in New Zealand," Ardern declared. "We have won that battle." After nearly five weeks at the maximum Level Four restrictions - with only essential services operating - the country will move to Level Three late on Monday.

That will allow some businesses, takeaway food outlets



Jacinda Ardern

and schools to reopen.

But Ardern warned there was no certainty about when all transmission can be eliminated, allowing a return to normal life.

Everyone wants to "bring back the social contact that we all miss", she said, "but to do it confidently we need to move

EXPLAINED
Strict curbs, widespread testing credited for progress

STRICT MEASURES implemented early into the pandemic's timeline played a key role in helping New Zealand contain the outbreak. The country began quarantining all incoming travellers starting March 14 (then among the toughest measures). It began locking down on March 23 and implemented its toughest "level 4" lockdown on March 25. Experts said widespread testing also played a key role, with the country reportedly having one of the highest testing rates per capita in the world.

slowly and we need to move cautiously."

"I will not risk the gains we've made in the health of New Zealanders. So if we need to remain at Level Three, we will."

The easing of restrictions came as New Zealand, a nation of five million people, reported only one new case of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 1,122 with 19 deaths.

Iran plans to reopen mosques in areas free of coronavirus

REUTERS
LONDON, APRIL 27

IRAN PLANS to reopen mosques in parts of the country that have been consistently free of the coronavirus outbreak as restrictions on Iranians gradually ease, President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday.

Iran, one of the Middle Eastern countries hardest hit by the pandemic, will be divided up into white, yellow and red regions based on the number of infections and deaths, Rouhani said, according to the presidency's website.

Activities in each region will be restricted accordingly, so an area that has been consistently free of infections or deaths will be labelled white and mosques could be reopened and Friday prayers resumed, Rouhani said.

He said the label given to any region in the Islamic Republic could change and he did not specify when the colour-coding programme would come into force.

Deputy Health Minister Iraj Hariri said in an interview with state TV on Sunday that 116 counties in the country could be considered white at the moment and 134 yellow.

Iranians have returned to shops, bazaars and parks over the past week as the country eases coronavirus restrictions, with the daily increase in the death toll below 100 since April 14. The toll rose by 60 over the past 24 hours to 5,710.



Anti-shutdown protesters in San Diego. AP

Pelosi endorses Joe Biden for president

AGENCIES
NEW YORK, APRIL 27

NANCY PELOSI, the speaker of the House, endorsed Joseph R Biden Jr on Monday as the Democratic Party continued to coalesce around its presumptive presidential nominee.

In a video released on Monday morning, Pelosi drew on her years of working with Biden behind the scenes on legislation when he was Obama's vice president, describing Biden as "a leader with the humility to seek expertise and science, and the confidence to act upon it."

Meanwhile, Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal endorsed Biden's 2020 White House bid, saying he is a dedicated public servant with the ability to unite Americans. Jayapal is the first Indian-American woman to be elected to the US House of Representatives.

"He (Trump) and his administration have demonstrated repeatedly - and most recently in



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi



PRIMARIES: THE DEMOCRATS

their disastrous response to COVID-19 - an inability to govern, make tough decisions, speak the truth and unite the country in common purpose. Any progress toward a better future requires defeating him this November," she said.

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

He found one of Stalin's mass graves, now he's in jail

ANDREW HIGGINS
SANDARMOKH (RUSSIA), APRIL 27

THE DAY began, like many others in her childhood years, with hours of tramping through an insect-infested forest with the family dog while her eccentric father, Yuri Dmitriev, wandered off to hunt in vain for corpses buried among the trees.

On that day more than 20 years ago, however, Dmitriev, an amateur but very determined historian, finally found the gruesome prize he had long been searching for - burial mounds containing the remains of political prisoners executed by Stalin's secret police. "Everything started here," said Dmitriev's 35-year-old daughter, Katerina Klodt, during



The forest at Sandarmokh in Russia where thousands of victims of Stalin were executed. NYT

a recent visit to the forest at Sandarmokh. "My dad's work was clearly made some people very uncomfortable."

Dmitriev is now in jail, awaiting trial on what his family,

friends and supporters dismiss as blatantly fabricated charges of pedophilia, an accusation that has frequently been used to discredit and silence voices the Russian authorities do not like.

An official in Karelia complained last year that the jailed historian's life work - the commemoration of Stalin's victims at Sandarmokh forest - had created an "unfounded sense of guilt" and been used by "foreign powers for propaganda against Russia."

In pursuit of a guilt-free version of Russia's past, men in camouflage uniforms visited the same forest last summer to do their own digging, uncovering the remains of 16 corpses that they hope will prove that the killing at Sandarmokh was, at least in part, the work of foreigners, not just the Soviet secret police.

Sponsored by the Military Historical Society, a state-funded organisation notorious for its nationalist take on Russian history, the diggers were looking for evidence to support a highly con-

tested theory put forward by two Karelia historians. They argue that the thousands of people buried at Sandarmokh are not all Stalin's victims but also include Soviet soldiers executed by the Finnish Army during World War II.

With the 75th anniversary on May 9 of the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany and its allies like Finland, the suffering inflicted on Russia by its own rulers has become an unwanted distraction from memories of the country's immense wartime sacrifice against foreign enemies.

President Vladimir V. Putin and his officials do not deny the horrors of the Stalin era, but intent on convincing Russians their country is besieged by external foes, want them focused on crimes committed by foreign aggressors.

Dmitriev, meanwhile, has

been sitting in a pretrial detention centre in Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia. Late last month, a municipal court - sealed off to visitors because of the coronavirus - extended his detention for another three months.

Klodt said she had no doubt about her father's innocence and blamed his travails on his stubborn insistence that all victims be remembered, not just those killed by foreigners. Sitting on a bench near a tree pinned with an American flag commemorating a man from San Francisco executed in Stalin's Great Terror, she pointed with disgust at a snow-covered hole dug by the Military Historical Society as part of its search for Russians killed by Finland.

"I am so tired of this circus," she said. "I don't understand what they are trying to prove." NYT

Rumours of Kim Jong Un health untrue: South Korea

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, APRIL 27

SOUTH KOREA'S government has dismissed rumours that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is in fragile condition, as speculation about his health intensifies amid the North's silence on his whereabouts.

There are concerns, particularly in Seoul and Washington, about what would happen to North Korea and its nuclear programme if anything had actually happened to Kim.

For South Korea and the US, Kim's absence would mean the departure of a man they've dealt with over the past two years to try to achieve the North's denuclearisation, though talks have

stalled in recent months.

Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul told a closed-door forum in Seoul that South Korea has "enough intelligence to confidently say that there are no unusual developments" in rival North Korea that would back up speculation about Kim's health, his ministry said on Monday.

On Monday, North Korea's state TV broadcast said Kim sent his thanks to workers and officials at a tourist resort construction site on the east coast.

The unification minister's comments are a reiteration of earlier South Korean statements that Kim Jong Un appeared to be handling state affairs normally and that no unusual activities had been detected in North Korea.

DIVESTMENT WATCH OIL MARKETING COMPANIES

Sliding crude prices, struggling global energy cos deter govt's BPCL stake sale plan

SUNNY VERMA & KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

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EXPLAINED

Adequate valuation may take time

THE CENTRE'S plans to sell its entire stake in BPCL are expected to face hurdles as the unprecedented slump in global crude prices may deter international interest in the state-owned energy major in the near term, as per a senior government official and sources in the energy industry. The government may have to wait longer for bids at an attractive valuation as major international energy players are battling the financial stress caused by disruption in the crude oil market.

Industry sources said many refining companies globally have filed for bankruptcies recently, creating a negative spiral for energy assets. Since January, a total of 10 companies, including Whiting Petroleum and Echo Energy Partners in the US, have filed for bankruptcies. As prices of crude fall, domestic oil marketing companies (OMCs) such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) typically tend to benefit from it. But this is the first time that despite oil prices hitting new lows, OMCs had to shut their refining plants and lower their capacity due to the nationwide coronavirus-induced lockdown. This is the first time that refineries in India are running at low capacity of 25-30 per cent, industry sources said. Shutting down of refineries is a big challenge as costs of restarting them rises significantly.

On April 12, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies agreed to reduce production by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May and June — nearly 10 per cent of global supply. However, even this could not stop further fall in oil prices due to the demand collapse, with the International Energy Agency projecting demand to shrink by 29 million bpd this month alone. This has created a tough scenario for BPCL's stake sale to go through at an attractive price in medium term.

An analyst at a leading brokerage firm, who wished to remain anonymous, said "the government would likely want to wait for the valuation to improve," adding that major global upstream players, such as Saudi Aramco, who were thought to be interested in purchasing a stake in BPCL would have to cut capital expenditure and acquisition targets, given the impact on their businesses from the fall in crude prices.

Steep fall in demand means the valuation for BPCL would remain depressed for some time. "Even when demand recovers, I don't think refining margin will recover soon," he said.

Shares of BPCL fell nearly 55 per cent from the high of Rs 549 on November 21, 2019 to Rs 253 on March 23, 2020 as the lockdown led to a crash in stock markets. It has since recovered to the Rs 350-level per share, still 36 per cent lower from November highs.

The Centre, last month, invited expressions of interest (EOIs) from interested parties with a net worth of at least \$10 billion for the strategic sale of BPCL — one of the largest oil marketing and oil refining companies in India with a refining capacity of 38.3 million metric tonnes per annum or about 15 per cent of the country's total refining capacity.

Divestment of the government's 52.98 per cent equity stake in BPCL forms a key part of its Rs 2.1-lakh crore disinvestment target for FY21. Finance Ministry officials did not reply to queries seeking comment for this story.

"The valuation for BPCL will be lower due to the current situation and this has partially been reflected in the stock prices. Earnings for BPCL in Q1 would definitely be impacted by lower marketing volumes," said Mayur Matani, equity analyst at ICICI securities, adding that once economic activity recovers, BPCL would do well on the marketing front as its marketing margins would benefit from low crude oil prices.

"Even if crude oil prices touch \$30-\$40 per barrel, it is a very good scenario for the marketing business (once demand picks up). So, in the near term, there will be some pain. Nobody who is willing to invest right now is actually looking for results in the next six months," he said.

lockdowns and the Bank of Japan expanded its stimulus program, while the price of oil continued to crumble as storage runs out.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1.21 per cent to 24,063.47. The S&P 500 gained

1.36 per cent to reach 2,875.31 and the Nasdaq Composite added 0.73 per cent to settle at 8,738.51. The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 1.77 per cent and MSCI's gauge of stocks across the globe gained 1.64 per cent.

A guard stands next to a money changer in Tokyo, Japan. The Bank of Japan, on Monday, announced expansion of its stimulus program. Reuters

lockdowns and the Bank of Japan expanded its stimulus program, while the price of oil continued to crumble as storage runs out.

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'NO DECISION ON MONETISING PART OF THE FISCAL DEFICIT'

Going beyond 3.5% fiscal deficit target 'unavoidable': RBI Governor

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

RESERVE BANK Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday said meeting the fiscal deficit target in FY21 is going to be challenging and the central bank has not yet made a decision on its monetisation. While several economists and former top officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have suggested the government overshooting its fiscal deficit target due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown, Das said that going beyond the 3.5 per cent target for fiscal deficit for the current fiscal year becomes "unavoidable".

"We will deal with it keeping in view the operational realities, the need to preserve the strength of the RBI's balance sheet, and most importantly, the goal of macroeconomic stability, our primary mandate," Das said in an interview to Cogencis.

When asked whether the RBI would monetise part of the fiscal deficit through private placement



"The mantra of coming out of the *chakravayuh* has to also be thought through very carefully and be factored in when entering the *chakravayuh*"

SHAKTIKANTA DAS
GOVERNOR, RBI

of bonds or issuance of any specific pandemic bonds, Das said, "We have not taken any view on the subject. When the time comes, we will take a judicious and balanced view, keeping in mind the parameters I set out earlier."

Talking about steps to combat the impact of the pandemic, Das pointed out that it was as important to make plans for exiting the extraordinary measures that are undertaken in response to a situation. "The mantra of coming out of the 'chakravayuh' has to also be thought through very carefully and be factored in when entering the 'chakravayuh'," he said, citing

the hard-to-exit battle formation from the epic Mahabharata.

Das also allayed fears that the central bank would resort to withdrawing accommodation quickly. "To ensure the markets don't read me differently and think that RBI is going on a tightening mode, let me make it very clear: the exit has to be well-timed, when you are confident that things are working and near normal," he said.

He said the RBI is ready to take more measures to improve flow of credit to small non-bank financial companies (NBFC) and micro-finance institutions (MFIs). The challenge of ensuring flows to

mid- and small-sized NBFCs and MFIs is still there, the RBI chief said. "That is an issue that is very much on our table. We will take further measures as necessary to address that challenge."

The Reserve Bank had fine-tuned the targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO) and announced TLTRO 2.0 aimed at directing funds to NBFCs through banks. However, the first TLTRO 2.0 saw demand for just about half of Rs 25,000 crore on offer. The RBI was aware that the demand may not be as good as other repo operations, despite some additional incentives, Das said. "We had a sense that the response may not be as good as TLTRO despite the additional incentives such as exemption from being reckoned as adjusted net bank credit."

"The auction results convey a telling message, which is that the banks are not willing to take on credit risk in their balance sheets beyond a point. We are reviewing the whole situation and based on that, we would decide on our approach," he said.

'VC inflows tumble to just \$2.2 bn in Mar quarter'

Hit by coronavirus-driven uncertainties, VC investments in the country plunged to a meagre \$2.2 billion in the March 2020 quarter, a KPMG report said



International firms and corporates, which contribute a major amount of VC to India, waited in the March quarter to see how COVID-19 affects them, thus deferring many VC deals

SLOW DEAL FLOW IN Q2: While the pipeline for deals is expected to remain relatively robust, deal flow is expected to become very slow, particularly in the second quarter

ROBUST INVESTMENTS OVER LONG TERM: Though venture capital (VC) investments may be challenging in the short term, it is expected to remain robust over the longer term

Major fundraises recorded in March quarter:
 ■ \$400 million by Byju's
 ■ \$110 million by Unacademy
 ■ \$150 million by mobility firm Bounce

■ Auto-tech
 ■ Health-tech related to fitness

Likely hot sectors of venture capitalists:
 ■ Education technology, or edutech

Challenges for cross-border VC investment:
 ■ Travel and movement restrictions
 ■ Inability to conduct in-person due diligence and face-to-face meetings

\$6 billion: Inflow of VC investments into the country — a record — during the December 2019 quarter

Source: KPMG/PTI

FPIs continue to be sellers as markets rise on liquidity boost to MFs

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO investors (FPIs) continued to remain sellers in domestic equity markets, even as the benchmarks rose on Monday on the back of the Reserve Bank's announcement of a Rs 50,000-crore liquidity support for mutual funds and in anticipation of a fiscal package. The Sensex ended the day 415.86 points, or 1.33 per cent, higher to close at 31,743.08. The Nifty50 closed 127.9 points, or 1.40 per cent, higher to settle at 9,282.3.

According to provisional data, FPIs sold equities worth \$120.3 million. Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) bought equities worth \$150.02 million. They were large sellers in March, pulling out \$8.3 billion. In April, FPIs have

continued to sell but the extent of selling has reduced and the net outflow till April 27 is at \$408.6 million. This, some market experts said, may suggest that FPIs still believe in India's consumption story.

Other experts believe the continued selling in emerging markets is because investors want to pile up on cash due to the on-going pandemic. The F&O segment recorded a turnover of Rs 7.15 lakh crore against the six-month average of Rs 14.42 lakh crore. The cash market turnover stood at Rs 45,740.8 crore against the six-month average of Rs 39,134 crore.

Meanwhile, the rupee appreciated by 21 paise to close at 76.25 against the US dollar on Monday, tracking positive domestic equities and weakening of the American currency in the overseas market. **FEWITHTPTI**

Asset quality could come under stress, says IndusInd Bank MD-CEO

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

INDUSIND BANK could see asset quality deteriorate as a result of the disruption to the economy after the COVID-19 outbreak, MD and CEO Sumant Kathpalia said Monday. Speaking to the media in his first post-results interaction, Kathpalia indicated the private sector lender's credit costs could go up to as much as 180 basis points (bps); in a business-as-usual scenario, the lender's credit cost would have ranged around 120-130 bps, he said.

Kathpalia said offering projections on loan growth, at this juncture, would be incorrect. "Somehow think all of us are in this situation of perfecting our balance sheet and making sure our collections are on track and our

portfolio remains as an asset. We are not seeing any high delinquencies."

IndusInd Bank's net profit fell 16 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to Rs 302 crore in the March quarter as a result of higher provisions

The bank's net profit fell 16 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to Rs 302 crore in the March quarter as a result of higher provisions. Its net interest income increased 45 per cent y-o-y to Rs 3,231 crore and net interest margin increased 10 bps sequentially to 4.25 per cent. Total advances grew 11 per cent y-o-y to Rs 2,07 lakh crore as on March 31, 2020 and total deposits rose 4 per cent y-o-y to Rs 2,02 lakh crore. **FE**

Ind-Ra: FY21 growth to hit 29-yr low of 1.9%, slip into negative territory if lockdown extended

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

INDIA RATINGS & Research (Ind-Ra) has cut the country's FY21 growth forecast to a 29-year low of 1.9 per cent from 3.6 per cent estimated earlier, assuming that the partial lockdown to counter the COVID-19 pandemic will continue till mid-May. In case the lockdown continues beyond that, Ind-Ra then expects gross domestic product (GDP) growth to slip into negative territory, contracting to a 41-year low of 2.1 per cent.

"... if the lockdown continues beyond mid-May 2020 and a gradual recovery takes root only from end-June 2020, GDP growth may slip further to negative 2.1 per cent, lowest in the last 41 years and only the sixth instance of contraction since FY52," Sunil Kumar Sinha, principal economist, Ind-Ra said. Many global and domestic research agencies have already cut India's growth forecast for this fiscal. The IMF expects the Indian economy to grow 1.9 per cent, while the World Bank has made a projection of 1.5-2.8 per cent.

On the fiscal front, lower tax and non-tax revenue due to lockdown and slowdown, along with the need to provide fiscal stimulus, will "destabilise the fiscal arithmetic of both union and state governments", Ind-Ra said. "Even without any significant fiscal stimulus, Ind-Ra expects fiscal deficit of the government to escalate to 4.4 per cent of GDP in FY21 (FY21 Budget Estimate: 3.5 per cent of GDP) and a stimulus package of INR4 trillion would push it to 6.0 per cent of GDP."

The agency, in its report, said that GDP may come back to the January-March FY20 level only by October-December FY21, due to resumption of normal economic activities during July-September FY21 and festive demand during October-December FY21.

On the recent measures taken by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that included a cut in repo rate by 75 basis points (bps), cut in the

Crisil lowers growth forecast by half to 1.8%

Mumbai: Rating agency Crisil on Monday nearly halved its GDP forecast for India to 1.8 per cent for 2020-21 while projecting total losses of Rs 10 lakh crore or Rs 7,000 per person due to "disastrous" lockdowns to control COVID-19 pandemic. The agency had a GDP growth estimate of 6 per cent for FY21, which was last revised to 3.5 per cent in late March. **PTI**

cash reserve ratio by 100 bps to 3 per cent and a targeted long term repo operations (TLTRO) worth Rs 1 lakh crore, it said the steps were focused on easing the tight monetary conditions building up in the economy but the financial market reacted otherwise.

"... the spread between the repo rate and capital market instruments, such as benchmark G-sec, AAA corporate bond, commercial paper of NBFCs, which were either flat or declining since the beginning of March 2020, started inching up after 13 March 2020. The spread rose abruptly in the range of 50-80 bps on the next day of RBI's Monetary Policy statement and have remained thereabouts since then. It is due to this kind of risk aversion that deployment of TLTRO funds so far has largely been into the bonds issued by public sector entities and large corporates," Sinha said.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, the agency expects the risk aversion to continue, saying that the funds available under TLTRO 2.0 may also not flow to the targeted segment i.e. investment-grade bonds, commercial papers, and non-convertible debentures of NBFCs, with at least 50 per cent of the total amount going to small and mid-sized NBFCs and micro-finance institutions.

Q4 RESULTS

HDFC Life profit slips 14.3% to ₹312 cr

Mumbai: HDFC Life on Monday reported a 14.3 per cent decline in its net profit at Rs 311.71 crore in the March quarter due to fall in investment income. In the year ago period, the private sector life insurer had reported a profit after tax of Rs 364.01 crore.

The investment income fell to negative Rs 10,229.92 crore in the quarter as against an income of Rs 3,755.6 crore in the year ago period. For FY20, profit remained flat at Rs 1,295 crore. HDFC Life's new business premium grew 15 per cent to Rs 17,239 crore in FY20 as against Rs 14,971 crore in 2018-19.

"We believe that insurance remains a multi-decade opportunity with significant potential," the company's managing director and chief executive officer Vibha Padalkar said. **PTI**

Adani Power reports loss of ₹1,312.86 crore

New Delhi: Adani Power Monday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 1,312.86 crore for the quarter ended March 31, mainly due higher operating cost.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 634.64 crore in the year-ago quarter, Adani Power said in a BSE filing. Its total income slipped to Rs 6,327.57 crore in the quarter from Rs 8,077.89 crore in the year-ago period. Total expenses in March quarter stood at Rs 7,980.17 crore as compared to Rs 8,162.01 crore in same period of 2018-19.

An official said that the loss is mainly due to rise in operational costs in the quarter and entire fiscal. The company's consolidated net loss stood at Rs 2,274.77 crore in 2019-20 compared to Rs 984.40 crore loss in 2018-19. **PTI**

US WTI crude plunges 18%, Brent hovers near \$20 a barrel

REUTERS
NEW YORK, APRIL 27

BRENT CRUDE hovered around \$20 a barrel and US crude plunged 18 per cent on Monday, driven lower by skittish investors fleeing the US benchmark due to lack of available storage to deal with a COVID-19-induced collapse in demand. Even as governments worldwide are taking tentative steps to lower restriction on movement to help economies rebound, fuel demand remains weak.

US West Texas Intermediate crude futures fell \$3.14, or 18.5 per cent, to \$13.80 a barrel by 1742 GMT. Brent crude slid \$1.40, or 6.5 per cent, to \$20.04 a barrel.

Meanwhile, global stock markets rose on Monday as investors cheered news that more countries and US states were looking to ease



A guard stands next to a money changer in Tokyo, Japan. The Bank of Japan, on Monday, announced expansion of its stimulus program. Reuters

lockdowns and the Bank of Japan expanded its stimulus program, while the price of oil continued to crumble as storage runs out.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1.21 per cent to 24,063.47. The S&P 500 gained

1.36 per cent to reach 2,875.31 and the Nasdaq Composite added 0.73 per cent to settle at 8,738.51. The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 1.77 per cent and MSCI's gauge of stocks across the globe gained 1.64 per cent.

SP Infra to sell 317-MW solar assets to KKR for ₹1,554 crore

New Delhi: Infrastructure developer Shapoorji Pallonji Infrastructure Capital (SP Infra) on Monday announced a Rs 1,554-crore deal with global investment firm KKR to sell five solar assets with a total capacity of 317 megawatts.

According to a company statement portfolio comprises 169 megawatts (MW) in Maharashtra and 148 MW in Tamil Nadu.

The SP Infra has the signed definitive agreements with KKR, under which the company will sell five operational solar energy assets to KKR for a total consideration of Rs 1,554 crore (\$204 million), the company said.

More details of the investment have not been disclosed. The transaction is subject to customary approvals. **PTI**

'UAE tells banks to freeze accounts of NMC founder Shetty, others'

REUTERS
DUBAI, APRIL 27

UNITED ARAB Emirates lenders have been told by the central bank to freeze the accounts of NMC Health shareholder BR Shetty and his family, three sources with knowledge of the matter said. NMC, founded by Shetty in the mid-1970s and has become the largest private healthcare provider in the UAE, was placed into administration this month.

Its shares, which NMC plans to delist in London, were suspended after more than halving in value since December, when short-seller Muddy Waters questioned its financial reporting.

The UAE freezing directive, which was issued by the central

NMC, founded by BR Shetty in the mid-1970s and the largest private healthcare provider in the UAE, was placed into administration this month

bank last week, extends to two other NMC shareholders, Khalifa al-Muhairi and Saeed Mohamed Butti Mohamed al-Qebaisi, the sources, who had seen the order, told Reuters.

Sebi reduces filing charges for draft papers, broker turnover fees

Mumbai: In order to help market participants tide over the current situation due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) announced reduction in broker turnover fees.

At the same time, the market regulator also announced reduction in filing fees on offer documents for public issues, rights issues and buyback of shares.

Sebi in its circular on Monday stated that benefits of reduction in broker turnover fees will automatically be passed to the investors as well. The broker turnover fee will be reduced to 50 per cent of the existing fee structure for the period June 2020 to March 2021. **FE**

BRIEFLY

Deferral of GST, GAAR reporting

New Delhi: The Income Tax Department on Monday deferred for the third time the requirement for companies to include in their I-T audit report the details of the GST and GAAR.

Lawsuit against Wipro in US

Washington: A group of five former employees of Wipro in the United States has filed a class action lawsuit accusing the Indian IT company of "employment discrimination" against individuals who are not South Asian and who are not of Indian origin. Wipro, headquartered in Bengaluru, has over 14,000 employees in the US. **PTI**



From my point of view, I'm very pessimistic that the circuit can resume a normal activity. In tennis, you need to travel every week, stay in hotels, go to different countries."

RAFAEL NADAL

Ombudsman wants administrator

Citing 'financial irregularities and wilful contempt' in DDCA, he asks Delhi High Court to supersede Apex Council

NIHAL KOSHIE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

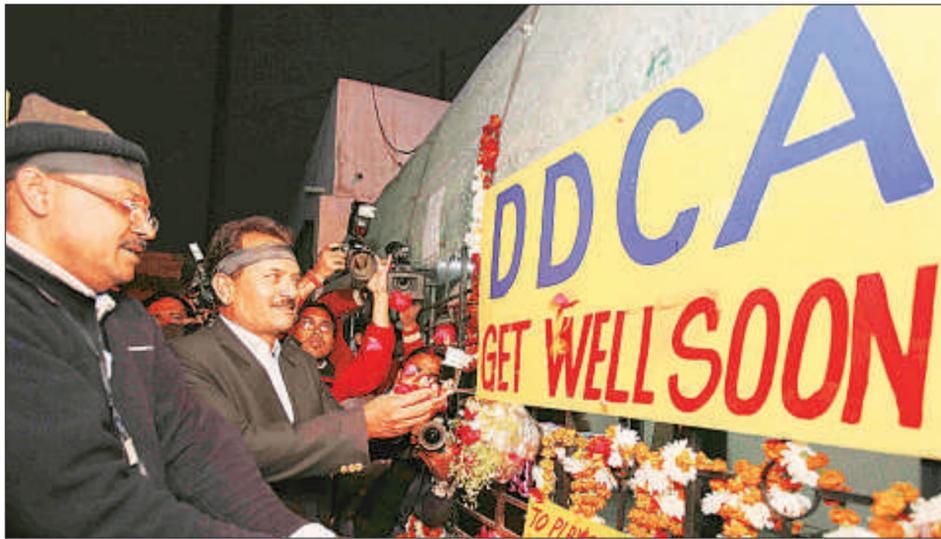
THE DELHI and District Cricket Association's (DDCA) ombudsman Justice (retired) Deepak Verma has asked for the appointment of an administrator to run the conflict-ridden state unit, citing financial irregularities and wilful contempt of orders passed by him and the court.

In his letter to the Delhi High Court, the ombudsman said the administrator, once appointed, would supersede the DDCA's Apex Council. Members of the council and the ombudsman have been at loggerheads over the debarment of four officials and the status of the state cricket unit's standing counsel.

"It is for everyone's information that owing to the current mess and the situation created in DDCA including but not limited to financial irregularities and wilful contempt of Orders passed by Ombudsman and High Court, I have made a reference to the Hon'ble Delhi High Court to intervene in the affairs of DDCA. I have further requested the High Court that present Apex Council be superseded and an Administrator be appointed (whosoever the High Court deems fit)," he wrote.

The state body has been in the news for the wrong reasons after it came to light last week that its general secretary Vinod Tihara has been jailed since mid-March. Tihara was arrested by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence for allegedly violating GST norms and was lodged in a Meerut jail. The constant squabbling between members has resulted in DDCA's legal bills running into crores of rupees, while coaches and other support staff remain unpaid for the previous cricket season. The move by the ombudsman to request the high court to put an administrator in charge comes after weeks of differences between Justice Verma and apex council members, who have accused him of passing 'one-sided orders' and 'failing to recognise resolutions passed by a majority'.

In March, Justice Verma had ordered a forensic audit of the DDCA for the past five years after a tender worth Rs 6.5 crore was awarded to a contractor for modernisation of the bar, restaurant, member's lounge and cricket library. He took the decision when he received no response from Apex Council members after he asked them to submit all documents related to MSL Jangid JV, the contractor. A direc-



For several years, DDCA has never been far from scandals and squabbles. The above picture was taken during a protest against the then DDCA administrators in 2009. File

tor and member of the infrastructure committee visited the given address of the contractor in Noida and claimed that no such company existed at the site. He also informed the ombudsman of the same. "I would like to point out that since the complaints were primarily made against the agreement (between DDCA and MSL Jangid JV), it would be proper to conduct the forensic audit in relation to the said agreement first, followed by detailed and comprehensive audit of the entire DDCA," the ombudsman said in an order dated March 20.

Justice Verma also stated that a copy of his letter to the Delhi High Court, asking for an administrator to be appointed, was submitted to standing counsel Gautam Dutta so that he could present the hard copy to the high court. The court has listed May 1 as the date to consider the ombudsman request.

Dutta said: "The Hon'ble Ombudsman has issued a reference to Hon'ble Chief Justice, Delhi High Court to dissolve the Apex Council

and appoint an Administrator at DDCA, given the situation at DDCA. It was listed today before HC. The judge recused. Now to be listed on 1 May before the parent bench which had passed the status quo orders on 13.03.2020."

The continuation of Dutta as the standing counsel has been a bone of contention as the Apex Council had removed him from his post earlier this month and claimed it to be a majority decision.

Members debarred

However, on April 15, the ombudsman debarred four members of the Apex Council - Apurv Jain, Nithin Gupta, Alok Mittal and joint secretary Rajan Manchanda - from administrative and financial work or taking any decisions related to DDCA. The ombudsman also stated that "Mr Gautam Dutta shall continue to perform his functions as DDCA standing counsel at least till the time the complaints pending before me attain finality," Verma added

that the "resolution to remove the standing counsel was unlawful as the persons who have presented and approved the resolution are facing a disciplinary inquiry before me".

Manchanda said that he would knock on the door of the court to stop the appointment of an administrator. "The ombudsman has been interfering in the day-to-day affairs of the Apex Council and the DDCA, which is not acceptable. We will challenge his decision to ask for an administrator. At the same time, we are ready to co-operate with any inquiry the ombudsman wants to conduct but if he wants us to submit any papers, then I request him to wait till the lockdown ends as all relevant documents are at the DDCA office," Manchanda said.

If HC appoints an administrator, it won't be the first time the DDCA is headed by a former judge. In 2016, Justice Mukul Mudgal was appointed as observer and a year later Justice Vikramjit Sen took over as administrator.

Akmal deserves his three-year ban, reckons former great Abbas

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, APRIL 27

FORMER PAKISTAN greats have little sympathy for Umar Akmal following the latter's three-year ban from all forms of cricket on corruption charges. Pakistan legend Zaheer Abbas tore into Akmal for his tendency to "misbehave" and his failure to report corrupt approaches despite being a senior cricketer.

"How can you say he is a great talent when he isn't following the rules? If you aren't following the rules, then you aren't a great player. Great players always follow the rules. Sachin Tendulkar, for example. If you aren't following rules, you are doubtful about your career," Abbas told *The Indian Express*.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Monday banned Akmal for not reporting spot-fixing offers ahead of this year's Pakistan Super League (PSL). "Umar Akmal handed three-year ban from all cricket by Chairman of the Disciplinary Panel Mir Justice (retired) Fazal-e-Miran Chauhan," PCB said in a tweet. He was provisionally suspended on February 20.

The former Pakistan captain also opined that in all likelihood Akmal wouldn't be playing for Pakistan again. "I think his international career is all but over. He deserved the punishment," he said.

"He (Akmal) wasn't a junior player. He was playing for Pakistan for a long time. He must have been told by the PCB about the ICC Anti-Corruption rules many times - what to do when a corrupt approach is made. But he was ignoring it. PCB got to know that somebody (a corruptor) was trying to get hold of Umar. Later on he confessed, but it was too late," Abbas said.

The PCB formally charged Akmal with two breaches of its Anti-Corruption code for two unrelated incidents on March 20. The charges come under Article 2.4.4 of the Board's Anti-Corruption Code, which deal with the failure to disclose (without delay) "full details of any approaches or invitations received by the Participant to engage in Corrupt Conduct" to the PCB's Vigilance and Security Department.

At a hearing at the National Cricket Academy, he represented himself, while the PCB was represented by lawyer Taffazul Rizvi.



Umar Akmal has featured in 16 Tests, 84 T20s, and 121 ODIs for Pakistan.

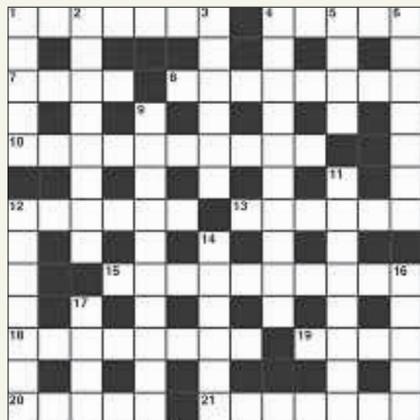
Akmal's career has been littered with disciplinary issues - including public criticism of former Pakistan head coach Mickey Arthur - for which he received fines and suspensions. But this is for the first time that the middle-order batsman has been sanctioned for breaching the Anti-Corruption code. In 2018, however, Akmal told Samaa TV that he had been offered \$200,000 by bookmakers to leave alone two deliveries during Pakistan's 2015 World Cup opener against India. "... every match I play against India, they offer me money to make some excuse and opt out of the game," he had said.

Stormy petrel

Akmal is a case of a talent gone awry. "From the very beginning he used to misbehave. But when I was the Pakistan team's chief batting consultant during a tour to Dhaka some years ago, he didn't show any misbehaviour in front of me," Abbas said.

Somehow, corruption code breaches keep surfacing in Pakistan cricket. From Saleem Malik to Umar Akmal, it's a long list; Pakistani cricketers banned for corruption. "The PCB does have a robust anti-corruption programme. Akmal was caught because PCB was keeping an eye on him. But if Pakistan were stricter on those players who started match-fixing, I think this (corruption) would have gone a long time ago," he remarked, without taking names.

CROSSWORD 4103



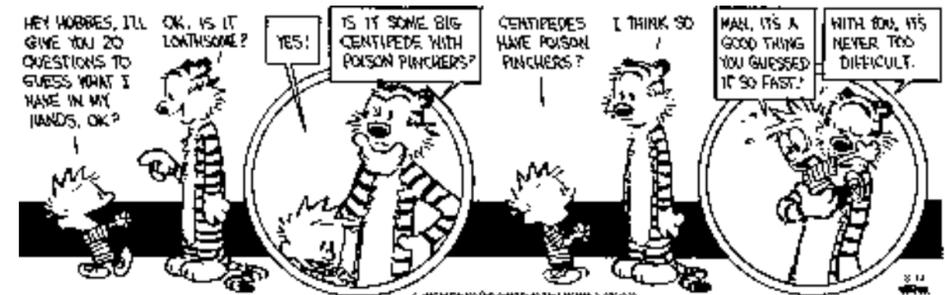
- | ACROSS | DOWN |
|--|--|
| 1 Prejudiced legal system? (4,3) | 1 Pack a quarter in of the best (5) |
| 4 Possibly evict a smelly cat (5) | 2 Official who looks very sour when put out (8) |
| 7 Don't work for nothing (4) | 3 A matter of some gravity (6) |
| 8 Extinct animal is around in changed form (8) | 4 She must step in line to succeed on stage (6,4) |
| 10 Pipe bursts each summer (10) | 5 Farm product from a co-operative allotment (4) |
| 12 Subject about right for a mundane circle (6) | 6 Sailors about to obtain objectives (7) |
| 13 Consents, but will be a long time coming round again (6) | 9 It's as rapid a variety as a houseplant enthusiast may desire (10) |
| 15 She's possibly recalled in a famous children's story (10) | 11 Salesman fortified with liquor is superseded (8) |
| 18 Keep up support (8) | 12 Ruth and I are upset about politician making a success (7) |
| 19 Vocal comeback in the choir (4) | 14 He may go to pot (6) |
| 20 He may be spotted laughing (5) | 16 Mother is upset over our love affair? (5) |
| 21 Report of big air crash (7) | 17 Kind of apple tree (4) |

Solutions Crossword 4102: Across: 1 Joint action, 9 Dialect, 10 Arena, 11 Lead, 12 Compiled, 14 Spirit, 16 Tongue, 18 Eighteen, 19 Scum, 22 Train, 23 Saracen, 24 Penetration. Down: 2 Omaha, 3 Noel, 4 Author, 5 Teaspoon, 6 Opening, 7 Adolescents, 8 Daydreaming, 13 Distance, 15 Ingrate, 17 Geyser, 20 Cacao, 21 Grit.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



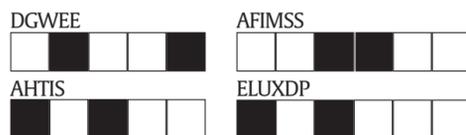
MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLER WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

He will have true glory who... it. - Lvy (8)



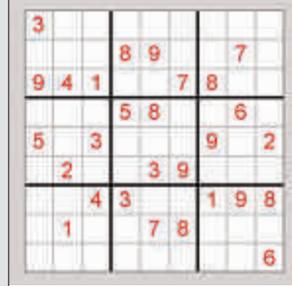
SOLUTION: WEDGE, SARTH, MESSIF, DUNLIX
Answer: He will have true glory who despises it. - Lvy

Difficulty Level 2s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SUDOKU 4193



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4192

