

**p2** Some nations inch toward reopening as virus deaths rise

**p5** MSME sector worst hit during lockdown

**p11** Random samples for COVID-19 tests collected in Dhubri district

## NEWS Capsule

### Students from Kota return

GUWAHATI, April 26: As many as 391 teenagers studying in Rajasthan's Kota returned to the State in 17 buses today. The boys will be lodged at the Sarusajai quarantine centre while the girls will stay at hotels nearby. COVID-19 tests will be conducted on them after five days and doctors will decide whether they can move to their homes. – Staff Reporter

### Austerity

GUWAHATI, April 26: Keeping in view the impact of the lockdown on economy, the State government will announce some austerity measures on April 29 or 30, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said today. – Staff Reporter

### Appeal

GUWAHATI, April 26: Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today appealed to owners of paying guest facilities lodging students and house-owners having tenants working in the private sector to give some concession on the April rent. – Staff Reporter

### Govt aid

GUWAHATI, April 26: The State government has disbursed a subsistence allowance of Rs 2,000 to two lakh people stranded outside the State. The figure is likely to touch three lakh by April 30. Another instalment of Rs 1,000 will be provided in May. – Staff Reporter

### Containment

GUWAHATI, April 26: The State government is likely to lift the containment zone tag from city's housing complex Spanish Garden in a day or two, health officials here said today. – Staff Reporter

### JOCOSERIOUS



I am compiling a list of lawmakers who have violated the lockdown norms!



Workers placing geobags on the Madarguri Borluit riverbank for protection from erosion, at Dhakuakhana on Sunday. – UB Photos

## COVID-19 situation improving: Centre

### Hotspot districts moving towards being non-hotspots

NEW DELHI, April 26: Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Sunday said the coronavirus situation in the country is improving as many hotspot districts (HSD) are moving towards being non-hotspot districts (NHSD).

The Minister visited All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Trauma Centre to take stock of the preparedness to overcome COVID-19, a statement from the ministry said.

On April 15, the Health Ministry declared 170 districts as COVID-19 hotspots and 207 districts as non-hotspots.

Hotspots are those districts which are reporting more number of cases or where the rate of growth of COVID-19 cases is high, the ministry said, adding that a detailed direction has been issued to states stating consolidated efforts are required to utilise this period of lockdown to curb the spread of the deadly virus.

The districts that have not reported any cases yet have also been directed to work on cluster containment plans, the ministry said.

Since then there have been no updates on the number of hotspots from

the health ministry.

On Sunday, during his visit, the Health Minister spoke to some COVID-19 positive patients through video calling and enquired about their health. Robots handled the technology at the patients' end, it said.

Through a graded, preemptive and proactive approach, the government of India is taking several steps along with the states/Union Territories for prevention, containment and management of COVID-19. These are being regularly reviewed and monitored at the highest level, the ministry said. – PTI

## Conditional inter-district movement to continue till April 30

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: The State government will allow the conditional inter-district movement of people in the State till April 30.

The DCs have received more than 73,000 requests from travelers who own vehicles, and 26,950 are learnt to have travelled yesterday to their respective destinations after getting the e-passes.

Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said around 34,000 requests were for round trips, and the DCs will issue passes to them between April 28 and 30. The ASTC will also operate the buses till April 30.

While the ASTC issued tickets to around 5,000 people in 18 districts yesterday, the public carrier had made arrangements to transport

around 12,000 passengers in 800 buses today, Transport Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said.

Today tickets were issued to 6,000 people for two morning slots (8 am and 11 am).

The ASTC is also operating 200 night buses today for long distance travelers for which tickets have been issued. Eighty city buses were operated in the city for taking the passengers to the boarding points, ASTC MD Anand Prakash Tiwari said.

The total number of registered applicants who wanted to take the ASTC facility for the inter-district movement through 104 helpline number was 41,651. To ensure social distancing, each ASTC bus carried 15-20 passengers within short distances only.

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## India's fight against COVID-19 people-driven: Modi

NEW DELHI, April 26:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said India's "people-driven" battle against COVID-19 is the only way for the country to overcome the pandemic, and asked people to shun any complacency that they will not be infected by the coronavirus because it has so far not affected the places where they live or work.

In his monthly *Mamki Baat* broadcast, Modi said the country is in the middle of a *yudh* (war) and asserted that people have to continue being careful and take precautions.

His note of caution comes against the backdrop of the Union government and states relaxing lockdown norms to revive economic activities.

"Urge you not to get over-confident. You should in your

over-enthusiasm not think that if the coronavirus has not yet reached your city, village, street or office, it is not going to reach now. Never make such a mistake. The experience of the world tells us a lot in this regard," he said.

Modi referred to a popular Hindi idiom *Sawdhani hati, durghatna ghati* (accident happens when caution is lowered) to make his point.

In his 30-minute address, Modi hailed states, emergency workers and civil society groups for their contribution in combating the pandemic, and said that the resolve shown by the people of the country has led to the beginning of a transformation with businesses, offices, educational institutions, medical sector rapidly undergoing new changes.

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## Govt confident of overcoming crisis: CM

R DUTTA CHOUDHURY

GUWAHATI, April 26: Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal today admitted that there would be major challenges ahead for the State Government to tide over the crisis created by outbreak of coronavirus. But at the same time, he expressed confidence that the State would be able to overcome the crisis working as "Team Assam".

In an interview with *The Assam Tribune*, the Chief Minister said that the State Government will soon start a process of consultation with economists and experts in various fields to chalk out comprehensive plans to tide over the crisis. He said that the present crisis exposed the weaknesses of the State and

"we must take corrective measures to deal with the problems." Giving an example, he pointed out that the State is not yet self sufficient in production of essential items and has to depend on imports

### COVID-19 pandemic

from other states. There is need for dealing with the problem on war footing, he added. He also said that the crisis led to improvement of the health care system in the State.

On the challenges, the Chief Minister said that stress has to be given on tea and agriculture sectors because of the involvement of sizeable number of people in these sectors. He said that tea pluck-

ing and manufacture have started by maintaining social distancing and the challenge now would be to explore the international market to boost exports. The agriculture sector has been exempted from the lockdown and harvesting has started. The challenge will now be to strengthen the marketing system, he said. Similarly, the hospitality industry along with tourism has taken a severe beating and after the situation improves, effective steps would have to be taken to give a boost to these sectors.

Sonowal said that while chalking out a comprehensive plan, stress would have to be given on providing employment avenues to the youths. There is a possibility that a large number of youths of Assam working in other states of the country may come back and this issue has also to be kept in mind, he admitted.

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## Alert TODAY Alive TOMORROW

### PM to interact with CMs today on COVID-19

NEW DELHI, April 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with chief ministers via video conference on Monday morning on the way ahead in the fight against the novel coronavirus, amid indications that the discussions could also focus on a graded exit from the ongoing lockdown.

This will be the third video conference of the Prime Minister with the chief ministers after the spread of the COVID-19 in the country. Sources indicated that besides discussing the way forward in dealing with the pandemic, the discussion could also focus on a "graded" exit from the lockdown which is in place till May 3.

The Centre and the state governments have been giving gradual relaxation in various fields and sectors to boost economic activities as also to provide relief to people. But some states are willing to extend the lockdown beyond May 3 to ensure that coronavirus cases remain under control.

The Centre has allowed neighbourhood and standalone shops, including those located in residential complexes, in urban areas to open during the lockdown. But those in the markets continue to remain shut till May 3. – PTI

## 8 more discharged, active cases in State now 7

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: Eight more cured COVID-19 patients were discharged from hospitals today, bringing down the number of active cases in the State to seven.

Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said four patients were discharged from Golaghat's Swahid Kushal Konwar Civil Hospital, while another four were discharged from MMCH in Guwahati.

"With this, the recovery rate in Assam has touched 77 per cent. However, the first COVID-19 patients of the State – currently under treatment at Silchar Medical College Hospital – has not yet recovered, and is repeatedly showing positive for the virus," Sarma said.

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COVID-19 STATUS	
WORLD	
Confirmed cases	2,920,660
Cured/Discharged	829,075
Death	203,670
INDIA	
Confirmed cases	26,917
Cured/Discharged	5,913
Death	826
ASSAM	
Confirmed cases	35
Cured/Discharged	27
Death	1
Data as on Sunday	

## Assamese Americans contributing to fight against COVID-19

DR UMESH C TAHBILDAR

Residing in New Jersey in close proximity of New York City that has been hit very hard by the COVID-19 pandemic has been an experience that was never imagined to happen. The New York City and the entire tri-state region are now trapped in a seemingly unending nightmare of deathly grip of the novel coronavirus. It has been and continues to be a frightening reality.

The first COVID-19 death in the New York state was on March 3. As of April 24, the death toll in the New York state has ballooned into 16,162 in less than two months. New York has established itself to be the epicentre of the pandemic spread. With less than half the population of the



New York state, New Jersey has logged 5,617 deaths as of April 24.

Death's cruel grip has not ended yet and the future course is still unknown. Some see a glimmer of hope in the latest numbers of infection, death rate and hospitalisation due to COVID-19. Lockdowns continue and Presidential guidelines are still followed in the tri-state region. It has been found that people over the age 75 are most vulnerable. The average age of the victims has been computed to be 51 years. The virus, however, has not discriminated against age, race, religion or skin colour. It has been reported that the black population has been affected more by the virus for various reasons, including more prevalent underlying health conditions among this group.

As for us (me and my wife), we have been holed up within the perimeter of the house for the last six weeks to stave off the virus. The only time we go out of the house is to collect mails from the mailbox. I go to my mail box with a gear to cover me from head to neck and with gloves in hands, keep the mail in garage, spray disinfectant on it and let it stay in the garage for two days to let the virus, if any, die.

We have not been to the grocery store for the last more than a month and a half although they are open for business with thinly stocked shelves. We get them delivered through online order. Grocery is delivered at the front door and we don't face the delivery man.

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## Despite lockdown, State set to export vegetables

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: In a bid to check waste of agriculture produce amid the lockdown, the State government in collaboration with a private entity is planning to export vegetables grown by local farmers to Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City.

Transport and Industry and Commerce Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary today said the private entity has come with a proposal to export vegetables to these three West Asian cities by chartered flight. Discussions are under way with the Civil Aviation Ministry and Cus-

toms department, he said.

Patowary said the transport department is working in co-ordination with the food and civil supplies department to make available sufficient amount of food products in the State. The supply chain is working smoothly and there will be no scarcity of food, he said adding, "We are even supplying essential commodities to other northeastern states."

He said during this difficult time, the transport department has been working with the Railways and so far 357 goods trains carrying essential commodities have been unloaded in 28 railway points in 18 districts.

To transport these commodities from the unloading sites, on an average about 1,500 trucks are being mobilised every day and so far 44,624 truck-trips have been made in the State to unload 357 railway rakes, with 31,435 man-day work of labourers.

Moreover, the FCI has brought 179 rakes of food items carrying 4.7 lakh MT of rice and 0.21 lakh MT of wheat. Out of these, 3.75 LMT of rice and 0.14 LMT of wheat are for Assam. Further, 21 more rakes carrying 0.27 LMT rice are en route to Assam.

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# Some nations inch toward reopening as virus deaths rise

BEIJING, April 26: Hawaii extended its stay-at-home order until the end of May, and California police closed a park because it got too crowded as US states and nations around the world took divergent paths on when to reopen their economies and communities.

The number of deaths officially attributed to the new coronavirus topped 200,000 globally, a figure widely believed to understate the actual total. A second US Navy ship, a destroyer off the coast

of South America, reported an outbreak on board.

Even as aides develop plans to shift President Donald Trump's public emphasis from the virus to addressing the economic crisis it has caused, Dr Anthony Fauci at the US National Institutes of Health warned against moving too quickly.

"You hear a lot about the need and the desire to get back to normal. That's understandable," he said. "If we don't get control of it we will never get back to normal. I

know we will, but we've got to do it correctly."

Societies are navigating an uncertain path between preventing a resurgence of the virus and providing economic and psychological relief for people cooped up at home.

Millions have lost jobs, with migrant workers and the poor particularly hard hit in many places. Protests have broken out from Berlin to Texas over the restrictions.

India allowed neighbourhood stores to reopen this weekend, though not in the

quarantined places that have been hit hardest. Neighbouring Sri Lanka has reimposed a nationwide lockdown until on Monday after partially lifting it.

The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began, said that all major construction projects have resumed as officials push to resume factory production and other economic activity after a two-and-a-half-month lockdown. China reported 11 new confirmed cases on Sunday and no additional deaths.

In Europe, Spain has joined Italy and France in preparing to loosen restrictions in early May, but Britain is holding off on any changes to its lockdown as its virus death toll topped 20,000. The figure doesn't include nursing home deaths, believed to be in the thousands.

Hawaii Governor David Ige extended both the state-at-home order and a mandatory quarantine for visitors through May 31. He warned of undoing progress in containing the virus if public plac-

es open up too early.

"This was not an easy decision. I know this has been difficult for everyone. Businesses need to reopen. People want to end this self-isolation and we want to return to normal," he said in a statement.

A spring heat wave drove an uptick of people to California beaches, golf courses and trails. Police in Pacific Grove said they had to close the picturesque Lovers Point Park and Beach at the southern end of Monterey Bay because of a lack of social distancing. - AP

## 'China needs to guard against resurgence'

BEIJING, April 26: China confirmed 11 new coronavirus cases, including six locally transmitted infections, taking the total count to 82,827, while a senior health official has warned of domestic resurgence of COVID-19 due to the rise in imported cases.

Death toll in China remained at 4,632 for the past 10 days, according to data released by the National Health Commission (NHC) on Sunday.

The 11 new confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported on Saturday. Of them, five were imported from overseas, while six were locally transmitted infections, it said.

Five of the new cases were in Heilongjiang province bordering Russia and another was in Guangdong province.

As many as 30 new asymptomatic cases, including seven imported, were also reported, taking the total number of such cases to 1,000, the NHC said.

Asymptomatic cases refer to people who are tested COVID-19 positive but develop no symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat. However, they pose a risk of spreading the disease to others.

China has so far registered total 82,827 COVID-19 cases,

including 77,394 recoveries.

While China contained the pandemic at Wuhan where the novel coronavirus first emerged in December last year, the growing numbers of imported cases as well as asymptomatic cases remained a cause of concern for health officials.

As of Saturday, the number of imported cases climbed to 1,634, including 22 in critical condition, the NHC said.

Also, the 1,000 suspected asymptomatic cases includes 151 from abroad. All such patients are still under medical observation.

NHC spokesperson Mi Feng has warned that China still faces a tough task to prevent a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic due to imported cases.

The number of countries as sources of imported cases reported on the Chinese mainland rose to 50 on Friday, he told a media briefing on Saturday.

Seven provincial-level regions reported newly imported cases or suspected cases on Friday, Mi noted, calling for targeted epidemic prevention and control measures as well as consistent personal protection. - PTI



Ignoring social distancing and mandates to wear masks or other face coverings, protesters attend an 'Open Texas' rally at the Texas State Capitol on Saturday in Austin, Texas. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas is under stay-at-home orders except for essential workers and businesses. - AP/PTI

## Separatists claim sole control of Aden

SANAA, April 26: Yemen's southern separatists on Sunday broke a peace deal with the country's internationally recognized government and claimed sole control of the regional capital of Aden, threatening to resume fighting between the two ostensible allies.

In a statement, the separatist Southern Transitional Council, which is backed by the United Arab Emirates, declared a state of emergency and said it wouldn't "self-govern" the key southern port city and other southern provinces. The separatists accused Yemen's government, which is supported by Saudi Arabia, of corruption and mismanagement.

There was no immediate response from the internationally recognised government to the separatists' announcement.

The division between the two supposed allies is another facet of the country's complicated civil war. On one side are the separatists and on the other are forces loyal to former President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Both have fought together in the Saudi-led coalition's war against Yemen's Shiite Houthi rebels.

The Houthis in 2014 overran major parts of northern Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa, pushing out the internationally recognised government and ushering in a war that has killed tens of thousands of people. Hadi fled first to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia. - AP

## As lockdown eases, Italy ponders!

ROME, Apr 26: As Italy prepares to emerge from the West's first and most extensive coronavirus lockdown, it is increasingly clear that something went terribly wrong in Lombardy, the hardest-hit region in Europe's hardest-hit country.

Italy had the bad luck of being the first Western country to be slammed by the outbreak, and its total of 26,000 fatalities lags behind only the US in the global death toll.

Italy's first homegrown case was recorded February 21, at a time when the World Health Organisation was still insisting the virus was "containable" and not nearly as infectious as the flu.

But there's also evidence that demographics and health care deficiencies combined with political and business interests to expose Lombardy's 10 million people in ways unseen anywhere else, particularly the most vulnerable in nursing homes.

Virologists and epidemiologists say what went wrong there will be studied for years, given how the outbreak overwhelmed a medical system considered one of Europe's best. In neighbouring Veneto, the impact was significantly more controlled.

Prosecutors are deciding whether to lay any criminal blame for the hundreds of dead in nursing homes, many of whom aren't even count-

ed in Lombardy's official death toll of 13,269.

By contrast, Lombardy's frontline doctors and nurses are being hailed as heroes for risking their lives to treat the sick under extraordinary levels of stress, exhaustion, isolation and fear.

Even after Italy registered its first homegrown case, doctors didn't understand the unusual way COVID-19 could present itself, with some patients experiencing a rapid decline in their ability to breathe.

"This was clinical information we didn't have," said Dr Maurizio Marvisi, a pneumologist at the San Camillo private clinic in hard-hit Cremona. - AP

## COVID-19 cases in Wuhan hospitals drop to zero for 1st time: official

BEIJING/WUHAN, April 26: The number of hospitalised COVID-19 patients in China's Wuhan, where the virus first emerged before turning out to be a pandemic, on Sunday dropped to zero for the first time, marking yet another milestone for the city which was opened up on April 8 after a 76-day lockdown.

The result has been achieved with the "hard efforts of medical workers in Wuhan" and those who were dispatched to assist the city in the

fight against the virus from across the country, said Mi Feng, a spokesperson for China's National Health Commission (NHC).

The last patient in Wuhan was cured on Friday, reducing the number of coronavirus patients in the city to zero, Mi said, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The health commission of Hubei province, whose capital is Wuhan, said that no new confirmed cases or new deaths due to COVID-19 were re-

ported on Saturday.

It said that 11 coronavirus patients were discharged from hospital after recovery in Wuhan.

Hubei has so far reported 68,128 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 50,333 in Wuhan. Hubei and Wuhan were in the thick of the coronavirus outbreak since early January this year, bearing the brunt of it.

China officially said that the coronavirus was noticed in late December in Wuhan but an-

nounced severe measures like the lockdown of 56-million-strong province from January 23, which drew criticism from the US and other countries that it acted late, leading to its spread globally.

There was a controversy about whether the virus, with the ability to transmit from human-to-human, emerged from the Huanan Seafood Market of Wuhan or escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) as alleged by the US. - PTI

## Around the WORLD



Trinette Chase, Ms Senior DC 2019, wears a velvet covering and a tiara as she helps distribute food to people facing economic hardship due to the coronavirus pandemic on Saturday, in southwest Washington. Chase is a volunteer with the community group, Love More, who were delivering food in collaboration with Martha's Table. - AP/PTI

## Not worth my 'time and effort'

WASHINGTON, April 26: US President Donald Trump has said that his daily coronavirus press briefings are not worth his "time and effort" as the "lamestream" media asks nothing but "hostile" questions, days after he faced intense rebuke for suggesting the possibility of treating COVID-19 patients by UV light or disinfectant injections.

Trump faced scathing criticism on Thursday for his outlandish suggestion, with health experts urging people not to listen to the President's "dangerous" advice.

After more than a month of daily coronavirus press briefings, Trump stayed behind closed doors on Saturday, hinting that he was considering halting the White House briefings. Trump took to Twitter about 45 minutes later, addressing the topic of his briefings.

"What is the purpose of having White House News Conferences when the Lamestream Media asks nothing but hostile questions, & then refuses to report the truth or facts accurately," the president tweeted. - PTI



Dutch teens cheer on their schooner after sailing home from the Caribbean across the Atlantic when coronavirus lockdowns prevented them flying, in the port of Harlingen, northern Netherlands on Sunday. - AP/PTI

## France's poorest areas

CLICHY-SOUS-BOIS (France), April 26: Joining more than 1,000 others, Djemba Diatite stood for hours in line to feed her growing family, grateful for handouts of fruits, vegetables and soap. It was her first time accepting charity, but she had no choice. The coronavirus pandemic has turned her small world upside down.

With open air markets closed, supermarket prices skyrocketing, an out-of-work husband, two children to feed and another on the way, Diatite said even tomatoes are now too expensive.

"This is my only solution," she said, relieved that a local group in her Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois stepped in with help.

Clichy-sous-Bois "where fiery nationwide riots started in 2005" is just 23 kilometres northeast of the French capital, but with its rows of housing projects, restless youth and residents teetering on the poverty line, it feels light years away.

The town mayor, seeing a looming crisis triggered by food shortages, sounded the alarm, and with scattered unrest simmering in impoverished suburbs, the French government announced a plan for urgent food assistance of 39 million euros (nearly \$42.1 million) for communities in need. - AP



Fruits seller Arsenio Martinez poses for a photo wearing a protective face mask with an original design that he created, at his green grocery store in Asuncion, Paraguay on Saturday. - AP/PTI

## Shakira during lockdown

LONDON, April 26: Pop diva Shakira has graduated with a degree in ancient philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania, a course she took during the lockdown in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Colombian singer is isolating with her two children and husband, professional footballer Gerard Pique at home in Spain.

"I just graduated from my 4 week Ancient Philosophy course with the University of Pennsylvania (@Penn). I know... my hobbies are very impractical, but it took a lot of hours after the kids were asleep.

"Thank you Plato and predecessors for all the 'fun' over the past month!" Shakira wrote on Twitter on April 23 as she flaunted her certificate. Last month, the "Me Gusta" singer said on social media that she took the course to make confinement "productive". - PTI



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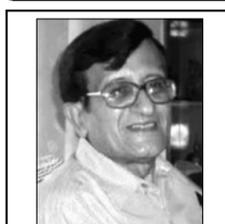
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Family Members Bharalumukh, Guwahati

CD/In Memo/P/.....

### SHRADDHANJALI



**Smt. Raju Mahesree** (W/o Late Shri O M Mahesree) D.O.B.: 09.08.1948 D.O.D.: 16.04.2020

Ma, you are the epitome of strength and love.

You endured through time. Rest in peace till we meet again.

In prayers with family, friends and well wishers. **Jorhat. Ph. No. 94351-41989.**

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### ANCHOR STORY

## Kids in Spain relish outdoor hour as virus lockdowns ease

BARCELONA (Spain), April 26: Shrieks of joy rang out Sunday in the streets of Spain as children were allowed to leave their homes for the first time in six weeks, while residents of Italy and France were eager to hear their leaders' plans on easing some of the world's strictest coronavirus lockdowns.

The sound of children shouting and the rattle of bikes on the pavement after the 44-day seclusion of Spain's youngest citizens offered a first taste of a gradual return to normal life in the country that has the second-highest number of confirmed infections, behind



the United States. "This is wonderful! I can't believe it has been six weeks," Susana Sabat?, a mother of 3-year-old twin boys, said in Barcelona. "My boys are very active. Today when they saw the front door and we gave them their scooters, they were

thrilled." Wary of igniting new infection flare-ups, nations around the world have been taking divergent paths on when to reopen their economies after weeks at a standstill under coronavirus lockdowns.

The number of deaths officially attributed to the

## Govt gives 3-month extension to Health Secretary Preeti Sudan

NEW DELHI, April 26: Health Secretary Preeti Sudan, due to retire this month-end, has been given a three-month extension on the crucial post, in a bid to maintain continuity in the government's response against coronavirus pandemic.

In a major top-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected on Sunday, Higher Education Secretary Amit Khare was given additional charge of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, while incumbent Ravi Mittal was shifted to the Department of Sports.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved Sudan's extension beyond the date of her superannuation on April 30, according to a Personnel Ministry order.

The government also appointed Rural Development Secretary Rajesh Bhushan as the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Health and Family Welfare department, indicating he may take over from Sudan after she retires on completion of the extended tenure.

The period as OSD will help Bhushan in understanding the work of the ministry, which has become central to the country's fight against COVID-19. As many as 23 senior IAS officers have been appointed as secretaries in different central government departments as part of the rejig.

Nagendra Nath Sinha will be the new Secretary of the Rural Development Department in place of Bhushan. Sinha is at present Secretary, the Department of Border Management in the Home Ministry.

Tarun Bajaj and Arvind Ku-

mar Sharma, who were working as the Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), have been appointed as Economic Affairs Secretary and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Secretary, respectively.

In a surprising change, Consumer Affairs Secretary Pawan Kumar Agarwal has been appointed as Special Secretary (Logistics), the Department of Commerce. He has been replaced by Leena Nandan, the Special Secretary in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Food and Public Distribution Secretary Ravi Kant has been shifted out as the Secretary, Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare and has been replaced by Sudhanshu Panday, currently Additional Secretary, the Department of Commerce. - PTI

Road Transport and Highways Secretary Sanjeev Ranjan has been shifted as the Shipping Secretary, a post which will fall vacant this month end upon superannuation of Gopal Krishna.

Aramane Giridhar, Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat will be the Secretary in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in place of Ranjan. CBSE chairperson Anita Karwal has been appointed as the Secretary, the Department of Education and Literacy. She is a 1988-batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre.

Her colleague from the same cadre, Rameshwar Prasad Gupta has been appointed as the Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Gupta is currently Special Secretary, NITI Aayog. - PTI

## Police adopt orphanages, old age homes during COVID-19 crisis

HYDERABAD, April 26: In a benevolent gesture, the Rachakonda Police Commissionerate here has adopted as many as 41 old age homes, orphanages and homes for specially-abled persons amid the ongoing lockdown.

In view of the COVID-19 crisis, inmates of the homes are being supplied with groceries and other essentials by the police even as different NGOs have also come forward to join hands with them in arranging ration, medicines and safety equipment.

Rachakonda Commissioner of Police Mahesh M Bhagwat said the police force decided to adopt the homes as they mostly depend on the service of kind-hearted people in society.

During the lockdown which restricts people to venture out, such people were not able to serve the needy nor the managements of the homes were in a position to step out to manage things.

The requirement of each of the homes is assessed by the SHO concerned and furnished to the Office of Commissioner of Police.

The Citizen Volunteer Cell at Rachakonda Police Commissionerate is managing the procurement and distribution of food, ration and other relief material and then maps the donors to the homes and ensures all that is necessary is supplied to them, said Bhagwat, who himself has distributed groceries at some of these homes and personally ensuring that their needs are fulfilled.

Bhagwat said so far 41 orphanages, old age homes and homes for specially-abled housing nearly 1,630 inmates were identified and the police would meet the requirements of the homes.

Rachakonda is one of the three Police Commissionerates covering Hyderabad and its adjoining areas. - PTI



Boys are seen sitting amid litter and playing games on mobile phones at Chunabhatti during the nationwide lockdown, in Mumbai on Sunday. - PTI

## Slum dwellings pose challenge as Mumbai fights coronavirus outbreak

MUMBAI, April 26: As coronavirus situation spirals, slum dwellings in Mumbai, where more than half of the city's 12 million population live in cramped space and unhygienic conditions, seem to be posing a daunting challenge in efforts to curb infections.

Known as the 'City of Dreams', Mumbai is home to the largest number of billionaires as well as Asia's largest slum Dharavi - one of the coronavirus hotspots. While area-wise it measures just about 2.4 square kilometres (sq kms), Dharavi alone has more than one million people.

Tata Group Chairman Emeritus Ratan Tata's remarks, earlier this week, that developers and architects are treating slums as 'residue' of the city and that was one of the reasons for the rapid spread of the pandemic highlighted the current situation. These so-called planners and builders should be ashamed of themselves for forcing a large majority of the people to live in sub-human conditions, he had said.

The megacity has reported 4,870 coronavirus cases and 191 deaths.

The octogenarian industrialist, also a long time resident of Mumbai, had lambasted realtors for neglecting the poor and creating vertical slums for big gains from high value housing that come up in the areas where slums stood once.

Lack of proper planning, flouting of norms, land cartelisation and rising property prices, are among the factors, that have contributed to the present situation of large number of people living in slums, experts opined.

The Maharashtra government and local authorities are taking measures to contain the spread of coronavirus infections and are appealing the citizens to stay home.

However, with rooms measuring barely 100-200 sq ft housing 8-10 people in slums, and scores of families sharing common toilets and water taps, the possibility of coronavirus cases going up is always high, they added.

"Blame it on policy paralysis and unending aspirations of both politicians as well as developers' community for the city not becoming slum-free. And today, these slums have turned into a haven for coronavirus," MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) former chief town planner VK Pathak said.

Further, he said housing policies that were developed by the competent authorities did not solve the issues of 'public housing' but were construed as policies for real estate development.

"Nearly 65-70 per cent of Mumbai's population stays in slums. Policies like the Urban Land Ceiling Act, free housing for slum dwellers and extension of cut off dates for regularising slums led to land cartelisation and increasing property rates," Pathak said.

Over the years, Mumbai has witnessed a large influx of migrants in search of jobs. They settled in clusters by building small hutments as they could not afford to buy homes and those areas later became illegal slums.

"Affordable housing and slum elimination are two surprisingly conflicting issues. We're trying to remove slums from seemingly unsuitable living conditions by relocating them to other locations which are 20-30 miles away and where there are no jobs for these uprooted people," Ratan Tata said earlier this week.

In 1995, as part of his pre-election promises, late Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray floated the idea of 'free housing' for slum dwellers. When the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance came to power the same year, their government launched the slum rehabilitation scheme.

Under the scheme, slums were proposed to be replaced with 'pukka' houses on the same plot of land, construction of which was to be cross-funded by a 'free sale component'. The latter was aimed at attracting investments from home buyers from slightly affluent financial background.

However, the scheme could not address the problems in its entirety and slums kept proliferating across the city. Real estate developers' body Naredco's National President Niranjana Hiranandani also acknowledged that proper urban planning has "not" been done.

"One acknowledges that the situation has been one where proper urban planning has not been done. The need to ensure fiscal viability of real estate projects creates a situation where over the years, we have seen real estate development happen in ways that weren't examples of 'sustainable living' or in sync with the environment.

According to him, a mix of acute scarcity of open spaces, restrictions on vertical growth and difficulties relating to slum rehabilitation policy confounds Mumbai's planned development.

An expert in real estate regulations, who did not wish to be identified, said faulty Floor Space Index (FSI) norms have also led to haphazard development in the city and skewed property prices.

FSI is a development tool that defines the extent to which construction is per-

mitted on a plot. For long, the permissible FSI for residential development in the island city has been 1.33 and it is 1 in the suburbs.

In 2019, then state government led by BJP's Devendra Fadnis increased the FSI for slum rehabilitation projects across the city to 4 from the earlier 3. The index is based on a ratio between the area of a covered floor or the built up area to the area of that plot on which a building stands. The new development plan 2034 for Mumbai has proposed to increase the FSI to 2.7.

"While the developers used this as a tool to build costly aspirational homes, local authorities used it as a means to generate revenues. In between, the interest of the public was ignored," the expert quoted above said.

Over the past several years, Maharashtra government has been planning to redevelop the most congested areas in the city like Dharavi and Kamathipura. The ambitious Dharavi redevelopment plan, which was conceptualised more than a decade ago in 2004, has not found takers yet as developers have found the proposal "financially unviable".

"Haphazard and in some instances, unplanned development just enhances the difficulty quotient. The slum proliferation challenge begins with open spaces reserved by authorities for future development or kept vacant as no development zones.

"Given the constant pressure from new migrants looking for homes, it opens up the pathway to proliferation of slums. This is a problem not unique only to Mumbai, but certainly more acute as compared to other cities," Hiranandani said. - PTI

## 12 killed in lightning strikes

PATNA, April 26: Twelve people were killed in lightning strikes in three districts of Bihar on Sunday, disaster management officials said.

Nine persons were killed in Saran district while two died in Jamui and one in Bhojpur, they said. Eight people were also injured in Saran district and they are being treated at hospital.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar condoled the deaths and announced an ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh to the families of each of the deceased. - PTI



A homeless woman rests in the middle of a deserted road, during the nationwide lockdown, outside Howrah station in Kolkata on Sunday. - PTI

## Over 200 Europeans stranded in India evacuated

KOCHI, April 26: More than 200 Europeans mostly Swiss nationals stranded in India, following the nationwide lockdown were evacuated by a special plane of Swiss International Airlines, Kerala Tourism department said here on Sunday.

The plane took off from Kochi late Saturday night and landed at the Zurich airport on Sunday morning (10 am IST), it said in a release here.

Besides the 164 passengers who had boarded from Kochi, the flight carried 49 others from Kolkata from where it had a stopover in the Kerala city.

Earlier, a Cochin International Airport spokesman said the aircraft had arrived here after picking up 62 Swiss nationals stranded in Kolkata.

This is the fourth flight that repatriated tourists from the state to Europe since the international airports were closed on March 23 to contain spread of Covid-19 disease.

At the airport here, Swiss Consul-General to India (Bangalore) Sebastian Huger saw the repatriation mission along with Syed Ibrahim, Honorary Consul of the German Honorary Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram.

Besides 115 Swiss citizens, the flight carried tourists from Germany, Austria, Norway, Denmark and France. Most of the passengers from Kochi were tourists in Kerala, while the others were brought in from neighbouring states, the release said.

Kerala had earlier facilitated the return of 268 tourists to the UK when a London-bound British Airways departed from Kochi on April 15.

Prior to it, an Air India aircraft with 232 passengers had left for Germany on March 31, and, four days later, a flight to France (112 people).

Kerala Tourism Minister Kadakampally Surendran said most of the foreign tourists stuck in the state have been repatriated.

There were messages from the returned guests appreciating the excellent arrangements that the government had made for their care and health during their stay after the lockdown.

Secretary of Kerala Tourism, Rani George said most of the guests who returned had used the registration portal of the Swiss consulate, while others sought the help of the Kerala Tourism's help desks. - PTI

## CRPF jawan kills self with rifle

NAGPUR, April 26: A 30-year-old CRPF jawan shot himself with his service rifle on Sunday in Bhamragadh taluka of Gadchiroli, some 170 kilometres from here, police said.

He was identified as Uttarakhand-resident Deepak Kumar attached to the force's battalion number 37, an official said.

"He shot himself in the chest with his Insas rifle at around 2:30 pm. A suicide note found at the spot cited health and family issues as triggers," an official said. - PTI

## Delhi saw fewer COVID cases, deaths this week: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, April 26: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said it has been eight weeks since the outbreak of coronavirus in Delhi, and there were fewer coronavirus cases and fewer fatalities in the city this week as compared to the last week.

Speaking to the media, Kejriwal said in other countries, the numbers were doubling week after week, but in Delhi the eighth week - starting April 19 - was better than the seventh week, between April 12 and 19.

"This week was slightly better than the week before, for the people of Delhi. There were fewer cases, fewer deaths and many more people went home after complete recovery," the Chief Minister said. Sharing the data, he said the eighth week (between April 19 and 26) had a better picture than the week before.

"The pattern of the rising cases and getting to double or triple of its original count has been observed across the world, but something like this was not observed here."

Kejriwal said while 850 cases were reported in the seventh week, in the eighth only 622 new cases were reported. "This week nine people died due to coronavirus, while in the week before that, 21 people died," he said.

In the seventh week, 260 people were cured and discharged, while 580 went home last week - "that is more than double of the previous week", the Chief Minister said, calling it a good sign.

He said that while there were 566 people admitted to the hospitals in the seventh week, just 34 people were admitted to the hospitals this week. "The last week was good for us,

people are following the lockdown in a disciplined manner, and we will soon be able to win our fight against Corona if we continue to follow the lockdown protocol like this."

Kejriwal also said that the plasma therapy is showing good results. "Our aim is that we should not let anyone die. I am happy that people are coming forward to donate their plasma to save lives." Speaking about a particular case, he said there was a very critical patient in the Lok Nayak Hospital.

"Doctors said he was sinking. He was administered plasma therapy and his health has improved significantly," Kejriwal said. He also said the government is asking the patients, who have recovered and discharged, to donate plasma and stressed the necessity of unity amongst all religions to fight and eradicate coronavirus. - IANS

## Indore strain may be deadlier, will send samples to NIV: Docs

BHOPAL, April 26: Doctors treating COVID-19 cases in Indore say a more virulent strain may be wreaking havoc in the city, which has emerged as the coronavirus hotspot in Madhya Pradesh.

They say samples from Indore, where COVID-19 has killed 57 people, will be sent to the Pune-based National Institute of Virology (NIV) to confirm their apprehensions of the strain being deadlier than in other parts of the country.

"We have a feeling the strain is definitely more virulent in Indore belt. We have discussed this with the NIV and will be sending samples for them to compare by extraction of virus genome," Dean of Government Mahatma Gandhi Memorial (MGM) Medical College Jyoti Bindal said.

"There are also other factors also for the high fatality rate, like patients turning up at the hospitals late," she said. "In Indore belt, the testing is confined to coronavirus detection only, and not its type," another doctor said.

Jitendra Bhargava, director of the state government-run School of Excellence in Pulmonary Medicine, also shared Bindal's concern, saying the high mortality rate in Indore needs to be investigated through viral culture and RNA extraction.

It is also true that the mortality rate is high in patients who had comorbidities (presence of additional conditions along with the primary condition) like cardiac and renal problems or diabetes and hypertension besides other immunity-compromising conditions, he said. - PTI

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## MESSAGE FOR TODAY

*Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once.*

— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## The Assam Tribune

## Vigilance needed

With not many days remaining for the extended period of lockdown to end, two recent steps by the Assam Government makes it a highly critical phase. As announced by the State Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, two mass quarantine centres are being set up on the Assam-Bengal border in Dhubri district to house people who might be returning to the State from outside once the lockdown period ends. The State Government would also build another mass quarantine centre at Srirampur of Kokrajhar district near the inter-State entry gate for such travellers. The Minister has rightly emphasized that Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts require special vigilance as they share border with West Bengal. Our neighbouring State has more than 500 Covid-19 positive cases, and since testing there is still not adequate, the actual numbers might be on the higher side. Thus any individuals making a journey through West Bengal to enter Assam will have to undergo quarantine. It has to be added that districts having a border with Bangladesh also require to be monitored carefully. The coronavirus pandemic having become the obsession of the moment, problems such as illegal migration from Bangladesh have been thrust to the backseat. Yet it should be kept in mind that with the pandemic raging, this problem has actually assumed an added negative dimension and extreme vigilance is needed considering the vulnerability of Bangladesh to the pandemic.

There certainly is, as the Minister has stated, a need to ramp up testing in bordering districts if a spike in the numbers in Assam is to be prevented. As far as legal entrants are concerned, it might be wiser, as far as possible, to have individuals quarantined at the border itself, rather than allow them entry before officials there give them a clean bill of health. For instance, around 390 students from Assam, who were stranded at Kota in Rajasthan, have arrived at Srirampur. The Assam administration plans to medically screen them at the border since, although they were quarantined at Kota, they might have contracted infection while passing through several States. The plan is to send those with no Covid-19 symptoms to the Sarusajai quarantine centre in Guwahati, the rest would be kept at the Srirampur quarantine centre till further order. But by now it has been established that mere screening is not enough to detect infected cases, for which full-fledged testing has to be done. Thus it would be more sensible to quarantine all the students at the border like any other individual desiring to enter the State. Also, the State Government has introduced another critical element by allowing inter-district travel, a step necessary to assist those stranded within Assam by the lockdown. This will entail movement of over a lakh of people from one place to another, and too would require careful handling.

## Timely action

The old saying 'A stitch in time saves nine' proved to be correct again in the fight against the coronavirus as timely action by the State Government prevented spreading of the disease in Sikkim, which was otherwise considered a vulnerable State because of the fact that it is a favourite destination for both domestic and foreign tourists. A large number of domestic and foreign tourists visit Sikkim every year and normally the flow increases in the months of March and April. But sensing the gravity of the situation, the Government of Sikkim took prompt action to fight the spreading of coronavirus well before the Government of India imposed the country-wide lockdown and because of such actions, till date, the State does not have a single case of Covid-19. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, announced a nationwide lockdown from the midnight of March 24 after the country observed a Janata Curfew on March 22. But the Government of Sikkim started acting on this front from the first part of March as it sensed the gravity of the situation. The Sikkim Government issued an advisory on March 2 asking the tourists to leave the State and all the places of tourist attraction were closed to avoid gathering of people on March 4. The Government started checking all people entering the State from March 2 and even before the lockdown was announced, the educational institutions, hotels and restaurants, cinema halls, malls, etc., were closed. The inter-State borders were sealed and strong action was taken to seal the international borders. The Government detected a foreign national who managed to stay back and he was examined and found to be corona negative.

Interestingly, the first case of Covid-19 was detected in India way back on January 30 when a student from Kerala who returned from China was detected positive. But apparently, no one took it seriously at that time as the normal day-to-day activities in all parts of the country went on and thousands of people gathered to attend the 'Namaste Trump' show organized by the Government of India in Gujarat on February 24. Moreover, the Government did not suspend operation of the international flights when the first case was reported and the new Government in Madhya Pradesh passed the floor test in the Assembly on March 25. All these actions proved that the Government failed to apprehend the situation on time but a small State showed the way and managed to protect its people with timely action. Interestingly, the Government of Sikkim is also not allowing the drivers of the trucks carrying essentials to enter the State and native drivers are driving the trucks from the entry point into the State. However, such a step is not possible in a State like Assam as it is the gateway to the entire Northeast and the trucks carrying essentials to all the States of the region pass through Assam.

## Covid-19 and population control

## ■ Sanjib Sabhapandit

It is now increasingly becoming clear to the logical mind that the role of God in creation and death of living organisms on earth is questionable. The consequences of human actions over the ages are far too convincing to believe that Nature is the final deciding factor.

Man is an animal like any other, born out of a biological process. For all living beings to exist, certain ambient conditions are a must. Those existed when life was born here. The distance from the Sun gave it comfortable light and temperature. The mass of the earth gave it the gravitational force for creating the envelope of atmospheric gases in which the living beings could breathe. The earth got the required time to cool down for the soil and water to be formed.

Then life formed or was born, cell biology occurred and the process of evolution started. Different permutations and combinations happened, complexities grew and under the influence of millions of climatic and celestial factors, different species developed. May be extraterrestrial beings also visited this planet and that resulted in the appearance of human beings.

Be that as it may, all moving creatures fell into different food chains for survival and we now see a deer eating grass and a tiger eating the deer. Energy is transferred to the predator while also balancing out the population of deer. Smaller fishes eat vegetation and bigger fishes eat the smaller fishes. Birds eat seeds and propagate vegetation or birds eat insects balancing the growth of insects. Wherever we observe, we see this transfer of energy and a balance

of species. During this whole exercise of eating and living, each species also indulge in the most primitive and fundamental act of perpetuating the race through a consummate passion for procreation.

The earth was sufficiently large and all the creatures could afford the luxury of a free life till the human race entered the scene with its unmatched brain power. The mere six foot tall figure gradually developed its skill to harness Nature to its advantage. In a mere 10,000 years man mustered enough skill to subjugate the animal kingdom and lord over everything. Its wings of imagination took it beyond borders, the oceans, the skies and into space. Those who started to move out earlier, won earlier. They coined a word called 'development' which meant treading beyond the immediate and the existing. This word which initially meant harnessing Nature and exploring the unknown, gradually started to mean acquiring the resources as wealth which converted them into a different species within the species. They began to be identified as wealthy or forceful. This process of development which man liked to call 'civilization' led to a word called 'politics'. This meant concentrating the free energy of all into the hands of some to manage the lesser mortals. Sometimes they were called kings; sometimes they were called political leaders. Such people also created another force called 'religion' to manage their shows according to their advantage. These

people allowed some people to amass most of the wealth.

By that time, different geographical factors led to the creation of countries or states or kingdoms and all such entities started marching towards a hypothetical goal called development as shown to them by the rich and powerful ones. A mad race began all over. Man started to forget the basics, realities and Nature. The

**Covid-19 has shown that the earth's resources are extremely stressed and this or any other such disaster may lead to the extinction of species. Man has forgotten that it is the most vulnerable of species and it cannot survive without others.**

rich and powerful created enormous varieties of products and services, challenged and defeated hundreds of natural adversities like disease and other calamities. Their brain power created transportation solutions, communication solutions, entertainment solutions, war machinery, essential and luxury products, computers and other creative items. These rich people now started attracting the better brains from all over to create a 'super earth' full of weird characteristics which would propel them into a super cosmic league! Man became supremely arrogant of success, wealth and power.

In the meantime without being really noticed, the human population was growing exponentially. It has reached a figure of almost 800 crore of increasingly higher average life

span by now. To feed this gigantic population, food is being produced by artificial means, with genetically-modified crops taking the front seat. To address various health issues, innumerable medicines are being administered. The millions of cars produced to meet the transportation needs of the billions are releasing huge polluting gases to the atmosphere. Millions of factories producing billions of items for the 'civilized' people are consuming enormous amount of energy polluting land, water and air. Land, on the other hand, is decreasing rapidly for human habitat. They are now trespassing into the world of animals, birds and aquatic life. Between an animal and a man, the choice is always the man. So elephants, tigers, etc., are becoming victims.

Physical pollution is now changing the cells of all living organisms while mental pollution from exploitation, greed, deprivation and inequalities is ruining the beauty of life.

The world is now clearly not in a position to sustain life in a natural way any more. Those powers that were hell bent upon subjugating others for their own interest were totally unmindful of this catastrophic development. They were busy developing newer and more sophisticated weapons of mass annihilation. For them, military might was economic might. Their paranoid psyche developed warfare techniques in which their own soldiers would not be killed. Robots would take place of their soldiers. The wars would be fought by proxy. They even designed chemical warfare techniques to incapacitate the

enemy population with a few bombs. They also devised virus and bacteria warfare to spread epidemics in the enemy territory.

What it implies is that the human mind, particularly of those who want to control the world economically, is severely impaired. The world is totally unsafe in these perverted hands.

Covid-19 has shown that the earth's resources are extremely stressed and this or any other such disaster may lead to the extinction of species. Man has forgotten that it is the most vulnerable of species and it cannot survive without others. A lockdown may help in preventing the spread of the virus for some time, but more lockdown will result in severe food shortage and starvation deaths. Then all hell will break out. The agonizing cry of the earth is already audible. Man is now helpless even with thousands of supersonic fighter jets or nuclear ballistic missiles. Man's ego has taken a beating rightly because it failed to respect Nature.

This situation is the direct fallout of too many people living on this planet. Their need for food, education, healthcare, mobility, communication, residence, jobs, land and, above all, freedom cannot be met without severely compromising the very existence of our mother earth.

Covid-19 has shown that each human being is more of a potential danger than an asset. Probably half of the present population is not needed. They were born perhaps on an assumption that God was responsible for each birth and death and that man has no responsibility on this account. This mindset must go and the present Covid-19 has told this to us in quite unambiguous terms.

## ASHAs: Covid-19 protagonists at grassroots level

## ■ Purabi Bhagawati

The National Rural Health Mission was launched on April 12, 2005 for providing effective, efficient and affordable healthcare to the rural population in the 18 States where a relatively low standard of public health has been recorded. For monitoring especially the reproductive health issues of the women, the Mission created a band of female health volunteers, named as Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) in each village within the identified States. The ASHA workers have been working as bridges between the doctors and the rural women. Again, their roles have been considered as a significant one as far as the awareness about family planning is concerned. The ASHAs are mostly selected by the community and therefore in most of the cases, the selected ASHAs are the insiders of the respective community.

As mentioned above, the ASHA workers have been deployed especially for the women's reproductive health and child healthcare. These

workers are considered as the grassroots level workers and the Government has been arranging some training facilities for these workers for the smooth functioning of their work. If we see from the inception, the ASHAs have been working in the field of reproductive health. Indeed, their role in terms of helping the rural folk about the family planning method has been as painstaking as commendable. Being the insiders of the community, they could easily build up the trust with the respective villagers. Further, after the appearance of the ASHA workers, the number of institutional delivery cases also has pointedly kept rising. Thus, they are such people who have been available especially for pregnant women at their doorsteps. Again there is criticism of the ASHAs' role that they only give importance to the pregnant women which leads to negligence for the holistic approach of health. As per a recent survey, around 31,955 ASHA workers have been working in different parts of the State of Assam.

In the present global pandemic situation, these workers have come with a different essence, which we can consider as an answer to the critics who have been criticizing them for putting their efforts only for the pregnant women. In Assam, these community workers have become the real grassroots protagonists who go to the field despite taking all the risks for not only to make the people aware of the corona threat, but also to help the authority concerned to find out the patients of Covid-19. After interacting with a few ASHAs, it has been observed that their insider identity most of the time has been the reason for humiliation. In their earlier role as reproductive health-care workers, such identity helped them to build trust but in the battle of this global pandemic, the situation is not the same. Their advice and knowledge over such new diseases have been reviewed under the cloud of uncertainty. Again many of the health workers reported that such a cloud of uncertainty existed in the initial days of the pandemic, but gradually with the help of social media and mass media, the

people even from remote areas are now able to understand the situation arising out of the crisis.

However, one of the major challenges for these health workers is to identify the patients. They have been working in the field without adequate protection, for which their work could be very risky for their own lives. Wearing only the saree which is given to them is not necessarily helpful in this situation. Being in the periphery, it is difficult for them to be heard by the authorities concerned. Though the demand for a standard amount of salary for them is not a new issue, but in this time of the pandemic, they have been emerging as the grassroots protagonists who do not limit themselves within the structured work and do their best to serve the nation.

Most of the ASHA workers are in the age group of 20 to 45 years who have been assigned to work in different parts of the country. Being the woman health workers, who have come forward to serve during a pandemic situation, there might be certain difficulties which they could face in their field. For

writing this piece, the author has tried to know a few of the ASHA experiences. Most of them reported that being woman health workers, they could become the victim of certain stigma. People often question their knowledge on the pandemic. Though the disease is not considered as stigmatized, people might consider that she (the ASHA) and her family members could be prone to infection because of her active engagement which could lead to social isolation from the community. Thus, being female health workers, in the present scenario they hardly get cooperation from their community members which disappoint them the most. Irrespective of the paradigm shift of the nature of the work of the ASHAs, at the ground level there is a question of acceptance and cooperation of the villagers of which the ASHA herself is a member. Along with the economic security, social security has been a significant matter for these workers who are giving their best to control the epidemic at the ground level and help to make a new history of women empowerment.

## Letters to the EDITOR

Sir, — The lockdown has hit almost all the sectors hard with many speculating the death knell of the economy. But at the same time, it has become blessings in disguise for the environment and wildlife. It seems the coronavirus lockdown is seriously helping nature to recoup itself. India being one of the highly-polluted countries in the world, the impact of the lockdown on the environment in the country can be felt by everyone. The lockdown shows us another view of nature and environment which several ambitious schemes drafted by the successive governments have failed to achieve over the years. The rivers like the Ganges, Yamuna and Cauvery have amazingly rejuvenated within such a short period. The drastic decline of industrial discharge and the reducing level of contamination by human beings have created the serene images of these rivers. Reports suggest that the water of the Ganges in Haridwar has now become fit for drinking for the first time in years. Crores of rupees spent by the governments over the projects for cleaning the rivers like the Ganges or Yamuna were unable to do what the lockdown has done. Delhi's

## Nature's gain

pollution level decreased to a record 20 years' low. The air quality index improved like never before. Migratory flamingos have come visiting Mumbai with record high numbers this year. Post lockdown, we should proceed with a balancing act of development along with preservation of nature and environment. For this the responsibility lies not only with the government but also with the citizens. Yours etc., KISHOR KUMAR KALITA, Kalaigaon.

## Building confidence

Sir, — It is understandable that the temporary shutdown of many micro, small and marginal firms run by the educated but unemployed youths is as important as that of the temporary shutdown of education institutions to curb the spread of Covid-19. However, as the online classes being provided by the educational institutions are necessary for the students to continue learning, building confidence among the firms owned by the unemployed youths to continue their firms and employees to work under them is also important. The Government should take care of such startups or firms by establishing online platforms for the development of their skills during the lockdown through authentic online portals. The skills developed during lockdown would

definitely build confidence among the employees to look for jobs. Yours etc., ABHIJIT HAZARIKA, Guwahati.

## Commendable service

Sir, — In these trying times when all the stakeholders of society have joined hands to curb the coronavirus pandemic and help the people during the lockdown, the role of the Tangla police in Udalguri district has drawn our attention. The steps they are taking are commendable as most of the violators of the lockdown were counselled and let off unlike other parts of State. The police teams also have kept vigil over the ATMs, banks and grocery shops to ensure that proper social distancing measures are adopted. There have also been unhindered movement of vegetable vendors and essential commodities. The Tangla police have also extended their helping hand to the poor and needy along with curbing the illegal trade of country liquor and gambling. Yours etc., ASHIM ROY, Tangla.

## Punitive action

Sir, — Even the rich nations with world class medical facilities have been brought to their knees. China did not inform the world in time about the coronavirus. Due to its tight media policy, it is also still not giving real information regarding

the deaths due to this pandemic. Even in this grim situation, it is shamelessly buying shares in the financially weaker companies of the rich countries. By doing so, it is trying to challenge the US economically and strategically. Moreover, it is making huge profits by selling medical goods, the quality of which is under question, to affected countries. It deserves a collective punitive action. Yours etc., CHANDAN KUMAR NATH, Sorbhog, Barpeta.

## Online classes

Sir, — The online classes have been very helpful as well as convenient for all the students during this lockdown period. Considering the lockdown, as there is no certainty of when it is going to get over, the online classes have been quite helpful. The teachers are trying to cover the syllabus on time and are also keeping us engaged with our studies by giving assignments and study materials. No doubt it is a good step to encourage the students and keep them away from idleness and negativity. But we belong to a remote area. I am a student of master's degree in Guwahati, but due to this crisis, I am now in my village Makhbaha in Tihu, Nalbari. The internet connectivity in my area is very slow. Hence, I am really struggling with my online classes. There are

many students who are facing this problem. It feels like we are lagging behind while the rest of the others have progressed. It often leads to frustration. But, due to the ongoing nationwide lockdown, we have no choice but to attend the online classes. Yours etc., LINA SHARMA, Tihu.

## River erosion

Sir, — The Mora Pagladiya river has been creating great inconveniences to the riverine people at places from Pakhamara to Barama-Dahkaunia under Baksa district. Some of the people have lost their movable and immovable properties due to the river's erosion during the rainy season over the years. Besides, the KBS Road, an important link road to the district headquarters at Mushalpur and also Bhutan, has been facing the effect of erosion at some places near the river. The stretch of the road near Saukuchi village has turned vulnerable due to erosion. Similarly, the river has created a vulnerable site at Niz-Juluki, Barama, where thousands of villagers have been under a great threat due to erosion and lack of adequate repairing of the river embankment. Yours etc., ROHIT CHANDRA DAS, Barama.

Articles (within 1000-1100 words) and Letters to the Editor for publication in the editorial page may be sent to the email ID: [editor@assamtribune.com](mailto:editor@assamtribune.com).

**WEATHER GUWAHATI**

**LOCAL FORECAST:**  
Generally cloudy sky with one or two spells of rain/thundershower is very likely to occur. Maximum and minimum temperatures are most likely to be 31°C & 19°C respectively on Monday.

**TEMPERATURE:**  
Max 30.8° C  
Min 19.0° C

## Governor's rule should be imposed in BTC: Dass

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: NDA constituent BJP has urged Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi to take over the administration of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) after the expiry of the present council's term tomorrow.

State BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass said that the Governor's rule should be imposed in the BTC till the next elections to the council are held.

The term of the present general council of the BTC is set to expire tomorrow.

The Assam State Election Commission has been forced to postpone elections to the council, which were slated for April 4, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opposition Congress had earlier called for the Governor's rule in the BTC.

## World Malaria Day observed

CITY CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI, April 26: World Malaria Day was observed at Medhikuchi LPS, Sonapur, maintaining social distancing in the presence of District Malaria Officer NR Choudhary and others. For prevention of malaria, bed net impregnation was also conducted among the community during the event.

## Sonowal visits homes for elderly people, women

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: Amid the coronavirus-induced nationwide lockdown, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal today visited Mothers Old Age Home and State Home for Women here.

He interacted with the inmates at both the places, besides taking stock of their health and availability of food and medicines. He also distributed nutritious food items and sanitizers among the inmates.

While visiting Mothers Old Age Home at Hatigaon, the Chief Minister appreciated Monalisa Society that runs the Home for its humanitarian service. He said the service provided by the Society is very encouraging and a praiseworthy example of human compassion. He said the State government is extending all possible support in successfully running the Home.

Saying that the lockdown is be-

ing enforced to ensure good health and safety of the citizens, Sonowal said as elderly persons are believed to be more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, there is a need to ensure regular health check-up for them, besides providing nutritious food to boost their immunity.

The Chief Minister during his visit to the State Home of Women at Jalukbari here, which is run by the Social Welfare department, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi by declaring the nationwide lockdown has allowed the people to keep themselves safe through social distancing. He said keeping this in view, the Social Welfare department has been directed to ensure safety and wellbeing of the inmates staying in different shelter homes across the State.

Sonowal urged the inmates to keep themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and remain fully alert. He informed them

about the precautionary measures which are to be taken for self-protection against novel coronavirus infection.

Santana Das Mahanta, superintendent of State Home for Women, informed the Chief Minister that presently there are 77 inmates, out of which 22 are below 18 years. She said regular classes are being held for them by a home tutor. A few students attend school, and bridge course under SSA has also been introduced for the illiterate elderly inmates, she informed.

The Chief Minister, while returning from State Home for Women, also paid a short visit to the Assam Sishu Kalyan Sadan and interacted with the children at the centre.

Minister of Social Welfare department Pramila Rani Brahma and Chief Minister's media adviser Hrishikesh Goswami were present during both the visits.



Food items being distributed to poor people by an NGO during the coronavirus-induced lockdown in Guwahati on Sunday. – UB Photos

## NF Rly women's wing giving free meals to needy

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: The Railway Women's Welfare Organisation of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been giving free meals to the needy and distributing masks among these people who are facing problems on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown.

"Indian Railways is making all-out efforts to supplement the healthcare initiatives of the Government of India. In this direction, Indian Railways is producing masks and hand sanitizers in-house in all its zonal units, production units and public sector undertakings (PSUs) as these items are of great necessity during this crucial period. This is in addition to the various other measures being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19," said Subhanan Chanda, chief public relations officer of NFR.

"Along with that, Northeast Frontier Railway Women's Wel-

fare Organisation (NFRWWO) has undertaken humanitarian efforts at various locations. NFRWWO has produced and distributed over 5,700 masks and provided meals to 500 needy persons," he said.

Chanda said several other NGOs such as Khalsa Centre North East and NECLP Raising Hands are also providing free meals to the needy people and contract labourers in goods yards with the help of Railway Police Force (RPF) and other railway employees by observing social distancing.

"The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) during the lockdown has so far provided over 16,000 free meals and other railway agencies have provided over 50,000 free meals to the needy people in the NFR zone, which were distributed by RPF personnel," Chanda said.

Among the locations covered are New Bongaigaon, Azara, Changsari, Kamakhya, Guwaha-

ti, New Guwahati, Silchar, New Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, New Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, Samsi, Manihari, Alipurduar and New Cooch-behar station areas.

He added that NFR has produced more than 2,500 litres of hand sanitizers and over 66,000 reusable face masks for use by its on-duty staff so far.

"Masks are being made by staff who are working from their homes due to lockdown and hand sanitizers are being produced in various depots. Masks are being made by staff in various locations like Agartala, Alipurduar, Lumding, Silchar, Katihar, Tinsukia and Rangiya," Chanda said.

"To ensure safety of the staff and boost their morale, we have ensured that masks and hand sanitizers are made available to all the staff coming on duty. These are also being ensured for contract labourers. Soap, water and washing facilities are being provided at all workplaces," Chanda added.

## NFR losing huge revenue

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) is losing revenue to the tune of Rs 1.5 crore to Rs 2 crore every day on account of the suspension of passenger train services.

"Passenger train services have remained suspended since the nationwide lockdown was enforced. Our zone's average daily earnings from passenger traffic is Rs 1.5 crore to Rs 2 crore. That revenue is not coming, on account of the suspension of services," an NFR official told this newspaper.

Asked about the total quantum of loss suffered by NFR during the last one month due to suspension of passenger train services, the official said, "We have not done the calculation. This is not the time to calculate loss or profit. Priority is now on helping the government to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control. Our freight services are operating and we are working to ensure an adequate supply of essentials to the people of this region. Calculation of loss or profit will be done later."

## Three quarantined

CITY CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI, April 26: A worker of Milanpur No.2 Masjid, Chandmari, his wife and son have been sent for quarantine after he returned from Nalbari, one of the red zones for COVID-19 in the State, on Sunday.

A source in the Chandmari police said that the worker, Saifuddin Rahman, had gone to his home in Loharkata village in Nalbari district on April 19 and today he came back with his family.

"A team of police and health officials visited the Masjid today after locals informed about it. They came here on an ambulance. A meeting was arranged with the Masjid committee members and a quarantine notice was pasted outside the mosque. The place was thoroughly sanitized," the source added.

"They were immediately sent for checkup," he added.



## MSME sector worst hit during lockdown

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector of Assam, which is a source of livelihood for lakhs of people, is the worst hit by the novel coronavirus-induced lockdown, revealed State Industry Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary here today.

The minister said that to chalk out a roadmap to revive the economy in the post-lockdown era, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal will soon convene a meeting with all noted economists and industry experts of Assam to get their pieces of advice and inputs.

Apart from this, the State government is also seeking opinions from various trade bodies like CII, FINER, etc., on how to revive the State's economy in the coming days.

Patowary said that every department, especially Agriculture, Veterinary and Industry, will also formulate their plans as damage control measures.

"In the Industry department, we are preparing a note about the revival plan for the post-lockdown era. Moreover, to implement the revival plans, the Transport de-

partment will provide all kinds of support to every department," Patowary said.

It may be noted here that as a measure to collect revenue amid the lockdown period, the government had allowed operation of wine shops with some precautionary measures across the State. Later, the order was withdrawn following an instruction from the Central government.

The State government also hiked the prices of fuels as a measure to collect extra revenue at a time while the prices of crude oil dipped to a record level in the global oil market.

Regarding relaxation of lockdown, Patowary said a further decision will be announced after the scheduled video conference of the Prime Minister with all the Chief Ministers on Monday.

He also made it clear that to curb the spread of coronavirus, the department will never allow plying of Ola and Uber taxis at any condition in the city.

On the other hand, he stated that the validity of transport permits, driving licences, registration certificates, etc., which will expire during this lockdown period, has been extended till June 30, 2020.

## Illicit liquor dens raided

CORRESPONDENT

JORABAT, April 26: A section of people here along with the Assam Excise department launched a crackdown on illicit country-made liquor dens that are thriving in and around the area. A team of about 30 Excise officials led by Superintendent of Excise (Kamrup Metro) Debajit Nath, today conducted a raid in Jorabat area, where a few liquor dens were operating. A large number of country-made liquor bottles were destroyed during the raid.

## Youth flees from hospital

CITY CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI, April 26: A youth who had come to the city from Manipur on Saturday fled from the Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital (MMCH) after a doctor advised him to stay quarantined for 14 days at the hospital. A source in the police said that the youth, named Bethel, had come from Manipur to meet his sister who stays in a rented room in the city. But, when the owner of the house restrained him to enter the premises without the consultation of a doctor, he decided to visit the hospital. However, a doctor in the hospital said the youth did not show any symptoms of COVID-19. The source said search is on to trace the youth.

## Maligaon school looted

CITY CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI, April 26: Miscreants broke into Maligaon Bengali ME School here on Saturday night and stole fans, water pump machine and several other items of the school. A police source in the Jalukbari Police Station said a case has been registered in this regard. Several theft cases were reported in the area in the last seven days. Another incident of theft was reported from the Gotanagar area of Maligaon last night.

## Relief distribution

GUWAHATI, April 26: The Central Guwahati Development Committee has taken an initiative to distribute food packets among a section of the needy people, especially the elderly and children, who had come to the city from Darbhanga district in Bihar before the lockdown. The members of the committee also provided relief to a section of people who had come to the city from Tripura, stated a press release.

## Online classes

GUWAHATI, April 26: For the benefit of students during the lockdown period, Dispur College has taken an initiative to upload class notes, study materials, class videos by faculties, e-books, etc., on the online platform. The Principal of the college has requested the faculties of Arts and Commerce to upload class notes and videos as per syllabus for HS and TDC students. Students can log on to <http://dispurcollege.ac.in/online/index.php> to find their required contents, stated a press release issued here today.

## Police, security personnel doing unenviable job amidst lockdown

ABINASH KALITA

GUWAHATI, April 26: As civilians are in the safety of their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the police and security personnel are on their feet round the clock ensuring law and order, facing all kinds of hardships even while being exposed to the danger of being infected by the virus.

At many checkpoints of the city, the police and security personnel, including SSB personnel, have been manned for more than 10 hours a day, with only a cup of tea and snacks in between, as the eateries and tea stalls have remained closed.

Ajay Malakar, an SSB personnel who has been deployed at the check point at Bhetapara Chariali, said he has been doing his duty with just tea and snacks during the lockdown.

"While on duty, we take milk tea with some biscuits. Most of the time, it is provided by the

NGOs and local people. And sometimes, police personnel also provide us with snacks and tea," he said, adding that at times they too have offered their meal to stranded or needy people.

He said that during the initial days of the lockdown, it was difficult for them to make people understand, but now the situation is much better.

"Despite being repeatedly asked to stay indoors to stop the spread of COVID-19, a few people were seen venturing out with no particular reason. It was much difficult to control the large number of labourers or daily wage earners as well, as they ventured out only to know when the lockdown would be lifted, as they do not possess any kind of news tracking device,"

he said. Due to the lockdown, daily wage workers have lost their sources of livelihood.

"To control such situation, sometimes we have to adopt the strictest measures. We have also caged the violators at times," he added.

As many as 18 security personnel, including SSB, police and civil defence personnel, are deployed

at Bhetapara Chariali. Their duty has been divided into three shifts.

Jakir Ali, a constable at Hatigaon Chariali, said he has had to do double-shift duty as well at times.

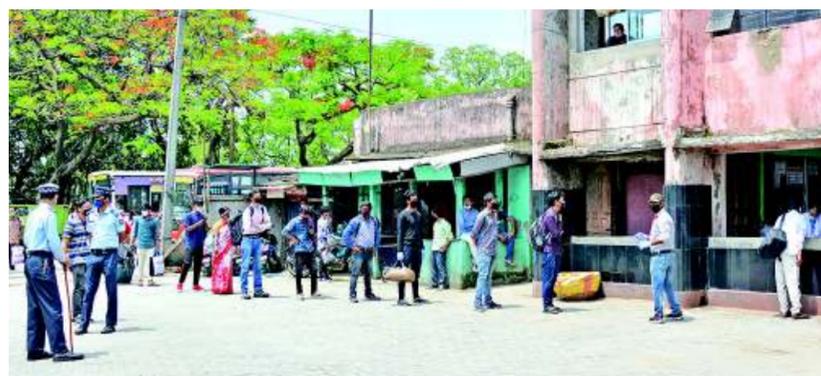
"We have been working on all these days having only tea and biscuits. Usually, I have my meal before coming to duty," he said. "But, it is much difficult in the evening shift as I don't have any vehicle to go back to my rented room at Dispur. I have to ask passersby for a lift. Not long after reaching my room, I have to start cooking again," he added.

Meanwhile, Ranjit Baruah, founder director of Aromica Tea, said he has been providing tea free of cost to the police personnel for the last 15 days or so.

"We have been providing black tea and milk tea to around 1,500 cops on duty in different parts of the city. The tea is being provided in disposable flasks so that the tea remains hot and fresh," Baruah added.



A street vendor selling fruits in Guwahati on Sunday. – UB Photos



## Blocking cremation to attract three-year jail term in TN

CHENNAI, April 26: Blocking the 'dignified' burial or cremation of people, who had died of a notified disease in Tamil Nadu will now attract a three year prison term, according to an ordinance promulgated by the state government.

The move comes in the wake of public protests against the burial of two doctors who died of COVID-19 in the city recently, with one of them turning violent where agitators even attacked health workers and civic body staff.

According to the ordinance, blocking or attempting to block the "dignified burial or cremation of those who had died of a notified disease" has been

made a criminal offence, an official release here said.

Under section 74 of the Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939, those indulging in such acts will have to face a minimum jail term of one year while the maximum award will be three years, the release added.

The offence will also carry a fine, it said but did not specify.

In two separate incidents recently, two doctors died of coronavirus in the city but locals protested their burial on grounds of fears of spread of the pandemic.

On both occasions, the mortal remains were buried elsewhere after officials could not

perform the formalities in the originally selected localities.

Last week, an orthopaedic surgeon had to bury his associate, a neurosurgeon who died of COVID-19, in the middle of the night using bare hands and a shovel at a crematorium with the help of two hospital ward boys after the undertakers fled when a mob protesting the interment, attacked and chased them away.

Over two dozen people have been arrested in connection with the incident, even as the City Police had warned of invoking the stringent Goondas Act against those preventing burial or victims of COVID-19. - PTI



Vegetable vendors travel in a crowded boat across the River Ganga, during the nationwide lockdown, in Patna on Sunday. - PTI

## Minorities panel wants release of Jamaat members after quarantine

NEW DELHI, April 26: The Delhi Minorities Commission has asked the Delhi Health Minister to allow the Tablighi Jamaat members to go free after their completion of the mandated quarantine period.

The Delhi Minorities Commission has written to Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain saying that the people brought to quarantine camps from the Markaz in Hazrat Nizamuddin will complete 28 days on Monday which is twice the mandatory period for COVID-19 suspects' quarantine as per WHO guidelines.

This means that these people are being unnecessarily kept in detention when 14 days is the longest period for the appearance of coronavirus symptoms in an infected person. People in other quarantine centres have been allowed to go home after 14 days if they tested negative, said the letter written by Zafrul Islam Khan, Chairman of the commission.

"It will be in the fitness of things that all such people who have spent 28 days in these camps and did not test positive should be allowed to go home or at least allowed to live somewhere else in Delhi while the lockdown continues," added Khan.

The Commission in its letter stated that there are thousands of inmates at present in COVID-19 quarantine camps across Delhi like Sultanpuri, Wazirabad, Narela and Dwarka etc. Supply of food and medical care is not satisfactory in these camps. The quarantined people include elderly as well as those with health issues like diabetes and heart problems.

Two of them, who were diabetic, died in recent days in Sultanpuri camp due to inadequate medical care and failure to supply medicines and food in time, he said. - IANS

## RSS chief's 'swadeshi' call to combat COVID-19

### Donation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 26: A Kerala Police team was pleasantly surprised when it reached the house of a centenarian freedom fighter near here to check on him and found him waiting for them with a donation for the struggle against coronavirus.

A police team went to the house of 102-year-old Parameswaran Nair, who was waiting for them - with a cheque. "We were surprised when he gave us a cheque of Rs 5,000 and said it was to be given to the CM Covid Relief Fund," SI Anil Kumar told IANS.

### India's ...

(Contd from page 1)

With the country under a lockdown since March 24 midnight, he said India's people-driven battle against the pandemic would be discussed when the world discusses the crisis later.

"India's fight against the coronavirus is people-driven in the truest sense of the term. Along with people, the government and administration are fighting it as well... This is the only way we can win over the virus," he said.

Citing a Sanskrit *shloka*, he said, "Fire, debt and illness, if taken lightly, grow again at the first opportunity, assuming dangerous proportions, so it is important to treat them completely. Therefore, in overenthusiasm, there should be no negligence. We will always have to remain cautious." - PTI

NEW DELHI, April 26: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday urged the people to go 'Swadeshi' to tackle the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that has claimed over 820 lives in India so far.

In an online address, Bhagwat also spoke on the importance of staying at home, following the lockdown rules and social distancing norms to combat the coronavirus. "Stay at home and pray to God," he said.

Bhagwat, while addressing the proposed intellectual class online by the Nagpur metropolis of RSS, said that the crisis of corona in the country is increasing. "People can win the war by staying at home. Also, we should follow lockdown norms and social distancing". He said the last few days of lockdown enabled him to spend time at home.

Reacting to the killing of two saints in Maharashtra's Palghar, Bhagwat urged everyone to control "anger". "The sages did not harm anyone," he said.

He said, "We have to follow the lockdown. We have to get out of this crisis. Our crisis has to be made an opportunity. Swadeshi has to be adopted". Mohan Bhagwat reiterated

the point of being self-reliant. "Air and water have become cleaner due to the lockdown," he said. "We have to consider how we can generate employment again after the end of lockdown." "The entire world is battling coronavirus. We will have to win this battle by staying at home," he said.

"This society is ours... the country is ours, that's why we are working. It is a new disease, so not everything is known. So work with caution. Do not get tired, you will have to keep trying. Please follow the government's instructions," Bhagwat said. "We do not distinguish between humans. Our effort is to help the needy," he added. The RSS chief said the Sangh has postponed all programmes till June 30.

Saying that there is a need to learn from the current crisis, Bhagwat said "we will have to adopt Swadeshi behaviour. The society as well as the country should adopt Swadeshi so that no one needs to depend on foreign products." "The coronavirus-triggered crisis can be treated as an opportunity to shape up a new India. Emphasis will have to be given on making quality indigenous products," he said. - IANS

## 11 new COVID-19 cases detected in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 26: Three health workers, including a woman doctor, were among the 11 people detected with COVID-19 in Kerala on Sunday, taking the total positive cases to 468 as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan called for ramping up of testing, including those who are asymptomatic and in quarantine.

The 41-year-old doctor, working at a Primary Health Centre at Elapara in the high range Idukki district, who did not exhibit any symptoms, is suspected to have been infected from the mother of a coronavirus patient who had come to her clinic.

While one person has returned to the state from Germany via Spain- Abu Dhabi, three had come from neighbouring states and seven are cases of local transmission, Health Minister KK Shailaja said in a press release.

Five cases were reported from Kottayam district, one person had come from outside the state and the remaining, including two health workers had been infected through contact, the minister added.

With samples of four people-one each from the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram, Kannur and Kasaragod, returning negative on Sunday, 342 have so far been cured of the infection.

The Chief Minister directed all Collectors, medical officers and police chiefs of all 14 districts to ramp up COVID-19 testing and evaluate the preventive measures being conducted across the state.

At least 20,127 people are under observation in various parts of the state, of whom 462 are in isolation wards of hospitals, including 99 admitted on Sunday.

The samples of 22,954 with symptoms have been sent for

testing and 21,997 samples are negative.

Kannur has the maximum number of positive cases 51, followed by Kasaragod 14.

With the graph of positive cases rising, Vijayan stressed the need to conduct more coronavirus tests and said asymptomatic persons should also be tested.

"Those with no symptoms should also be tested and government would make available necessary test kits. All those in quarantine should also be tested," Vijayan said addressing officials through video conference.

There will be no relaxation in the hotspots, he added.

Many people who have been stranded in various places outside the state have expressed their desire to return. But while taking a decision, a practical approach is needed, a press release quoting Vijayan said.

As new cases were emerg-

ing from border states, Vijayan emphasised the need to make surveillance stringent.

With regard to the plea of several stranded Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), especially from the Gulf region, including those who had gone on visit visas, pregnant women and children and the elderly to return, Vijayan said airports should have testing facilities and quarantine provisions should also be close to the four airports.

Health Minister Shailaja, Revenue minister K Chandrasekharan, Chief Secretary Tom Jose and Additional Chief Secretary Vishwas Mehta were among those who participated in the meeting here.

Meanwhile, the Non Resident Keralite Affairs (NOR-KA) Department on Sunday begun online registration of stranded Keralites in various countries, who are wanting to return to the state. - PTI

## 8 more ....

(Contd from page 1)

Till date, 7,616 sample tests have been conducted in the State. While 35 were positive, the results of 209 are awaited. The rest were negative.

The minister informed that random tests began at three locations of Dhubri district today.

"The samples are being collected scientifically, touching a cross-section of people. By tomorrow evening, we will know if there is any instance of community transmission," he said.

Sarma claimed that the State has so far been "successful" in containing the spread of the virus as all the positive cases were detected among people who were al-

ready kept in quarantine. "Our containment strategy worked, and we were able to keep the susceptible people in quarantine," he asserted.

The minister further informed that the State Government was keeping a close watch on the Assam-Bengal border so that there is no inter-state movement.

"Besides the two main roads connecting both the states, there are also eight-nine roads through villages. We are keeping a close watch on these roads as well," he said.

On the rapid test kits, Sarma said the government would follow the ICMR directions and as of now the State is continuing to use them at the government hospitals.

## Despite lockdown ...

(Contd from page 1)

"The ASTC has also been extending support to manage the situation arising from the pandemic in the State by providing 211 buses which are now operating in coordination with the district administrations, hospitals, police and municipal bodies. Out of these 211 buses, 39 are operating with the health department facilitating the movement of health officials," Patowary said.

## Govt confident of ...

(Contd from page 1)

Replying to a question, Sonowal admitted that repairing and construction of embankments were delayed because of the lockdown and with the rainy season approaching, the possibility of the State facing floods and erosion cannot be ruled out. He said that the Water Resources Department has been instructed to start work on a war footing by maintaining social distance and "we hope to complete repairing of the embankments before the floods."

The Chief Minister admitted that the financial health of the State is a major cause of concern as the revenue generation has come down drastically. Though the Cen-

tre has promised to extend help to the State, the resources of the Central Government are also shrinking. To deal with the problem, the State Government will have to reduce expenditure and stress will have to be given only on the priority sectors, he added. He expressed the view that the lockdown may have to be eased in the areas demarcated as green zones to resume economic activities, but no such decision has yet been taken.

On the battle against COVID-19, the Chief Minister admitted that it was a Herculean task, but all the ministers, MLAs, MPs, elected representatives of the local bodies, officers and employees of the State Government are working as a team in this hour of crisis. Along with the Health Department, the other departments concerned including Police, Food and Civil Supplies, Power, Transport, etc., are working round the clock in the fight against coronavirus. As there have been allegations of irregularities in distribution of essential items, he also warned that strong action would be taken against anyone found to be indulging in corruption at this critical period.

The Chief Minister also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for taking bold steps for the protection of the lives of 1.3 billion Indian citizens and leading the war against COVID-19 from the front.

circumstances. As examples, Dr Prakash Bhuyan, vice president of clinical development at Inovio Pharmaceuticals, is directly involved in developing a COVID-19 vaccine on DNA medicine platform. Dr Bhuyan is an infectious disease specialist and an immunologist. Dr Bharati Deka from Guwahati, who is specialised in infectious disease, is rendering her services at various hospitals in New Jersey. Dr Aswini Choudhury of New York with roots in Chhaygaon, Assam has been busy in telemedicine isolating COVID-19 patients.

Many other doctors have given their professional services in various hospitals across the country in the midst of this dangerous COVID-19 environment. Dr Sakuntala Chowdhury, a statistician, is working as a data scientist with the

COVID-19 US National Database working on artificial intelligence models for risk mitigation. Her daughter Namrata (Gargee), a physician from the NY Presbyterian Hospital, is performing her risky duty to respond to calls from emergency rooms of New York City hospitals. Niren Choudhury of New Jersey has been active in helping people in need of food. Probal Tahbaldar is calling senior Assamese citizens around New Jersey for their grocery needs and volunteering to deliver grocery at their doorstep. My wife, Pronoti Tahbaldar is sewing sorely needed masks for the community.

The younger generation is also equally active. For example, Anuj Dutta, son of Satyajit and Chayanika Dutta of New Jersey, is rendering his service in response to call for help

in COVID-19 environment. In brief, a spirit of giving and helping is shining through among the entire community.

In the midst of the calamitous situation, the Assamese people here are keeping reasonably high spirits. Every year, this is the jolliest time to enjoy the beautiful spring weather and celebrate Rongali Bihu with great excitement and fervour. Although the ongoing pandemic has dampened the spirit to some extent, the enthusiasm has sustained. Many organisers like Shyam Deb Choudhury and Niraj Barbara have painstakingly organised the Bihu celebration on DISCO video conference platform with songs and dances and display of Assamese Bihu goodies like those spectacular ones of Tripiti Bora and others.

## Conditional ...

(Contd from page 1)

"For the first phase, priority was to send the passengers between two nearest districts. Accordingly, ASTC sent SMS tickets to around 5,000 people, containing bus details, boarding point, serial number, origin and destination, time and date of journey, etc.," Patowary said.

In Guwahati, Paltan Bazar, Machkhowa, Adabari and ISBT, Betkuchi have been fixed as the designated boarding points. For other districts, ASTC-headquartered bus stations will be the boarding points.

**SOCIETY FOR TRIPURA MEDICAL COLLEGE &**

**Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Memorial Teaching Hospital**  
(Registered under Societies Registration Act. 1860 having Registration No. 5770 of 2009)  
Hapania, Agartala-799014, West Tripura  
Telefax : 0381-237-3143/237-6657/237-4144,  
Website : [www.tmc.nic.in](http://www.tmc.nic.in)  
Email : [tmc.agt@gmail.com](mailto:tmc.agt@gmail.com)

No. F.19(PR-6)/SFTMC/2015 Dated : 25.04.2020

**RECRUITMENT NOTIFICATION**

The Society invites applications from the eligible candidates for recruitment to the post of **Principal** of TMC & Dr. BRAM Teaching Hospital. Last date of submission of applications is 30th May, 2020 at 3.00 p.m. For details please visit website of the Society - [www.tmc.nic.in/25042020.pdf](http://www.tmc.nic.in/25042020.pdf).

ICA/D/46/20

No. DME/MolecularLab/232/2019/5152

**INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)**

**GLOBAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING**

Re-e-Tenders are invited online through e-procurement system i.e. through website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) from the intending Manufacturer/Accredited Dealers for Setting up of Molecular Oncology Laboratory at State Cancer Institute, GMC, Guwahati on turnkey basis under the Health & F.W. Department, Govt of Assam.

The current tendered is 3rd time tender and the earlier tenders could not be finalized due to less participation now is being tendered again. Hence, modifications made in the earlier tenders will be part of the current tender.

The e-Tender is a Two-Bid System, to be submitted with affixed Court Fee Stamp Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight point two five paise) only (for local bidders) or IPO of Rs. 10/- (Rupees Ten) only (in case of bidders from outside of the State of Assam) in favour of "Director of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

**Important dates of the e-Tender**

Sl.No.	Scheduled	Start Date	Start Time	End Date	End Time
1.	e- Tender Publishing	27-04 -2020	11.00 AM	-	
2.	e- Tender Download	28-04-2020	11.00 AM	22-05 -2020	12.00 Noon
3.	Pre-Bid meeting	11-05-2020	11.30 AM	Office of the Director of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Ghy-22.	
4.	Bid Submission	12-05-2020	12.00 Noon	22-05 -2020	12.00 Noon
5.	Bid Opening	22-05-2020	03.00 PM		

**1. Brief Schedule**

Description (Name of the Items)	Bid Security (E.M.D.)	Delivery/ Installation schedule/ Completion period	Tender fees in Rs.	Eligibility
Setting up of Molecular Oncology Laboratory at State Cancer Institute, GMC, Guwahati on turnkey basis.	Rs. 3.00 Lakhs	45 days	Rs.5,000/-	Manufacturer/ accredited Dealer

The detailed information of Bidding documents are available online through e-procurement system i.e. through website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) only. The bidders would be required to register in the website for submission of the bids. The bidders are required to have Digital Signature (DSC) from any of the Certifying Authorities. Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-procurement may obtain the same by registering in the [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in). The requirements to register with the e-procurement portal are available on the website indicated above. The tender fees is non refundable and payable in favour of the "Director of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022, at SBI-Dispur (Guwahati) Branch.

**Sd/- Director of Medical Education, Assam**  
Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-22.

Jananasoyog/C/79/20

## Assamese Americans contributing ...

(Contd from page 1)

From the front door, we carry it to the garage and again wait two days before bringing into the kitchen after washing with baking soda and hot water.

On the healthcare front, in the early phase of emergence of the virus, the healthcare system in the city was strained to the extreme. Hospitals were overwhelmed. A US Navy Hospital Ship was called in to help accommodate overflow of patients. The ship was berthed on a pier on the Hudson river on west side of Manhattan. There was a shortage of masks, ventilators, PPE, etc.

It was a daunting task for the healthcare workers to serve. But they did this with utmost dedication. Eventually, relief came in terms of supply surge. There came a time when there



## WEATHER NORTHEAST

**Forecast for North Eastern States:** Rain/thundershowers very likely to occur at a few places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

**Warning:** Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty wind with speed (30-40) kmph is very likely to occur at isolated places over Assam and Meghalaya. Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty wind with speed (40-50) kmph is likely to occur at isolated places over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Heavy rain is very likely to occur at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.

### Temperatures:

	Max (°C)	Min (°C)
Dibrugarh	31.4	18.2
Tezpur	30.1	19.6
Silchar	32.4	21.0
Dhubri	27.7	21.0
Jorhat	30.5	17.6
N Lakhimpur	32.1	18.8
Shillong	19.1	N/A
Cherrapunjee	21.7	13.5
Aizawl	23.9	14.9
Kohima	21.4	11.8
Pasighat	31.8	19.2
Itanagar	32.5	17.5

# Meghalaya allows conditional inter-state movement from Assam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

SHILLONG, April 26: Hundreds of vehicles from Barak valley in Assam passed through Meghalaya on Sunday after the governments of both states agreed to allow "conditional" inter-state movement.

Since Sunday morning, there was a long queue of buses and private vehicles at Ratacherra, East Jaintia Hills check point, to enter Meghalaya and move on to other districts of Assam. Only vehicles which had passes from the Assam government to embark on this journey were allowed to pass through.

The decision to open the border was taken after the Assam government on Friday announced that it would allow conditional inter-district movement of people from Saturday to Monday.

However, some districts in Barak valley can only connect with other districts of Assam via roads passing through Meghalaya. This necessitated coordination between the two state governments.

Sources said Meghalaya Chief Secretary MS Rao received a request to assist the stranded people from Barak valley to move through Meghalaya.

"There were around 600-700 buses and private vehicles at the Ratacherra check-gate. We started to allow these vehicles to pass through, based on the list we received," East Jaintia Hills Deputy Commissioner Fredrick M Doph informed *The Assam Tribune*.

Officials said the check gate is over 100 km from district headquarters Khliehriat and officials received the list of vehicles on WhatsApp and email.

Since there is also a need to have hard copies of the list of permitted vehicles, two shifts of officials are moving in and out of the district headquarters, as there are minimum facilities at the check-gate. "We have a number of officials working to facilitate this movement. By 6 pm on Sunday, out of the long queue of vehicles, we have just 20 small vehicles and six buses at the check-gate waiting to enter the state. These vehicles would be allowed to move through the night," Doph said. "We will continue to allow the movement of these vehicles for three days from Sunday," he added.

Apart from this conditional inter-state movement, vehicles carrying essential commodities have been moving through Meghalaya to reach different districts of Assam, Tripura and Mizoram, officials added.

# Wire fence along Myanmar border in Churachandpur completed



CORRESPONDENT

IMPHAL, April 26: As part of the government's efforts to prevent trans-border movement of people against the backdrop of the COVID-19 outbreak, barb wire fencing covering about 220 metres along the Indo-Myanmar border in Churachandpur district has been completed, official sources said on Sunday.

The fence was erected at Pakmual area under Singngat subdivision in the hill district, the source said.

One company of the India Reserve Battalion (IRB) and

police personnel from Behang Police Station are patrolling the villages to check cross-border movement from Myanmar, the district information officer said.

**Committee mulls mechanism to bring back stranded citizens:** Meanwhile, the newly constituted state consultative committee for COVID-19 is likely to work out a mechanism to bring back stranded citizens including students from outside the state, according to another official source in Imphal. A meeting of the committee with Chief Minister

N Biren Singh in the chair was held on Friday.

Appreciating the measures taken up by the state government for the prevention and containment of COVID-19, the meeting noted that thousands of people from Manipur are stranded outside the state due to the lockdown, and agreed that a mechanism for bringing them back to Manipur needs to be worked out, the source said.

Regarding people who do not need institutional quarantine, the meeting felt that community quarantine centres may be opened in various assembly constituencies to quarantine students and other people stranded outside after they return to the state.

The Health department is expected to assist the MLAs and local clubs in identifying the various locations and their capacities as per guidelines, the source said.

Discussing the importance of scaling up of COVID-19 testing, the meeting also felt the need to have in place clear-cut protocol for screening of persons returning to the state.

On April 23, a 21-member state consultative committee for COVID-19 was constituted to fight the dreaded virus. Two COVID-19 cases, which were reported on March 24 and April 2 have been discharged from the JNIMS and RIMS hospitals in Imphal on April 12 and April 21, respectively.

# Tripura to chalk out post-lockdown education plan

CORRESPONDENT

AGARTALA, April 26: Tripura Education Minister Ratan Lal Nath has convened a meeting on Monday to discuss issues related to school education triggered by the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

The education system in the State has suffered due to the lockdown. In most states, students have been promoted to the next class without exams and Tripura also did the same.

The new academic session has already begun but classes could not be held yet owing to the ongoing lockdown.

The Education Department has introduced online classes besides teaching through cable news channels and also set up a call centre where teachers take questions from students and answer their queries during appointed hours.

Another major concern is that certain examinations of the State board and the Central board remained unfinished.

In Tripura, though the Madhyamik examination has concluded, the higher secondary examination could not be completed.

The evaluation of answer scripts commenced from April 24 but no decision has been taken on unfinished examinations at the higher secondary level. Besides, the dates for joint entrance examinations are yet to be finalised and this will cast a shadow on the admission of students to medical and engineering colleges.

All these have created a complicated situation. Sources said the Education Minister will discuss all these issues with the Education Secretary and directors of higher, secondary and elementary education departments. A final decision is likely to be taken during Monday's meeting.

The meeting will be followed by a national-level meeting convened by Union Minister for Human Resource Development Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank on Tuesday.

The national-level meeting will be held through video-conferencing and all issues related to education, including postponement of exams, promotion to higher classes and joint entrance examination, will be deliberated, official sources said.

# 5,546 people from Mizoram stranded outside State

CORRESPONDENT

AIZAWL, April 26: As many as 5,546 people from Mizoram are stranded in different States and Union Territories since the nationwide lockdown was imposed. It was stated by the State's Task Group on Migrant Workers and Stranded Travellers.

The Mizoram Government had launched a web portal for the stranded people and so far 5,546 have registered on the portal. Among the stranded people, 3,194 are workers, followed by 2,103 students and 249 patients who had gone for treatment outside the State. The highest number of stranded people is in Maharashtra, which stands at 863.

# Nagaland's Mon dist launches app to track COVID-19 status

CORRESPONDENT

DIMAPUR, April 26: In another first in Nagaland, the Mon district administration has launched a mobile app to monitor the current, previous and future movement of people under observation for COVID-19.

Deputy Commissioner Thavaseelan K on Saturday said that besides monitoring the movement of people under observation for COVID-19, the app will also track user locations and profiles, information on vital signs, where people last travelled and how they were progressing daily.

The district administration thanked Nagaland principal secretary R Ramakrishnan for helping it to collaborate with Kishore Reddy of Sita Corp, US, for developing and deploying the app.

He said the NL-SOJO COVID Exposure Tracking is being adopted around the world as a quick and simple way for local government and health authorities to keep track of the health status and exposure risk within their communities.

Thavaseelan said the authorities are alerted when users go outside the defined boundaries, during quarantine or lockdown – a tactic that has successfully limited the spread of COVID-19.

To use the app, people simply fill out a profile, with travel history, medical symptoms, vital signs, etc. They get instant alerts from the authorities, maps of test centres and hospitals, educational COVID-19 resources from official sources, and if enabled, the view of the last visited locations of infected individuals, he said.

He said the communication includes receiving alerts about users' locations for compliance with local safety guidelines, sending mass messages, email and SMS emergency calls.

The app is useful for monitoring individuals in quarantine or lockdown, medical and emergency personnel providing care, employees in essential, retail, grocery stores and other high-exposure occupations, recent travellers by air, rail, bus, etc., and voluntary citizen opt-in.

Thavaseelan said the app is available on Google Play Store. It can be downloaded and used directly from their smartphones. It will be available on the Apple iOS App store shortly.

Mon district along the Indo-Myanmar border in Nagaland is way ahead of other districts in the state. The district administration had put in place arrangements to combat the virus much before other districts. The Mon District COVID-19 War Room was set up on April 10 at the District Rural Development Agency on April 10 whereas Chief Secretary Temjen Toy directed all Deputy Commissioners to set up District COVID-19 War Rooms on April 21.

# Tripura orders probe into purchase of COVID-19 kits

CORRESPONDENT

AGARTALA, April 26: Tripura Chief Minister Biplob Kumar Deb has ordered a probe into the allegations of corruption in procurement of COVID-19 test kits and sanitizers.

Health and Family Welfare Secretary Dr Debasish Basu and Mission Director of National Health Mission (NHM) Aditi Majumder have been removed from their respective posts to ensure an impartial inquiry.

A senior official said the government has taken a serious note of the allegations of malpractices in procurement of COVID-19 kits and sanitizers.

"The Chief Minister has ordered a probe into the allegations and removed the officers against whom the allegations were levelled. Further steps will be taken once the government receives the inquiry report," he said.

Nath said Secretary of Industries and Commerce Kiran Gite and Finance Secretary Tanushree Debbarma were asked to conduct the probe and submit the report at the earliest.

Additional Chief Secretary SK Rakesh has been posted as the Secretary of Health & Family Welfare Department while S Shivsankar Jaiswal will take over as the Mission Director of NHM.

# Pharmacies to keep records of people buying medicines for fever, cough

CORRESPONDENT

DIMAPUR, April 26: The Nagaland Government on Sunday directed pharmacies to collect information of persons buying medicines for fever and cough in a bid to identify people possibly suffering from COVID-19.

The government said the information should be collected in a prescribed format and sent to the WhatsApp numbers of the respective districts.

It said this would entail a bit more work on the part of the pharmacies. "However, in this extra ordinary times, we need to upscale our surveillance and thus, cooperation is sought from all the retail pharmacies," the order said.

The State Government also constituted an advisory committee on COVID-19 to formulate long-term strategies to deal with the pandemic.

This decision was taken by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) at a meeting convened in Kohima on Saturday to review the preparedness and mitigation measures being undertaken by the State Government against the virus.

The advisory committee comprised experts from different fields like medicine, supply chain, disaster management, emergency response, etc. It would advise the State Government on incremental comprehensive measures for containment of COVID-19.

The committee would also seek advice of international experts as and when the need arises.

The SDMA accorded in-principle approval to prepare a blueprint for COVID-19 response and control programme for incremental containment.

The meeting reviewed the preparedness and mitigation measures taken by the State Government such as containment/contingency plan, procurement of medical equipment/essential goods, setting up of BSL-lab, distribution of rice and other relief materials in all districts, financial assistance to the stranded students, working people and patients, activation of surveillance team, setting up of war room and State-level control room, setting up of control rooms in all districts and sealing of international border along Myanmar and inter-State border.



Lok Sabha MP from Tripura West Pratima Bhoomik distributing homemade masks to storm-hit villagers at Jampajjala in Sepahijala district on Sunday. – Photo: Correspondent

# Former Arunachal MLA passes away

CORRESPONDENT

ITANAGAR, April 26: Former Arunachal Pradesh MLA Nido Techu breathed his last at his hometown Tamen in Kamle district on Saturday. He was 75.

Techu was the first legislator to represent the Raga Assembly constituency. He is survived by three daughters and five sons.

Born on February 2, 1945 in Lalin (Nido) village, he served as a government servant for nine years before starting his political career as a Member of Pradesh Council in 1972. Late Techu

went on to become the first MLA from Raga in 1978. He held key posts in the government under the first Chief Minister PK Thungon, including Chairman of the Estimate Committee.

Late Techu was known for his simplicity. Apart from being very active in social service, he is revered by the people for his dedication to uplift the downtrodden sections of the society.

His eldest son Nido Pavitra was also elected twice from Raga in 2004 and 2009.

Governor Brig (Retd) Dr BD Mishra and Chief Minister Pema Khandu have condoled his sudden demise.

The Governor said that in his death, the State has lost a true pioneer of democratic progress in Arunachal Pradesh. "I join the people of Arunachal Pradesh to pray to the Almighty God for grant of eternal peace for the departed soul and fortitude for the bereaved family to bear the irreparable loss," the Governor said in his condolence message.

"In his demise, our State has lost a first generation leader who led from the front. His work for the downtrodden and needy will always be remembered," Khandu said.

May his soul rest in peace in heavenly abode, the Chief Minister added.

# Amazon-origin fish in Manipur's waters sparks concern

SOBHAPATI SAMOM

IMPHAL, April 26: An Amazon sailfin catfish, a fish from the Amazon river basin in South America, which was recently detected in the aquatic ecosystem of Manipur, has raised serious concerns in the state about invasion by a foreign species.

The fish – also known as sucker mouth catfish – was caught by a fisherman on April 22 from the Waishel canal in Bishnupur district where the largest freshwater lake in the North East is located. This one-foot-long fish is said to be a prolific breeder and fast spreading species. The algae-eating fish can grow up to 49 cm and weigh up to 310 gm.

According to fish experts here, the species was reported from the Ganga river at Patna some years ago. It was also reported from the Brahmaputra in

lower Assam, but not from any other Northeastern state.

Expressing concern over the development, Senior Scientist (Fishery) Dr Ch Basudha Devi of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), North East Region, Manipur centre, said that detection of such species from water bodies in the state was not a good sign because their presence may demolish the aquatic diversity of the region.

Associate Professor Yumnam Lokeshwor of the Department of Zoology, Assam Don Bosco University, said that as there is no native predator to control them, the Amazon species will start expanding and occupy the entire habitat and start competing with Manipur's native species which are already low in number.

Manipur's water bodies are increasingly becoming populated by alien fish



species. Some of them have been let out for commercial purposes by the authorities, and some get released accidentally due to lack of necessary regulations.

Lokeshwor said more than a dozen al-

ien fish species, including seven authorised exotic food fishes, two authorised larvicidal fishes, three unauthorised exotic food fishes and five other freshwater ornamental fishes, have been found in the

state's water bodies, and with the increase in their numbers, some species have emerged as a threat to native species.

In the recent past, the IUCN had listed seven native fishes of Manipur as endangered freshwater species. Even the state fish Pengba has vanished from the wild and is now only bred in farm ponds.

"The state fishery authorities must launch a new policy to monitor the introduction of new species, including exotic aquarium species, as this hobby is increasing day by day," Lokeshwor said. ICAR scientist Basudha Devi also echoed a similar feeling.

Acknowledging the issue, Fisheries department Director N Gojendro said the department was taking up the matter with higher authorities to formulate a comprehensive guideline for import, culture and marketing of fishes in the state.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Jail inmate dies at JMCH

JORHAT, April 26: Nimai Doley *alias* Limai, who was serving a life sentence at Central Jail, Jorhat, died at JMCH on late Friday night after he was brought to the medical college by the jail staff following complaint of sickness. It may be mentioned here that Doley was one of the 11 convicts awarded life imprisonment by Additional Sessions Judge Court (Jorhat), on March 13 this year after being found guilty in the murder of three persons of a family of Majuli, on suspicion of practising witchcraft on August 28, 2012. Another convict was awarded death penalty in the case. — Staff Correspondent

## Relief materials distributed

UDALGURI, April 26: The Fagun Eco-Tourism Centre of Garobasti of Udalguri district distributed relief materials to the villagers covering six villages yesterday. The organisation in association with the personnel of the 23rd battalion of SSB and youth volunteers of Navajyoti Yuvak distributed the relief materials. On the other hand, the Uttar Udalguri Golondi Chhat Puja Committee also distributed relief materials to 80 poor families of five villages yesterday. — Correspondent

## Rajkumar extends help to poor

PATACHARKUCHI, April 26: Popular actor Rajkumar Talukdar distributed relief materials to the poor people of Bajali recently. "The ongoing lockdown has hit our people to a large extent, and, therefore, we have decided to provide food to the poor people," he said. — ANN Service



A farmer starts ploughing his paddy field after relaxation for agricultural activities at Dergaon Kamargaon on Sunday. — Photo: Sanjoy Kumar Hazarika

## Healthcare service

UDALGURI, April 26: The Common Service Centre (CSC) in association with the Udalguri district unit of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has extended healthcare service to the people living in the remote areas of the district. Assistant Commissioner of Udalguri district, Dimple Baruah informed that nearly 119 CSCs volunteers have been rendering healthcare service to the people. — Correspondent

## World Malaria Day observed

DHUBRI, April 26: World Malaria Day was observed in Dhubri district on Saturday by the district health officials while strictly following the norms laid by the Union Health Ministry. In this connection, a series of programmes were organised at different places, which were supervised by Nazia Khatun, district VBD Consultant. — Correspondent

## Mishap claims one

JORHAT, April 26: A person identified as Diganta Dutta (38) of Gowalgaon on the outskirts of the town here died on the spot after a tanker reportedly hit the scooter, which he was riding at Malow-Ali area of Jorhat bypass on Saturday evening. A police source said that another person pillion riding with Dutta received injuries and has been hospitalised. A team of Jorhat Traffic Police later located the tanker at Kakodonga area of National Highway-37 and apprehended the driver, the source added. — Staff Correspondent

## Over 90 members of nomadic tribe stuck in Dhubri

## CORRESPONDENT

DHUBRI, April 26: 94 members, including children, women and elderly persons of a nomadic group, which calls itself *Baidhyas* are stuck at the Chandakhol area under Dhubri PS due to nationwide lockdown.

This group came to Dhubri district in the first week of January this year and visited various places here and finally when they reached Chandakhol area in the month of March, the lockdown was announced. Since then they have been staying in an open field under tents. The group contains 27 families with more than 20 children and 27 women along with a few elderly persons.

The elderly people informed that they are from various villages under North 24 Parganas district of West



A group of Baidhyas, a nomadic tribe, living in tents in an open field at Chandakhol area in Dhubri. — Photo: Irfan Khondker

Bengal and they came to Assam to do business. These people settle in one place and then roam around the nearby places by selling ornamental stones and showing various magic tricks. "We came to Dhubri district almost four months ago and just when we were about to leave Dhubri,

## Lockdown impact

the lockdown was announced and since then we along with our families are living in this deplorable condition in this open field", said Ranjit Maal, the *sardar* of the group. He informed that they

have already exhausted all their income in this period and now their condition is pathetic. "Most of the women in our group have already sold off their jewellery to the nearby villagers, to get

money for survival" added Maal. He added that the boys have sold off their phones, so that the families could survive.

However, Maal said that they don't want to return to their native place, but only want the State to facilitate them with proper food and

a hygienic place to live in. "Even if we are transported to our home district, the administration there will not take us, as we have been staying so long in a red zone district", Maal said, adding, "it's better to live together here rather than going to quarantine centres in West Bengal".

It was informed that the villagers are helping them and the administration has also provided them rations. They also said that the police team under the supervision of DSP Trinayan Bhuyan is currently providing them rations. "But, the rations we are getting is not enough. We are left with no money, to buy vegetables and other essential commodities", Maal said. They also informed that another group of 50 people are stuck similarly at Balajan in the district.

## Relief distributed among needy families

## ANN SERVICE

SUALKUCHI, April 26: In a bid to provide support to needy families of greater Sualkuchi areas during the ongoing nationwide lockdown, a section of people including some leading citizens and social organisations have been distributing food items in different parts of the aforesaid localities.

Guwahati-based senior citizens including Dr Achyut Baishya, Umesh Das, Satya Ram Kalita, Bishwa Nath Kalita, Amiya Kalita and Munin Kalita distributed grocery items like rice, dal, mustard oil, potato, onion, salt, sugar etc., among 300 families of Lah, Kayatol, Bamundi, Halogaon, Silguri etc.

The Lah Unyan Samiti distributed stuff among 70 needy families while Barlah Ujan Khel distributed essential goods among 100 families of Barlah area.

Some senior citizens including Mahendra Das, Jatin Das, Ramesh Das, Renu Das, Achyut Das, Nagen Deka, Bhanu Das of Ramdia, Nampara, Kahibari distributed essential items among 150 families. The stuff of Halogaon small Hospital under leadership of Dr Jugal Das, in-charge of the hospital distributed essential items among 65 families. Dr Dipak Das, Subdivisional Health officer of Sualkuchi PHE was present in the distribution programme. Gautam Kalita, a businessman of Sualkuchi distributed essential items among 100 families of Adaboi area.

Munindra Lal Baishya (Mamu), of Sualkuchi, a businessman distributed essential items among 425 families of greater Madya Sualkuchi and Pub Sualkuchi GP areas.

**Donation to Arogya Nidhi:** Standing by the Government's efforts to help the poor and needy people during the COVID-19 caused lockdown, the No. 2 Pub Bongshar Cooperative Society, Dadara of Kamrup district donated Rs 1.5 lakh to the Assam Arogya Nidhi.

Narayan Baishya, owner of PNB Brick Industry and a resident of Bongshar on the outskirts of Sualkuchi under Jalukbari LAC donated Rs 1 lakh to the Assam Arogya Nidhi recently through Himanta Biswa Sarma, MLA of the constituency. Karmeswar Pathak, president Bongshar Dou Utsav Samiti and Indra Kanta Baishya, treasurer of the Dou Utsav Samiti contributed Rs 25,000 and Debendra Nath Kakti, a resident of Bongshar donated Rs 10,000 to the Assam Arogya Nidhi.

The Mahapurushiya Dharmalochani Sabha of Sri Sri Sankardev Mandir contributed Rs 25,000 while the all Assam Scheduled Caste Dhubi Jati Loka Kalyan Parishad donated Rs 10,000 to the Assam Arogya Nidhi.

OSP employees of all treasury officials of Assam donated Rs 50,000 to the Assam Arogya Nidhi. Matiram Das, a resident of Srihati and a retired teacher contributed Rs 51,000 to the Assam Arogya Nidhi.

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

JORHAT, April 26: The Jorhat district administration has allowed sale of fish seeds in Jorhat town with the imposition of certain conditions.

An order passed by an Additional District Magistrate of Jorhat on Saturday, stated that arrangements have been made for sale and distribution of fish seeds to community tanks and individuals in Jorhat town through sellers identified by the District Fishery Development Officer, Jorhat.

The order said that vendors will be permitted to collect fish seeds from the allotted place only and will be allowed to sell strictly within the areas notified to them (vendors) from 7 am to 3 pm daily. Only healthy and fresh fish seeds certified by the District Fishery Development Officer, Jorhat, will be allowed for sale and any complaint in this regard will attract penal action, the order mentioned.

The order stated that the vendors will have to

maintain personal hygiene by wearing masks, hand gloves, maintain social distancing and not spit in public places while carrying out their activities.

The order also said that for movement of persons/vehicles in this regard permission has to be obtained from e-pass cell, Jorhat and the entire process of sale and distribution of fish seeds will be monitored by the District Fishery Development Officer, Jorhat and his staff under the control of Jorhat district administration and reports submitted daily.

**Prohibitory order:** The Jorhat District Magistrate by an order passed on Saturday under Section 144 of Cr PC, Section 34 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, has imposed ban on manufacture and sale of gutka, tobacco etc., and has also prohibited spitting at public places in the district.

The order mentioned that any violation of the prohibitions imposed will be dealt strictly under Section 188 of the IPC.

## OBITUARY

## Prof Prasad Goswami

GUWAHATI, April 26: Prof Prasad Goswami, retired Principal of Pandu College passed away on April 21. He was 76.

He leaves behind his wife and a host of relatives and friends.

## Ramani Kanta Ray

## ANN SERVICE

GOSSAIGAON, April 26: Ramani Kanta Ray, retired Senior Inspector of Cooperative Societies, Government of Assam, expired at his Dindinga residence today. He was 85.

He was suffering from various ailments including asthma. He was associated with many social and cultural activities. He was loved and respected by all sections of people. He also served as an auditor of the Gossaigaon subdivision Pensioner Association for three terms. He leaves behind his wife, one son and two daughters along with grandsons and granddaughters and a host of relatives.

## Himanshu Pathak

## ANN SERVICE

GOSSAIGAON, April 26: Himanshu Pathak, retired headmaster of Juroram Pathak Girls' High School, breathed his last at his Gandhinagar house, Barpeta on April 25 due to old-age ailments. After retirement from service he was engaged in spreading knowledge among students. He was also very fond of animals. He leaves behind his wife, two sons, two daughters along with a host of grandchildren. His death was widely mourned.

## Girish Ch Sarma

## ANN SERVICE

PATACHARKUCHI, April 26: Retired Sanskrit teacher of Patacharkuchi Girls' High School, Girish Chandra Sarma breathed his last at the age of 98 yesterday at his Bamunkuchi residence.

Sarma was a pious man and a well known priest of the locality. He also wrote two books namely *Sri Sri Chandi Charit* and *Lakshi Charit*.

He leaves behind two sons out of four, daughters-in-law, two daughters, sons-in-law and a host of well-wishers. His death was widely mourned in the locality.

## Bolicharan Halo

## ANN SERVICE

TIHU, April 26: Bolicharan Halo, a leading social worker and a retired railway employee of Haribhanga village under Tihu subdivision, passed away on April 23 at his residence due to old-age ailments. He was 81. He was an executive member of Haribhanga Gaon Unnayan Committee, Siva Mandir Committee and also a member of Suba Development Committee.

He leaves behind his wife, three sons, a daughter and a host of grandchildren and relatives.

## Children afflicted with skin ailments treated

## CORRESPONDENT

HAILAKANDI, April 26: The Health department of Hailakandi district has started treatment of children afflicted with skin disease at Kadmacherra village in the district.

The department stepped in for treatment of skin diseases and rashes among the children at Kadmacherra area under Algapur revenue circle as per the instructions of the administration.

Consequent upon receiving news that children at Kad-

macherra area are suffering from rashes and skin ailments, the Childline authorities informed the district administration about it, said Deputy Commissioner Keerthi Jalli.

On getting information from Childline, Deputy Commissioner, Keerthi Jalli swung into action and directed the Health authorities here to proceed to the area and to provide necessary medical care and treatment to the children afflicted with rashes and skin ailments.

A team of Mobile Medical Unit rushed to Kadmacherra

and started treating the children with skin infections. It also provided medicines and medicated soaps after clinically examining the affected children.

The Public Health Engineering department also reached the spot and distributed purified water packets in the area. The administration also distributed ration to the local people. DC Keerthi Jalli informed that the children are showing signs of recovery after the treatment and said they are happy that the children are recovering from skin ailments.



Members of Ajmal Foundation distributing food packets among poor people at Raha, on Saturday. — UB Photos

## Himanta visits Kokrajhar, reviews preparedness

## CORRESPONDENT

KOKRAJHAR, April 26: State Health Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday visited Kokrajhar to review the present situation and to check the preparedness against COVID-19 pandemic.

During his visit, Sarma inspected some quarantine centres at Kokrajhar and checked an under-construction quarantine camp for more than 1000 people at SAI Complex Kathalguri in Kokrajhar.

He expressed the hope that the quarantine camps would bolster the State government's fight against COVID-19.

Talking to mediapersons, Dr Sarma said that any person found positive case would be sent strictly to the hospital.

So far nearly 1.5 lakh people stranded out of State were given away financial support from the State Government and it was taking stern

measures to combat the coronavirus in the State, he said.

Several quarantine centres have been set up in different districts of Assam including Kokrajhar, he said. He also informed that till date over 5 lakh people are stranded out of the State due to nationwide lockdown.

Dr Sarma was accompanied by BTC Chief Hagrama Mohillary, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Pijush Hazarika, Tourism Minister Chandan Brahma, Rajya Sabha MP Biswajit Daimary, minister Smt Pramila Rani Brahma among others.

It may be mentioned here that on Friday Dr Sarma had announced that surveillance in Kokrajhar district will be intensified as it shares border with West Bengal.

**NTPC distributes masks, sanitisers:** The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) situated at Salakati in Kokrajhar has also come forward to join the fight against COV-

ID-19 by distributing masks and sanitisers here at Kokrajhar.

Anil Chawla, AGM, HR, NTPC, Bongaigaon distributed masks and sanitisers among the members of Kokrajhar Press Club (KPC) at KPC premises at Kokrajhar.

On the same day, the NTPC also distributed masks and sanitisers among the railway officials of Kokrajhar Railway Station, Salakati Railway Station and Basugaon Railway Station. Senior Manager Tridip Roy Barman (FM) and Senior Manager (HR) DS Kumar of NTPC, Bongaigaon actively took part in the mask and sanitiser distribution programs along with other officials.

Talking to mediapersons Chawla said that NTPC has taken some efforts for community welfare in the district against the current pandemic of COVID-19.

At the same time he also informed that a total of 300 food packets were handed over to the district police au-

thorities of Kokrajhar and the same were distributed at Satyapur village in Gossaigaon subdivision.

It may be mentioned here that as part of various initiatives undertaken for community welfare NTPC Bongaigaon recently distributed food packets to the villagers of nearby villages of the power station namely Henabil, Naljabari and Bhumiki in Kokrajhar district.

A large number of needy families were benefited from the programme. The distribution programme was done in association with district police and civil administration.

It may further be mentioned here that NTPC Bongaigaon is running in full strength and its three units fully operational to cater to 24x7 power supply as part of essential services during the times of lockdown. Necessary measures have also been taken to counter the COVID-19 pandemic which includes cent percent thermal scanning at the entrance gate.

## Health workers resent new order

## CORRESPONDENT

GOALPARA, April 26: A section of frontline health workers has expressed its resentment over the Health Department's directive to them to take up surveillance activities, including collection of blood samples for identifying Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)/Japanese Encephalitis (JE), malaria and dengue in the district.

Talking to this correspondent, some frontline workers including surveillance workers and MPWs, who do not wish to be named, said that it's an uphill task considering that they are on the frontline in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, protecting themselves becomes the key to fighting the

contagion and there is always the chance that they can also become an agent of community transmission.

There is palpable anger among these workers for getting such instructions via WhatsApp message vide letter no. NVBDCP/GLP/Tech-G/Cores/2019/2020/118, dated 17/04/2020 in a district which is in the red zone.

Meanwhile, they also informed that through a memorandum addressed to the Joint Director, Health and Family Welfare, Goalpara that the frontline health workers have expressed their fear of getting contaminated during the course of collecting blood samples from individuals due to lack of adequate precautionary measures including PPEs in the district.

# Serum Institute to start production of Oxford Univ COVID-19 vaccine in 2/3 wks

NEW DELHI, April 26: Vaccine major Serum Institute of India today said it plans to start production of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Oxford University in the next two to three weeks and hopes to bring it to the market by October if the human clinical trials are successful.

The Pune-based company has partnered with Oxford University as one of the seven global institutions manufacturing the vaccine.

"Our team has been working closely with Dr Hill from Oxford University, and we are expecting to initiate pro-

duction of the vaccine in 2-3 weeks and produce 5 million doses per month for the first 6 months, following which, we hope to scale up production to 10 million doses per month," Serum Institute India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla said.

SII has collaborated with scientists at Oxford University for a malaria vaccine project in the past and can say with certainty that they are some of the best scientists, he added.

"We expect the (COVID-19) vaccine to be out in the market by September - October, only if the trials are successful

with the requisite safety and assured efficacy. We will be starting trials in India for this vaccine hopefully over the next 2-3 weeks' time," Poonawalla said.

## Launch by Sept/Oct if trials succeed

SII will be manufacturing the vaccine in anticipation of clinical trials succeeding by September - October in the UK, he added.

"Following that, we have undertaken the decision to initiate manufacturing at our own risk. The decision has been solely taken to have a jump-start on

manufacturing, to have enough doses available, if the clinical trials prove successful," Poonawalla said.

The company plans to initiate the tri-

als in India for the vaccine with necessary regulatory approvals, which are under way presently.

"Keeping the current situation in mind, we have funded this endeavour at a personal capacity and hopefully will be able to enlist the support of other partners to further scale up the vaccine pro-

duction," Poonawalla said.

The vaccines will be manufactured at the company's facility in Pune. Building a new facility for COVID-19 vaccine would have taken around 2-3 years, he added.

The Indian regulatory authorities are working with the company to ensure smooth procedural functioning. "We are in touch with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and ICMR," Poonawalla said.

The company had earlier said it will not patent any COVID-19 vaccine which it develops.

Asked about the decision, Poonawalla reiterated, "We will not patent Serum's vaccine for COVID-19 and will make it available for all to produce and sell, not just in India but across the world."

Whosoever makes and develops the vaccine will need multiple partners to manufacture the vaccine, he added.

"I hope that whichever company develops the vaccine does not get it patented and makes it available based on royalties or a commercial understanding to as many manufacturers across the world to make billions of dosages at a fast pace," Poonawalla said. - PTI

## Reliance JioMart goes live on WhatsApp

MUMBAI, April 26: After signing a massive \$5.7-billion deal with Facebook, Reliance Industries' latest venture to expand into the retail market, JioMart, has reportedly gone live with its official WhatsApp number.

According to media reports, JioMart is currently available in the suburban Mumbai areas of Navi Mumbai, Thane and Kalyan currently.

However, the service is expected to be rolled out in the rest of the country soon.

To order from JioMart, one simply needs to add JioMart's WhatsApp number 88500 08000 on their phones, and then JioMart will send a link to the user's WhatsApp chat window which is valid for 30 minutes.

By clicking on the link, the user will be directed to a new page where he/she has to fill his address and phone number. After filling out the necessary information, JioMart would show the customer a catalogue of all the available items.

Once placed, the order will be relayed to the local kirana store, along with the details of the customer.

The customer on the other end, would receive the name of the kirana store to which the order has been dispatched, receiving the notification with the order and the kirana/JioMart store details on his number.

Through the kirana stores, Reliance is also planning to sell its own private labels under brand names such as Best Farms, Good Life, Masti Oye, Kaffe, Enzo, Mopz, Expel and Home One. - IANS

## 1,338 patents filed by Indian cos in US in 2018-19: Report

NEW DELHI, April 26: Over 1,300 patents were filed by Indian firms in the US in 2018-19 across domains like pharmaceuticals, artificial intelligence, chemistry and communication technology, a report by industry body Nasscom said.

A total of 1,338 patents were filed in 2018-19, of which 59.4 per cent were tech patents with computer technology, communication technology and AI being the top domain areas, the report said.

It added that IT services companies like Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Wipro and HCL were among the top filers. The report is based on data extracted from Questel Orbit Patent Database as on January 31, 2020 with the support of Sagacious IP.

It noted that 2018-19 data is provisional, considering there is a window of approximately 18 months from the filing date to the publication date. Thus some of the patent applications filed for 2018 and 2019 may not have been published (disclosed in the public domain) yet, it added. The provisional number for 2017-18 was 1,287.

Among the non-tech patents (40.6 per cent) in 2018-19, the top domain areas were chemistry and chemical compositions, pharmaceuticals, and mechanical and structural inventions. The top filers included Reliance Industries Ltd, Sun Pharma, Welspun and Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd. The report said AI continues to lead in terms of total patents filed under emerging technology, while cloud computing patents led in terms of growth. - PTI

## PPE production ramped up to over 1 lakh per day: Govt

NEW DELHI, April 26: The government today said the production capacity of PPE coveralls required by medical personnel treating COVID-19 cases in the country has been ramped up to more than 1 lakh per day, with Bengaluru emerging as a major hub for its production.

"The PPE kits are being sent to States by the Ministry of Health as per requirement.

"Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Department of Pharmaceuticals, and Ministry of Textiles are continuously working with various industry bodies, stakeholders and manufacturers on 24x7 basis to streamline the supply chain, remove bottlenecks and maintain a steady supply of all materials required for the healthcare professionals," an official statement said.

Production capacity of coveralls required by medical personnel treating COVID-19 cases in the country has been ramped up to more than 1 lakh per day, it added.

Nearly fifty per cent of the coverall production in the country is from Bengaluru.

Other than Bengaluru, PPE coveralls are also being manufactured by approved production units in Tirupur, Chennai and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Ahmedabad and Vadodara in Gujarat, Phagwara and Ludhiana in Punjab, Kusumnagar and Bhiwandi in Maharashtra, Dungarpur in Rajasthan, Kolkata, Delhi, Noida, Gurugram and few other places.

"The cumulative production till date is approximately one million coverall

units," the statement issued by the Textile Ministry said.

Body coveralls (PPE) have a stringent technical requirements as prescribed by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare since it is a specialised protective suit meant for high level of protection to health professionals.

HLL Lifecare Ltd is the designated single-window procurement agency for the hospitals and healthcare organisations under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

In the last week of January 2020, the technical standard for the coveralls was prescribed as per WHO class-3 exposure pressure in accordance with ISO-16003 or its equivalent.

"Such materials were being manufactured by a few international companies, who expressed their inability to supply on account of a complete glut in stocks and ban on exports by the source countries. Only a limited quantity was offered and procured by the procurement organisation of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare," the statement said.

The Health Ministry finalised the technical requirement on March 2, based on the indigenous availability of materials and the technical requirement for a high level of protection of the healthcare professionals who would deal with the COVID-19 cases, in consultation with medical experts in the field.

The specification was published on the official website of HLL Lifecare Ltd on March 5, 2020, inviting manufacturers having adequate capability to participate in the procurement process. - PTI

## HDFC Bank deploys mobile ATM in Guwahati

### BUSINESS REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: HDFC Bank on Saturday deployed a mobile automated teller machine (ATM) to assist customers during the time of lockdown in Guwahati.

The mobile ATM will eliminate the need to move out of a locality to withdraw cash, a statement by country's largest private sector lender said, adding that before Guwahati, the bank has deployed such mobile ATMs across Mumbai, New Delhi, Allahabad, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and Jaipur.

The deployment locations are being identified in consultation with all local municipal authorities across Guwahati city and every day the mobile ATM will cover 3-5 locations between 10 am and 5 pm, it said.



"During this difficult time, we want to do our part to help everyone 'Stay Home and Stay Safe'. Our mobile ATM facility will help our customers and the general public get access to easy

cash withdrawal and other facilities as we stand together to curb the spread of COVID-19," the statement quoted Sandeep Kumar, Branch Banking Head, HDFC Bank, as saying.

All necessary precautions in terms of maintaining social distancing while queuing for the ATM and sanitization are being taken to ensure safety of staff and customers, it added.

## Coal India contribution

KOLKATA, April 26: State-run Coal India Ltd said it has contributed Rs 221 crore to the PM-CARES Fund to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees of CIL have voluntarily contributed one day's salary, which amounted to Rs 61 crore, and the miner donated an amount of Rs 160 crore from its CSR corpus to the Fund, a company official said. - PTI

## CBIC clears Rs 10,700-cr refund in 16 days

NEW DELHI, April 26: The Central Board of Indirect Taxes (CBIC) has cleared over Rs 10,700-crore worth refunds in GST and customs duty between April 8-23.

In the 'Special Refund and Drawback Disposal Drive', the CBIC officers have cleared over 1.07 lakh goods and services tax and IGST refund claims worth Rs 9,818.12 crore.

Over 1.86 lakh customs and duty drawback refunds were processed totalling Rs 915.56 crore, the CBIC said in a tweet.

"CBIC is committed to help GST taxpayers/Exim

trade during #COVID19. Expeditious sanction of refunds during Special Refund Drive provides relief to trade, especially MSMEs," it said.

The Finance Ministry had

### GST, customs duty

on April 8 said that to provide relief during COVID-19, it has been decided to issue all pending GST and customs refunds which would benefit around 1 lakh business enti-

ties, including MSMEs.

The total refunds granted will be approximately Rs 18,000 crore, it had said.

The CBIC had earlier asked its field officers to avoid asking for physical submission of documents from entities who are claiming GST and customs refunds and instead use official e-mail for all communications.

The CBIC had said the decision to process pending refund claims has been taken with a view to provide immediate relief to taxpayers in these difficult times. - PTI

## Retailers witness spike in sale of pvt labels

NEW DELHI, April 26: Leading retailers Future Retail and Metro Cash & Carry have witnessed a spike in their private labels as supply lines from other manufacturers are disrupted amid the lockdown.

The retailers said their in-house brands in essential categories such as staples and food have witnessed over two-fold jump in sales during the period of lockdown.

The retailers have pushed their private labels to fill the gaps in supply chain due to production shortage and transportation from other manufacturers, and even introduced new products under their private labels during the crisis.

Encouraged by the customer response, retailers are also now extending their private labels in categories such as packed foods and beverages, a segment which is largely dominated by the leading FMCG companies.

"Our private label brands have witnessed encouraging growth in the past few weeks and yes we have been able to cater to our

customer needs through our own brands..." MetroCash & Carry India MD & CEO Arvind Mediratta told PTI.

It has ramped up capacities in almost all essential categories including pulses, flours, rice, oil, among others, besides other key categories in personal and home care products such as hand wash, sanitizers, and cleaners to ensure availability of stocks at its stores during the lockdown.

### Disrupted supply lines

According to Future Retail, which runs retail brands like Big Bazar and EasyDay, it has also witnessed a "significant increase" in sales volume of private labels at its stores after the lockdown. "We have witnessed this trend in segments such as staples, grains, snacking and spices," a Future Group official said, adding, "there is a significant increase in that."

On being asked whether the company expects this trend to continue post lockdown, he said it cannot be ascertained at this stage but definitely consumers have got a taste of their private labels and may figure in their future shopping list. - PTI

## Experts warn cos to guard against fake news to tackle COVID-19 crisis better

NEW DELHI, April 26: As the deadly coronavirus infection spreads fast in India and elsewhere, even faster is the spread of fake news regarding the pandemic and experts warn this 'infodemic' can have huge economic costs for companies across the world in addition to health concerns for the public at large.

While authorities have announced severe penal actions for those spreading fake news regarding this pandemic, which has already caused nearly 2 lakh deaths globally with more than 28 lakh infections since its outbreak in China last December, widespread misinformation surrounding the disease has seen people drinking disinfectants and industrial alcohol while trying various rumoured treatments.

False claims and fake news, mostly forwarded through social media platforms, have also led to several cases of religion-based attacks, hate speeches and other discriminatory activities, while cyber frauds are also on the rise with scammers seeking to take advantage of the crisis situation.

In addition to the damages caused to public health and societal behaviour, experts warn the undeterred wave of fake news poses a huge risk to corporates, for whom it becomes difficult at times to filter out the right information that is crucial for them to ensure success of their business continuity, especially when almost the entire world is locked down.

Farah Lalani, who is a community creator for media, entertainment and information industries at the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF), said businesses need to be proactive about calling out misinformation that is spreading about their brand, directing customers to official channels and making sure there is always clear and up-to-date information on all their social accounts.

"While bad actors, fraudsters, and uninformed users can spread fabricated or misleading information, if businesses collaborate closely with the entire media ecosystem and regulatory bodies, they can start to work together to solve this very challenging problem," she told PTI.

In India, some organisations including industry bodies and advocacy groups have begun compiling official and credible information about the COVID-19 fight and the ongoing lockdown to help companies in their preparedness for tackling the crisis.

Leading advocacy group Chase India, which was among the first to start this practice right from the initial days of the COVID-19 crisis emerging as a major threat in the country, has been sending across multiple daily updates to its clients, including on the latest actions taken by the Central and State governments and also on initiatives being taken by various corporates.

Experts said the correct information is necessary for companies to help them understand, analyse and then implement various new guidelines being issued by the Central and State governments.

"In today's circumstances, besides the current public health crisis of COVID-19 and socio-economic impact related to climate change, one of the biggest concerns is legitimate and timely sourcing of informa-

tion," Chase India's Co-Founder and Executive Vice-President Manash K Neog said.

"As a public policy consultancy, our key challenge during the pre-lockdown phase was to mitigate frenzy around rumours of lockdown for our clients as it was creating panic for the operational teams of clients.

"Further to that, we have institutionalised mechanisms such as our hourly and daily COVID-19 advisory trackers for the Central and State governments to support clients with timely and authentic information on the basis of which they are able to better plan their business continuity strategies," he added.

According to experts, companies are working hard to ensure timely access to right information as costs could be too high for them if they fall for some misinformation and in such a situation the role of media is also very important.

Releasing a new survey recently, which found that just about one-fourth of the consumers in India currently pay for news but nearly two-thirds are willing to pay, the

WEF said the current coronavirus challenge further emphasises the indispensable role that the media plays in society today.

With social media becoming the main platform for spread of false claims, giants like Facebook and Twitter have also begun deleting such posts and taking other actions.

Some of the posts deleted on such grounds include those of public figures as well, the most famous being posts shared by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro in which he had claimed anti-malaria prescription drug hydroxychloroquine was an effective treatment for COVID-19.

Various social media platforms have also imposed several restrictions on advertisements claiming various cures for COVID-19, while hate content regarding the pandemic is also being dealt with sternly.

However, all these steps have not been able to totally eradicate the fake news flow, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described as 'infodemic' in the context of the novel coronavirus. - PTI



# Random samples for COVID-19 tests collected in Dhubri district

CORRESPONDENT

DHUBRI, April 26: In a bid to check possible coronavirus-infected patients in Dhubri district other than those linked to the Nizamuddin Markaz and Athgaon religious congregations, random samples for COVID-19 tests were collected in Dhubri, Bilasipara and Chapar area today.

It was informed that in each area the health department aims to collect 50 random samples. A total of 150 samples collected randomly from the containment zones of the district will be sent for the COVID-19 test.

It may be mentioned that till date, 5 persons in the district have been detected to be COVID-19 positive. Till now, 4 containment zones have been declared by the administration. Out of

these containment zones, two are in Bilasipara, while one each are in Chapar and Dhubri town areas.

"As of now, we are collecting random samples from inhabitants of the containment zones only," said Joint Director of Health Services Sayed Imdadullah.

Till the time of filing this report, the samples were being collected at the civil hospitals and BPHCs.

The Joint Director of Health Services added: "On being requested by our workers, people from these areas come out voluntarily to these centres where our lab technicians collect the samples."

He added that they deputed volunteers clusterwise from the containment zones and these random samples will be checked separately from the normal samples that goes for COVID-19 testing.

Meanwhile in another develop-

ment, three patients from Dhubri district who were found to be COVID-19 positive earlier, were released from Mahendra Mohan Choudhary Hospital after they were found to be negative during successive tests.

According to administrative official Al Haz Jamal Uddi, the first COVID-19 positive patient of the district, besides the other COVID-19 positive patients of the district have been released and are coming to Dhubri town where they will be kept under observation for 14 more days.

Till date, 2,788 persons are in home quarantine, while 384 persons have been released from mass quarantine, apart from the random samples. In all, 523 samples have been collected from Dhubri district, out of which results of 235 samples are awaited.

# Debananda Konwar cremated at Nitaipukhuri Konwar Gaon



For the Great Beyond: The mortal remains of Debananda Konwar being consigned to the flames at Nitaipukhuri Konwar Gaon on Sunday. — Photo: Manoj Borthakur.

CORRESPONDENT

SIVASAGAR, April 26: The last rites of former Revenue Minister and ex-Governor of Bihar and Tripura, Debananda Konwar was performed this morning at his ancestral village at Nitaipukhuri Konwar Gaon with full state honours.

Minister of State for Revenue and Disaster Management (independent charge) Jogen Mohan offered floral tributes on behalf of the Chief Minister. Others who offered tributes were Jorhat MP Topon Kumar Gogoi, Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Thowra MLA

Kushal Duwori, former MLA Sushanta Borgohain, Sivasagar Deputy Commissioner Lakhinandan Gogoi, Sivasagar additional deputy commissioners Mun Gogoi and Junmoni Sonowal, Demow RCO Indika Gogoi and a host of other dignitaries.

After three rounds were fired into the air soon after the tribute-paying ceremony, Konwar's son Palash performed the last rites prior to consigning his father's body to the flames.

There was a huge gathering of local villagers along with former party followers at the funeral site.

Earlier, Konwar's body

was brought from his Rukminigaoon-based residence in Guwahati yesterday where he died at the age of 88.

Born in 1932 at Rajah Ali Tea Estate in Tinsukia where his father Padma Konwar worked, his mother was Kusum Kumari Konwar. He did his primary education from Nitaipukhuri, about 35 kms from Sivasagar town.

Devananda Konwar was the eldest of three brothers and six sisters. Konwar had his school education in Khowang as his father was an employee with Khowang Tea Estate. He passed the matriculation examination from Khowang High School in 1st division and

then graduated from Cotton College and went on to become a post-graduate from Delhi University.

Konwar began his career as an English teacher in Cotton College, Guwahati and later joined as marketing executive with a private company in Mumbai before coming back to Assam to start a degree college in Guwahati as its founder principal.

In 1969, Konwar joined Gauhati High Court as a lawyer. Konwar subsequently joined the Congress party in 1955 as a student leader and was elected to the State Assembly from Sivasagar constituency in 1983 during the peak of the Assam Agitation.

Later, he was re-elected from Thowra constituency on three consecutive occasions from 1991 to 2001. Konwar held various positions in the Congress party in the district and the state level. He was a senior Congress leader and was a Cabinet Minister in the Hiteswar Saikia government in 1991 and later was the Law and Revenue Minister in the Tarun Gogoi government in 2001.

However, at the fag end of his career, Konwar joined AIUDF, surprising many in the political circles.

Earlier, Konwar was appointed as Governor of Bihar and Tripura with additional charge of West Bengal for a period of two months.

# Lakhimpur Police collects medicines from Guwahati for cancer patient

CORRESPONDENT

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, April 26: Lakhimpur Police has lately played the role of a Good Samaritan by procuring medicines for patients of the district, which are not available locally, during the ongoing lockdown.

Recently, Lakhimpur Police procured medicines for a cancer patient in No. 3 Islampur village in Nowboisa. The patient, an elderly man in the village, was in dire straits as the nationwide lockdown made his medicines inaccessible as they are sold only in a chemist shop based in Guwahati.

As the patient informed Lakhimpur Police through their helpline number about his plight, the men in uniform after



'They alone live, who live for others'...: A policeman handing over relief material to an elderly woman at North Lakhimpur during the lockdown. — Photo: Farhana Ahmed.

having procured the medicines, delivered them within three days at the former's doorstep.

It may be recalled that Lakhimpur Police has been delivering medicines to people at their doorstep with helpline response since the imposition of lockdown for the coronavirus pandemic.

So far, the district police have delivered medicines to eight different patients by bringing it from outside their jurisdiction. In recent times, Lakhimpur Police has also been busy in providing essential commodities to the poor and needy in various parts of the district since the beginning of the lockdown by promptly responding to distress calls to its helpline number.

# Kidnapped man yet to be traced

CORRESPONDENT

HAF LONG, April 26: Even after 48 hours of the incident, Santosh Hojai of Harangajao, who was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen on April 24, has remained untraced.

Meanwhile, Santosh's wife Joyanla Hojai approached Jadike Naisho Hosom, the Dimasa apex body for its intervention to find out her husband.

She stated thus, "I am a resident of village Gamadi Hawar of Harangajao in Dima Hasao district who has been living in the area peacefully with my entire family since long. But unfortunately on April 24 last, a group of 5 unidentified persons in civil dress with sophisticated weapons came to our residence at around 6 pm asking for the owner of the JCB. They said that their Alto car was stuck nearby, for which they needed help to drag out the vehicle. When my husband (Santosh Hojai) approached them, they instantly dragged him inside their white Bolero car and took him away."

Subsequently, Joyanla Hojai while trying to submit an FIR at Harangajao Police Station was asked to return home instead by the OC, who said her husband would return home next day, i.e., on April 25, though he is still missing.

On being contacted, Superintendent of Police Bir Bikram Gogoi informed that a case in this connection had been registered and it was too early to comment since investigation into the case has just started.

Condemned

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, April 26: The Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Yuva Parishad has condemned the molestation incident that took place at Karimganj recently amid the lockdown hours.

The organisation also demanded immediate justice to the victim and stern action against the culprit.

OBITUARY

Bimala Devi Goswami

GUWAHATI, April 26: Bimala Devi Goswami, an elderly citizen of Khotiamari Sattri in Palashbari, passed away at her son's residence here early this morning.

She was 93.

Goswami was the wife of eminent agriculturist late Paresh Chandra Deva Goswami.

She leaves behind four sons and four daughters.

Her last rites were performed at the Navagraha crematorium.

# Four more COVID-19 patients released from Golaghat hospital

CORRESPONDENT

DERGAON, April 26: Four more COVID-19 patients undergoing treatment at the Swahid Kushal Konwar Civil Hospital (SKKCH) in Golaghat were released today.

Golaghat Deputy Commissioner Bibhash Chandra Modi in the presence of Joint Director of Health Services Dr Toufique Rahman and the Superintendent of SKKCH Dr Uttam Prasad Dutta felicitated the patients with a *phulam gamusa* each and a packet of sweets in the afternoon.

The four patients who were found COVID-19 negative and released today are Anowar Hussain of Dighalipam in Dergaon, Alina Begum of Dhulia Gaon in Marangi, Rahimuddin Ahmed and Saleha Begum of Bhehoguri in Merapani respectively. However, they will have to stay at the quarantine facility at Anajari Bibah Bhavan for mandatory observation for another 14 days.

All of them expressed their satisfaction over the dedication of Health Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma along with the hospitality offered by the district administration.

With this, a total of eight patients out of nine were released from the hospital, while four others were released on April 18 in the presence of the Health Minister.

At present, only Jesmin Begum of Islampur, Merapani is under treatment in the hospital.

It may perhaps be pertinent to mention that nine positive cases in Golaghat district was at the top of the chart in the state and was included in the COVID-19 Hotspot and Red Zone along with four other districts of the state.

Contest organised

NALBARI, April 26: As the people never faced such a lockdown earlier, the Deputy Commissioner of Nalbari Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury has taken a unique step to share the citizens' experiences through their writings.

The DC organised an online writing competition among the people of the district. The topic of competition is: 'The three positive realisations I have experienced during the lockdown period'.

The DC said he has organised the contest in order to encourage the people in a positive manner. The contest is for three age groups, above 40 years, 15-40 years and less than 15 years. The participants can write on the topic either in Assamese or English within 300 words. There will be three cash prizes and certificates for each category. The first prize is Rs 5,000, second prize Rs 3,000 and third prize is Rs.1,000.

The evaluation will be by a panel headed by litterateur Dr Basanta Kumar Bhattacharjya. The last date for submission is April 30. The entire prize money will be borne by the Deputy Commissioner from his salary. — Correspondent

# Stranded passengers leave for home districts from Cachar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR, April 26: Following the Government's decision to allow people stranded in different districts since the lockdown to leave for their respective homes, the inter-district movement in Barak Valley through ASTC buses and private vehicles for three days started from Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner Barnali Sarma along with Cachar SP Manabendra Dev Ray and other officials bid the passengers adieu, besides wishing them safe journey.

ADC Sumit Sattawan informed the media that a list of passengers who had booked their slots for travelling to Karimganj and Dima Hasao districts from Cachar was given to the district on Friday night following which arrangement of buses were made centrally from the ISBT after medical screening of the passengers.

"In all, we sent 126 passengers for Karimganj, Dima Hasao and Hailakandi. Out of 78 passengers who had registered by dialing 104 helpline for moving to Karimganj from here, 58 passengers turned up at the police outposts of the town which served as the local pick-up points and among the 77 passengers registered for Dima Hasao, 43 passengers



Bon voyage: Cachar DC Barnali Sarma, SP Manabendra Dev Ray along with other officials bidding farewell to the outgoing passengers on Sunday. — Photo: Arindam Gupta.

reached the designated police stations for pick-up."

"There were 25 passengers for Hailakandi who missed out registering on the helpline. All the outbound passengers started their journey from the ISBT. Also, 11 passengers reached Cachar district from Karimganj and eight from Hailakandi so far," Sattawan said.

On Sunday till 3 pm, 187 passengers belonging to Kamrup, Kamrup Metro, Nagaon, Karimganj and Hailakandi were sent. The passengers were sent to their respective destinations by seven buses viz 2 for Karimganj, 1 for Hailakandi and

4 for Guwahati, Sattawan informed.

"We have a schedule of sending as many as 400 outbound passengers to different districts across the state and all of them would be sent in phases throughout the day," the official maintained.

Talking about the shifting of passengers to Guwahati via Meghalaya, Sattawan informed that the Government of Meghalaya has allowed only ASTC buses to ply through the state and reach the destination without any midway halt. In his words, those willing to travel via private vehicles shall have to wait for some more time.

Further, the ADC informed that seven drop-in points, including Katigora, Sonai, Udharbond, Poliapol, Dholai, Rangirkhari and Silchar police stations have been designated for disembarking of passengers coming to Cachar from other places.

Those who could not go back home for obvious reasons should wait till the Government opens up another opportunity in the coming days, he added.

Cachar Deputy Commissioner Barnali Sarma bade farewell to the outbound stranded passengers from the district to their homes on Saturday.



Socialising, but from afar: Perched on a window grill, a child greets his friend on the other side of the road during the nationwide lockdown, at Gar-Ali in Jorhat on Sunday. — Photo: Wasim Rahman.

# I was lacking in basics last season: Kuldeep

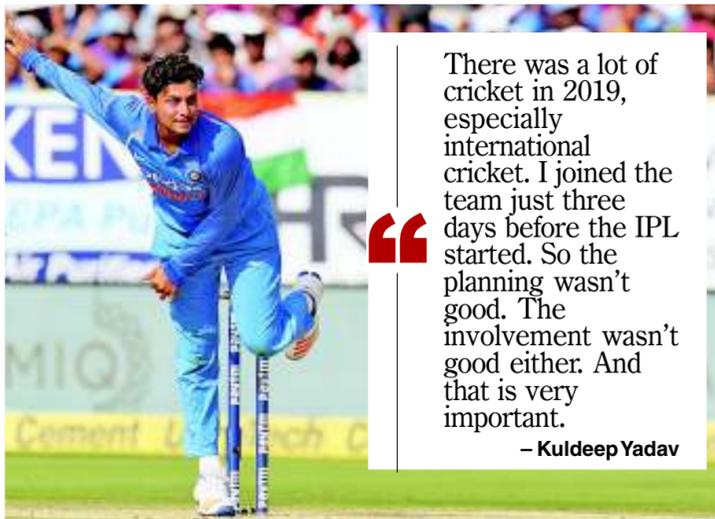
NEW DELHI, April 26: India spinner Kuldeep Yadav says he was "lacking in the basics" last season owing to playing too many games, leading to an IPL that could have been better than how it turned out.

He said he didn't plan enough last time and having learned his lesson, the chinaman bowler was "100 per cent sure of success" in IPL 2020 whose fate hangs in balance because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I was fully prepared for this IPL 2020 and I had planned a lot. I was 100 per cent sure that this IPL would be a success," Kuldeep was quoted as saying in Kolkata Knight Riders website.

Asked about last season, Kuldeep spoke about why he struggled to get going.

"When I came into IPL, I didn't give myself enough time to train. The biggest learning from 2019 was that I did not plan for the season. There was a lot of cricket in 2019, especially interna-



There was a lot of cricket in 2019, especially international cricket. I joined the team just three days before the IPL started. So the planning wasn't good. The involvement wasn't good either. And that is very important.

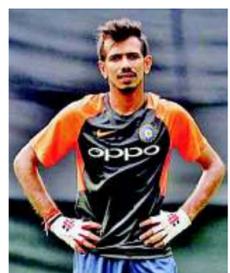
— Kuldeep Yadav

tional cricket. I joined the team just three days before the IPL started. So the planning wasn't good. The involvement wasn't good either. And that is very important," he said. "I don't think the last IPL

was all that bad for me. I bowled very well. But a leg-spinner's success is based on the number of wickets he picks. I didn't manage to pick many wickets, but my economy was good."

The lack of wickets dented his confidence, the spinner said. "When you don't pick wickets your confidence drops a bit. Then there was a game where I went for a lot of runs.

You are very annoying on social media: Gayle tells Chahal



NEW DELHI, April 26: Big-hitting West Indies opener Chris Gayle says Indian spinner Yuzvendra Chahal is "very annoying" on social media and he is going to block him.

Chahal is one of the most busiest Indian cricketers on social media and with the coronavirus-forced lockdown in place, he is spending more time than ever on various platforms.

"I am going to tell TikTok to block you as well, seriously. You are very annoying on social media man. You need to get off social media right now. We are tired of Chahal. I don't wanna see you in my life again. I am gonna block you," Gayle said during a live session on Instagram.

With no cricket due to coronavirus pandemic, players are engaging with fans these days on social media to keep themselves busy.

Earlier, India skipper Virat Kohli had referred to Chahal as a clown during a live video session with former South Africa cricketer AB de Villiers.

"Have you seen his TikTok videos? You should go and check out Yuzvendra Chahal's TikTok videos," said Kohli.

"You will not believe this guy is playing international cricket and he is 29-year-old. Just go and look at his videos. He's an absolute clown." —PTI

## Top Indian stars foresee new normal once pandemic ends

NEW DELHI, April 26: Will the fans rush back? Will training abroad be as hassle-free as it used to be? What about contact sports where social distancing can't really be practised?

In a nutshell, will sports and watching sports ever be the same again in a world scarred by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Seeking answers to these questions, PTI sports team reached out to some of India's biggest sportspersons — current and former — who gazed into the crystal ball and predicted the future of sports once the action resumes.

The responses were a mix of trepidation and optimism. Here's a peek into their thoughts:

**SACHIN TENDULKAR:** No doubt the world is going through the biggest challenge in our lifetime. I think players will be wary for some time when it comes to using saliva (to shine the ball). It will play on their minds.

High fives and hugging your team-mates will be avoided for some time. This is what I would like to believe. They will be conscious to begin with and may maintain social distancing.

**ABHINAV BINDRA:** Sport is a tool that unites people and brings joy to thousands of participants and viewers across the world. While aspects of heightened safety protocols will be integrated for the foreseeable future, the want and attraction of sport will not diminish.

As the general populous has become more conscious of their health and their physical wellbeing, avenues to use sport to improve fitness will grow.

The post-COVID-19 world could be a blessing in disguise for India. There may not be so much foreign exposure and this may allow India to build proper sporting infrastructure.

**BAJRANG PUNIA:** Wrestling is a contact sport. When wrestling will resume, there is no way you can avoid physical contact. But I don't think there would be any hesitation. I don't see any change happening.

The only thing that can happen is that the sport will become more intense. All athletes will return after a long time. They are not used to such long breaks. All of us are analysing our weaknesses and strengths, so when tournaments will resume, the competition will be intense.

**MC MARY KOM:** We are all hoping and praying desperately for things to go back to normal but can they ever? Of course

not. This virus is an enemy that no one even understands completely. Sports will change. Mine is a contact sport and I am personally worried how we are going to deal with it. For the time being, I don't see any sparring happening in training at least, I would be totally against it.

I believe training itself will become very individualistic. As for the fans, they will come back to watch, I don't see a problem there. But yes, the standard of hygiene at tournaments will go up to another level.

I believe once a vaccine is developed, things can go back to how they were before but until then, travelling will be less frequent, training will not exactly be a team thing and tournaments, I don't know how they will resume.

**VIJENDER SINGH:** I don't think it would be all that easy to bring back the fans, it shouldn't be because I believe people should be wary but India is an unpredictable country, *kuch bhi ho sakta hai yahan* (anything is possible here). People have been at home for so long, they might just head to the stadium at the first opportunity.

Logic demands that they become more cautious. Athletes will be more cautious certainly, training abroad won't be all that easy, less tournaments will happen and whenever they happen, I am not sure what the participation would be like.

**BHAICHUNG BHUTIA:** In today's age, when television and digital platforms have become so important part of our lives, I don't think the lack of spectators in stadiums will have much of a bearing as far as business is concerned. I see the TV and digital gaining from this.

Sports events will gradually come back to what they were before. They can be held behind closed doors for now. Till the time a vaccine is out, I don't think they can have people inside as it involves a lot of risks.

**B SAI PRANEETH:** We have to travel a lot and I think everybody will be scared to travel to countries like China, Korea and even the European countries even if the international calendar resumes.

The fear of contracting the virus will always be there at the back of your mind, even when you are eating in any restaurant or even playing. I don't know how even playing would be possible considering the fact that during a match the shuttle is touched by the players and by the service judge. —PTI

So my confidence level dropped," Kuldeep admitted. "I was lacking in the basics. Playing a lot of cricket affects your basics.

"If you are in regular touch with your coach then your basics won't be affected."

He heaped praise on former KKR captain Gautam Gambhir and bowling consultant Wasim Akram, saying they had a "big influence" on his career in his early years at the Knight Riders.

"Gauti bhai (Gambhir) had a huge influence on me from the start of my stint at KKR. He always spoke to me a lot. Not only during the time he was at KKR, but even after that, over these last two years," Kuldeep said.

"He always kept me motivated. When you get that kind of confidence from your captain, it becomes a huge plus point for any player. It helps you remain confident, and that translates into good performances." —PTI

## Ashwin remains India's best spinner: Saqlain

NEW DELHI, April 26: Pakistan spin great Saqlain Mushtaq fails to understand how a proven performer like Ravichandran Ashwin has been kept out of India's limited-overs set-up, saying a successful Test bowler is bound to succeed in the shorter formats.

Ashwin, a regular in the IPL, has been kept out of the shorter formats since July 2017. Same was the case with Ravindra Jadeja but he is back playing all three formats, largely because of his all-round abilities.

"Class is permanent whether you are a finger-spinner or wrist-spinner. Your skills, game reading abilities matter a lot. I was surprised when Ashwin was sidelined from one-day cricket," Saqlain, the inventor of 'Doosra', told PTI.

"He knows how to get batsman out in the five-day game, which is much tougher than limited overs cricket. Anyone can do the containment job but someone who knows how to take wickets can contain also. He knows both. How can you keep him out? You have to back your best players."

Seeking more variety, the selectors had opted for wrist-spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal after the 2017 Champions Trophy. They both have established themselves in limited overs cricket but have not featured in the eleven together since the 2019 World Cup.

Though Ashwin remains India's number one spinner at home, he is not a sure starter in overseas Tests. He was benched for the two-Test series in the West Indies last year, drawing a lot of attention and more recently, played a Test in New Zealand in the two-match series with Jadeja playing the other one. —PTI

## Archer's World Cup medal misplaced



LONDON, April 26: England pacer Jofra Archer has "gone mad" searching for his World Cup winners' medal that got misplaced while he moved into a new house which has been "turned upside down" during the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

"I had it (medal) hanging off a portrait someone did for me and sent to me, I had my medal hanging on that," the 25-year-old fast bowler of

Caribbean descent was quoted as saying by BBC Radio.

"I moved flat and the picture is on the new wall but there's no medal. I turned the house upside down for about a week but I still haven't managed to find it," he added.

Archer played a part in England's maiden World Cup triumph last year.

"I know it should be in the house so I will keep eyes out for it but I've gone mad look-

ing for it already," said the Barbados-born cricketer, who bowled the Super Over, who bowled the Super Over in the World Cup final against New Zealand at the Lord's.

Archer, who made his international debut only last year, said the forced break due to the COVID-19 pandemic has given him time to search for the medal.

"There's nothing else to do in isolation. It's all hands on deck," he said.

Asked what was his initial reaction when England skipper Eoin Morgan handed him the ball in the World Cup final Super Over, Archer said: "I wasn't sure until I had to go down there and warm up.

"That doesn't mean I didn't want it, I just didn't think I was in a position to volunteer. I was just coming into the team, I'd played the least amount of games in the squad. I didn't think it was my time to volunteer," he said. —PTI

## Everton 'appalled' by Kean's house party

LONDON, April 26: Everton said they are "appalled" at one of their players widely reported to be Italian international Moise Kean hosting a house party contravening the social distancing measures recommended by the British government due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The 20-year-old striker filmed himself hosting the party, *The Daily Mirror* reported.

*The Daily Mirror* says Kean sent video clips to a private Snapchat group, with the footage showing female guests giving lap dances.

The caption on one picture was labelled 'quarantine clean'.

Everton issued a statement expressing their fury at the player's actions — they did not name Kean — on a day when the death toll in hospitals in the United Kingdom passed the 20,000 mark.

"Everton are appalled to learn of an incident in which



Moise Kean is one of several Premier League players to be held to account for breaking the social distancing measures recommended by the British government due to the coronavirus pandemic.

a first-team player ignored government guidance and club policy in relation to the coronavirus crisis," read the club statement.

"The club has strongly expressed its disappointment to the player and made it clear that such actions are com-

pletely unacceptable."

The club added that all their staff had been informed of the government guidelines, which include one piece of exercise a day and to restrict oneself to social interaction with just those of the household. —AFP

## Pujara is hardest to bowl at in Test cricket: Cummins



MELBOURNE, April 26: Australia's world number one pacer Pat Cummins finds India's middle-order mainstay

Cheteshwar Pujara the toughest batsman to bowl at in Test cricket and called him a "pain in the back" for his team.

With his solid batting at number three, Pujara had played an influential role in India's historic triumph Down Under in 2018-19.

Cummins held Pujara in high esteem when asked which batsman he found toughest to bowl to during a Question & Answer session that was arranged by the Australian Cricketers Association (ACA).

"There are a lot of them out there, unfortunately. But I am going to go with (someone different, and he is Cheteshwar) Pujara from India. He was a real pain in the back for us," Cummins said. —PTI

## 'Paris 2024 Olympics plans obsolete'

PARIS, April 26: Plans for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris are "obsolete and outdated" in light of the coronavirus pandemic, IOC member and former French sports minister Guy Drut said on Sunday.

Former Olympic champion Drut, who won gold in the 110m hurdles in 1976 and took silver four years before, added in a column for Franceinfo that the Olympic Games needed to be "reinvented" to put them more in touch with reality.

"The crisis we're going through has a lasting impact on our daily lives, our way of life, our economy, our social pact, our choice of society," wrote Drut.

"It cannot and must not remain without effect on the imperative necessity which is to reinvent ourselves.

"The Olympic and Paralympic Games are no exception to

this new context. They too must reinvent themselves." The International Olympic Committee, jointly with local organisers, has been forced into delaying the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by one year to 2021 because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

But Drut, an IOC member since 1996, argued that postponement of dates was just the tip of the iceberg.

"Can the response to this crisis be translated by simply postponing dates, without the Games model — both economic and organisational — also being deeply rethought?" asked the 69-year-old, who served as sports minister in France between 1995-97 under Jacques Chirac.

"The beautiful project that we built and carried in the bid phase for Paris 2024 is now obsolete, outdated, out of touch with reality." —AFP

## Dhoni always takes responsibility when team loses: Mohit Sharma



NEW DELHI, April 26: He has played most of his cricket under MS Dhoni and pacer Mohit Sharma says the revered former India skipper is a true leader who does not back off when it comes to taking responsibility in challenging times.

The 31-year-old pacer has played under Dhoni both at Chennai Super Kings and the Indian team. He was to play for Delhi Capitals this season but the lockdown has postponed the league indefinitely.

"His humility and sense of gratitude is what sets him apart from other players I have played with. In sport, there's a difference between a captain and a leader — I believe he's a true leader," Sharma said during an Instagram session organised by the Delhi franchise.

"When the team wins, you'll never find him any-

where prominently, but when the team loses, he's always right in front, taking responsibility — that's the sign of a leader and why I admire him so much."

The coronavirus-forced lockdown has delayed his re-

turn to competitive cricket after a back surgery but Sharma says whenever the IPL is played, his side will be a strong contender for the title.

Sharma was out of action for about 10 months due to a back injury, which troubled

When the team wins, you'll never find him (MS Dhoni) anywhere prominently, but when the team loses, he's always right in front, taking responsibility — that's the sign of a leader and why I admire him so much.

— Mohit Sharma

"I think it is a huge opportunity for our team. We have a fantastic group of players with a very strong Indian core, and I believe our team has the right players in all departments who can help us in challenging for the trophy.

"It would also be a golden opportunity to work and learn from Ricky Ponting — all the players only have praises for him. I hope the team does exceedingly well when the IPL happens, and we can give the Delhi fans great joy," Sharma added. —PTI