

WHAT'S INSIDE



LEISURE, P9

Games people play

Exploring the world, going on an adventure or practising life in quarantine, online games are providing much more than just entertainment in lockdown



WORDS WORTH, P4

In search of Fifth Estate

In times when the media has been undermined, what could provide alternatives?

LOCKDOWN-2

Govt revises own orders, stakeholders left clueless

Latest directive on opening of shops leads to much confusion, clarifications

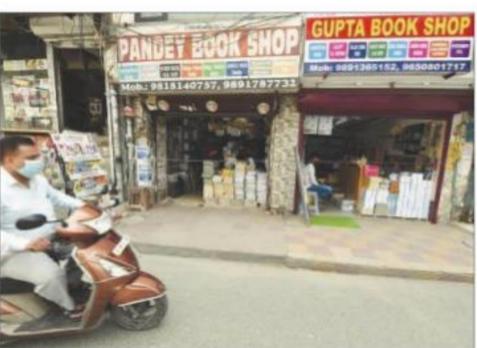
DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
New Delhi, April 25

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

Alluding to the legalese of the order, Punjab special chief secretary KBS Sidhu tweeted the Centre's order and wrote: "So, this seems to be good news about some shops being allowed to open by Govt. Can some volunteer translate this into simple English?" Hours later, Assam chief secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna tweeted: "State government would take a view on this on Monday after watching the situation for two days."

It appeared states were once again caught unawares by the Centre. A month ago on March 24 when the Centre announced the first phase of lockdown, which left the states unprepared in managing its consequences such as the massive supply chain disruption, and migrant labour walking to their homes, some states, including one ruled by the BJP, suggested that adequate discussions had not been held with them before the announcement. Following this, it was expected the Centre would deliberate, discuss and plan more comprehensively when it became clear the lockdown would be extended. So when PM Narendra Modi announced April 14 an extension of the lockdown, he did give the state machinery five days to get its act together as the new measures were to kick in on April 20.

However, if during the first phase of lockdown the government had to issue as many as six addendum and clarifications to its guidelines in the first few days, the second



Bookstores in Delhi open on Saturday after relaxation to shops selling non-essential items

PHOTO: PTI

During first phase of lockdown, Centre issued six addendum and clarifications to its guidelines

In second phase of lockdown, seven clarifications already from home ministry

On opening of shops, clarification on Saturday that exemptions only for shops selling items and not those providing services

phase of the lockdown has already seen seven such from the ministry of home affairs.

Within two days of its April 15 guidelines, on April 17, MHA issued its first addendum allowing harvest of minor forest produce, activities regarding bamboo, coconut, areca nut, cocoa, spice plantation.

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STOCKS FOR JUST A WEEK

Only 3 lakh RNA extraction kits left

Testing may be hit; growth of new cases down to 6%

ABANTIKA GHOSH
New Delhi, April 25

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

The RNA extraction kits are required to prepare samples for the RT-PCR test — one kit per test. This comes at a time when serological tests, or rapid antibody tests, have been suspended across the country following complaints of varying levels of accuracy.

"We are pushing for acquiring the kits quickly and have placed orders with various vendors. We are hoping to get at least a million each of both the RNA extraction kits and the viral transport medium kits, with the supplies starting soon. The problem is that the RT-PCR kits cannot be used without the RNA extraction kits," said a source. Some states



COVID-19 UPDATE

24,942 TOTAL CASES

779 DEATHS SO FAR

1,490 NEW CASES

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

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

Continued on Page 5

Quick Picks

WHO says you may catch coronavirus more than once

CATCHING COVID-19 ONCE may not protect you from getting it again, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). "There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from Covid-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," the United Nations agency said in a statement. Page 6

IBBI excludes lockdown from resolution time frame

THE INSOLVENCY REGULATOR has issued notifications to exclude the lockdown period following the Covid-19 outbreak from the time frames governing corporate insolvency resolution or liquidation processes. The IBC stipulates that the resolution process of a stressed company will have to be completed in a maximum of 270 days. Page 3

HIT NOSTALGIA

TV reruns are attracting viewers, but not the ads

DD National, with its reruns of Ramayan, leading the growth of Hindi GEC category

VENKATA SUSMITA BISWAS
Mumbai, April 25

RRUNS HAVE BECOME the norm on general entertainment channels (GECs) during the lockdown owing to lack of fresh content. DD National has brought back iconic shows such as Ramayan, Bunyiaad, Circus, Shaktimaan and Byomkesh Bakshi. Colors is broadcasting reruns of shows Balika Vadhu, Jai Shri Krishna, Mahakali, Ram Siya Ke Luv Kush, Dance Deewane and Comedy Nights With Kapil. Meanwhile, Zee TV is playing reruns of Jamai Raja, Pavitra Rishtha, Jodha Akbar, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Li'l Champs 2017 and Hum Paanch. Office Office is being broadcast on Sony SAB and Star Plus' Mahabharat and Siya Ke Ram are back on TV too.

Anumber of these reruns are being broadcast during the non-prime time slots on TV. Non-prime time viewing has increased by 79% in India since the lockdown as per a study by Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC) and Nielsen.

The GEC genre has grown by 17% during the week of April 11-17 over the sample pre-covid period in January. "The reruns of classics seem to be reaping benefits for channels like DD National and other GECs too in terms of viewership," says Sunil Lulla, CEO, BARC India. At the beginning of the lockdown, in the week of March 28-April 3, GEC viewership grew only by 9%. The Hindi GEC genre, which

has grown by 43%, clocked an all-time high viewership with 850 crore impressions in week 15 (April 11-17) in the Hindi speaking markets since 2015. A large part of the Hindi GEC growth can be attributed to the tremendous surge in the viewership of DD National due to the return of marquee shows on the channel. DD National, which does not typically find itself in the top 10 channels list, has become the reigning GEC during the lockdown in India and has left leading entertainment channels like Zee TV, Colors, Star Plus and Sony Entertainment Television far behind.

Continued on Page 5



GEC viewership in India during lockdown

Increase in viewership over pre-covid period in January (%)

April 11-17 17%

Mar 28-Apr 3 9%

Source: BARC-Nielsen report

DRESSING UP BOOKS

Foreign subsidiaries fudged audit report, bank records: Probe

KHUSHBOO NARAYAN
Mumbai, April 25

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

These forged documents were allegedly used to avail of better credit facilities from lenders and to also allegedly manipulate the financial statements of the flagship firm of the group — Cox and Kings — show records of the resolution professional appointed by the NCLT and an internal probe conducted by Yes Bank after the exit of Rana Kapoor, co-founder of the bank.

Cox and Kings was one of Yes Bank's top borrowers when Kapoor was heading the bank. Yes Bank had an exposure of ₹2,267 crore to Cox and Kings.

As per probe records, in 2018, Malvern Travel UK, a firm where Cox and Kings held 49% stake, submitted "forged and fabricated" end-use cer-

tificate and a bank account statement of its statutory auditor BDO LLP and bank Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), respectively, with Yes Bank. This was done to obtain a loan of ₹47 million (about ₹440 crore) from Yes Bank.

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

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THE COX & KINGS DOSSIER

AN EXPRESS SERIES PART 3

Sanjay Kothari

President's secretary Kothari is new CVC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

SANJAY KOTHARI, THE secretary to the President, was on Saturday appointed the central vigilance commissioner, according to a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique. The post of the chief of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), the country's anti-corruption watchdog, has been lying vacant since June last year after KV Chowdhary completed his tenure.

The name of Kothari was recommended by a high-level selection panel headed by the PM in February. The move was then opposed by Congress, which had termed the process adopted for the appointment of the CVC "illegal, unlawful and unconstitutional".

Full report on Page 3

From e-tailers to kirana shops, local brands are the new flavour

Limited supply of branded FMCG goods has given opportunity for local goods to make a mark

REYA MEHROTRA
New Delhi, April 25

SEVERAL FMCG BRANDS might have taken a hit owing to poor supply chains and accessibility in the over a month of the lockdown, but

for local brands it has been an opportunity they have not missed. A visit to any neighbourhood kirana shop will reveal piles of snacks, bakery goods, groceries, soaps and sanitisers that have been made in the immediate vicinity. And it's a win-win for everyone — manufacturers, shop owners and customers.

In the absence of adequate supplies from major brands, shops have filled their shelves with local brands of chips, snacks, rusk, atta, oil, soaps, sanitisers, pulses, biscuits, breads, etc. Customers, too, are buying happily, more relieved at the sheer availability than fretting over the

absence of their usual brands. Anukriti Dasgupta, a homemaker and resident of Gurgaon says, "When we go grocery shopping these days, popular branded items are few, so we opt for locally-made goods. For products like spices, rusk, chips, etc, the brand does not matter and their prices are cheaper too. But for things like milk, we are sticking to renowned brands to ensure quality."

A recent report by Nielsen, a global marketing research firm, Nielsen COVID-19 Impact on FMCG and Retail: Edition 2, reveals that in March alone, as many as 152 new players entered the hand sanitiser seg-

SMALL MAKES IT BIG



A recent Nielsen report reveals that in March alone, 152 new players entered the hand sanitiser segment

Having made their mark, local manufacturers are waiting for the lockdown to be over to consolidate

ment and sales of local-made hand sanitisers grew from 11% between November 2019 and January 2020 to 53% in February this year.

More Retail deputy MD Mohit Kampani was recently quoted as saying, "Shifts are happening in atta, pulses, spices and edible oil with local brands, and those who are able to supply are gaining share as their supply chains have a fair degree of flexibility."

Having made their mark, local manufacturers are now waiting for the lockdown to be over to consolidate.

Nitesh Kalra, a supplier of bakery items in Sundar Vihar, Delhi, says, "My brand of baked

goods, The Basket Pie, has sold well, but I would like to scale up things after the lockdown with better stock and more staff.

People like him will get help from e-tailers too, who are pitching in to help general stores reach out to a wider customer base. Amazon has launched a 'local shops on Amazon' programme to help kirana stores to sell online.

The programme includes stores from Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Coimbatore, Surat, Indore, Lucknow, Saharanpur, Faridabad, Kota and Varanasi, among others. The Confederation of All India Traders

(CAIT) is also working with the Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT) to launch a national marketplace for the country's over 70 million traders, which will give a huge push to local brands.

Amazon India vice-president, seller services, Gopal Pillai has said their programme will also help customers with faster deliveries and a greater selection.

The development came soon after the announcement of the mega \$5.7-billion deal between Facebook and Reliance Jio that aims to link kirana stores and customers through WhatsApp.

Opinion

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

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

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

The Green Revolution changed everything.

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

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

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

Who owns the food grain?

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

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

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

No cash, no food

Today, it is a stark fact that millions of families have run out of cash. They cannot buy food. The worst fate that can befall a person is being locked down, alone or with his family, with no money and no food. The poor are forced to com-

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Hoarding government, starving people



A homeless man eats food given by volunteers during lockdown in Bengaluru, India

promise their dignity by standing in long queues for free cooked food provided by the government or private bodies. The distribution of free cooked food can *never* be perfect. The food will not reach all parts of a state. The quality will be poor. The quantity will be inadequate. If there are old people or small children in a family, they cannot stand in line to get food; the other members of the family have to beg for additional portions.

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

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

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

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

Within our means

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

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



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Not so invisible

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

Rahul back soon

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

Quick on the draw

Hardeep Puri is well networked thanks to his IFS background and UN experience. He understood the gravity of the COVID-19 threat very early. In mid-January at a Delhi press conference Puri referred to the coronavirus spread as a "pandemic", at a time when the WHO was still underplaying it as a "global health emergency". As Civil Aviation Minister, Puri asked Air India to stop all its flights to and from China, while the US and Europe were still getting a surge of Chinese tourists

who came to celebrate the Chinese New Year in January end. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was similarly quick on the draw in putting in place measures to isolate India. Modi did factor in the human suffering because of a lockdown without notice. But his advisers concluded that prior intimation would have led to total panic and caused uncontrollable surges of humanity towards transport hubs, defeating the whole purpose of the exercise.

Country's lifeline

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

Enemy within

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

Out of court?

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

Magnanimity of the rich

When the game returns, the struggling cricket boards will be dependent on three superpowers—India, England, Australia—for bailouts

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



TENNIS NOW HAS a 'Big Three' plan. Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic are teaming up to help fund lower-ranked players during Covid-19. Tennis, like other sports, is top-heavy. A lot of players, ranked 200 and below, are struggling to survive at the moment without a stable income. ATP and WTA tournaments are suspended. The ITF circuit has come to a standstill, and tennis being an expensive sport, the vast majority of players have been reeling under heavy financial burdens.

Federer, Nadal and Djokovic are trying to raise at least \$3 million to fund the lower-ranked players. Taking a cue from their initiative, the International Tennis Federation (ITF), Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and the four Grand Slams decided to set up a fund to financially assist players during this period. The lower-rung in tennis is benefiting from

the magnanimity of the rich.

Move to cricket, where a 'Big Three' redux appears likely in the post-Covid-19 world. Cricket, like all other sectors, is feeling the pinch of a global economic meltdown and without money smaller/weaker nations are skating on thin ice. When the game returns, it would be a battle for survival for many cricket nations. Only India, England and Australia have the financial wherewithal to weather the storm.

Last week, during a conversation with *The Indian Express*, former International Cricket Council (ICC) and Cricket South Africa (CSA) chief executive Haroon Lorgat agreed that the cricketing world order would change after the pandemic. "No doubt the (cricketing) world order will change post-Covid-19. There's enough evidence to suggest that what will follow the pandemic will be an economic recession that won't be limited to any one country. Experts are forecasting a global recession. Just about everything will require some form of re-engineering and cricket will be no exception. Things won't be the same. What I pray for is that the (cricket) leadership will consider and support everybody. It's never been more poignant than now and clearly those who



Eden Gardens during the ICC T20 World Cup match between Bangladesh and New Zealand

EXPRESS ARCHIVE

have will need to support those who have not. Otherwise the cricket world will downsize to a much smaller and much weaker world."

The struggling cricket boards will have to be dependent on the game's three superpowers—India to a large extent—for bailouts. This perfectly sets the stage for a 'Big Three' revival, to be led by India. Almost every country is reliant on playing against India to maximise revenue. And

there's a school of thought that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) should set the new cricket world order on their own terms, for India contributes to more than 70% of the ICC's revenue.

The erstwhile Big Three model in the ICC, introduced in 2014 for the 2015-2023 rights cycle, had approved a contribution-based revenue sharing system for the members of the global body. Accordingly, the BCCI's revenue share was pro-

jected at \$570 million. Then, in 2017, with Shashank Manohar as the independent ICC chair, the game's governing body dismantled the 'Big Three' model and settled for a more equitable revenue distribution system. The BCCI's revenue share was reduced by \$170 million, much to the chagrin of an overwhelming majority of the Indian cricket board functionaries.

On the face of it, the equation is simple. India brings money to cricket, while

others spend. So the BCCI is well within its rights to demand a larger share of the pie. The argument has logic. Then again, survival of the richest cannot be applicable to sport. Cricket already works in a lopsided environment. The gap between the rich and the poor is wide and post Covid-19 it will become even wider.

Cricket also has only a handful of nations to show for at the top level. Further, contraction will badly affect the sport. Without Kane Williamson's New Zealand, cricket loses its dignity. Minus South Africa, it will be bereft of its cross-cultural presence. West Indies are the game's *joie de vivre*. Without the Russells and the Pollards, cricket—also the BCCI's most prized cash cow, the Indian Premier League (IPL)—will be poorer. Without Pakistan, the game will lose some finest talents like Babar Azam and Shaheen Afridi. Amid a flurry of academy products, Pakistan, their gully cricket to be precise, keep the game connected to its grassroots. Lorgat was spot on when he said: "The (cricket) world is a group of many nations, not just one or two countries. There's no World Cup without various countries playing together."

If eventually there is a 'Big Three' redux at the ICC and its financial model is altered, it will be imperative to hit on a structure that serves the interests of every cricket-playing nation, especially the weaker ones. As the world heads towards a great depression, cricket needs to take a leaf out of tennis's book to maintain equilibrium.



INSOLVENCY REGULATIONS IBBI excludes lockdown from resolution time frame

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, April 25

THE INSOLVENCY REGULATOR has issued notifications to exclude the lockdown period following the Covid-19 outbreak from the time frames governing corporate insolvency resolution or liquidation processes.

Introducing a special provision in the IBBI (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016, the regulator said: "...the period of lockdown imposed by the central government in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak shall not be counted for the purposes of the time-line for any activity that could not be completed due to such lockdown, in relation to a corporate insolvency resolution process." A similar amendment to the regulations for liquidations under the insolvency and bankruptcy code was also notified.

The insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC) stipulates that the resolution process of a stressed company will have to be completed in a maximum of 270 days. Accordingly, various processes are to be completed within specified time frames. The amendment to the resolution regulation would come into force retrospectively from March 29, while that to the liquidation regulation would take effect from April 17. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has clarified that



A makeshift barricade blocks the entry to a containment area during the lockdown in Bengaluru

given the lockdown, the notifications couldn't be printed in the official gazette on time. However, the regulator had already posted the decisions on its official website well on time, specifying the date from which these amendments would take effect, with a note that these will also be printed in the government's gazette. So, the apparent retrospective nature of the latest notifications doesn't harm stakeholders' interests.

Commenting on the move, Daizy Chawla, senior partner at Singh & Associates, said: "This was the need of the hour, as due to the lockdown many procedures which are to be done as per the timelines provided under the corporate person regulations as well liquidation process could not be performed and the adjudicating authority (NCLT) would otherwise be flooded with applications for excluding such period or exten-

sion of timelines where the period prescribed under the code has already expired."

After the lockdown was announced on March 24, the government has initiated a raft of measures to allay the fears of India Inc. As the prospect of several companies turning bankrupt in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak loomed large, the cabinet earlier this week cleared a proposal to promulgate an ordinance to suspend insolvency proceedings against new defaulters for six months.

Once the ordinance comes into force following Presidential assent, sections 7, 9 and 10 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) will remain suspended for six months. Already, in a bid to insulate small businesses from being dragged to the NCLT, the government recently raised default threshold for triggering insolvency to ₹1 crore from just ₹1 lakh ear-

About 328 entities opt for RBI's three-month moratorium, says Icra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai, April 25

AT LEAST 328 entities across sectors, including state-owned and those backed by big conglomerates, have opted for availing the Reserve Bank's three-month moratorium on their debt repayments, rating agency ICRA said on Saturday. The list of entities, rated by it, include Air India Express, ONGC Petro Additions, entities from Tata Group, JSW Group and GMR Group.

On March 27, the RBI had given the borrowers a three-month moratorium on debt repayments for the March-May period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a voluntary measure and the interest keeps accruing on the loan during the period of moratorium, and experts have opined that such a move would generally elongate the loan repayment period. ICRA said that it is disclosing the names of the entities as per a mandate received from Sebi, and made it clear that missed payment by these entities even in the case of pending formal approval from the lending institutions prior to the original due date, is not considered an instance of default.

Rajya Sabha spends 28% time on making laws, 40% on matters of public concerns

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

THE RAJYA SABHA spends 40% of its functional time on deliberating issues of public importance, 32% on ensuring accountability of the executive and 28% in making laws, a survey has revealed. The first-of-its-kind analysis conducted by the RS secretariat also reveals that the upper house functioned for 340 hours per year. During 1978-2018, the house clocked 77% productivity and 23% loss of time, the survey reveals. The analysis on utilisation of time during the sessions by the RS revealed that the house spends 40.20% of its functional time on deliberating various issues of public importance, followed by 32.22% in ensuring the accountability of the executive and 27.57% in making laws. This pattern of time used by the upper house is an outcome of the analysis undertaken by the RS secretariat for the 41-year period since 1978 for which the required data is available. This



A file photo of a Rajya Sabha session

trend analysis was undertaken after RS chairman M Venkaiah Naidu sought to know details of time spent by the House on its three functions—the legislative, oversight and deliberative.

The deliberative functions of the RS include taking up issues of public importance and concerns under various instruments like discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address, general discussion on the budgets, short duration discussions, zero hour and special mentions, discussion on

working of ministries, etc. While the general discussion on the budgets took a share of 7.08% of the total functional time of RS during 1978-2018, the share of discussion on the motion of thanks comes to 4.36% while 3.93% of the time was spent discussing the functioning of various ministries. The zero hour and special mentions took about 10% of the time of the house. The oversight function of the house is ensured through questions (time share of 14.19%), calling attention

notices (7.11%), statements of ministers on various issues (6.33%), private members' resolutions (3.16%), half an hour discussions (1.25%), the survey reveals.

In an indication of the broad trend, RS spent 27.57% of its functional time on the making of laws for the country, which includes 24.05% of the time spent on consideration and passing of the government bills and 3.52% on private members' bills. During the period the survey was undertaken, the house spent 3,429 hours on the consideration and passing of government bills and 489 hours on private members' bills. The time spent on government bills ranged from 10.87% of the total time in 2015 to 40.09% in 2002. However, this has touched a record high of 45.90% during the historic 250th session of RS in winter last year, when a record 15 bills were passed with the house spending 49.08 hours out of the total session time of 107.05 hours during this landmark ses-

Traders seek clarity on reopening of shops, urge states to issue guidelines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

WITH THE CENTRE allowing reopening of neighbourhood and standalone shops, traders on Saturday sought more clarity for easier implementation of the order and urged states to issue necessary guidelines, without which shop owners would not be able to resume work. The Retailers Association of India (RAI) said the government's order to allow reopening of shops is open to interpretation as terms like "market complexes" are not easily understood. The retail industry body said that keeping in mind the current environment and lessons learnt by keeping the essential retail open through the lockdown, "We would recommend that the government open up all channels of retail on a date that it feels safe with the social distancing norms clearly defined," while



A police officer stands guard near a shop in Guwahati

also asking for malls to be allowed to open.

The government on Friday night allowed the opening of neighbourhood and standalone shops, including those located in residential complexes within municipal areas, but at a 50% strength and after taking necessary precautions. However, the order, signed by Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla, made it clear that shops in the market places, multi-brand and single-brand malls located in municipal areas shall continue to remain closed till May 3. "We feel

the current circular is open to interpretation and needs more clarity for easier implementation - terms like market complexes are not easily understood," RAI said in a statement.

Domestic traders' body CAIT said that shopkeepers would not open their stores till states issue necessary guidelines. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said that shop owners are now waiting for necessary guidelines from the state governments. "In pursuance of the order of the home ministry, the state governments have to issue necessary order to implement the order of the central government. Traders shall have to wait for the orders of states and after that only, they will be eligible to open the shops by complying (with) the norms of health safety and social distancing," CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said.

Northern railways develops hands-free basins for contactless experience

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

THE RAILWAYS PLANS to roll out hands-free washbasins at all its stations, field units and hospitals to protect its employees and passengers from coronavirus infection. An order was issued on Saturday to develop and carry out trial for similar contactless washbasin system for passenger coaches as well. In this washbasin, the user has to primarily press a pedal attached to the contactless basin with his feet for water and soap to come out from separate dispensers, without touching any knob with his or her hands. A northern railways workshop has, however, manufactured different models of contactless washbasins with the help of local resources and in-house.

President's secretary Sanjay Kothari is new Central Vigilance Commissioner

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

SANJAY KOTHARI, THE secretary to the president, was on Saturday, appointed the central vigilance commissioner, according to a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique. The post of the chief of the central vigilance commission (CVC), the country's anti-corruption

watchdog, was lying vacant since June last year after KV Chowdhary completed his tenure. "At a ceremony held today at 10:30 am at Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sanjay Kothari was sworn in as the Central Vigilance Commissioner," the communique said.

Kothari, 63, made and subscribed the oath of his office before the President, it

said. The swearing-in ceremony was attended by the Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi among others. The name of Kothari was recommended by a high-level selection panel headed by the Prime Minister in February. The move was then opposed by Congress that had termed the process adopted

for the appointment of the central vigilance commissioner "illegal, unlawful and unconstitutional" and demanded immediate scrapping of the decision.

Kothari's appointment to the top post of the probity watchdog now may further escalate a war of words between the ruling party and the opposition Congress.

HDFC acquires 6.43% stake in Reliance Capital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

MORTGAGE LENDER HDFC on Saturday, said that it has acquired 6.43% stake in debt-trapped Reliance Capital by invoking pledged shares. These shares were acquired pursuant to invocation of pledge by security trustee on behalf of the corporation, which was pledged against a loan given by the lender in its normal course of business, HDFC Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

JK Cement receives nod to commence operations in Raj, MP, Haryana, Guj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

JK CEMENT ON Saturday, said that it has received permission from the authorities to commence operations at its manufacturing facilities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana along with its new project site at Gujarat. Operations have partially resumed or are being resumed after initiating all necessary safety measures for workmen and employees, as stipulated by the government authorities, JK Cement said in a regulatory filing.

IIT Madras-incubated edutech startup GUVI raises ₹6 crore

GUVI, A STARTUP incubated by IIT Madras and CIIE.CO-IIM Ahmedabad, has raised ₹6 crore in its pre-series A Round of funding from Education Catalyst Fund, an education focused venture capital fund managed by CBA Capital. GUVI has a deep penetration in India with presence in over 1,000 engineering colleges.

FE BUREAU

Free supply of PDS pulses under PMGAY to speed up in 1st week of May: Govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

Distribution of free pulses to 20 crore PDS households across the country will speed up in the first week of May as the massive operation of transportation and milling of 5.88 lakh tonne of pulses for the same is underway, the government said on Saturday. Most of the beneficiaries will receive the quota for the first month within April or latest by the first week of May. Several states would be able to distribute pulses for all three months in the first go itself, it said.

For the remaining states, the efforts are being made to complete the distribution for all three months within May itself, preferably within the third

week of May, it added.

Nearly a month back, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced free distribution of 1 kg pulses for three months to each household registered with public distribution system (PDS) under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Anna Yojana (PMGAY) to ensure protein needs of the poor during the COVID-19 lockdown.

"While, as on date, about 30,000 tonnes of pulses have been distributed, this would speed up in the first week of May," the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement. While the monthly requirement of pulses is about 1.96 lakh tonne under the PMGAY, about 1.45 lakh tonne of milled and cleaned pulses have so far been offered to the states

for distribution through PDS, also called ration shops. About one-third of the monthly requirement of pulses has been taken by the states and union territories to final destinations for distribution, it said.

Around 17 states and union territories such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Andamans, Chandigarh, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana have begun distribution.

Several other states and UTs have decided to distribute pulses along with food grain distribution in the first week of May for reasons of social distancing and public safety.

'Gradual opening up non-essential goods via ecommerce will help'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 25

WALMART-OWNED FLIPKART ON Saturday, said that gradual opening up delivery of non-essential goods through e-commerce will help meet consumer demands, while easing the burden of piled up inventory of micro, small and medium enterprises amid the nationwide lockdown. The comments came after the government allowed neighbourhood and standalone shops, including those located in residential complexes in urban areas, to open (at 50% strength and after taking necessary precautions) during the ongoing lockdown till May 3.

It will ease the burden of piled up inventory of MSMEs amid the nationwide lockdown, Flipkart said

In rural areas, all shops, except those in shopping malls, are allowed to open. However, the opening of shops located in COVID-19 hotspot and containment zones, sale of non-essential items by e-commerce platforms and sale of liquor continue to be prohibited under the late-night order on Friday. A Flipkart group spokesperson welcomed the government's decision of providing gradual relaxations in retail.

UP government freezes state employees' DA for 18 months, allowances for a year

DEEPA JAINANI
Lucknow, April 25

TAKING A CUE from the central government, the Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday, suspended fresh Dearness Allowances (DA) hikes given to the state employees, teachers and pensioners in view of a severe dip in revenues amid the economic crisis arising out of the coronavirus and its resultant lockdown. The DA allowances hike would be suspended between January 2020 to June 2021. The order issued by the state finance department here on Saturday will impact over 16 lakh state employees and officers, approximately three lakh teachers and 12 lakh pensioners.

Public Notice

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited
CIN: L66010MH2000PLC127837
Registered office: 1089, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai - 400025 (Reg. No. 105 dated 24.11.2000)
Ph: 022-40391600, Fax: 022-24376638, Email: ir@iciciprulife.com, Website: www.iciciprulife.com

Consolidated Financial Result						
Sr. No	Particulars	Three months ended/at			Year ended/at	
		March 31, 2020	December 31, 2019	March 31, 2019	March 31, 2020	March 31, 2019
		(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)
1	Premium Income (gross) ¹	10,64,700	8,26,365	10,16,363	33,43,070	30,92,977
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before tax, Exceptional and / or Extraordinary items)	17,090	30,306	27,786	1,06,698	1,16,124
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	17,090	30,306	27,786	1,06,698	1,16,124
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	17,873	30,177	26,102	1,06,698	1,13,893
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)) ²	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
6	Paid up equity share capital	1,43,586	1,43,585	1,43,578	1,43,586	1,43,578
7	Reserves (excluding revaluation reserve)	6,07,357	5,89,445	5,41,202	6,07,357	5,41,202
8	Earnings per share (face value of ₹ 10/- each)					
	(a) Basic (not annualised for three months) (in ₹)	1.24	2.10	1.82	7.43	7.93
	(b) Diluted (not annualised for three months) (in ₹)	1.24	2.10	1.82	7.42	7.93

Key numbers of Standalone Audited Results of the Company are as under : (₹ in lakhs)

Sr. No	Particulars	Three months ended/at			Year ended/at	
		March 31, 2020	December 31, 2019	March 31, 2019	March 31, 2020	March 31, 2019
		(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)
1	Premium Income (gross) ¹	10,64,700	8,26,365	10,16,363	33,43,070	30,92,977
2	Profit before tax	17,166	30,375	27,821	1,06,875	1,16,296
3	Profit after tax	17,949	30,246	26,137	1,06,875	1,14,065
4	Total Comprehensive income ²	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

¹ Premium income is gross of reinsurance and net of goods & service tax.
² The new Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) are currently not applicable to Insurance companies in India.

Note: The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly financial results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligation and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the quarterly financial results are available on the Stock Exchange websites (www.nseindia.com and www.bseindia.com) and the Company's website (www.iciciprulife.com).

For and on behalf of Board of Directors
N. S. Kannan
Managing Director & CEO
DIN: 00066009

Mumbai
April 25, 2020

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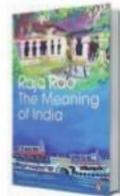
*The critical illness benefit is an optional accelerated benefit and the death benefit will be reduced by the critical illness cover paid to the policyholder. ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited. Registered Address: ICICI Pru Life Towers, 1089, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai - 400025. IRDAI Regn no. 105. CIN: L66010MH2000PLC127837. For more details on risk factors, terms and conditions, please read sales brochure carefully before concluding a sale. UIN: 105N151V04. COMP/DOC/Apr/2019/244/2309

BWARE OF SPURIOUS / FRAUD PHONE CALLS: IRDAI is not involved in activities like selling insurance policies, announcing bonus or investment of premiums. Public receiving such phone calls are requested to lodge a police complaint.

Words Worth

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

ON THE SHELF



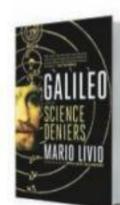
THE MEANING OF INDIA
Raja Rao
Penguin
Random House
Pp221, ₹319.20

First published in 1996 when he was 88 years old, this selection of nearly six decades of Raja Rao's non-fiction is an audacious contemplation on the deeper significance of India. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Rao teases out the implications of Advaita, or non-dualism, which he regards as India's unique contribution to the world.



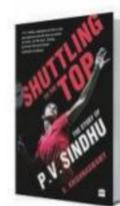
DELHI IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
KA Nizami;
translated by
Ather Farouqui
Oxford
University Press
Pp184, ₹1,100

The fascinating and chequered history of Delhi through the centuries has been a popular subject among authors. Yet, only a few other than KA Nizami record in rich detail the cultural, social, economic and spiritual fabric of the city between the 13th and 18th centuries. This book is a compilation of the historian's lectures delivered at the University of Delhi and the Ghalib Institute in Delhi.



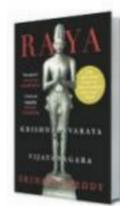
GALILEO: AND THE SCIENCE DENIERS
Mario Livio
Simon & Schuster
Pp304, ₹599

A fresh interpretation of the life of Galileo Galilei, one of history's greatest and most fascinating scientists, that sheds new light on his discoveries and how he was challenged by science deniers. Astrophysicist and bestselling author Mario Livio draws on his own scientific expertise to provide captivating insights into how Galileo reached his bold new conclusions about the cosmos.



SHUTTLING TO THE TOP
Krishnaswamy V
HarperCollins
Pp 220, ₹334.95

Volleyball was the topic of conversation at breakfast and dinner table, but badminton player Pulella Gopichand was PV Sindhu's hero. At a time when Saina Nehwal was a rising star, eight-year-old Sindhu would travel over 40 km from her home in a railway colony in Secunderabad to get to Gopichand's academy and train. *Shuttling to the Top* is the fascinating story of the player.



RAYA: KRISHNA-DEVARAYA OF VIJAYANAGARA
Srinivas Reddy
Juggernaut
Pp232

Raya: Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara by Srinivas Reddy is the definitive biography of Krishnadevaraya, the emperor of Vijayanagar empire. The author Srinivas Reddy has read all of Krishnadevaraya's texts in the original. So he uses an impressive array of primary sources, liberally quoting from them to preserve their distinct textures and flavours.



MEMORY OF LIGHT
Ruth Vanita
Penguin
Random House
Pp159

Preparations for King George the Third's 50th birthday gala are in full swing in Lucknow. As poets and performers vie to be part of the show, Chapla Bai, a dazzling courtesan from Kashi, briefly enters this competitive world, and sweeps the poet Nafis Bai off her feet. An irresistible passion takes root, expanding and contracting. It's a novel about remembering, dreaming, conversing and singing.

All books available as e-books

In search of a Fifth Estate

In times when the media as a watchdog has been undermined, what could provide alternatives?

AMITABH RANJAN

AMID A SURFEIT of reports that we get to read each day in the time of the global pandemic, here are three that you may have come across in their chronological order, not that the chronology itself is of any significance: Air India airlifts 647 Indians and seven Malaysians over two days on January 31 and February 1 from Wuhan, the ground zero of Covid-19. In February, Cambodia allows *MS Westerdam* with 1,445 passengers and 802 crew onboard to dock in Sihanoukville after the ship is turned away from at least five ports. In March, Cuba allows *MS Braemar* to dock at the port of Mariel after the ship is refused permission to make landfall by countries in the Caribbean because five passengers onboard the ship were found to be virus-positive.

Carried as routine reports, the media failed to look at the larger and humane side of the stories. Amid the pandemic and resultant fear, these were extraordinary gestures of international solidarity and a respect for right to life of every human being. All these made for excellent human-interest stories. These were about the authorities going beyond their call of duty. While you got to read something about these on digital platforms, why didn't the mainstream media devote more column space or airtime to these stories?

Is it because Cuba, which otherwise has an excellent record of providing medical care for the needy across the world, has been a constant irritant for the US in its own backyard? Is it because Cambodia (part of Indo-China) still reminds the West of its own excesses and pricks its guilty conscience? Is it because the West is yet to acknowledge an India, part of the Two-Thirds world (to borrow from the author's lexicon to replace Third World), coming of age in emergency handling at a time when the developed nations seem to have little clue?

Instances similar to these and questions thereto have close resemblance to some of the references curated by Kalinga Seneviratne in his book *Myth of 'Free Media' and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era*, putting under the scanner the so-called 'free media' and also questioning the relevance of adversarial media function in the Asian socio-



Migrant workers and their families during the lockdown in New Delhi. The central government blamed 'panic created by fake news' behind the mass movement of migrant workers after the lockdown was announced

political ecosystem.

A veteran journalist and a teacher, Seneviratne writes with a rare insight which comes from years of journalistic pursuits across geographies and media platforms. For him, the post-truth era has been there all along. It was there long before it became part of the media lexicon in more recent times, post-Donald Trump and post-Brexit.

The media function theories—based on libertarian, authoritarian and social responsibility—that students have been taught for the past half-a-century are all focused on individual human right, the right to communicate. But it is political in nature. They do not adequately cover vast populations due to institutionalised cultural barriers. For example, communication problems of migrant communities to the West or those of the people in the vast hinterlands in Asian countries are seldom addressed. The global media today is driven by biases, ideological leanings, geo-politics, business interests. And, as a result, it works to spread half-truths, disinformation and alternative facts.

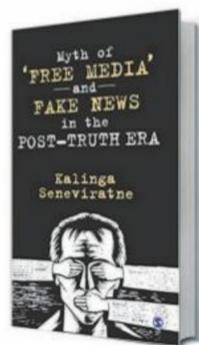
So, truth is a casualty. Instead, you get to read something which masquerades as truth, for there are more overriding considerations in the current media ecosystem. It depends on which part of the world you are from, which

part of the world you are in, which ideology you adhere to, or more bluntly, whose brief you carry, and more importantly, who owns your business.

US academics Noam Chomsky, Robert McChesney and Edward Herman have been arguing for more than two decades that the 'Fourth Estate' model of the media is dead and what we have is a 'Propaganda Model' that "manufactures consent" for conglomerates which own the media to serve their economic and political interests. The Libertarian Media Function theory worked as long as media companies only owned media, but now they are entertainment companies, film studios, sports franchises, even oil companies and arm manufacturers.

So, if the Fourth Estate theory of the media as watchdog has been undermined with the expansion of neoliberal economic models into the media arena, where is the alternative? The media, which for long has been the resource of the citizenry to oppose the decisions of the government that would have harmful effect on the people, was no longer playing that role. We must, therefore, explore a Fifth Estate.

The social media riding on the Internet has been providing platforms that could be utilised to democratise and humanise media. "Yet, just when



Myth of 'Free Media' and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era
Kalinga Seneviratne
Sage
₹1,150, Pp 348

Sorrow & solace

Jeet Thayil's new novel is a poem of nothingness, an attempt by a lover to reclaim his wife's memory, and eventually himself

ASHUTOSH BHARDWAJ

THERE AREN'T MANY Indian novels that narrate the life of a man who finds himself in sorrow after the death of his wife. There are works whose male protagonists, after being deserted by their wife or lover, fill the void by beginning another relation in which the past remains a dominant presence. But a novel built around the ashes of a young wife is rare.

Reading Jeet Thayil's latest novel *Low*, Johan Sebastian Bach's iconic composition *The Chaconne* suddenly came to mind. Legend goes that Bach composed it soon after the death of his wife and poured his grief into music. Over a century later, in a letter to Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms wrote about his predecessor's art: "On one staff, for a small instrument, the man writes a

whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings."

When I say that I found myself listening to Bach while reading *Low*, I don't imply that it is a masterpiece. The novel has its flaws, but it captures grief with a penetrating intensity and authenticity.

After the death of his young wife Aki in Delhi, Dominic Ullis takes a flight to Bombay (the novel doesn't call it Mumbai) to drown himself into its streets. He has no belongings, no luggage. He has left everything behind; his only companion is an urn containing her ashes. Thus begins a weekend of drugs and dope in which he meets many characters, both strangers and old friends.

Like Thayil's previous novel *The Book of Chocolate Saints*, *Low* is also said to be an autobiographical work. Like the protagonist of his first novel, the DSC-award winner *Narcopolis*, Ullis is also a heroin addict; so is Thayil.

Both Ullis and Aki are melancholic



A novel built around the ashes of a young wife is rare

characters. He is a heroin addict; she had been living with an acute death wish ever since early childhood, who believed that "everyone of us lives with a death sentence". Both were together for a mere four years before she ended her life.

The novel has two distinct strands. His wanderings through the heroin-induced haze in Bombay, and her recurring memory that pierces him. The novel soars when the narrative shifts to their lives. It somewhat loses its force when it begins describing his adventures with drugs.

His name is often pronounced or mistaken as Ulysses. It may not be without a metaphor, as it invokes a motif of

the protagonist's wanderings in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The novel begins with

Thayil's prose is precise and poignant. He is among the most innovative fiction writers of Indian English. Low further buttresses his reputation

of dubious sexuality." "Low" was her favourite word; she used it in multiple ways. She had always been living "the low". If he asked her what she'd been doing all day she would say, "I

was low." "As if it were a republic to which she had a multiple-entry twenty-year visa...As if her low country lay everywhere like a vast spiritual archipelago."

Aki, to me, is the most endearing and strong woman character in Thayil's fiction so far. She lives her torment with clarity and conviction, her sorrow never seeks any solace. Her fearlessness is the result of a simple deduction: "compared to her own fantasies of dying, the danger posed by the real world were irrelevant, banal, not worth worrying about".

Thayil's prose is precise and poignant. He is among the most innovative fiction writers of Indian English. *Low* further buttresses his reputation. Between grief and nothing I chose grief, wrote William Faulkner. Thayil's novel is a poem of nothingness, an attempt by a lover to reclaim her memory and, thus, eventually himself. A man who never screams, his grief quietly percolates inside.

A conversation between Ullis and a woman looms over the narrative.

"He mentioned that you lost your wife."

"Lost implies a possibility of finding."

"How did she expire?"

"Milk expires. My wife died."

And yet there is a hope. In the last scene, on the return flight to Delhi, he goes to the aircraft's bathroom, rolls up a note and snorts the last of his wife's ashes. "It made him remorseful that he no longer had anything left of her. But she would live in his nasal passages and blood vessels and in each throbbing cell."

After Aki's death Ullis repeatedly listened to Schubert's poignant composition *Ave Maria*, a Christian prayer that invokes Mother Mary at the hour of death. I read *Low* when the world is facing a lethal virus.

Ashutosh Bhardwaj is an award-winning writer & journalist

From the Front Page

TV reruns attract viewers, not ads

The channel's leadership position has made it a favourite among advertisers, media planners say. The number of advertisers on Ramayan has increased from three at the beginning of the lockdown to 42 in week 15. A 10-second ad spot on Ramayan is in the range of ₹ 65,000 to ₹ 75,000. "It is unfortunate that despite high GEC viewership, revenue is not following the eyeballs," says Sudhir Kumar, director, offline media, DCMN.

Only 3 lakh RNA extraction kits left

In a recent paper in the Indian Journal of Medical Research, scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) estimated that moving to a 24-hour working model would enhance daily testing capacity to 40,464 samples. This could be increased to 1 lakh to 1.20 lakh by using machines available with various organisations such as NACO and the National TB Elimination programme. "Using combination/multiplex kits, and provision of automated RNA extraction platforms at all laboratories could also optimise run time and contribute to capacity increase by 1.5-2 times," the ICMR scientists wrote. However, the shortage of RNA extraction kits could hamper these plans to ramp up testing. Meanwhile, 1,490 new cases and 56 deaths were reported on Saturday, taking the total tally to 24,942 cases (5,209 recovered) and 779 deaths. The ICMR said a total of 5,79,957 samples had been tested so far. The government on Saturday also said the daily growth rate of new cases has dipped to 6%, which is the lowest since the country crossed 100 cases. The Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by health minister Harsh Vardhan, met to review the preparations and deliberate on the way ahead. A detailed presentation on the COVID-

19 situation across the country, along with the response and management, was made. GoM was informed that over 1 lakh PPEs and N95 masks are being manufactured in the country daily. Currently, there are 104 domestic manufacturers of PPEs and three making N95 masks. Domestic manufacturers have also started production of ventilators and orders have been placed for over 59,000 units through nine manufacturers.

Foreign subsidiaries fudged audit report, bank statements

Based on these account statements, Yes Bank alleged diversion of loan funds by Malvern to other Cox & Kings Group entities "leading to a complete destruction of enterprise value of Malvern". "As a former auditor of Malvern Travel, we are bound by commercial confidentiality and so can't comment on any allegations made about the former management," said the official spokesperson of BDO. An email to RBS in UK did not elicit any response. Records show that Raffingers UK LLP, an audit firm, has filed a criminal complaint before the National Crime Agency in the UK against Prometheon Enterprise Ltd (UK), a subsidiary of Cox and Kings Group for forging the statement of accounts of Prometheon for financial year 2019. Raffingers has said it has not signed any statement of accounts of Prometheon for FY 2109, as it was not able to complete its audit. Significantly, records of the resolution professional show that the forged statement of accounts of Prometheon was allegedly sent to the statutory auditors of Cox & Kings in India, for consolidation, from a "fictitious domain name and email id of Raffingers". In March, the resolution professional informed the MCA that due to the alleged forgery by Prometheon, the consolidated accounts of Cox

and Kings Ltd signed by its chief financial officer and company secretary are incorrect. The RP has also reported it as a fraud to the MCA. Yes Bank has an exposure of 157 million pounds (about ₹1460 crore) to Prometheon, that has defaulted in its payment obligation since June 2019. Cox and Kings was sent to bankruptcy and insolvency court in India in October 2019 after it defaulted on payments. The travel and tour company owes ₹5,500 crore to banks and financial institutions. Banks that have an exposure to the firm include Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Indusind, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Kotak Mahindra among others. Detailed emails to Cox and Kings, Ajay Ajit Peter Kerker, the former promoter of the company and Yes Bank remained unanswered. Yes Bank has also alleged that Cox and Kings Financial Services Ltd, allegedly submitted a "manipulated" debtor statement with the bank to avail of a higher working capital facility of ₹400 crore and "siphoned" the loan. The bank has also alleged that Cox & Kings has allegedly misused ₹4387 crore, it got from the sale of its profitable education firm, Holidaybreak Education Ltd in January 2019. According to the records "between February 2019 to July 2019, Cox & Kings has shared five different versions about the utilisation of the sale proceeds" with its lenders. Last month, Ajay Ajit Peter Kerker was summoned for questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), in connection with the money laundering case against Rana Kapoor. Kapoor, currently lodged in jail, is accused of taking kickbacks in lieu of granting loans to several companies that have now defaulted on repayments.

Govt revises own orders, stakeholders left clueless

It also included operations of NBFCs and cooperative societies and

activities related to power transmission lines and telecom optical fibre. While this may be explained as additional activities being permitted probably based on demands by some states, an order issued by it two days later showed it was also poorly planned. On April 19, the MHA issued orders revoking permission to e-commerce companies to sell non-essential items. In an attempt to kick-start the economy, the April 15 guidelines had allowed e-commerce platforms to resume sale of items beyond groceries and food stuff. However, the government soon faced pressure from small traders who said this would cause "trade imbalance" and the government promptly revoked orders. Its new order on Friday allowing a host of local shops to open is likely to please small traders and may allow government the liberty to nudge them to accept e-commerce operations in coming days, which the PM talked about in his LinkedIn post less than a week ago. Despite orders by the government for their operations to resume, industry representatives began expressing fear that strict Covid-19 containment guidelines on factory premises and provisions of penalty for their violations were a deterrent to restarting work. They feared despite all precautions if someone tested positive on factory premises, they could be in legal trouble. Industries also said it would be difficult for them to provide in-situ accommodation for labour or transport them in private vehicles. As an industrialist put it: "How do I accommodate staff in factory premises when shops for beddings are shut?" Clearly, stakeholders had not been adequately consulted before issuing guidelines leading to confusion on the ground. "True, some of these situations could have been avoided through adequate discussions with industry representatives and trade bodies beforehand. However, that was not our domain. It was being handled by ministry of commerce," a

home ministry official said. Not surprisingly, the MHA had to again issue clarifications on April 22 saying that penalties would be levied only if offence occurs with "consent, cognisance or negligence of employer". When this did little to assuage fears, home secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to all states on April 23 emphasising that its guidelines had no clause describing provisions for prosecution of employer or sealing of factory premises in case a worker tested positive for virus. The guidelines do, however, detail provisions under the Disaster Management Act where employers can be prosecuted for violation of central guidelines as determined by local authorities. Bhalla's letter also went on to clarify that no fresh permissions were required for operation of such factories that were already functional in the first lockdown. Another instance of the Centre and states not being on the same page relates to handling of Covid-19 outbreak and enforcing the lockdown. It reached a flashpoint when Kerala issued its own guidelines for phase II of the lockdown on April 17. Given how the virus was aggressively contained, and to restore livelihoods, the state provided many relaxations including operation of dine-in restaurants and barber shops,

opening of book shops and local workshops, movement of public in buses within a city, etc. Within two days, on April 19, MHA shot off a letter to Kerala saying these were a dilution of guidelines issued by it and the state was not allowed to do so under the Disaster Management Act. Yet, on April 21, the Centre issued orders to open shops for educational books—an activity it had prohibited Kerala from undertaking—and electric fans. Here too, the ambiguity meant that fans were still not selling on the ground since there are no exclusive fan shops. They are largely sold through electrical equipment shops which sell multiple items. On the same day, in a separate letter to all states it warned them not to dilute its guidelines. It did this even as the government of Uttar Pradesh continued to pull out hundreds of students belonging to its state from Kota in Rajasthan in buses. The MHA maintained stoic silence as to how this was in consonance with its national guidelines. In fact, the BJP-JDU government in Bihar has protested against students being allowed to move out of Rajasthan and wrote to the Centre recently calling it an "utter violation of guidelines issued by the MHA". As clamour over suffering of stranded migrant labour grew vis-a-vis prioritising of extraction of students, the UP

government on Friday announced it would pull out its migrant labour from states across India and transport them to their native places in buses. Here, the MHA has maintained silence as to how this would be allowed under the current guidelines. On April 19, MHA had issued detailed standard operating procedures allowing movement of migrant labour within a state. It had asked states to arrange for their transport and food and water during transit to workplace. It, however, prohibited inter-state transfer of migrant labour. Sources now say there could be a fresh order in this regard. It only captures how the state machinery has been stumbling from one hurdle to another because of what appears to be inadequate consultation and planning. Among the multiple activities it has had to issue clarifications on since April 15 are services of caregivers of senior citizens residing with them, operation of prepaid mobile recharge utilities, bread factories, milk processing plants, flour mills, dal mills, several horticulture activities and transport of items related to functioning of aparies etc. On Saturday, too, it had to issue further clarifications to its orders on the same day stating barber shops would remain shut since they offer services and do not sell items. As

confusion prevailed over its exemptions given to certain category of shops across the country on Friday, the MHA issued multiple clarifications on Saturday to clear the air. On the category of shops, the MHA said, "In rural areas, all shops, except those in shopping malls are allowed to open. In urban areas, all standalone shops, neighbourhood shops & shops in residential complexes are allowed to open. Shops in markets/market complexes and shopping malls are not allowed to open." The MHA also clarified there would be no sale of liquor, paan or tobacco products and that "sale by e-commerce companies will continue to be permitted for essential goods only".

It has also been clarified that none of these exemptions would apply to containment zones and hotspots. It also said that in reading its guidelines, it must be remembered that exemptions are only for shops selling items and not those providing services. "In view of queries coming from various sections of society, it is clarified that all restaurants, salons and barber shops would remain closed. They render services & the relaxations given under #lockdown restrictions yesterday pertain only to shops selling items," MHA said.

"IMPORTANT"

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GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU / WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
PALAR BASIN CIRCLE, CHEPAUK, CHENNAI - 5.
 Form of Contract : Lumpsum - Item Rate Contract
Tender Notice (Two Cover System)
Tender Notice No.01 PBC / 2020-21 / Dt.24.04.2020

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, the Superintending Engineer, WRD, Palar Basin Circle, Chennai-5 invites tender from eligible tenderers for the works of (1) "Construction of Drop cum Regulator Formation of Diversion Channel with Allied Structures like Box Culvert and Syphon at L.S. 5600m of Thervaikandigai Reservoir at Thervaikandigai Village, Construction of Bridge below weir at L.S. 5600 m of Thervaikandigai Reservoir at Thervaikandigai Village in Gummudipondi Taluk and construction of Inlets at L.S. 2200 m of K.P. Canal and 39 m of Off-take canal of Thervaikandigai Reservoir in Uthukkottai Taluk of Thiruvallur District" (2) "Design, Drawing, fabrication, supply and erection of vertical spillway, service and emergency shutters and its components in the newly constructed Orathur spillway of Orathur village, repair and modification of docking place in 19 vents with corrosion preventive surface coating in Chembarambakkam Tank of Kancheepuram District and renovation and replacement of sand vent shutters in Sathyamoorthy Sagar Dam in Thiruvallur District" at his office upto 03.00 P.M on 28.05.2020 in sealed covers. The tender will be opened at 03.30 P.M at his chamber on the same day.

Other informations such as name of work, details of Work, Value, EMD, Cost of tender schedule, etc., will be available in the Government website "www.tenders.tn.gov.in". Any Corrections or Modifications will be published on website only.

Superintending Engineer, WRD.,
 Palar Basin Circle, Chennai - 5.

DIPR/1692/Tender/2020

SHRIRAM TRANSPORT FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED
 Corporate Identity No. (CIN) : L65191TN1979PLC007874
Regd. Office: Mookambika Complex, 3rd Floor, No.4, Lady Desika Road, Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004.
 Tel No: +91 44 2499 0356, Fax : +91 44 2499 3272.
 Website: www.stfc.in Email id: secretarial@stfc.in.

NOTICE

In compliance with the provisions of Section 110 of the Companies Act, 2013 (the 'Act') read with the Rule 20 and Rule 22 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 (the 'Rules'), Regulation 44 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 and the relaxations and clarifications issued by Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) vide General Circular No.14/2020 dated April 08, 2020 and General Circular No.17/2020 dated April 13, 2020 (Circulars), we are furnishing the following details:

- The business to be transacted through voting by electronic means for seeking approval of the Members for the renewal of limit to issue Debentures on private placement basis by the Board in compliance with applicable provisions of the Act read with the Rules and Circulars.
- Date of completion of dispatch of Notice to Members through e-mail is **April 25, 2020**
- The Company has sent an email of the Notice dated April 20, 2020 to all the Members whose name appeared on the Register of Members/ Record of Depositories received from National Securities Depository Limited/ Central Depository Services (India) Limited (Depositories) as on **Wednesday, April 22, 2020 (cut-off date)** and whose email addresses are registered with depository participant(s). A person who is not a Member as on the cut-off date should treat this Notice for information purpose only.
- Members whose email addresses are not registered, but Mobile numbers are available, SMS are being sent to Members by Integrated Registry Management Services Private Limited containing the weblink for downloading the Notice. Please treat this Notice as our attempt to reach all our Members who have missed or not received other communication on this subject matter and intend to participate in proposed remote e-voting.
- Due to country wide lockdown followed by supply chain disruption and labour demobilization, we are unable to send physical postal ballot notice to our Members, hence we urge all of them to use remote e-voting facility and cast their valuable vote.
- Details of the process and manner of remote e-voting along with the User Id and password are provided over email to all Members who have registered their email addresses.
- For Members who have not registered their email addresses or have not received any communication regarding the Notice may obtain the user Id and password by sending a request at csdstd@integratedindia.in, secretarial@stfc.in or contact Integrated Registry Management Services Private Limited, Company's RTA at 044 28140801 or the Company at 022 40959595 between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on all working days (except Saturday and Sunday) till 48 hours prior to the closure of the voting period.
- Members who have not registered their email address and in consequence could not receive the Notice may temporarily get their email address registered with the RTA, by clicking the link: https://www.integratedindia.in/DR_Email_Registration.aspx and following the registration process as guided thereafter. Post successful registration of the email address, the Member will receive soft copy of the Notice at his/her registered email address and the procedure for e-voting along with the User ID and the Password to enable remote e-voting for this Notice. In case of any queries, Member may write to csdstd@integratedindia.in
- It is clarified that for permanent registration of email address, the Members are however requested to register their email address, in respect of electronic holdings with the Depositories / Depository Participant and in respect of physical holdings with the RTA.
- The date and time of commencement of voting through electronic means – **Monday, April 27, 2020 (9:00 Hours IST)**.
- The date and time of end of voting through electronics means – **Tuesday, May 26, 2020 (17:00 Hours IST)**.
- The remote e-voting platform will be disabled at 17:00 Hours IST on Tuesday, May 26, 2020 by Central Depository Services (India) Limited (CDSL). Once the vote on resolution is cast by the Members, the Members shall not be allowed to change it subsequently.
- Website address where Notice is displayed:- Company- www.stfc.in, and CDSL- www.cdslindia.com. Notice is also submitted to BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited and the same are also available on their websites.
- Contact details of the person responsible to address the grievances connected with the remote e-voting: Mr. Vivek Achwal, Company Secretary, Corporate Office - Wockhardt Towers, Level-3, West Wing, C-2, G Block, Bandra - Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai - 400051. Telephone Number: +91-022-40959595, Email id: secretarial@stfc.in.
- The Company has appointed Mr. P. Sriam (Membership No. FCS 4862), a Practicing Company Secretary (PCS No.3310), Chennai as Scrutinizer for conducting the remote e-voting process thereto in accordance with the provisions of the Act and the Rules in a fair and transparent manner.
- The results of the remote e-voting will be declared on **Thursday, May 28, 2020** at 05.00 P.M. at the Registered office of the Company in case the normalcy is restored. In case of lock-down, the results of the remote e-voting along with the scrutinizer's report will be uploaded on the Company's website www.stfc.in and will be communicated to the National Stock Exchange of India Limited and BSE Limited, where the equity shares of the Company are listed.

By the Order of the Board of Directors
 For **Shriram Transport Finance Company Limited**

Place: Mumbai Sd/
 Date : April 25, 2020
 Vivek Achwal
 Company Secretary

Trial of Gilead's virus treatment running ahead of schedule

REUTERS
 Los Angeles, April 25

A KEY US government trial of Gilead Sciences Inc's experimental coronavirus treatment may yield results as early as mid-May, according to the study's lead investigator, after doctors clamoured to enroll their patients in the study. Preliminary findings from the randomised trial of the antiviral drug remdesivir, begun in February by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), could come even sooner, lead researcher Dr Andre Kalil told Reuters in an interview. There are currently no approved treatments or vaccines for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new virus that has killed over 190,000 people globally, according to a Reuters tally. Remdesivir has drawn tremendous attention as a therapy with the potential to alter the course of the disease, based on anecdotal reports that it may have helped some patients. Those hopes were dampened somewhat on Thursday, when details from a Chinese remdesivir trial in patients with severe COVID-19 inadvertently released by the World Health Organization suggested it provided no benefit. Gilead pushed back on that

interpretation saying the study, which was stopped early due to low patient enrolment, cannot provide meaningful conclusions.

Other reports have provided reason for optimism. Doctors at Houston Methodist Hospital told Reuters that since March 23, they have treated 41 mostly severely ill COVID-19 patients with the drug. None have died and half are back home. But they and other doctors contacted by Reuters said they need much more information than the few details available from the Chinese trial and anecdotal reports on its emergency use in the United States to form a view on remdesivir. They emphasised a need to see how patients on remdesivir fare compared to those who do not receive the therapy in a rigorous clinical trial at different stages of illness to know whether and under what circumstances it may provide benefit. The NIAID trial "has all the necessary scientific standards that are really going to help us define if this drug works or not," said Dr Kalil, a professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Centre. It is a randomised, double-blind study in which half the patients were given the drug and the other half a placebo. Enrolment in the trial closed on Sunday, but has far exceeded initial goals of 400 to 500 patients, he said.

China approves third vaccine for clinical trials

CHINA HAS APPROVED its third coronavirus vaccine for the second phase of clinical trials as it reported 12 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total number of infections in the country to 82,816. China has approved three coronavirus vaccines, including the one developed by Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for clinical trials.

An "inactivated" vaccine developed by Wuhan Institute of Biological Products under the China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) and the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) started its clinical trials, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. An "inactivated" vaccine consists of virus particles, bacteria, or other pathogens that have been grown in culture and then lose disease-producing capacity. In contrast, live vaccines use pathogens that are still alive. PTI

MIRAE ASSET Mutual Fund

NOTICE NO. 17/2020

NOTICE is hereby given further to our notice cum addendum dated April 24, 2020 wherein it was stated that physical transactions shall be accepted at the Registered & Corporate Office of the AMC situated at 606, Windsor Bldg., Off C.S.T Road, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai - 400098 w.e.f April 27, 2020.

It is hereby clarified that pursuant to our notice cum addendum dated March 22, 2020, March 25, 2020 and April 20, 2020, Mirae Asset Mutual Fund continues to accept transactions through the online mode and all the investors are encouraged to adopt online means for transacting. Investors can visit the 'Transact page' on our website (www.miraeeassetmf.co.in/transact) or K-Fin tech website: <https://mfs.kfintech.com/investor/> or the app made available by the RTA: KFINKART INVESTOR. The investor can also transact through Distributors website, MF Utility platform, Stock Exchange platforms or any other online platform meant for transacting. Further, pursuant to the aforesaid notice cum addendums, our designated email ids i.e. transact@miraeeasset.com and insti.care@miraeeasset.com continue to be the 'official points of acceptance' for processing the transactions.

All other terms and conditions forming part of the aforementioned notice cum addenda remain unchanged.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors of
MIRAE ASSET INVESTMENT MANAGERS (INDIA) PVT. LTD.
 (Asset Management Company for Mirae Asset Mutual Fund)

Place : Mumbai Sd/
 Date : April 25, 2020
AUTHORISED SIGNATORY

MIRAE ASSET MUTUAL FUND (Investment Manager: Mirae Asset Investment Managers (India) Private Limited) (CIN: U65990MH2019PTC324625).
Registered & Corporate Office: 606, Windsor, Off CST Road, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai - 400098.
 ☎ 1800 2090 777 (Toll free), ✉ customercare@miraeeasset.com www.miraeeassetmf.co.in

Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

Nippon India Mutual Fund (Formerly Reliance Mutual Fund)
 Wealth sets you free

Nippon Life India Asset Management Limited
 (Formerly known as Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management Limited)
 (CIN - L65910MH1995PLC220793)

Registered Office: Reliance Centre, 7th Floor, South Wing, Off Western Express Highway, Santacruz (East), Mumbai - 400 055.
 Tel No. +91 022 4303 1000 • Fax No. +91 022 4303 7662 • www.nipponindiamf.com

NOTICE CUM ADDENDUM NO. 8

Notice is hereby given that considering the COVID-19 scenario, Nippon India Mutual Fund ("NIMF")/ Nippon Life India Asset Management Limited (NAM INDIA) has decided to modify a condition in SIP Pause facility in all the eligible open ended schemes of NIMF for a temporary period starting from April 27, 2020 to June 30, 2020.

Accordingly, the criteria of acceptance of SIP Pause request only after completion of six SIP instalments shall not be applicable for a temporary period from April 27, 2020 till June 30, 2020. Consequently, during this temporary period, investors can request for SIP Pause facility irrespective of number of SIP instalments processed in respective schemes.

The AMC reserves the right at its sole discretion to withdraw / modify the above condition / provision. All other terms and conditions of SIP Pause facility read with the addendum issued from time to time shall remain unchanged.

For **NIPPON LIFE INDIA ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED**
 (formerly known as Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management Limited)
 (Asset Management Company for Nippon India Mutual Fund)

Mumbai Sd/
 April 24, 2020
Authorised Signatory

Make even idle money work! Invest in Mutual Funds

Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

US states start easing lockdowns as coronavirus weakens in Asia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Savannah (US), April 25

THE US STATES of Georgia, Oklahoma and Alaska began loosening lockdown orders on their pandemic-wounded businesses, even as the confirmed US death toll from the coronavirus soared past 50,000 and despite warnings from health experts that such steps may be coming too early.

The news came as the outbreak appeared to continue to subside in much of Asia. In China, where the virus was first detected late last year, authorities on Saturday reported no new deaths for the 10th straight day, along with just 12 new cases, 11 of them brought from overseas and one local transmission in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang bordering Russia, according to the National Health Commission.

Just 838 people remain hospitalized in China with Covid-19 while another 1,000 are undergoing isolation and monitoring for being either suspected cases or having tested positive for the virus while showing no symptoms. China has reported a total of 4,632 deaths among 82,816 cases.

South Korea reported 10 fresh cases, the eighth day in a row its daily jump came below



Two men walk down a ramp to a parking lot in Atlanta, Georgia, in the US

20. There were no new deaths for the second straight day.

India announced the easing of a stringent lockdown for 1.3 billion people with the reopening of neighbourhood and standalone shops. India has reported more than 18,600 cases and 775 deaths. Last week, it allowed resumption of manufacturing and farming activities in rural areas as millions of daily wage earners were left without work.

In France, the government is leaving families to decide whether to keep children at home or send them back to class when the nationwide lockdown, in place since March 17, starts to be lifted on May 11.

As in many countries, the tourism industry in France has been ravaged by the pandemic and a French hotel executive predicted his business will remain "catastrophic" for the rest of this year.

"Zero per cent (occupancy) in April, probably in May and probably in June," Serge Cachan, president of the Astotel chain of Paris hotels, told The Associated Press. With estimated losses this year of 60-70%, Cachan said he is counting on government help to survive.

Belgium announced that after May 3, hospitals will progressively open to some non-essential tasks and textile

shops also will be allowed to reopen as the country begins relaxing safeguards.

Denmark has reopened schools for the youngest grads, while in Spain, parents face the decision of whether to let kids get their first fresh air in weeks when the country on Sunday starts to ease the total ban on letting them outside.

In the US, Republican governors in Georgia and Oklahoma allowed salons, spas and barber shops to reopen, while Alaska opened the way for restaurants to resume dine-in service and retail shops and other businesses to open their doors, all with limitations. Some Alaska municipalities chose to maintain stricter rules.

Though limited in scope, and subject to social-distancing restrictions, the reopenings marked a symbolic milestone in the debate raging in the United States and beyond as to how quickly political leaders should lift economically devastating lockdown orders.

During a White House press briefing Friday, President Donald Trump spoke optimistically of the economy but also asked people to continue social distancing and using face coverings. The same day, Trump signed a \$484 billion bill to aid employers and hospitals under stress from the pandemic.

WHO warns you may catch coronavirus more than once

BLOOMBERG
London, April 25

CATCHING COVID-19 ONCE may not protect you from getting it again, according to the World Health Organization, a finding that could jeopardise efforts to allow people to return to work after recovering from the virus.

"There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from Covid-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," the United Nations agency said in an April 24 statement.

The WHO guidance came after some governments suggested that people who have antibodies to the coronavirus could be issued an "immunity passport" or "risk-free certificate" that would allow them to

travel or return to work, based on the assumption that they were safe from re-infection, according to the statement. People issued such a certificate could ignore public-health guidance, increasing the risk of the disease spreading further. Chile was the first country to announce plans to issue immunity cards based partly on antibody tests. This has raised concerns because the tests have proven unreliable elsewhere, and some people may get deliberately ill in order to obtain the card. The US and others have nonetheless said they're looking into the option.

While there's a consensus that the key to ending the coronavirus pandemic is establishing co-called herd immunity, there are many unknowns. One is whether researchers can develop a safe and effective vac-

The guidance came after some governments suggested people who have antibodies could be issued an 'immunity passport' or 'risk-free certificate' that would allow them to travel or return to work, based on the assumption they were safe from re-infection

Another is how long people who've recovered have immunity; reinfection after months or years is common with other human coronaviruses.

Finally, it's not clear what percentage of people must be immune to protect the "herd." That depends on the contagiousness of the virus.

The WHO said it's reviewing the scientific evidence on antibody responses to coronavirus, but as yet no study has evaluated whether the presence of antibodies "confers immunity to subsequent infection by this virus in humans." And while many countries are currently testing for antibodies, these studies aren't designed to determine whether people recovered from the disease acquire immunity, the agency said.

As the hunt for a vaccine continues around the world, the WHO has formed an international alliance to ensure that treatments are distributed fairly. French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are involved in the alliance.

Britain nears grim milestone of 20K coronavirus hospital deaths

REUTERS
London, April 25

BRITAIN COULD HIT the grim milestone of 20,000 Covid-19 deaths later on Saturday, when the daily count is added to the current toll of 19,506 people who tested positive for the new coronavirus and died in hospital.

The death toll from Covid-19 in hospitals across the UK rose on Friday by 684 in 24

hours to 19,506. Passing the 20,000 mark will be an uncomfortable moment for the government, whose chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance said on March 17 that keeping the toll under that number would be "a good outcome in terms of where we would hope to get".

Britain has the fifth highest official coronavirus death toll in the world, after the US, Italy, Spain and France. Scien-

tists have said that the death rate will start to decline quickly only in another couple of weeks.

The total number of fatalities is likely to be thousands higher once more comprehensive but lagging figures that include deaths in nursing homes are added. As of April 10, the hospital toll underestimated deaths by around 40%.

The UK government, which was slower than European

peers to impose a lockdown, has been heavily criticised over limited testing capacity and for failing to deliver enough personal protective equipment to front-line health workers.

In the latest setback, a website for essential workers to apply for a coronavirus test was shut down on Friday, just hours after the government announced that a greater range of people would now be eligible for testing.

'Indians, ethnic minority medics in UK at high risk'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London, April 25

MEDICAL AND HEALTHCARE professionals from Indian and the minority ethnic backgrounds fall into a higher risk category of contracting the deadly coronavirus in the UK, a first-of-its-kind survey among medics in the country has concluded.

The Research and Innovation Forum of the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) conducted the week-long online survey between April 14 and 21 to determine risk factors and emerging concerns within healthcare professionals as wider community data began to reflect black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) vulnerabilities during the

pandemic.

Around 2,003 respondents from all backgrounds returned the questionnaire, with the majority (66%) being hospital doctors and primary care practitioners forming the second large group (24%). Of those surveyed, 86 per cent were from BAME backgrounds, with South Asians forming the bulk of the sample at 75%.

"This is the largest survey of its kind that involves BAME healthcare workers from all backgrounds. And the results are no surprise, that being of BAME background is a major risk factor for contracting the virus," said Dr Indranil Chakravorty, chair of the BAPIO Research and Innovation Forum.

The survey also shows that



A file photo of nurses wearing protective gear in central England's Selston village

a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) is a major concern to medics and also

confirms that being BAME is a significant independent risk factor in contracting

Covid-19 irrespective of comorbidities — or the presence of one or more additional conditions co-occurring with a primary medical condition, such as obesity. The survey also found that 64 medical professionals reported being reprimanded for wearing or wanting PPE.

"We have been urging government to protect those who are vulnerable, so that front-line workers do not themselves fall ill," BAPIO president Ramesh Mehta said. "BAPIO is very keen to do research in this area and we are looking to getting involved with large studies with partners such as Imperial College London to ensure we have the scientific evidence that can be applied in clinical practice," Mehta said.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Gaza City, April 25

FOR THE FIRST time in years, sewing factories in the Gaza Strip are back to working at full capacity — producing masks, gloves and protective gowns, some of which are bound for Israel.

It's a rare economic lifeline in the coastal territory, which has been blockaded by Israel and Egypt since the Hamas militant group seized power from rival Palestinian forces in the strip in 2007. The blockade, and three wars between Hamas and Israel, have devastated the local economy, with unemployment hovering around 50%. But the sudden opportunity also shows how Gaza's economy is at the mercy of those enforcing the blockade — and how depressed wages have become. Workers earn as little as \$8 a day.

So far, Gaza appears to have been largely spared from the coronavirus pandemic, with only 17 cases detected, all within quarantine facilities set up for those returning from abroad. Many still fear an outbreak in the impoverished territory, which is home to 2 million people and where the health care system has been battered by years of conflict. But for now, authorities are cautiously allowing most busi-

nesses to stay open. It's a rare economic lifeline in the coastal territory, which has been blockaded by Israel and Egypt since the Hamas militant group seized power from rival Palestinian forces in the strip in 2007

Rizq al-Madhoun, owner of the Bahaa garment company, said he has produced more than 1 million masks in the past three weeks, "all for the Israeli market". Gaza may not have the advanced machinery seen in other places, but he said residents' sewing skills are unmatched. "Gaza workers are distinguished in handwork and they are better than workers in China or Turkey," he said.

Another factory, Unipal 2000, is able to employ 800 workers across two shifts to produce protective equipment around the clock. Both factories import fabric and other materials from customers in Israel and then produce items like masks, gloves and surgical gowns. Unipal makes about 150,000 pieces a day, and demand is high as countries around the world grapple with shortages. Asked about doing business with

Israeli customers, both factory owners said they did not want to discuss politics and framed their work in terms of business and humanitarian needs.

"Despite the siege in Gaza, we export these masks and protective clothes to the whole world without exception," Bashir Bawab, the owner of Unipal 2000, said. "We feel we are doing a humanitarian duty."

In recent years, Tamer Emad, a skilled textile worker, was able to work one week per month at best. But over the past month, he has been on the Unipal factory floor every day, earning around \$8 per shift. "This has provided us with a good opportunity ahead of Ramadan," he said. Such wages are typical in the depressed Gaza economy, but would barely keep a family afloat. It costs around \$250 a month to rent a two-bedroom apartment. Omar Shaban, an economist who heads a local think tank, said the conditions created by the blockade allow for "exploitation", but that low-wage jobs still provide income for many people.

Unipal 2000 first opened in an industrial zone along the frontier in 1998, when the peace process was in full swing. But like many other Gaza businesses, it was forced to shut down after the Hamas takeover and the blockade.

Taiwan sommelier takes wine tasting classes online

REUTERS
Taipei, April 25

A YOUNG TAIWANESE sommelier is taking his wine tasting classes online to keep his business afloat, as social distancing rules to contain the spread of the new coronavirus prevents large gatherings.

Live streaming from his studio in Taipei, Peter Petrus, the professional name he uses for his business, teaches the art of wine-tasting online to people

across the island.

The containment measures have had a big impact on business, Petrus told Reuters. "So I started contemplating if there might be a way to work around this situation — at the end of the day the company has to keep going."

While Taiwan has been relatively successful so far in curbing the spread of the virus, with 428 cases and six deaths, the government has been promoting social distancing and dis-

While Taiwan has been relatively successful so far in curbing the spread of the virus, with 428 cases and six deaths, the government has been promoting social distancing and discouraging large gatherings to keep the pandemic under control

couraging large gatherings to keep the pandemic under control. Online tasting has a few constraints — mainly around packing, maintaining the right temperature and sending the bottles on time to customers. "The problem with wine is that it starts oxidation once you open the bottle," said Petrus, who meticulously pours a selection of wine into smaller bottles and labels each before couriering.

Students who receive the wine samples join Petrus online

to sip together as they flip through the course material. Petrus, who films and livestreams via his smartphone, keeps his students engaged while he explains the finer points of each wine.

Candice Yang, a 32-year-old maths teacher, who joined one of his online courses this week, described the experience as "quite special." "It feels just the same (as being there) with a bit of additional warmth and chill-out, because it's so cosy at home."

Cotton, natural silk, chiffon best materials for homemade masks against Covid: Study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Washington, April 25

AS PEOPLE RESORT to making their own cloth masks due to shortage of surgical and N95 varieties in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, a new study says a combination of cotton with natural silk or chiffon can filter out aerosol particles provided that the mask fits well.

According to the researchers, including those from the University of Chicago in the US, SARS-CoV-2, the new coronavirus that causes Covid-19, is thought to spread mainly through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks or breathes.

They said these droplets form in a wide range of sizes, but the tiniest ones, called aerosols, can easily slip through the openings between certain cloth fibers, leading some experts to doubt if cloth masks can actually help prevent disease. In the study, published in the journal ACS Nano, the scientists assessed the ability of common fabrics, alone or in combination, to filter out aerosols similar in size to respiratory droplets.

They used an aerosol mixing chamber to produce particles ranging from 10 nanometres to



According to the researchers, SARS-CoV-2, the new coronavirus that causes Covid-19, is thought to spread mainly through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks or breathes

6 micrometres in diameter, which is tens to hundreds of times smaller than the width of a single human hair. A fan blew the aerosol across various cloth samples at an airflow rate corresponding to a person's respiration at rest, and the research team measured the number and size of particles in air before and after passing through the fabric. The scientists found one layer of

a tightly woven cotton sheet combined with two layers of polyester-spandex chiffon, a sheer fabric often used in evening gowns, filtered out the most aerosol particles, 80-99%, depending on particle size.

They said the performance of these fabric layers was close to that of an N95 mask material. According to the study, substituting the chiffon with natural silk or flannel, or simply using a cotton quilt with cotton-polyester batting, produced similar results. The researchers said tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton, can act as a mechanical barrier to particles, whereas fabrics that hold a static charge, like certain types of chiffon and natural silk, serve as an electrostatic barrier.

But they cautioned even a small gap, by as much as 1%, reduced the filtering efficiency of all masks by half or more, emphasising the importance of a properly fitted mask. "Our studies also imply that gaps can result in over a 60% decrease in the filtration efficiency, implying the need for future cloth mask design studies to take into account issues of 'fit' and leakage, while allowing the exhaled air to vent efficiently," the scientists wrote in the study.

China witnesses more imported coronavirus cases despite curbs

REUTERS
Beijing, April 25

CHINA'S NORTHWESTERN PROVINCE of Shaanxi reported on Saturday seven new imported cases of the novel coronavirus, all in citizens returning home from Russia, even as domestic cases in the country were largely curbed.

The port city of Manzhouli in Inner Mongolia also reported three new imported cases, without giving details. China has instituted stringent checks at its ports and border points, banning the entry of foreign nationals on March 28, and even diverting international flights from its capital city Beijing. Still it has faced a continuous trickle of cases brought in by Chinese citizens wanting to return home in spite of risks of getting infected.

In recent days, many of these have come back from Russia. The new cases in Shaanxi were all Chinese nationals who had returned on April 20 on a flight from Moscow that was diverted away from Beijing. As of Saturday, the flight had a con-



People wear face masks to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus as they walk through an outdoor shopping area in Beijing

firmed total of 30 cases, and 8 asymptomatic infections, according to the provincial health commission.

No further details were given about the imported cases in Manzhouli in Inner Mongolia. The northern province announced Friday that it would start requiring all international arrivals to undergo a 28-day quarantine, as well as two tests for Covid-19 as well as an antibody test. China reported 12 new coronavirus cases on April 24, compared with six new cases on the pre-

vious day, National Health Commission data showed on Saturday. Of those, 11 were imported, compared with two the previous day.

The commission also reported 29 new asymptomatic cases, slightly down from the previous day's 34. Four of these cases were imported. The total number of confirmed cases in China, where the virus first emerged in late December, is now 82,816. The death toll remained the same at 4,632, with no new deaths reported on April 24.

Saudi Arabia abolishes flogging as punishment

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
Riyadh, April 25

SAUDI ARABIA HAS abolished flogging as a punishment, the Supreme Court announced, hailing the latest in a series of "human rights advances" made by the king and his powerful son. Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia, sometimes extending to hundreds of lashes, have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups. But they say the headline legal reforms overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have brought no let-up in the conservative Islamic kingdom's crushing of dissent, including through the use of the death penalty.

The Saudi supreme court said the latest reform was intended to "bring the kingdom into line with international human rights norms against corporal punishment". Previously the courts could order the flogging of convicts found guilty of offences ranging from extramarital sex and breach of the peace to murder. In future, judges will have to choose between fines and/or jail sentences, or non-custodial alternatives like community service,

Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups

the court said in a statement seen by AFP on Saturday. The most high-profile instance of flogging in recent years was the case of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2014 for "insulting" Islam. He was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov human rights prize the following year.

The abolition of corporal punishment in Saudi Arabia comes just days after the kingdom's human rights record was again in the spotlight following news of the death from a stroke in custody of leading activist Abdullah al-Hamid, 69. Hamid was a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was sentenced to 11 years in jail in March 2013, campaigners said. He was convicted on multiple charges, including "breaking allegiance" to the Saudi ruler, "inciting disorder" and seeking to disrupt state security, Amnesty International said.

Spotlight

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020



INFORMAL BEGINNINGS

The glass industry is both a cottage industry and factory industry. As per Corning Museum of Glass in US, man-made glass can be traced back approximately 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia when people discovered they could combine sand, soda and lime to create this transparent material

Tea losing aroma

Estate owners fear huge losses after the crisis is over—short supply, price rise and sharp decline in Indian exports

TEA GARDENS IN India have been closed since December, losing out around 120 million kg of tea. December being a lean season for cultivation, the bushes are pruned and readied for harvest in March-April. Now, with a complete lockdown, estate owners fear losses after the crisis is over—short supply, price rise and sharp decline in exports, expecting buyers to control overspending and subsidised rates in the future.

“The pandemic will cause a deep financial crisis to a sector already hard-hit,” says Jayaraman Thangavelu, managing director, Havukal and Warwick, a tea estate in Tamil Nadu. “We anticipate over 20 million kg shortfall in the crop in south India as operations are not full-fledged and supply chain activities need to be restored.” Tea has

been selling at an average of ₹150 a kg and prices have remained stagnant for past five years.

Tea gardens in India have not reopened after winter, losing around 120 million kg of tea

Dry winter and limited stock could affect the yield in north India. An industry insider, on the condition of anonymity, anticipates that tea exports next year may not be robust, saying, “We will face difficulty in selling the first flush, as contracts might get cancelled and export buyers will look at replacement due to shortage of good quality. The first flush produces the best-quality tea and is exported to major countries, fetching a higher price. If it is wiped out, the second flush in May could salvage things to an extent.”

For Gaurav Jalan, director of Doomni Tea Estate in Assam, the closure will amount to irretrievable losses. “This year, winter was dry, which is not good for bush health... the loss of first flush will see a shortage of about 70 million kg of premium quality. Transportation chain is not regularised, and there is no tea in stock,” he says. Darjeeling makes about 8.5 million kg tea a year. Of this, 25% of volume comes from the first flush with 40% value. North India lost 3% crop in March and 2% more in April.



Tea exports next year may not be robust, industry insiders say

BLOOMBERG



Sustaining business would be a challenge, experts say

EXPRESS PHOTO

Unorganised chaos

India currently has over 75 million micro, small and medium enterprises, and close to a quarter of these firms will face closure, hitting the unorganised sector hard

A SENSE OF fear prevails in the unorganised sector, which includes street vendors, electricians, homepreneurs, artists and the self-employed. Like Delhi-based electrician Ram Singh from Nepal, who is struggling for cash in absence of work. “I foresee a bleak future,” he says.

Manish Gouhari, the Delhi-based proprietor of The Family Cottage, a women's ethnic-wear outlet in Rajouri Garden, Delhi, feels that fund flow will be hit. “The consumer may not step out of the house for a non-essential item as ours. But I will have to pay my workers and buy my essential items. Where will this money come from?” he asks.

India currently has over 75 million MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and close to a quarter of these firms will face closure if the lockdown goes beyond four weeks, while a staggering 43% will shut shop if the panic extends beyond eight weeks, as per a study commissioned by the All India Manufacturers' Organisation.

According to the International Labour Organization, about 400 million Indians in the informal economy are at risk of falling deeper into poverty because of the lockdown. The crisis is expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours globally in Q2—equivalent to 195 million full-time workers (assuming a 48-hour work week). This implies that many workers will face loss of income and deeper poverty.

For Delhi-based accessory designer Ambar Pariddi Sahai, it is a ‘thrive-to-survive’ situation. “I was running a business in my comfort zone, but now it will not be easy, as I have to minimise my cost of functioning, reduce overheads, manpower and wages.” She hopes for some government stimulus. Delhi-based Utkarsh Arora, director, Xylo Woodworks, a supplier of decor elements, finds the sector becoming more unstable. For small-scale businesses with limited capital and market reach, like Reshmi Dey's, who runs an art studio called Glass Sutra, sustaining business would be a challenge.

Overall, the unorganised sector is labour-intensive with income inequality and no job security, which means it is bound to go through insufficient economic activity. The sector needs steps to widen social security of workers, with formal benefits and policies.

The hard road AHEAD

While millions face the disease, almost all are facing economic hurdles. No sector is untouched, and no impact is small. Looking beyond oil and aviation, we bring you stories of sectors facing their own unique challenges

VAISHALI DAR

CONFINED TO A one-room house in a nondescript neighbourhood of north-east Delhi, Rajendra Kumar is uncertain about his future and his two schoolgoing kids. For him, the extension of the lockdown means a protracted financial crisis, which may take five to six months to resolve. Kumar, a tailor by profession, is the sole breadwinner of the family, who operates from Lajpat Nagar in

south Delhi, and earns ₹20,000 per month. With no work at hand, he is now coping with uncertainties. “I have no income to run my house. Since my expertise is tailoring, I will wait for the markets to open to earn a living,” says the 45-year-old, who left his village near Gwalior years back to settle in the city for good.

The impact of the pandemic wiping out commercial and economic activities has not only left Kumar in dire straits financially, but many individuals and business owners in panic. A majority of

small- and large-scale businesses already fear the economic impact, leading to a reduction in revenues, loss of trade, investment and supply chains. When the world emerges from the pandemic, sooner or later, some businesses are probably going to be the hardest hit or would have vanished. The disruption would impact the consumption of both essential and discretionary items, leading to low income, limited workforce and jobs at risk. We look at some sectors which are already feeling the heat...



Wrestler Sushil Kumar

Game suspended

The pandemic will result in a serious economic ripple effect for sportspersons, as well as sponsored events

ball Association, The National Hockey League, and major football competitions, including the UEFA Champions League, Formula 1, European Football leagues, or Wimbledon—postponed, the future of sports at the moment looks grim. A serious economic ripple effect for players, full-time sponsored events and seasons postponed and huge losses, throw some light on the industry's darkest hour.

“If the tournaments are postponed for an indefinite time period, then it's a com-

The over ₹2,000-crore manufacturing of cricket, hockey, football, rugby and fitness range has stopped in Jalandhar, a manufacturing hub of sports goods

plete loss of game. Thousands of players earn their bread and butter from academy training and tournaments. We can't have a sport in an empty stadium—but as a federation, we understand and prioritise the importance of human health and life. We believe in development through healthy competition,” says Subrata Dutta, senior vice-president, All India Football Federation (AIFF). The federation has suspended tournaments at all levels, including the flagship I-League, which delivers a massive financial hit of ₹600 crore a year.

For BCCI and IPL, top overseas players are at risk of losing contracts worth millions of dollars in the event of a cancellation. Manmeet Singh Goindi, former director, Sports Authority of India (east region), says the next six months are crucial. “Players prepared for training and competition will go back to where they started. The idea of sport, including contact and community sports like judo, wrestling and marathons, would change, as all these require social distancing. Various levels of decision-making—international, country and national governing body—for each sport are required,” he says.

Adding to the economic woes of sporting events worldwide, Jaideep Ghosh, partner and national head, transport, leisure and sports, KPMG India, feels, “Large events involve big money in media rights, sponsorships, ticketing, among others. A significant dent in employment and consumer spending is likely. Grassroots and youth sports development also suffers in the short term. Social and cultural motivations, team pride also take a dip.”

Jobs jeopardised

Fresh graduates have no job offers; only those with updated skills have good chances of employment

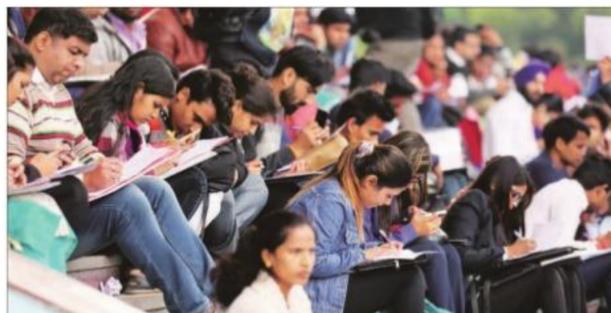
AS PER REPORTS, jobs offered to six students of IIT-Madras have been revoked by companies due to the pandemic. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Fresh graduates and professionals are looking at a minimum of a year's unemployment and uncertainty, and like the IITians, even loss of offers.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) recently conducted an online ‘CEOs Snap Poll’, with 200 CEOs across sectors to study the

impact on domestic economy and jobs. A majority of the firms expected revenues to fall more than 10% and profits to decline more than 5% in April-June and

About 52% firms foresee job losses because of the pandemic, as per an online poll conducted in April by the CII

January-March. About 52% of the firms foresee job losses, as a result of the outbreak. About 47% of the firms expect less than 15% job losses. On the other hand, 32% of the firms expect to shed about 15-30% jobs once the lockdown ends. Industry trade organisation Federation of Indian Export



A file photo of candidates at a job fair

EXPRESS PHOTO

Organisations has warned of 15 million job losses in the absence of a relief package for the export sector.

Deepak Sood, secretary-general of

Assocham, recommends a transfusion of over \$200 billion into the Indian economy, with \$50-100 billion cash infused to arrest the loss of jobs and

compensate for loss of income.

With job cuts on the rise, KPMG estimates the government spend on skill development for the year 2020-21 to be ₹30 billion. So if hiring is put off for the period, and when the process resumes, only candidates with updated and attractive skillsets shall be employed.

Placements and internships have impacted companies, which are delaying the onboarding of students. Industry expert Kalpen Shukla, president of IIM Alumni Association (Mumbai Chapter), says, “We may face a difficult situation, especially in the case of summer internships, primarily due to location-specific disruptions. Those with degrees, but not in possession of the right skills, would find themselves unemployable in a fiercely resource-constrained economy. The much-cherished ‘democratic dividend’ could

become ‘democratic disaster.’”

Anurag Singh Rathore, dean for corporate relations, IIT-Delhi, agrees: “The manufacturing sector is impacted; the disruption can last months. A student may reutilise this time to learn a new skill online or offline.”

Ariya B Majumdar, dean, admissions and outreach, OP Jindal Global University, has realigned the placement strategy to reach out to corporates unlikely to be affected by the pandemic. “We have seen an uptick in the number of e-commerce firms,” he says.

Rishiraj Biswas, a graduate from Faculty of Management Studies, Delhi, has been upskilling through an online finance course after passing out this year. “The job scenario has been blurry for fresh graduates and it may worsen later. I want to keep pace with the industry's demands,” he says.

Fe Lines

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

STORIES AND TRENDS FROM INDIA AND AROUND THE WORLD THAT CAUGHT OUR FANCY



VAISHALI DAR

WITH EXTENDED STAY-AT-HOME directives issued by governments across the globe, one is bound to experience some anxiety or confusion. In such a scenario, some creative hashtags on social media have come to the rescue of netizens, offering distraction as well as solace in these trying times.

Sports personalities and other celebrities across the world are adopting hashtags like #StayHomeFor, #stayhome, #Stay-AtHomeChallenge and curating many challenges to stay upbeat. American DJ Diplo, for instance, joined soccer players Lionel Messi and Xavi Hernandez to take on the toilet paper challenge, in which one has to kick a roll of toilet paper. The challenge is a playful response to consumers hoarding toilet paper.

The #safehands campaign by the World Health Organization (WHO) promotes the power of washing hands to fight the virus. The hashtag seeks to raise awareness on proper hand hygiene. Celebrities like Anushka Sharma, Deepika Padukone, Selena Gomez, Naomi Campbell and Maria Sharapova have also requested their followers to maintain strict hand hygiene.

With no possibility of travel in the near future, the hashtag #ViewFromMyWindow has one posting their throwback travel images. #QuarantineAndChill, #MyPandemicSurvivalPlan, #ImDoingFineBecause are some other trending hashtags.

#TogetherAtHome found some celebrity musicians playing concerts online to ease the stress of self-isolation. Star musicians like Coldplay's Chris Martin, John Legend, Miley Cyrus, JoJo and Diplo have taken up the call to entertain their fans and keep the spirit of music alive.

Instagrammers are also taking part in the challenge #untiltomorrow, posting a silly photo of themselves and keeping it on their page for 24 hours. Anyone who likes the picture before it is deleted has to post their own 'until tomorrow' photo.

One of the most important hashtags trending is #flattenthecurve in aid of the health authorities urging people to stay at home and self-isolate. It aims to help limit the spread and reduce the load on hospitals and healthcare workers.

Brands like The IWC Schaffhausen, a luxury Swiss watchmaker, launched #timewellshared, an initiative for employees, brand ambassadors and partners to share online lectures, speeches and webinars to entertain and support

Survival hashtags

Some creative hashtags on social media have come to the rescue of netizens, offering distraction as well as solace in these trying times



Following the WHO's #safehands campaign, celebrities like Selena Gomez have requested their followers to maintain strict hand hygiene

people in difficult times. The initiative includes contributions from ambassadors like Tom Brady, Fabian Cancellara, David Coulthard and Maro Engel. NITI Aayog and Deepika Padukone have endorsed #HumHongeKamyaab, a video campaign by marketing firm Gozooop, to show the determination and spirit of India during the lockdown. British Council's YouTube channel has introduced #FiveFilmsForFreedom, a collection of five LGBTQIA short films, with live sessions with activists working for the LGBTQ+ community.

#CoronaHaregaIndiaJeetega aims to provide help to healthcare workers and security personnel who are risking their lives for the safety and well-being of Indian citizens. Under this, healthcare startup Pristyn Care has committed to provide

10,000 medical masks to shield and safeguard Delhi police personnel of the south-west district. Fitness startup cult.fit launched #MovementForMovement challenge to donate to the PM CARES fund. For every single person who takes on the challenge and completes 12 days of online workout, cult.fit will contribute ₹100 to the Prime Minister's Covid-19 relief fund.

Entertainment channel Zoom has launched The Zoom Studios #StuckWithYou initiative with curated content and real-life narratives like quarantine tales, songs, video logs, audio stories, etc, for viewers. With #HackCovid19, the Aegis School of Data Science invites ideas to bridge the gap among various government stakeholders, investors, hospitals and individuals to provide solutions to defeat the spread of the virus and control its impact.

TECH-NOW-LOGY

What after Zoom?

After privacy concerns and a government advisory against popular video conferencing app Zoom, everyone is looking for alternatives

SHRIYA ROY

THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK has fundamentally changed people's relationship with others and the outside world. Not just that, the global pandemic is also slowly changing people's usage of the internet. From conference calls to video chats, chat apps have become a necessary tool in the reconfigured social structure around the world.

Zoom's video conferencing app gained popularity as the app seemed exceptionally well prepared for a pandemic-like situation, with its usage booming in the past few weeks. Zoom was being used by millions not only for work, but also for social gatherings, cultural events, etc. The app allowed up to 100 people on a call and up to 500 if you paid for an expanded version.

But all was not well. The happy days for Zoom came to an end as the app came under scrutiny for privacy issues, with users pointing out that it might have violated privacy standards. The Government of India raised concerns, with the Union home ministry in a notification saying that the app is 'unsafe' and vulnerable to cyber crimes. The notification asked government employees to refrain from using it for meetings. India's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) also raised concerns over potential cyberattacks through Zoom. The app has, however, responded to the MHA's circular, saying that it's extremely serious about user security.

The big question now is: what's the alternative to Zoom? Is it a dead end? Not quite. Going a step forward, the central government has launched a video conferencing app development challenge for Indian companies with a prize money of ₹1 crore. The "Innovation Challenge for Development of Video Conferencing Solution" has been introduced by the government to facilitate work from home. The video conferencing app should be able to work on any kind of device, in poor network areas, should have encrypted communication and should use less power. The results of the government challenge will be announced on July 29. The winning team will be given ₹1 crore to deploy the app for use by central and state governments across India and a certificate by the minister of electronics and information technology. The government says the app will



act as an alternative to Zoom.

Then there is group video chat app Houseparty, which has become a favourite with the younger generation, as through it they can chill at once with multiple people just like at a normal house party. The app also has integrated games that users can play with one another and allows up to eight people to be on a call together. However, the app, too, came under the radar when users complained that it enables hacking. In response, the app company announced a million-dollar reward for anyone who could prove that the allegations were part of a smear campaign.

The pre-existing Google Hangouts has also gained hits, as the quarantine has forced more and more people to socialise virtually. The video platform allows 25 people and can be accessed through an app, Gmail or other Google accounts. Although connectivity is an issue, it is the most easily accessible app. Plus, it's easy to use if you have a Google account. In terms of privacy as well, it is much more secure than other apps, as it follows Google's high privacy standards.

FaceTime, a mobile app that is native to iPhones, iPads and Mac desktops, allows up to 32 people to get on a video conference call. The app has been around for quite sometime now, but has once again gained traction, with the lockdown restrictions in place. FaceTime is handy because it comes pre-installed if you have an iPhone and can be used internationally over a data connection, much like WhatsApp.

Another new app doing the rounds is Bunch, a group video and games app, that allows eight people to take part at a time. The user interface is colourful and splashy, and includes various games like

The government has launched a videoconferencing app development challenge for Indian firms with a prize money of ₹1 cr. The government says the app will act as an alternative to Zoom

Trivia, billiards, among others. Bunch creates the experience of partying with friends on video chat and jumping together into the same game session. "The best games are serving as social networks," said Selcuk Atli, CEO, Bunch.

Then there are chat apps that are specifically helping people deal with isolation and loneliness during this time. Take, for instance, QuarantineChat app. Danielle Baskin and Max Hawkins, two artists and long-distance friends, created the free digital voice service in 2019 to help connect people across the world. By downloading Dial Up, an app that hosts QuarantineChat, people can subscribe to periodic calls that randomly pair them with a chat partner who is also at home. "We thought our app would be great to combat feelings of disconnection," Baskin and Hawkins said.

As most businesses reimagine operations, the design community has also found a unique way to stay in touch as they work from home. Architects report that working from home means less communication with the rest of the team and the impossibility of visiting the building site. ArchChat app bridges this gap. The app was launched in January this year and is free for architects, designers, engineering consultants and their clients. It aids users to chat privately in a preferred language and view respective communications for each drawing, design, etc, for a project space. Chats related to the living room, for instance, will be inside the 'living room' folder. For now, ArchChat is the only communication platform to collaborate on design and construction projects.

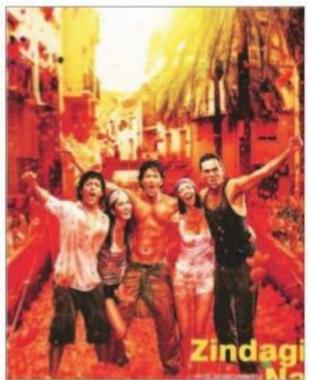
Apart from the regular chat and video-call apps, group virtual movie nights on Netflix are also helping people stay in touch. Netflix Party, a Google Chrome browser extension, lets multiple Netflix users sync and watch movies on the platform together, giving them the feel of hanging out and having fun with friends. Dating apps like Tinder, Hinge and Bumble have also shifted to video call/dating feature, as lockdown restrictions require one to stay at home.

GLOBETROTTER FROM THE COUCH

For all those adventure seekers, explorers and travellers who are missing their expeditions, we bring a list of travel movies to quench your travelling thirst. Compiled by **Reya Mehrotra**

Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara

This 2011 film, directed by Zoya Akhtar, features an ensemble cast of Katrina Kaif, Hrithik Roshan, Kalki Koechlin, Abhay Deol and Farhan Akhtar. The film has been extensively shot in Spain, India, Egypt and the UK. The plot focuses on three college friends who reunite for a three-week road trip. One particular song in the film shows the La Tomatina festival of Spain. Be it deep sea diving, bull rac-



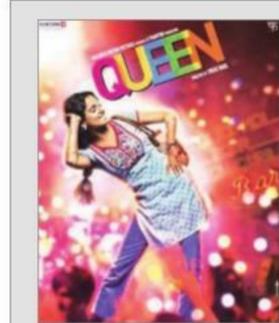
ing or sky diving, the movie takes you on an adventurous trip across countries.

The Bucket List

The Bucket List is a 2007 comedy drama film starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. In the movie, the two terminally ill men take on a road trip to tick off their things-to-do before they finally kick the bucket. They go skydiving, drive a sports car, ride motorcycles, visit the Taj Mahal, dine in France and visit Mount Everest in Nepal during their globetrotting trip. They also travel to Egypt and Hong Kong before finally returning. The movie surely promises an exhaustive, but a long trip round the globe from your couch.

Dil Dhadakne Do

The 2015 Indian comedy drama film *Dil Dhadakne Do* is another masterpiece of Zoya Akhtar having an ensemble cast. The family drama of a dysfunctional Punjabi family takes place on a cruise trip planned to celebrate the 30th wedding anniversary of the parents. The luxuries of the cruise ship, sailing through the Mediterranean and Europe, coupled with trips to France, Spain, Turkey, Tunisia and Italy and the parallel family saga make



Queen

The 2014 movie starring Kangana Ranaut won many hearts in India and abroad. Rani, a Delhi girl, takes off on her honeymoon alone after her wedding is called off. She travels to Paris and Amsterdam for the first time and explores the cities, and is introduced to western culture. She visits the Eiffel Tower, nightclubs, makes new friends and falls in love with the independent spirit of the cities.

for an interesting watch. The award-winning film also received positive reviews from the critics.

Blended

The 2014 American comedy takes you on a tour of Africa. The movie stars Drew Barrymore and Adam Sandler. The movie

Eat Pray Love

Based on the 2006 memoir of American author Elizabeth Gilbert, the 2010 biographical film stars Julia Roberts. The plot unfolds as the protagonist Elizabeth finds herself lost and in search of what she wants in life even as she has a successful career and a family. After her divorce, she embarks on a journey across the world in the quest for self-discovery. She finds her faith in India, her love for food in Italy and her peace in Indonesia. The film has been shot in the US, Italy and India.



has been filmed in a luxury resort and casino Sun City in South Africa and in Lake Lanier, Buford and Gainesville in Georgia, US. The camping adventures of the two families in the movie, the wildlife shots, extensive landscapes, the paragliding that goes wrong and a peek into Africa's tribal culture, all of it makes you



Piku

The 2015 comedy drama by Shoojit Sircar stars Deepika Padukone, Amitabh Bachchan and Irrfan Khan in lead roles. The story revolves around the short-tempered Piku and her grumpy and ageing father Bhashkor. Together, they embark on a road trip to their hometown Kolkata all the way from Delhi along with their driver. The movie showcases the spirit and essence of Kolkata.

want to experience it yourself.

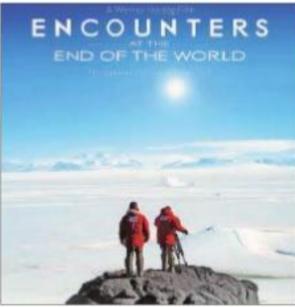
Holiday in the Wild

The 2019 movie *Holiday in the Wild*, starring Kristin Davis and Rob Lowe, is an ode to the conservation cause of elephants. Shot extensively in a sanctuary in South Africa and Zambia, the movie captures

the natural beauty of the African landscape. In the movie, Kate surprises her husband with a ticket to Zambia for their second honeymoon, but finds out that he wants to end the marriage. She anyway travels to Zambia alone to rediscover herself and falls in love with Manu, an elephant at the sanctuary and eventually with Derek, the caretaker of the sanctuary and decides to settle in Zambia.

Encounters at the End of the World

The 2007 American documentary film studies people and places in Antarctica. This is not a typical Antarctica film, but captures the aspirations of the people who live there. The film's sequences have been shot in tunnels deep below the South Pole station carved from snow and ice. The makers of the film also explore the ice caves formed by fumaroles. Watch this movie to get a glimpse of Antarctica like never seen before.



Leisure

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

REYA MEHROTRA

HENRY DAVID THOREAU'S 1854 book *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, is quite an apt read for current times when we have all been advised to live simply in seclusion at home. It's no wonder then that the book is the inspiration behind an eponymously-named video game, which takes you on a wild trip. To survive in the woods in the *Walden* game, one needs basic necessities like food, shelter, fuel and clothing. The game teaches you to be self-reliant and live in harmony with nature, exploring and discovering its various marvels.

Not surprisingly, the video game has been an extremely popular choice for netizens to pass time while staying cooped up at home. And it's not the only one. With ample time in hand, families and friends, divided by distance and cities, are bonding over online games in the country today. With people working from home and practising social distancing, mobile gaming has emerged as a preferred recreational/daily life activity to beat boredom and spend quality time together.

Gaming app owners say they have seen phenomenal growth in the past few months. Parth Chadha, founder, EWar Games (part of gHack technologies), a real-money gaming platform that combines features from multiple platforms providing a one-stop solution for a mobile gamer, says it's been less than four months since EWar's inception, but the growth has been increasing every month. "Since the start of our journey in January 2020, we have had double-digit growth every month. The number of games played on the EWar platform increased by around three times between February and March. The last three-four weeks have been exceptionally phenomenal for us as a company, especially after the announcement of the countrywide lockdown," says Chadha, adding, "EWar's gaming platform recently witnessed 200% growth in its user base, taking our total user count to over five lakh. Further, since the lockdown, our app has noted four times the growth in the average number of games played daily, and also an overwhelming surge in terms of organic, as well as referral traffic and in-app user engagements." For Chadha, the 18-24 age group forms the major part of the e-gaming traffic.

The online gaming



Games people play

Exploring the world, going on an adventure or practising life in quarantine, online games are providing much more than just entertainment in lockdown

fever is so high that between March 10 and April 10, the game *Call of Duty: Warzone* was downloaded 50 million times, making it the hottest action war game in that period. The game *PubG* also reported a 50-80% increase in active users in February and March.

Seeing the potential in the segment, Facebook, too, has added a gaming icon as one of its main tabs. By clicking on the tab, one can discover, play, watch and share personalised gaming content. It's a shortcut to easily connect with gaming groups and access content related to games. The social media platform plans to expand the feature after getting feed-

back for the current setup. It is also in the process of testing its own Facebook gaming app on Android.

Gaming from home

For many, online gaming is the bridge that is allowing them to connect with loved ones in a fun way. "I play Ludo everyday with my family. I also play it online with my cousins who are based in other cities. It makes for good family time, as everyone is working from home or on paid/unpaid leave. I would rather prefer physical sports because they keep

you fit, but one doesn't have the option of going out these days, so online gaming is everyone's favourite," says Alina Harun, guest experience specialist, Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram.

Aspiring professional video gamers are treating this time to finetune their gaming strategy. "Since I have no studies and internship work at the moment, I am dedicating more time to online games. I am an e-sport player and play games like *PubG*. I practise everyday for three hours. I also plan to take up gaming in the near future, so this time is good for practice and to remain updated about new features. I mostly play with my friends who are all e-sport players and we are aware of each other's gaming styles," says 18-year-old Aditya Sharma, a Delhi-based student and avid gamer.



STORIED PAST

Board games have been popular in India since eons. Pachisi, a board game similar to Ludo, has often been described as the 'national game of India'. The game was even reportedly played by the Mughal emperor Akbar

GAME FROM HOME



Carrom Pool
Carrom Pool is an easy-to-play, multiplayer board game. One can either play with friends or online with other players. The smoother the strike, the better



Ludo King
The free-to-play mobile game application allows you to either play with family or online with unknown players. One can choose to play with two or four persons and roll the dice to get the lucky numbers



Monopoly
You can buy, sell and make your way to riches in *Monopoly* with friends and family online. The classic multiplayer board game can be played on mobiles and tablets

Uno
The family-friendly game has new rules, tournaments and adventures, and allows you to send messages and voice notes to fellow players

Call of Duty: WarZone
The free-to-play multiplayer battle video game gives you a modern massive combat experience. It was launched this year to be played on Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and PC.

PubG
PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds is an online multiplayer battle game developed by a South Korean company. The action-oriented mobile game calls for survival and the last one standing wins

Pictionary
Draw and let them guess. The family game never allows you to feel bored while at home. From children to elders, everyone loves this creative game

FIFA Soccer
Your knowledge of football helps you win in this soccer game, where you compete internationally with others



RUTH LA FERLA

SELF-SECLUSION, WEEK 1. I'd been planning to watch over the health of loved ones. But I'd also been looking forward to having time on my hands: long idle hours during which I'd administer liberal doses of self-love. **Week 2:** I found myself ditching those overzealous routines for a rigorously streamlined plan of action. I've razed my hair to within an inch of my scalp. **Week 3:** I've turned my back on the ascetic life, eating what I love: bananas in ripe quantities, dark chocolate, generous dollops of peanut butter mashed into just about everything. I've banished spandex and am wafting around my living space in an all-forgiving caftan, congratulating myself for dispensing with other peoples' notions of what a woman looks like.

Still, I had to wonder: With few beauty tools at hand, and no pressing reason to get gussied up, would I work more efficiently, reflect more profoundly and get

FOMO is over. Give in to the joy of letting go

As the days of quarantine drag on, many women are revelling in the relinquishment of high heels, painful waxes and constricting garments

in touch with my authentic self?

Femininity, it's been noted, is a performance (as transgender women know all too intimately). Would functioning without an audience make hash of our self-image? Would it undermine the foundations of our identity? Or would it free us to divert our energies in loftier directions? Who knows?

What I have learned during this interval is that it can be liberating, even

enlightening, to sign on with a sisterhood—people of varying ages, racial and social backgrounds, professions, and styles, openly engaging in a little self-neglect. For years, outrageous social media displays have aggravated FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out. Now we can revel in the Joy of Letting Go, Technically JOLGO, but, amalgamated with You Only Live Once: JOLO!

"Some of us will regard this time as an

opportunity to make changes we've been wanting to make," said Carolyn Mair, the author of *The Psychology of Fashion* and a professor at the London College of Fashion. "We may stop wearing high heels and shapewear. And, if we are feminists, we may see this as a chance to reflect on why we wear these things in the first place."

We may also discover that we are surprisingly durable: the tougher sex, according to Sharon Moalem, a scientist

and physician, who argued recently in *The New York Times* that when it comes to survival, women lead with the advantage of a spare X chromosome that helps maintain vital functions in the brain and immune system.

Undergarments have become optional, too, for Shanna Goldstein, the 48-year-old founder of a plus-size clothing line. "My husband and my best friend begged me not to admit that I haven't been wearing a bra," she said. For a fashion designer, her look has become surprisingly (and refreshingly) lax.

Some of us are still finding reassurance in ritual and routine. Personal upkeep remains essential to Chelsea Frazier, a fellow in the English department at Cornell University. "Beauty for me is 100% performance of my blackness, my queerness, my femininity," Frazier, 31, said. "A worldwide pandemic will certainly affect that. But it doesn't eliminate it."

NYT

Mind & Games

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

How scientists could stop the next pandemic before it starts

Researchers believe they could pre-emptively create vaccines and drugs to fight a wide range of viral threats—if they can get sufficient funding

JENNIFER KAHN

ONA COLD morning in February 2018, a group of 30 microbiologists, zoologists and public-health experts from around the world met at the headquarters of the World Health Organization in Geneva. The group was established by the WHO in 2015 to create a priority list of dangerous viruses — specifically, those for which no vaccines or drugs were already in development. The consensus, at least among those in the room, was that as populations and global travel continued to grow and development increasingly pushed into wild areas, it was almost inevitable that once-containable local outbreaks, like SARS or Ebola, could become global disasters.

"The meeting was in a big room, with all the tables arranged around the edge, facing each other," one of the group's members, Peter Daszak, recalled recently. "It was a very formal process. Each person was asked to present the case for including a particular disease on the list of top threats. And everything you say is being taken down, and checked factually, and recorded."

Daszak, who directs the pandemic-prevention group EcoHealth Alliance and is also chairman of the Forum on Microbial Threats at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, had been given the task of presenting on SARS, a lethal coronavirus that killed roughly 800 people after it emerged in 2002. "We'd done a lot of research on coronaviruses, so we knew they were a clear and present danger," he told me. "High mortality, no drugs or vaccines in the pipeline, with new variants that could still be emerging."

The discussion, he said, was intense. "Everyone else in the room knows the facts already — they've read all the research," Daszak said. But for each pathogen, the



Workers assemble Covid-19 test kits at a lab in Utah, US

speaker had to convince the room that it presented a significant threat — "that this disease really could take off, and that we should concentrate on it rather than on Lassa fever or something else. So, you argue the case, and then people vote. And sometimes it gets quite heated. I remember that monkeypox was an issue, because there are outbreaks, but there's really nothing we can do about them. It was a really rigorous, really excellent debate — and then afterward, we went and had fondue."

The final list — which did contain SARS and MERS, along with seven other respiratory, hemorrhagic or otherwise-lethal viruses — also included something the WHO dubbed "Disease X": a stand-in for all the unknown pathogens, or devastating variations on existing pathogens, that had yet to emerge. Daszak describes Covid-19, the disease caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, as exactly the kind of threat that Disease X was meant to represent: a novel, highly infectious coronavirus, with a high mortality rate, and no existing treatment or prevention. "The problem isn't that prevention was impossible," Daszak told me. "It was very possible. But we didn't do it. Governments thought it was too expen-

According to some infectious-disease experts, the scientific tools already exist to create a kind of viral-defence department. What's lacking is resources

Pharmaceutical companies operate for profit. And the WHO, for the most part, had neither the funding nor the power to enforce the large-scale global collaboration necessary to combat it.

As Covid-19 has spread around the world, overwhelming hospitals and even mortuaries, there has been widespread consternation over how we could have been caught so flat-footed by a virus. Given all the shining advances of high-tech medicine — computer-controlled surgery, unprecedented immunotherapies, artificial-intelligence programs for assessing heart-disease risk — this failure feels utterly baffling. How could the entire world remain so powerless? More important, what could be different next time?

According to some infectious-disease experts, the scientific tools already exist to

create a kind of viral-defence department — one that would allow us to pursue a broad range of vital global projects, from developing vaccines and drugs that work against a wide range of pathogens to monitoring disease hot spots and identifying potential high-risk viruses, both known and unknown. What's lacking is resources. "We really did miss the wake-up call," Daszak says. "The alarm went off with SARS, and we hit the snooze button. And then we hit it again with Ebola, with MERS, with Zika. Now that we're awake, we should think about where to go from here."

In late March, Vincent Racaniello, host of the podcast *This Week in Virology* and a professor at Columbia University, conducted an interview with the pediatric infectious-disease expert Mark Denison. Denison, who teaches at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, led a team that developed one of the most promising current treatments for Covid-19: the drug remdesivir, currently being tested by the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences.

On the show, Denison noted that because it is almost impossible to predict which virus might cause the next pandemic, researchers had long argued that

it was essential to design panviral drugs and vaccines that would be effective against a wide range of strains: all types of influenza, for instance, or a substantial group of coronaviruses rather than just one. When his lab was first applying for a grant to study remdesivir, Denison recalled, that was already the goal. "We don't want to work with a compound unless it inhibits every coronavirus we test," Denison said. "Because we're worried about MERS, we're worried about SARS-1, but they're not really our problem. The future is the problem."

Panviral drugs — ones that work broadly within or across virus families — are harder to make than broad-spectrum antibiotics, largely because viruses work by hijacking the machinery of our cells, harnessing their key functions in order to replicate. "It's definitely possible to make a drug that would work across a good range of coronaviruses," Racaniello says. "We honestly should have had one long ago, since SARS in 2003. It would have taken care of this outbreak in China before it got out. And the only reason we didn't is because there wasn't enough financial backing."

Governments, meanwhile, have been reluctant to fund development — both because it's expensive and because the rewards can feel remote, especially as many diseases originate in other countries. "We don't prevent well; we respond well," Daszak notes.

Global nonprofits like the Gates Foundation have tried to step into this funding void. The foundation has supported GAVI, an international alliance that helps vaccinate children in poor countries and spearheaded a fund to fight HIV, tuberculosis and malaria worldwide. Mark Suzman, the chief executive of the Gates Foundation, says that when governments and companies do pull together, the focus is often on projects like these rather than "forward-looking" issues like pandemics or climate change. One exception, he says, has been CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, an NGO that was founded in 2017 to coordinate and finance the development of new vaccines for diseases that might lead to a pandemic. When it started, Suzman told me, CEPI was a low-profile project: "It was really a response to the Ebola epidemic of 2014 and 2015. Now, of course, it looks incredibly farsighted."

The group also funds technologies aimed at "Disease X" with the goal of faster vaccine development should a totally new threat emerge.

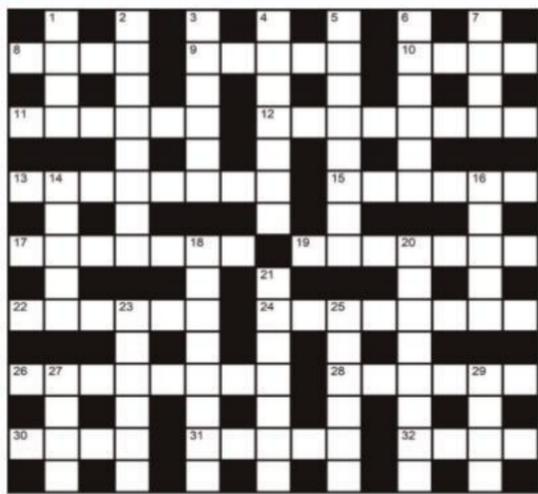


In a chaotic season, where to begin your spring cleanup?

- First things first, start your cleanup near the house. You can do this a little at a time. Walking past a mess every time you go out is not very inspiring.
- In the edible garden, why prep the tomato, eggplant or pepper rows if you haven't planted lettuce or other cold-hardy things yet? Spot-clean targeted areas for the earliest crops, then double back
- Similarly, begin by gently removing matted leaves to uncover spring ornamentals, like flower bulbs and other early bloomers, even if you can't stop to clean the whole bed.
- If you scored seeds early, before they became as elusive as toilet paper, dry beans and pasta, make a calendar of what to sow when, indoors or out, and organise the packets week-by-week, in an accordion file or recipe-card box.
- Move any packet that's best sown a little at a time ahead two weeks in the filing system after you use it, to plan for a staggered supply of salad greens, carrots, beets, radishes and even cilantro.
- Make space in the compost heap for incoming debris because you'll be generating it fast. Extract (and preferably screen) finished material from the bottom to top-dress beds as you clean them.

MARGARET ROACH/NYT

CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Shelter for animals or birds (4)
 - Seaport in NW Israel (5)
 - Hints for models and actors (4)
 - Bury (6)
 - Incited by earnest appeal (8)
 - A sudden happening that brings good fortune (8)
 - Buoyant (6)
 - Apple's other Steve (7)
 - Jemmy or metal bar used as a lever (7)
 - One who exacts much interest on loans (6)
 - "D" in GDP (8)
 - Red Indians - "con his ma" anagram? (8)
 - Save from danger (6)
 - Property claim (4)
 - "G" of GE Shipping Ltd. (5)
 - Extinct bird (4)
- DOWN**
- Ex-Aussie batsman David ___ (4)
 - Obliged (8)
 - Morbid fear (6)
 - In poor and pathetic condition (7)
 - Popular Swiss watches (3,5)
 - Beetle (6)
 - Pop in Paris (4)
 - Symbols or statues? (5)
 - Ahmedabad based ___ Exports Ltd (5)
 - Property of any kind that is transported by an aircraft excluding passenger baggage and mail (3,5)
 - Tata's retail garment business line (8)
 - A long wandering and eventful journey (7)
 - Rules as a monarch (6)
 - Manufacturer of Zen and Esteem (6)
 - Metamorphoses author (4)
 - Indo-Pak language (4)

KAKURO



In Kakuro sum puzzles, the numbers in the black squares refer to the SUMS of the digits, which you are to fill into the empty spaces directly below or to the right of the black square containing the number. No zeroes are used here, only the digits one through nine. An important point: A digit cannot appear more than once in any particular digit combination.

BIZ QUIZ

- 'Exit from The Lockdown' is a report released by which industry body of India?
- As of 2020, what is the maximum subscription an individual can make in Sovereign Gold Bonds, issued by the government?
- Which state has announced a ₹50 lakh insurance cover for Police personnel and state government employees involved in the Covid-19 fight?

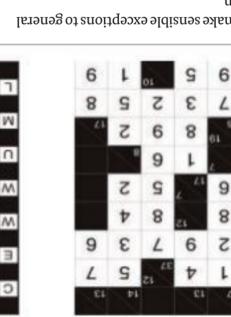
BUZZ WORD

The Buzz Word is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is _____ by trial and error.

Today's clue: MYA equals _____ TAX

Msp pabwbmtzp patgmg mkxyfpgprgteip pabpnmtrkg mk aprpoyi owippg. - Pimtrq P.Xkotgr

ANSWERS



BRIDGE BOUTS L SUBRAMANIAN

WHY HELP DECLARER

Enjoy declarer's play in the diagram below from an IMP match. See whether you would have played as well as he did, to succeed in the contract.

Dir: South	S 8 6 5 3	W	N	E	S
Vul: N-S	H 4	-	-	-	1NT
	DA 5 2	2C*	3C	-	Pass
	CAQT 8 3	All Pass			3NT

*Landy, 5-5 / 5-4 in the majors

N
S

SAQ
HAT 7
DQT 9 6 3
CK 7 2

Contract: 3NT by south. West leads the H5. East follows with the jack. Plan the play.

Play: Declarer held up the ace and won the third round when east continued with the king and the queen, dummy discarding spades on the hearts. South led the C2 from hand and when west followed with the nine, won with the ace. Dummy played the C3 now and finessed the seven when east followed with the five. West threw a high spade. Declarer cashed the CK next on which west pitched the two of spades.

Entering dummy by the DA, declarer cashed the CQ on which west let go a diamond. When dummy cashed the ten of clubs west was squeezed in three suits as he had come down to SK-JH 9-8 DKC.

Since west could not let go a spade or the DK, he discarded a heart. Declarer exited in a diamond now. West won and cashed the H9... but had to lead a spade into declarer's SA-Q. The complete hands were:

S 8 6 5 3
H 4
DA 5 2
CAQT 8 3

N	ST 7 4
S	HKQJ 2
	DJ 7
	CJ 6 5 4

SAQ
HAT 7
DQT 9 6 3
CK 7 2

Discussion: The above three-suit strip squeeze was executed by Nirmal Kumar Jain, a good friend of mine in a league match held recently in Chennai. You would have perceived that declarer was helped in the play by his LHO's overall. However, you have to give it to him for judging correctly the 4-1 break in clubs and finesse against the jack. In the closed room, declarer went down in the contract as west chose not to participate in the bidding with the awful hand that he had.