

PAKISTANI AMONG TWO MILITANTS KILLED

Colonel, Major among five security personnel killed in eight-hour gunbattle in North Kashmir

Security forces were trying to save hostages in Handwara

ADIL AKHZER
HANDWARA, MAY 3

A DECORATED Commanding Officer of the Army's counter-insurgency Rashtriya Rifles, a Major and a J&K Police officer were among the five security personnel killed in a gunfight that stretched on for over eight hours in North Kashmir's Handwara on Saturday.



Family members of J&K Police Sub-Inspector Sageer Ahmad Pathan arrive to take his body in Handwara. Shuaib Masoodi

The security forces had lost contact with the men towards Saturday evening, after they went inside a house in Chanjimmullah village of

Handwara in North Kashmir, to flush out militants. The dead included the two militants, one of them identified as a Pakistani. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

'He promised he would come soon. He is coming, but wrapped in Tricolour'

HAMZA KHAN, PALLAVI SINGHAL & MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA
JAIPUR, PANCHKULA, CHANDIGARH, MAY 3

THE CALL came on Sunday morning, but Pallavi Sharma says she hadn't been able to get through to husband Colonel Ashutosh Sharma, the Commanding Officer of 21 Rashtriya Rifles, all of Saturday night.



Maj Anuj Sood (left) and Col Ashutosh Sharma of 21 RR.

'HAVEN'T TOLD OUR PARENTS, CAN'T EVEN CRY' **PAGE 4**

With their daughter Tamanna, 12, sitting beside her at their Jaipur home, Pallavi said, "I couldn't contact him. I called the unit and got to know he was stuck somewhere. When so much time passes with someone being stuck, you know something is wrong."

The Army called the family to inform them that Colonel Sharma, 44, had died along with another officer, Major Anuj Sood, 30, and three other security **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Salons to stores to cafes: small services stare at end of road
Wait for safety net as Covid threatens operations built on savings, struggle

PRABHA RAGHAVAN, SUNNY VERMA, PRANAV MUKUL & AASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

FROM A South Mumbai cafe that wound up after 10 years in operations to a standalone salon in the heart of the capital that is unsure whether it can ever start again to an eatery in Meerut's shopping hub launched by a first-time entrepreneur with his personal savings - each distress story in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector is unique but all of them have the same refrain.

Operations built on the back of personal savings, sweat and struggle, now face the end of the road. For, it is not just the problem of how to survive the current phase, but questions more basic: how difficult will it be to pick up the pieces when things inch back to normal? Will there be a demand for their services to ensure viability?

These beneficiaries of India's consumption boom, helped in recent years by online apps and delivery options, now stare at a bleak future as beauty parlours, spas, restaurants, retail stores, guest houses, and several other segments of the services trade face up to what lies on the other side of the pandemic.

Till then, the dice is loaded: there is no credit to tide over the lockdown phase, new credit cycle rules entail vendors demanding ready cash even as buyers are unwilling to pay on delivery, the

MSME SOS
AN EXPRESS SERIES
PART 2

depleting working capital on payouts such as rent, electricity and salaries, and a complete lack of certainty on when demand will be back - if at all.

Take 43-year old Vishal Batra, who ventured out of family business to start his own in January 2020. His eatery in Meerut's main market area held early promise, launched with an investment of Rs 10 lakh he pooled from his savings and some family assistance. Then the lockdown hit.

Revenues are zero, but Batra has to pay shop rent and staff salaries, in addition to paying food expenses for seven employees who are stranded in Meerut.

"It takes time for a new business to pick up and we had just began covering our expenses, but in March, the lockdown started. In the first week of April, we started selling through Zomato, but barely 10 days later, the pizza-delivery case (case of a pizza delivery boy testing positive for coronavirus in Delhi, leading to 72 families to whom he delivered and 17 other delivery boys being quarantined) happened and our orders fell sharply," Batra said. He had to down the shutters for the time being.

Chef Pooja Dhingra in Mumbai is far away from Batra **CONTINUED ON PAGE 9**

West Bengal committee to decide on easing curbs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 3

EVEN AS several states have issued guidelines on restrictions and exemptions in their respective red and green zones, depending on coronavirus risk, the West Bengal government will take a call on it Monday.

A task force led by state Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha will decide which shops and industries will be allowed to open in green and orange zones. According to sources in the state secretariat, the panel will take a call after going through the Centre's guidelines, some of which have been modified and may be changed further.

Senior officials, however, made it clear that complete lockdown would continue in red-zone districts. A district is categorised as a red zone if there are substantial numbers of active cases. The other criteria are the rate at which confirmed cases are doubling, and surveillance feedback. Only grocery shops, markets, sweet shops, and pharmacies will be allowed to remain open in such districts, and the usual restrictions will apply.

FULL REPORT, **PAGE 3**



Workers at the Mazdoor Line in the jute mill hub of Titagarh in Bengal's North 24-Parganas district. The mills have been shut since March 22. Partha Paul

Sacks they make are key to country's crops, Bengal jute mill hub despairs

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & ATRI MITRA
BARRACKPORE, MAY 3

IN MAZDOOR Line, a cluster of two-room tenements near the Barrackpore Trunk Road in the jute mill hub of Titagarh in North 24-Parganas, 28-year-old Mithun Prajapati points to his wife and two children: "Kya khayega yeh log (what will they eat)?"

A jute mill worker, Prajapati has been without work since March 22 and the lockdown extension has added to his worries.

TEST REPORTS FROM THE FIELD
TRACKING THE VIRUS, LOCKDOWN

He says the PDS ration is not enough and he is counting on a "little advance" from the mill owner because he has run out of money.

He is not the only one. The Mazdoor Line is home to over

140 families, most with similar complaints of little or no money in hand, hoping for an "advance".

The gloom is pervasive, enveloping worker settlements across North 24 Parganas - in Titagarh, Barrackpore, Kanchrapara, Naihati and Halisahar. This is one district from where India sources its jute bags, always in great demand for grains to be packed during harvesting.

On April 14, Union Textiles Minister Smriti Irani wrote to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, urging her to operationalise 18 **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

As new phase of lockdown begins, Centre tells states: 72% of deaths in 20 districts

DIPANKAR GHOSE
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

AS A new phase of the lockdown with relaxations begins on Monday, 20 districts account for 68 per cent of the active COVID-19 cases in the country, the Centre has communicated to states. As many as 72 per cent of deaths

from the disease have occurred in just 20 districts, state chief secretaries were told in a meeting

chaired by the Cabinet Secretary on Sunday.

These districts cover major urban centres such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Chennai and Pune among others. Significant overlaps are likely between the two sets of districts.

The union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has deployed central public health teams to assist "state health departments" in **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Migrants pay to return home, states ask Centre to foot the train fare bill

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR & IRAM SIDDIQI
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, MAY 3

MANY MIGRANT workers boarding the Shramik Special trains to return to their home states are paying for their tickets. While 31 such trains have run so far and more are expected over the next 15 days, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot Sunday demanded the Centre and the Railways

bear the expenditure on humanitarian grounds since the workers were already facing economic hardships.

When contacted, Railway Board Chairman VK Yadav said it was a conscious call not to run these trains free of cost so that only those who intend to travel were transported. "Problem is once you make services free, everyone is eligible to travel. Then who is coming to the stations; who all are travelling would become a problem to track. This service is for stranded **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Train tickets issued to migrants in Nashik Friday.

Allow hydel project in NE, but give Rs 4 cr to study tigers, says Institute

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

A SUB-COMMITTEE of the Environment Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee has recommended clearance of the 3,097-MW Etalin hydroelectric project near a tiger habitat in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley district, accepting "in toto" the report of a field study by the Wildlife Institute of India under the same ministry.

Funded by the developer, the WII study concluded that the project would not affect tigers since none was camera-trapped in the project area during the four-month fieldwork.

Yet the report sought Rs 4 crore, as part of a Rs 11-crore conservation plan, for research and "monitoring tiger distribution and movements" in a 10-km radius of the project site for five years.

Reasoning that "villages, habitat degradation, hunting, high vehicle movement and low prey base" might have kept tigers away from the proposed project area, the WII report said that tiger presence could not be "completely ruled out" based on the short study.

Therefore, stopping short of naming itself, the WII recommended: "A competent research organisation needs to be engaged for this monitoring **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Covid strategist, AIIMS chief Dr Randeep Guleria is guest at e-Adda today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

AS INDIA approaches the end of a 40-day national lockdown and negotiates a staggered exit, some key questions sharply frame its fight against Covid-19: Are we prepared for a possible surge in cases if curbs are eased? What does containment mean when people start moving more between districts and states? Do we have enough beds, paramedical staff, intensive care units, and ventilators to face a possible spike? How much testing is optimal and do we have enough kits? What's the new normal? **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Dr Randeep Guleria



Mumbai doc booked for 'sexual assault' of Covid patient, confined to home

SAGAR RAJPUT
MUMBAI, MAY 3

A 34-YEAR-OLD doctor has been booked for allegedly sexually assaulting a 44-year-old male patient of Covid-19 in the ICU ward of Wockhardt hospital in Mumbai on May 1 - the accused had joined the hospital just a day earlier. Agripada police, however, said the accused has not been questioned or arrested due to fears that he may be infected by the coronavirus. Instead, they said, he has been placed in quarantine inside his home in an apartment block in Thane, and is being monitored. The hospital, meanwhile,

said it has sacked the accused. "The doctor was on his first day of duty, having joined the previous day. Following the receipt of information of misconduct and as per protocol, the administration immediately informed the police. The services of the doctor were terminated," Wockhardt said in a statement Sunday.

Police sources said the accused, an MD who had completed his medical education at a Navi Mumbai medical college, had been recruited by the hospital on April 30, the same day when the patient was admitted. The alleged incident took place around 9.30 am on May 1 (Friday), they said. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

THE NEW CAPITALISM
BY ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY
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Punjab records biggest spike, 55% of cases in state now have a Nanded link

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
JALANDHAR, CHANDIGARH, MAY 3

PUNJAB ON Sunday saw its steepest rise in Covid-19 cases, with 331 more persons, mostly pilgrims returning from Nanded, testing positive for the novel coronavirus. Of the state's tally of 1,102 cases, those who have returned from Nanded now account for 55.2% (609 cases).

Out of the 331 cases reported Sunday, 270 have links to Nanded, including 12 cotton factory workers who came back on the same buses as the pilgrims. The 12 belong to Nawanshahr, Punjab's first hotspot, which has



reported 85 cases till now.

Maharashtra and Punjab have been trading charges over the source of the infections among the Nanded pilgrims, around 4,000 of whom had been stuck at a Sikh shrine there since March due to the lockdown. Maharashtra has blamed drivers **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

PAGE 1 ANCHOR Malegaon mystery: Covid count low but surge in overall deaths

12 due to coronavirus but 580 deaths in April is double the number last year, govt to randomly test next of kin

ZEESHAN SHAIKH
MALEGAON, MUMBAI, MAY 3

THE NUMBER of official Covid deaths in Malegaon in Maharashtra is just 12 since the first case in early April but, overall, the number of deaths in this city has shown an unusual surge.

At 580 deaths for April, as per civic records obtained by The Indian Express, it's almost twice the figure for the same month

last year (277) and a 48 per cent jump over the number of deaths in March this year (see chart).

Hard pressed to explain this spike - some officials blame the locked-down private hospitals - the state government has decided to randomly test family members of all those who died after April 10.

This amid concerns that some of those who have died may have had Covid but went undetected - and could, possi-

bly, have passed on the infection to close contacts.

Malegaon, in Nashik district, (population: 6 lakh) registered its first Covid case and death on April 8, and has since emerged as a hotspot with 229 cases and 12 deaths until Sunday. There has been no Covid death, as per official records, since April 27.

Last Thursday, over two hours at the city's biggest burial ground, Bada Kabrastan, The Indian Express witnessed nine



Nine bodies were brought to Malegaon's biggest burial ground in just over two hours last Thursday. Zeeshan Shaikh

SHARP SPIKE		
	2019	2020
January	354	275
February	288	312
March	214	390
April*	267	580

bodies being brought in. "On a normal day, we would have six or seven burials. Over the last three days, we have had

over 30 each day," said Raees Ahmed Ansari, administrator of the burial ground. In April, it saw as many as 457 burials - last April, the figure was just 140.

Officials said the number of cremations has remained relatively unchanged, 26 this April as compared to 22 last April. Of Malegaon's population, an estimated 79 per cent are Muslim.

"There has been a surge in deaths in April. Without a thorough study it would be difficult to say if some of these deaths happened due to Covid-19. We have decided to randomly test family members of all those

who died post April 10 to check if they are carrying an infection," said Pankaj Ashiya, IAS, who oversees the Malegaon Emergency Operation Centre established after the Covid outbreak in the city.

The Indian Express spoke with several families of those who died in April, local doctors and health officials. Some attributed the surge to private hospitals shutting down or cutting off access to healthcare. Their fear, officials said, was exacerbated after the death of five medical practitioners, three of whom **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

FROM PAGE ONE

J&K

On Sunday morning, after recovering their bodies, the Army confirmed the deaths of Colonel Ashutosh Sharma, Commanding Officer of RR's 21 Battalion, Major Anuj Sood of the same battalion, SI Sajeer Ahmad Pathan of J&K Police's Special Operations Group, Naik Rajesh Kumar and Lance Naik Dinesh Singh.

A release said the men lost their lives in a bid to evacuate civilians, having got intelligence that militants had taken them hostage. "A joint operation was launched by Army and JK Police. A team comprising five Army and JK Police personnel entered the target area, and successfully extricated the civ (civilians)," the release said. However, it added, the team came under heavy fire. "In the ensuing firefight two terrorists were eliminated and the team of five Army and JK Personnel attained martyrdom."

It's the second time 21 RR has lost a Commanding Officer. In 2000, the then CO and a Brigadier had died in an IED attack. Top Army and police officers arrived in Handwara to pay homage to the dead officers on Sunday.

The Handwara encounter began on Saturday afternoon, when a joint team of the Army, paramilitary and J&K Police cordoned Chanjimullah village and approached a cowshed where two militants were believed to be hiding. Sources said towards late evening, the officers found themselves trapped in a house with the militants, which was when contact with the men was lost.

An officer said that after they couldn't communicate with the officers, they halted the exchange of fire. "Firing again started at midnight. Subsequently, the two militants were shot dead," a security officer in Handwara said, adding that they also pressed in para commandos for the operation.

On Sunday evening, the J&K Police identified one of the dead militants as Pakistani national Haider, and said he was affiliated with the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and had been operating in Kashmir for the past couple of years. "The identity of the other terrorist is being ascertained," a J&K Police spokesperson said.

The Army said its men had fol-

lowed the militants into Chanjimullah village after an encounter with them on Friday afternoon at Waterbala, around 3 km away, in Handwara district.

This is a second big blow to the Army in Kashmir within a month. In the first week of April, five elite Special Forces commandos had died in a gun battle lasting several days near the LoC, also in Kupwara district. Five militants had been killed then.

'He promised...'

personnel, in an encounter in Chanjimmullah area of Handwara, North Kashmir.

Major Sood's family got the news of his death the same day as he was scheduled to return home after a gap of six months. While he had finished his two-year stint in Jammu and Kashmir in March, he had been told to stay on due to the lockdown. "He was to come home for a month-long leave and then join at Gurdaspur in Punjab," his father Brigadier (ret'd) C K Sood, who was in the EME Corps and also served in Kashmir, told *The Indian Express*, at their home in Panchkula, Haryana.

In their last conversation, on Saturday, Anuj told him he was heading for an operation, the Brigadier said. "I later texted him to ask about his whereabouts. He texted back saying they were chasing two militants."

His eyes welling up, the retired officer said Anuj had been married just two-and-a-half years and spent barely two-three months with wife Akriti in that time. The two got married in September 2017, and recently Akriti quit her job at a private company in Pune to live with Anuj in Gurdaspur. She is currently in Dharamshala, at her parents' place, and the Army is sending vehicles to get her to Panchkula amid the lockdown.

Colonel Sharma's family, including his elder brother Piush, 47, and mother, last spoke with him on May 1, the 26th Raising Day of 21 Rashtriya Rifles. The last time Pallavi met him was on February 28, when he received the Sena Medal for gallantry at a ceremony in Udhamapur.

Piush said Sharma always wanted to join the forces. "Our family has an 'Army culture'. I wanted to get into the Army too but couldn't due to certain family

issues. I lived my aspirations through Ashutosh," Piush said, calling his younger sibling "my only friend".

Originally belonging to Bulandshahr district in Uttar Pradesh, where they still own some land, the family came to settle in Jaipur some years ago. A cousin, Sunil Pathak, said they decided to move after father Shambhu Dutt Pathak's death.

Daughter Tamanna, who is in Class 6, said she too would join the Army like her father.

While Major Anuj was the third generation of the family in the Army, Sood said he did not want his son to join the forces. "He was a brilliant child, an all-rounder, good at sports, studies, extra-curricular. I wanted him to join the corporate world, have a full life. But he had a calling. This is what he wanted to do," Sood said.

Anuj's elder sister, who is currently in Melbourne, won't be able to make it for the funeral. Younger sister Harshita, also in the Army, is headed home from Army War College, Mhow, where she is undergoing some training. Anuj's mother passed away in January 2011 of cancer.

With Sharma's body expected to arrive home on Monday, Piush broke down, saying this is not how he hoped to meet his younger brother again. "He had promised he will come soon. He is indeed coming, but wrapped in the Tricolour."

Brigadier Sood recalled asking Anuj once what he would do if he couldn't clear the NDA exam. The boy who won horse-riding nationals in Kolkata in 2005 said, "with a cocky smile", "international jockey banaonga".

Bengal jute mill

jute mills identified by the Centre to deal with the shortage of bags for packing food grains. The state government subsequently allowed all jute mills to reopen with the condition that they use 15 per cent of their workforce, ensure social distancing and other protective norms.

But owners say that running mills with 15 per cent staff and maintaining social distancing is difficult. Moreover, most mills fall near red zones and are staring at a longer lockdown post-May 3. Owners estimate that their pro-

duction loss could be over 2 lakh ton if the situation continues.

West Bengal has 52 jute mills, of which six are under lockout for different reasons. Of the remaining 46, 18 mills are in North 24 Parganas. There are about two lakh workers engaged in jute mills apart from others associated with the trade.

Chief Minister Banerjee, at a press conference last month, said: "We have already given permission for jute mills to work, but with less workers and social distance."

Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said, "Out of 46, 26 jute mills have been given permission to start operations. However, some are near containment areas. Their 15% work force are at least 500 workmen. So, it is difficult to maintain social distance."

Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) chairman Raghavendra Gupta said, "Jute is labour-intensive production. So, we cannot start production with only 15% workers. We wrote a letter to the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary and also intimated the condition to the central government."

On worker wages, Gupta said: "We have already started giving up to Rs 5,000 advance to workers. Most owners have distributed this advance. Some of them may not have. The workers should talk to them."

The industry used to produce 12 lakh ton jute each year. This year, production is down by 1.2 lakh ton and, according to Gupta, may slide further to 2 lakh ton.

Malegaon

were confirmed Covid cases.

Said Malegaon's Health Officer Govind Chaudhary: "We still have to study whether some of the deaths were because of Covid and went unreported. Malegaon initially faced a problem as a lot of private facilities had shut down. People with diseases could not get access to timely treatment and medicines which led to the jump in deaths."

As of now 20 patients are being treated in Dedicated Covid Hospitals; 70 in Dedicated Covid Health Care (DCHC) centres which are for moderate cases; 232 in Covid Care Centres for cases deemed to be mild and 245 were kept in quarantine centres.

State Health Minister Rajesh

Tope who visited Malegaon earlier this week said that he observed people were not reporting to hospitals even if they had symptoms.

"Private hospitals have been asked to restart, the Collector has been ordered to ensure non-Covid patients are treated there. Fever clinics and mobile vans have also been started to ensure door to door survey is done," he said.

On the ground, though, there are gaps in handling of suspected Covid cases.

An illustrative case is that of 60-year-old Shamim Bano Abdul Qayyum who complained of feeling uneasy last Saturday. Her son took her to a private hospital which referred her to a dedicated Covid centre where she was admitted as doctors felt she had symptoms.

"On Sunday (April 26), she called me to say she was the only woman in the entire ward at Mansoor Hospital surrounded by men and complained that she was not being given her regular diabetes medicine. On Monday morning, I received a call from a patient who was in an adjoining bed who told me that it looked like she had probably died in her sleep," son Tauseef Qayyum said.

"My brother wrapped up her body. He also wrapped up two other bodies that died on the same day. My mother's swab test was taken but we are still awaiting the result," Tauseef said. Neither Tauseef nor his brothers have been tested yet.

"We are stretched thin and but are doing all we can with the resources we have. The high deaths in the city are a matter of concern but not all are victims of the virus. A lot of these deaths have happened because of the shutting down of services by private hospitals. We are now working overtime to ensure that private hospitals open up," said Nitin Kapadnis, deputy commissioner of Malegaon Municipal Corporation (MMC) who is responsible for formulating a containment plan for the city.

"It is a densely packed community. We have 10-15 people staying in 100 to 150 sq ft of space. The conditions make social distancing very difficult. Also a large chunk of people are daily-wage earners. Lack of money and poor living conditions make them vulnerable," Kapadnis said.

Randeep Guleria

There is no better person to address these questions than Dr Randeep Guleria, Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the country, who is closely involved in building strategies for prevention, containment, and management of COVID-19 in India. The Indian Express will host its second online Express Adda with Dr Guleria, also internationally renowned pulmonologist, on Monday, May 4.

The e-Adda will be moderated by Ravish Tiwari, Political Editor, and Kaunain Sheriff M, Principal Correspondent.

Dr Guleria is part of the core team of top officials reviewing and monitoring the pandemic in the country. He heads the Clinical Research Group of the National Task Force for COVID-19. He is also a member of the empowered group constituted by the government to track the availability of facilities and critical care training and heads a team that runs the National Tele-consultation Centre at AIIMS, connecting doctors across the country in real-time for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

The Express Adda is a series of informal interactions organised by The Indian Express Group and features those at the centre of change. Among the recent guests were Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian, former UK Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and cancer specialist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee. Last week, the Adda moved online with Dr Arvind Subramanian, former Chief Economic Adviser and Visiting Lecturer at Harvard Kennedy School as the first e-Adda guest.

NE hydel project research in collaboration with the state forest department.

Asked why the institute did not opt for a longer study and how monitoring tigers in the area would guide policy once the project was cleared, Dr GV Gopi, coordinator of the study and WII scientist, said: "We worked within a time frame and it is up to the forest department which research organisation they engage (for the prescribed monitoring) or how they factor in future research inputs."

Advising that "the project may be allowed," the FAC sub-commit-

tee noted last month: "The wildlife study done by WII is accepted in toto... along with all the recommendations with condition that the UA (user agency) funds the Conservation Plan."

The FAC considered the recommendations "favourably" during its April 23 meeting held via videoconference.

Senior Environment ministry officials did not respond to queries for comments.

Several aspects of the WII's engagement in the clearance process of the Etalin hydel project raise questions of propriety and conflict of interest.

Consider these: * In February 2017, the FAC sought a "multiple seasonal replicate" study to assess the abundance of wildlife at the proposed project site. The WII limited the study to four months of fieldwork and expanded its scope to charting a conservation plan for mitigating the project's impact.

* Etalin Hydro Electric Power Company Limited, a JV between Jindal Power Limited and the state government, funded the Rs 1.7-crore study, following an order by the ministry in September 2017 that "the cost of the study will be borne by the user agency as demanded by WII".

* The study was led by WII's Dr Gopi who was also picked as a member of the FAC sub-committee that subsequently accepted the study's recommendations.

Proposed at a distance of 12 km from Dibang wildlife sanctuary, the Rs 25,000-crore Etalin hydel project will require felling 278,038 trees over 11.65 sq km of mostly thick, multi-strata, "truly irreplaceable" subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forest. The FAC has considered the project four times since 2015.

Wockhardt

Police have registered a case under IPC sections 377 (unnatural offences), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of diseases endangering life) and 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of diseases endangering life), based on a complaint from the hospital's HR head.

"We have registered the case on the basis of what the HR manager has said in his statement. He told us that the accused was interviewed on April 28 and 29 following which he was hired by the hospital, and April 30 was his first day at work. He committed the offence on the second day," a police officer told *The Indian Express*.

The complaint states that the accused entered the patient's room in the ICU on the hospital's 10th floor on May 1. It says the accused made physical advances that the patient tried to resist. "The patient raised an alarm when the doctor assaulted him and staffers who were stationed outside went inside the room," said an officer.

The victim then informed hospital authorities about the incident. "The hospital took a decision to inform both police and BMC," an official said.

"We have registered a case but we have not arrested the doctor. He came in close contact with the patient, so we suspect even he might have got infected," said Senior Police Inspector Savlaram Agwane of Agrpada station. "We are yet to take a statement from the victim and the suspect," an investigator said.

A senior doctor from the hospital said it had to urgently recruit younger doctors after a policy decision was taken to keep those above 60 years old and with comorbidities at home as a precautionary measure. "The hospital has hired a few younger consultants. This doctor was not known to many," the senior doctor said.

Wockhardt hospital reopened on April 23 after being sealed for nearly a month when 80 staffers were infected with COVID-19. A BMC official said the hospital, a dedicated COVID-19 facility, has now opened up 30 beds to treat patients.

Nanded link

who came from Punjab to get them for the infection, saying the pilgrims had tested negative and were only then allowed to leave. The discovery of cases among the cotton workers, who also stayed with the pilgrims at the Gurdwara Langar Sahib for some days, is expected to broaden the tracing now.

Apart from them, two drivers who returned to Nanded from Punjab after dropping the pilgrims have now tested positive. "This morning, three persons tested positive for coronavirus. Out of them, two are drivers who returned from Punjab after providing a vehicle service," Nanded's Civil Surgeon Dr Neelkanth Bhosikar said.

"Now, the number of Covid-19 patients who returned to Nanded from Punjab has gone up to five," a district official said.

On Saturday, 20 pilgrims still at the Nanded shrine, Gurdwara Langar Sahib, tested positive.

Local Nawanshar leaders had reached out to the workers belonging to the area to get to Nanded to board the buses returning to Punjab with the Sikh pilgrims. Around 700 workers and traders from Punjab are believed to be stranded in various parts of Maharashtra, and 50-odd of them took the buses.

One of the workers who has tested positive and is now in Nawanshar said, "I had gone to the Marathwada region for work. I got in touch with leaders in Nawanshar, who informed me about the buses being arranged from Nanded." The 26-year-old said other workers too had come to the Nanded gurdwara, hiring taxis or taking lift in trucks, hoping to get home.

On Sunday, Punjab's coronavirus toll rose by three to 23. A 48-year-old tested positive for Covid after his death in Ferozpur, while the other two deaths were reported from Ludhiana.

Lockdown 3.0

managing the outbreak in 20 districts that have the highest number of cases. These 20 districts were home to nearly 100 million people at the time of the 2011 Census.

"These teams shall report to the Addl Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary/Additional Secretary (Health) of respective states and assist state health department in implementation of containment measures for COVID-19 in affected areas within these districts/cities," the Health Ministry's order says.

"Eight districts are doubling faster than 10 days: Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Central Delhi, Kolkata, North Delhi, Kanpur Nagar, Krishna," said the presentation made at Sunday's meeting. Seven districts have a higher case fatality rate than the India average of 3.2 per cent, the presentation said.

The case fatality rate (CFR) is the ratio of confirmed deaths to confirmed cases. These seven districts include major urban and industrial centres such as Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Indore, Surat, Central Delhi, and Krishna.

According to the presentation, nine districts, including Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Indore, Thane, Agra, Kumool and Kolkata, have positivity rates that are "two times the India average (4.4%)". Among the top 20 districts of concern with high numbers, nine are short on critical health infrastructure, the presentation said.

As lockdown 3.0 begins, 130 districts have been categorised in the red zone, 284 in orange, and 319 in green — the presentation noted that "states have flagged data related issues in zonal classification". Sources said that in previous interactions, several states have protested against the number of red-zone districts. Some states have repeatedly asked that the power to classify should be delegated to them — the presentation, however, seemed to indicate that the Centre would not agree, though an attempt would be made to make the data more robust.

The presentation said that "going forward", zonal classification would be done on "line list of patient data". The Centre also requested all states to "remove mismatch of all testing data in ICMR portal". States have also been asked to "update line listing of patient data, update outcome data (deaths, recoveries) and maintain health infrastructure data (isolation beds, oxygen beds, ICU beds) on COVID India portal as they impact district classification".

In districts that have a high doubling rate, the Centre has suggested that states should employ field units to enforce social distancing, ensure rigorous contact tracing, counsel patients and contacts on the importance of following isolation and quarantine guidelines, and make sure that PPE kits and prophylaxis with hydroxychloroquine are made available if large numbers of health workers are infected.

In districts with high case fatality rates, the "suggested actions" include raising awareness through community action, and appointing "community volunteers/opinion leaders/religious leaders" for awareness and increased sampling. In areas where there is "poor healthcare seeking behaviour" such as delayed reporting of cases, the suggested actions include "intensify (ing) active case search, designation of COVID 19, ensuring well functioning helplines with adequate operational capacity, and advertising the helpline number.

Where there are "inadequate health care staff", it has been suggested to "mobilize staff from different sources" including adjacent districts and private doctors on contractual basis, and explore the possibility of engaging retired professionals, final year students, and NGOs.

In another Shramik Special that left Bhiwandi for Gorakhpur, workers were asked to pay Rs 800. Laxman Gawd (36) said his family loaned the money on interest for him. (WITH INPUTS FROM ASAD REHMAN IN LUCKNOW & KAMAAL SAIYED IN SURAT)

professionals, final year students, and NGOs.

Train fare

migrant workers, students etc only and they are allowed to travel only after thorough screening. These trains are not for general public. "Yadav told *The Indian Express*. "So we are charging just nominal fare."

Separately, in a letter to state chief secretaries, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla Sunday sought to clarify that the transport facilitation was only for such "distressed" persons who were stranded after having started from their places of work before the lockdown. "... (it) does not extend to those categories of persons, who are otherwise residing normally at places, other than the native places for purposes of work etc, and who wish to visit their native places in normal course," it said.

In its guidelines published Saturday, Railways said it would hand over the tickets to the originating states and the state would "collect the ticket fare" and hand them over to Railways.

Jharkhand, which paid Rs 5.4 lakh to Kota administration for one train to bring students back from Kota, said it was yet to make payment for the 1,200 migrant workers who boarded the first Shramik Special Train from Lingampalli in Telangana to Hatia in Jharkhand. "Initially, there was some confusion whether to pay to the states or the Railways. On May 2, an SOP issued by Ministry is Railways makes it clear. It says the fares have to be collected by the passengers," he said.

Point 11 (c) of the Railways' SOP on sale of tickets states: "The Local State government authority shall handover the tickets to the passengers cleared by them and collect the ticket fare and handover the amount to railways."

Railway Board Chairman Yadav said states were trying out many models of financing the services. "We see three-four models emerging. In many places, employers of labourers have given them the money to go home; in some places, NGOs have sponsored. There are originating states which are paying, and then there are destination states paying to originating states. The services have just started, so the process will get established slowly," he said.

Maharashtra CM Thackeray, however, said Sunday, "Migrant labourers are able to return to their homes after many days. Since their financial condition has deteriorated, the Railways should not charge any ticket fare on humanitarian grounds." When contacted, Anil Parab, Transport Minister, Maharashtra told *The Indian Express* that fare collected from migrants was given to the Railways. "The Centre should take a call on fares and ask Railways to not charge money for running the Shramik specials. It will simplify the process and clear the confusion within states," said Parab.

The Shramik Special trains are allowed to run at two-third capacity and for single runs, which means they are sent back to their originating places empty. Instead of around 1,600, each train has been allowed to carry 1,200. "Obviously there is no question of profit here. In fact, we are serving complimentary food and water. I have instructed that no matter how many bottles of water a person requires, we should give them. We are giving soap, sanitiser etc. We are not running these services to earn any money," Yadav, Chairman, Railway Board, said.

The Railways is charging non-AC sleeper fare as per distance along with a superfast charge of Rs 30 and a reserved-berth charge of Rs 20 on each ticket.

In the train that left for Puri from Surat on Saturday, each passenger had to pay Rs 710. Surat District Collector Dhaval Patel said Odisha community leaders provided the list of those who wanted to travel along with contact detail. "They also collected the fare. An officer went with the community leader to the station and collected the 1,200 tickets and paid the amount to railway," he said.

At Nashik, 332 migrants put up at shelter homes left for Bhopal on Friday were paid Rs 250 per ticket. Sawant Kochle, who worked as a driver in Mumbai and was returning with his wife and two children said, he spent his last savings of Rs 500 for the fare.

In another Shramik Special that left Bhiwandi for Gorakhpur, workers were asked to pay Rs 800. Laxman Gawd (36) said his family loaned the money on interest for him.

(WITH INPUTS FROM ASAD REHMAN IN LUCKNOW & KAMAAL SAIYED IN SURAT)

E-XPLAINED by The Indian EXPRESS



44 days of lockdown, over 1,200 deaths, what next?

Tracking India's COVID journey so far, looking at where the curve is headed

with

Dr K Srinath Reddy

President, Public Health Foundation of India; Member, Executive Group of the International Steering Committee of WHO'S COVID-19 Solidarity Trial; Member, ICMR's COVID-19 Task Force

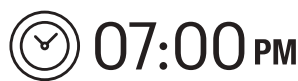
As policymakers warn of a long, grim battle and predict a "new normal" ahead, join us as Dr Reddy explains what it will take for India and the world to coexist with the novel coronavirus. Dr Reddy will be in conversation with

Monojit Majumdar

Editor, Explained, The Indian Express

Abantika Gosh

Deputy Associate Editor, The Indian Express



To register, SMS - IEEXP <space> "PD" <space> "Your name and email ID" to 56161
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SHOWERING PRAISE

Petals being showered by Air Force over Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute in New Town on Sunday. Partha Paul

■ An Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter showered flower petals over two hospitals in Kolkata as a mark of gratitude to frontline coronavirus warriors, a Defence spokesperson said. Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat had announced on Friday that the three services of the armed forces will carry out a series of activities to thank the "corona warriors".

■ An IAF Mi-17 helicopter took off from Barrackpore air force station and showered flower petals over Chittaranjan cancer institute and Alipore's Command Hospital, the spokesperson said. It was an expression of gratitude to doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and other professionals who are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic from the frontline, he said. PTI

2 more dead; migrants from Rajasthan to reach tomorrow

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 3

TWO MORE patients died of novel coronavirus and 41 new positive cases had been reported in the last 24 hours, stated a bulletin released by the West Bengal government on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the state government has initiated the process of bringing back thousands of migrant labourers back from Rajasthan. They are scheduled to reach Bengal on Tuesday.

"As a part of our promise to bring back citizens of Bengal stranded in other states, 2 special trains from Ajmer & Kerala would leave tomorrow for West Bengal carrying more than 2500 migrant labourers, pilgrims, students & patients. Everyone coming in to be screened as per protocols," CM Mamata Banerjee said in a tweet.

According to the bulletin, no person was discharged from any hospital in the last 24 hours. So, the total number of active positive cases stood at 663 in West Bengal, while the COVID-19 toll reached 50. As many as 1,939 samples were tested in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 22,915. Till now, the total number of people discharged remained 199.

Sources said among the two



new cases, a bureaucrat and a senior police officer of North 24 Parganas district tested positive for COVID-19 and had been admitted to Desun Hospital in Kolkata.

A senior police officer of Pragati Maidan police station also tested positive. Senior Kolkata Police officers on Sunday visited the said police station to boost the other officers' morale, sources added.

Meanwhile, an official tweet from the Information and Cultural Affairs Department said a special train would leave Ajmer in Rajasthan on Monday to bring back migrant workers to Bengal. The train will run non-stop and reach here on May 5 morning. The department also announced that active steps had been taken to bring back stranded migrant labourers of Bengal from Kerala. A special train will leave Kerala on Monday.

Two weeks after delivery, Covid positive woman recovers, thanks hospital

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 3

AMID UBIQUITOUS despair due to the novel coronavirus, a sliver of hope emerged in Howrah district. A 24-year-old coronavirus positive woman, who had delivered a baby two weeks ago, has been discharged from hospital after her recovery from the disease. Her baby had tested negative for COVID-19.

"Her recovery has boosted us. We are proud of our team that diligently took care of her for 18 days," said Shubhashish Mitra, Sanjeeban Hospital director, Uluberia.

She had mild breathing problems when she was brought to the hospital on April 13, the day she tested positive. She was moved to the isolation ward and monitored continuously, said Mitra.

"We frequently made multi-speciality efforts and monitored the pregnancy and heart rate of the foetus... We avoided a Cesa-



The mother and baby were discharged on May 1. Express

rean," said Mitra. The hospital set up a special team, including a gynaecologist and a paediatrician. On April 20, she gave birth to a boy weighing 2.7 kg. After that, she gradually recovered. The mother was kept separate from her baby, but she was allowed to breastfeed him. On May 1, the mother was discharged from the hospital.

Her husband said, "The hospital kept me in loop about the health of my wife and son through video calls." She thanked the hospital staff for taking care of her.



Spanish footballers playing for Mohun Bagan leave for Delhi, at New Town on Sunday. The players, coaches and support staff, along with their families, will take a flight to Spain from the national Capital. Partha Paul

Chief Secy-led panel to decide easing curbs today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 3

A TASK force led by state Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha on Monday will decide which shops and industries will be allowed to open in green and orange zones.

According to sources in the state secretariat, the panel will take a call after going through the Centre's guidelines, some of which have been modified and may be changed further.

Senior officials, however, made it clear that complete lockdown would continue in red-zone districts. A district is categorised as a red zone if there are substantial numbers of active cases. The other criteria are the rate at which confirmed cases are doubling, and surveillance feedback.

Only grocery shops, markets, sweet shops, and pharmacies will be allowed to remain open in such districts, and the usual restrictions will apply.

Comparatively more relaxations will be allowed in orange zones — areas with no recent surge in positive cases — and green zones, or districts with no cases in 21 days.

"The task force deciding lockdown relaxations, led by the

Chief Secretary, will meet on Monday. After that the committee will decide, following the Centre's guidelines, which shops, services and industries will be allowed to open in green zones as well as orange zones. Accordingly, they may issue an order on Monday," said a senior state secretariat official.

On Friday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had said shopping malls, hawkers' corners and market complexes would not be allowed to open in areas eligible for fewer restrictions. "We will only allow standalone shops," she added.

With the Centre advising against restarting passenger bus services, the government is thinking about continuing the ban. Banerjee had earlier said private buses could be allowed to run in green zones, provided they do not carry more than 20 passengers.

The Chief Minister has said her administration will allow taxis to operate if they transport only three passengers at a time. The limit on passengers will also apply to auto rickshaws.

The task force will also have to take a call on reopening liquor shops since they are a major revenue source.

Governor slams CM for her remarks against Oppn parties, journalists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 3

GOVERNOR JAGDEEP Dhankhar has once again hit out at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging her to express regret over her statements — "political parties are vultures waiting for dead bodies" and "journalists must behave". Earlier this week, the CM

had made these two remarks during a press conference held at the state secretariat, Nabanna.

In an official statement on lockdown extension issued on May 2, Dhankhar said, "My message to senior police and administrative officers: Be fair, avoid any political affiliation or stance and deliver with your best foot forward. I am sure all concerned in the state govt will ensure that the

needed get the full benefit of free ration from Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. There should be no corruption, diversion, political interference or controlling this. Benefit should reach poor & not the coffers of black marketers."

Taking a dig at Banerjee, Dhankhar said, "The Chief Minister should regret her statement that 'political parties are vultures in wait for the dead bod-

ies' and that journalists 'must behave' and take everyone along."

On Saturday, the Governor had accused the state government of hiding the actual number of coronavirus cases in the state. He alleged that the Centre had information that there are 931 COVID-19 cases in West Bengal, while the state government claimed the number of active cases to be just 572.

The Indian EXPRESS
— JOURNALISM OF COURAGE —

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Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences;
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in conversation with

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We also request for passes for 100% of our office workers because there are thousands of offices where only 2,3 or very few office workers are at work and unless all the necessary related sections such as computer, application form, receipt, voucher, payment, commission computing etc., are not fully functional, the office cannot run. The reduced number of workers to one-third or half cannot do the required job. Moreover, we will require many other relevant permissions such as the permission to operate few kinds of vehicles, etc.

For passes and other permissions, our authorised managers will contact you with the complete list of the workers. We request you to please get the passes and required permissions, etc. arranged at the earliest so that we can open our offices soon.

Being the guardian of the world's largest family Sahara India Pariwar, I am conveying to you the feelings of its 15 lakh workers and on their behalf, I express my heartfelt gratitude and deep regards to you the Head of the District Administration and every member of your Team, Doctors, Nurses, Paramedics, Members of the Police Force, officials and workers of Local Administration, Sanitation Workers and all the warriors who are fighting the tough battle against the corona pandemic in this difficult time.

Sahara Pranam

Saharasi
(Subrata Roy Sahara)



4 THE OUTBREAK NATION

EVACUATING INDIANS ABROAD

Centre asks states to ready protocol

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

HAVING STARTED the process of taking migrant labourers back to their home states in trains, the government is now looking at evacuating Indians stuck abroad.

In a presentation shared with states during a meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Sunday, the Centre gave state-wise breakups of people wanting to return to India and asked them to ready quarantine and testing facilities for them.

In the MEA's presentation, it was estimated that of the 1 crore people who are currently abroad on an Indian passport, about 1,92,000 in dire need may be brought back in socially-distanced flights, that they themselves pay for, once the states are ready with their protocols. This, provided they have proof of being COVID negative.

Kerala has shared a detailed protocol with the Centre for bringing back 3.6 lakh of its estimated 22 lakh people stuck in various countries. However, sources said the Centre feels their criteria for evacuation is too broad-based, and wants to restrict the number to workers with expired visas and such others who have no resources or documents to stay where they are.

A source who was at the meeting said, "The MEA has done an exercise to bring back about 1,92,000 people from various countries... Many people have been stuck since March 22. There are some 88 lakh people in the Gulf alone who want to come back. They will be charged

the fare and allowed to travel only if they have a COVID-free certificate. States have been given a breakup of how many they will have to accommodate."

The protocol Kerala has shared with states banks on free testing facilities available in countries like the UAE. For others like Saudi Arabia, where outsiders do not have access to free testing, the state has proposed flying down Indians doctors and lab technicians with reagents, while the local embassy negotiates for use of laboratory facilities.

"When asymptomatic people with a COVID-free certificate land here, they go home but are monitored every day. Symptomatic people are screened and tested. If they are negative, they go home with monitoring, and if they are positive they go to hospital," said an official.

The UAE has offered to fly stranded Indians and citizens of other countries, who wish to be repatriated, if they test negative, the UAE's ambassador to India Dr Ahmed Abdul Rahman Albanna had said mid-April.

Officials said there were concerns in some states about the evacuees putting pressure on the already stretched system. Sources said that Sunday's presentation was to give states time to "get their act together".

Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said: "There is something afoot to bring back Indians. We do not have too many people, about 300-400. We have also sent about \$2,000 to whoever registered on our website — about 59 people in all."

Don't force migrant workers to leave: Kerala to Collectors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MAY 3

FACING the threat of acute shortage of labour force in case of an bloc exit of migrant workers, the Kerala government on Sunday issued directions that only those workers who are adamant to return home should be sent back.

Since Friday, Railways have operated 11 Shramik non-stop trains for migrant workers who are stranded in Kerala. These trains have taken around 12,000 migrant workers to Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand.

After the lockdown, 3.39 lakh migrant workers were camping in Kerala — a major chunk of them taken care of by their employers or people who rented out accommodation.

Chief Secretary Tom Jose Sunday issued a direction to various District Collectors that migrant workers should not be forced to go. Workers who want to stay in Kerala will be given necessary support.

The direction comes amid complaints that even those who were not keen to return were made to leave. The labour sector, including construction segment, will become active after the lockdown, he said.

Rail coaches to be COVID hospitals for Tier II and III cities, villages

ABANTIKA GHOSH &
AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

AMID PROJECTIONS of a second wave of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) cases once the lockdown is lifted, there is a proposal to roll out "train hospitals" in Tier II and Tier III cities as well as villages, where the existing health infrastructure may not be sufficient.

While 5,150 train coaches (non-AC) have already been converted into "isolation centres", the NITI Aayog has proposed that some of these should be upgraded to hospitals, with oxygen, ICU and ventilator facilities.

This is in preparation for a likely surge in cases. According to NITI Aayog's presentation shared with states last week, if the lockdown was lifted as scheduled on May 3, the number of cases was estimated to touch 65,000 by May 15, and 2.74 crore by August 15.

So far, about 20 per cent of the over 40,000 cases across the country have needed hospitalisation.

"This idea came from the Prime Minister. The conversion of some of these isolation facilities into hospitals (Level II and Level III COVID care centres) is a highly logical step. It gives us capacity with mobility, especially in places where medical infrastructure is lacking. They can reach anywhere in the country within 24 hours, they can be parked anywhere. So we are prepared for a surge at any place, any time the local infrastructure is not enough," said Dr V K Paul, member (health), NITI Aayog, who chairs the empowered group on medical emer-

gency management plan. He said some of these "train hospitals" could be retained even after the pandemic, to be used during disasters. "Some of these could continue to be with the National Disaster Management Authority," he said. The staff, said Dr Paul, could be sourced either locally from wherever the train is stationed, or posted on a rotational basis. "NITI Aayog has suggested to the empowered group to provide Level-II care, i.e. dedicated COVID health centres, in the railway coaches, with facilities for administering oxygen, IV fluids etc., to strengthen the support to districts, as and when needed. It has further been suggested that a small fraction of coaches should also be included as Level-III, i.e. dedicated COVID hospitals, if possible. However, the current protocol still stands for railway coaches — as Level-I facilities," said Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan.



Over 5,000 train coaches have been converted into Level-I isolation centres. File

"As per consultations with the Health Ministry, we had prepared these coaches as Level-I centres. We have been given to understand that, if needed, these would be deployed in areas where isolation facility is not there. That is where the matter stands as of now," said Arun Arora, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer, Northern Railway.

There are currently three levels of COVID-19 facilities in the country: Level-I is for isolation of those who are positive but asymptomatic or have a history of contact with a confirmed patient; Level-II (dedicated COVID health centres) are hospitals with oxygen facilities that offer care for cases that have been clinically assigned as moderate; Level-III (dedicated COVID hospitals) are fully equipped hospitals with ventilators and ICUs to treat severe cases. Following consultations between the Health and Railways ministries, 5,150 train coaches have been converted into Level-I isolation centres, but are yet to be used. Dr Paul mooted the idea to upgrade these into Level-II and Level-III facilities at a meeting with the Railways' top brass last month. It was understood that these coaches would add more value to the COVID-19 containment infrastructure as hospitals on wheels rather than isolation facilities. "It was pointed out that isolation of asymptomatic patients could happen anywhere, like stadiums, schools etc, whereas these coaches could be more useful as hospitals," said a source. However, some issues were raised, including the fact that since these are non-AC coaches, it would get very hot for the patients, and would not have the facilities needed for plugging in sophisticated machines for healthcare. The example of the Railways' Lifeline Express, a hospital on wheels, was cited. However, source said replicating a similar rake would take about six months. The coaches have already undergone considerable modifications for use as isolation centres — the middle berths have been removed, two toilets have been converted into bathrooms etc — at an estimated cost of Rs 2 lakh per coach. Each coach has been re-structured to accommodate 16 patients. According to the Railways' usage protocol, each coach has space for two oxygen cylinders; the roof of the coach would have to be insulated for cooling; each rake should be designated to be attached to a COVID-care hospital; and an emergency resuscitation centre should be kept at the platform where a train with these coaches is parked.

MHA asks states to use home guards, NCC for non-serious work

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

WITH A rise in the number of COVID-19 cases among police and prison inmates, the Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday issued orders and SOPs for containment of coronavirus infections among these two groups.

For police, the MHA has suggested that states must prepare a second line of defence and allow work from home for police wherever possible. It has also asked them to deploy home guards and civil defence personnel instead of police at places where law and order is not an issue.

In the case of prisons, MHA has asked for thorough assessment of COVID risk among inmates through thermal scanning, investigation of health history of newly arrested inmates, limited visit of non-essential staff to prisons and restricting the movement of prisoners within jail premises. "Home Guards, Civil Defence, NCC cadets, Scouts and Guides and Student Police Cadets may be utilised in areas where there are not imminent law and order issues. They can especially be of help in maintaining order at the relief centres and in facilitating the maintenance of supply chain and for coordinating other essential services," the MHA said.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

A fireworks display by Navy ships in the Arabian Sea off the Maharashtra coast to thank frontline workers. ANI

Armed forces express gratitude to 'corona warriors', get PM praise

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday appreciated the efforts by the armed forces to thank doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and others combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the last day of the second phase of the lockdown — with a more relaxed lockdown period set to kick in for two weeks — Air Force and Navy aircraft went on flypasts, showered petals on hospitals, and displayed banners, Army bands played their best tunes at hospitals treating COVID-19 patients, and the Navy's vessels lit up flares.

Senior officers from all three services also laid wreaths at the National Police Memorial in the capital to express gratitude to law enforcement personnel.

Prime Minister Modi tweeted a video showing some of these activities, and said it was a great gesture by the forces. "Saluting those who are at the forefront, bravely fighting COVID-19. Great gesture by our armed forces," Modi said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said: "Armed Forces today have organised several activities to show their respect and express gratitude towards the Corona Warriors who are battling against the global pandemic."

ENS

'People of Sikkim have been extremely disciplined, this is a reason for our success'

AS INDIA battles the COVID-19 pandemic, Sikkim remains untouched by the virus. However, the state remains cautious even as it prepares for relaxation of restrictions while the lockdown enters the third phase. Sikkim Chief Minister **PREM SINGH TAMANG** speaks to **ESHA ROY** about the road ahead.

Sikkim has not had a single positive case. How did you ensure this?

Ever since news of the virus in China started coming in, we remained alert, especially as we share a border with China, apart from two other international borders with Bhutan and Nepal. We conducted intensive screening of those entering and leaving the state at four of our main checkpoints since February, after the first case was reported in

India in January. We didn't want to wait for the Centre to issue instructions. I felt we should take immediate measures.

By March 5, we had banned all foreign tourists from entering Sikkim. Foreign tourists who were in the state were asked to leave. By March 17, we had banned all domestic tourists and, like foreign tourists, the domestic tourists who were in the state were asked to leave. The hotel industry was upset when we brought these measures, but now they tell us it was the right thing to do, otherwise we would have got cases as well.

We also completely shut all our borders, including Nathula pass, where our people carry out traditional trade with the local Chinese across the border. Nathula was in any case hardly functioning at the time because we were just pulling out of win-



THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW
WITH
PREM SINGH TAMANG
CHIEF MINISTER, SIKKIM

While the Northeast had been relatively unaffected, in the last month, several cases emerged in these states as well. How did you avoid this?

No one, including Sikkimese people living in other states, were allowed to enter, no one was allowed to leave. In other Northeast states, positive cases came when locals living outside came home. We have more than 2,000 students studying in other parts of

the country and many more working. We asked them to stay where they are. We have been in constant touch with them through our resident commissioner, sending them food rations, monetary assistance and any other form of help that they need.

I myself have spoken to a number of students. Some want to come back. I have assured them they will be brought back at an appropriate time. Many others have voluntarily stayed on, saying they wanted Sikkim protected from the virus. This is one of the main reasons why we have been so successful — it is because the people of Sikkim have been extremely disciplined, following all guidelines of the lockdown like social distancing, strictly. We have not had to use police force at all, so our police have been effectively used in monitoring and surveil-

lance of borders. For those outside the state, we have provided Rs 5,000 one-time assistance to students, Rs 10,000 assistance to Sikkimese employed in other cities and Rs 30,000 to those who had gone out for medical treatment.

Migrant workers within the state — from West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar — who were not allowed to leave were given Rs 2,000 per month. Registered labour within the state were also given this amount, apart from ASHA workers who were given a one-time incentive of Rs 5,000, frontline health workers a one-time incentive of Rs 3,000 and safai karmacharis Rs 5,000. This financial assistance further ensured that they followed our directives.

FULL INTERVIEW ON
www.indianexpress.com

HANDWARA ENCOUNTER

'Haven't told our parents, can't even cry before them'

ADIL AKHZER, RAAKHI JAGGA & LALMANI VERMA SRINAGAR, LUDHIANA, DEHRADUN, MAY 3

SAGEER AHMAD Pathan, the J&K Police Sub-Inspector killed in the encounter at Handwara in Kupwara district on Saturday, had been part of several successful anti-militancy operations in the Valley, earning him three out-of-turn promotions in the force's Special Operations Group (SOG) and several gallantry medals.

A resident of Karnah in Kupwara, the 42-year-old was leading the SOG team under the command of District SP, Handwara, that was part of the operation, along with the Army's 21 Rashtriya Rifles Battalion. Pathan had joined police in 1999 in its Armed Wing, and had been with the counter-insurgency unit SOG since 2006.

"In recognition of his immense contribution, Pathan was granted three out-of-turn promotions and rose from the rank of a Constable to Sub-Inspector," a police spokesperson said. Among the bravery awards

Pathan — who leaves behind his parents, wife and four children — was Sher-i-Kashmir Police Medal for Gallantry in 2009 and Police Medal for Gallantry by the President of India in 2011.

Calling him a courageous officer, the J&K Police said Pathan "attained martyrdom protecting integrity and sovereignty of our nation and safeguarding the interests of people till last breath".

Naik Rajesh Kumar, who also died in the encounter, was one of five siblings. The family is based in Rajrana village of Punjab's Mansa district.

Brother Subash Kumar said they were yet to tell their parents of the 29-year-old's death and were waiting for the body, expected to arrive on Monday morning. "They will not be able to bear the shock. We are not even crying in front of them," Rajesh joined the Army 10 years ago and last visited home in February.

Owning less than one acre of land, the family makes by doing contract farming at times and depended on the money Rajesh sent home, villagers said. While the two sisters are married, neither of the brothers is.

116 benches of SC heard 835 matters during lockdown

SEEMACHISHTI
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

ATOTAL of 116 benches of the Supreme Court heard matters during 22 days of hearings between March 23 — once lockdown rules entailing court hearings via video-conferencing were put in practice by the apex court — and May 1. It resorted to limited hearings via video-conferencing during this time.

Figures accessed by *The Indian Express* confirm that 43 benches were designated for main matters and 73 benches for review petitions. The number of matters heard was 538, apart from 297 connected matters, sources said. Judgments were delivered in 57 matters that had been reserved or were Curia advisari vult and another 268 connected matters "comprising all categories of matters". Also, 58 prayers for interim relief and mentioning were heard. A total of 49 special leave petitions, 92 writ petitions and 138 review petitions were disposed of.

In comparison, Delhi High Court took up 623 cases in this period via video-conferencing. Chief Justice of India SA Bobde told *The Indian Express* last week about a slump in court activity,

with filings having dropped steeply. "In January, there were up to 205 filings per day and a total of 4,108 for the month. In April so far (until April 26), the total number of e-filings was 305," he said.

The apex court under CJ Bobde has been keen to be seen as a court that wishes to adopt modern methods made possible by electronic communication. The Supreme Court was set to launch the use of artificial intelligence in March, but the plans were delayed due to COVID-19. Even before the lockdown was declared nationally, it was by an order on March 6 that the Supreme Court instituted a new practice to observe physical distancing but continue to hear matters that come up.

Concerns have been raised in some quarters that video-conferencing leads to more opacity and not openness, but sources said the "practice is not new". In 2003, the Supreme Court in its judgment passed in State of Maharashtra v. Prafulla Desai in 2003 held that recording of evidence by a court through video-conferencing mode shall be considered to be "as per procedure established by law".

FULL STORY ON
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NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)
ITEM RATE Offer(s) in two part system are invited from reputed, resourceful and experienced parties meeting prescribed qualifying criteria for following work:

Sl. No.	Description of work and NIT No.	Tender Document available on B&R's Website	Due Date of submission of Bid
1.	Annual Maintenance Contract for installed Solar LED Street Lights in PAN India basis for 5 years under Atal Jyoti Yojana (AJAY) of Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) NIT No: B&R / MDS / 71104 / EESL / BSLB / MAINT / NIT dated 04.05.2020	04.05.2020	18.05.2020

Interested resourceful Contractors may download the tender documents from Co's Website <http://www.bridgeroof.co.in>.
Corrigendum / Addendum, if any, shall be hosted in Co's Website <http://www.bridgeroof.co.in>.

GUJARAT MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LIMITED
(A Government of Gujarat Undertaking)
Regd. Office: Block No. 14/1,
Dr. Jivraj Mehta Bhavan, Sector-10, Gandhinagar
Ph. 079-23250767, 23250766, 23257698

EMERGENCY TENDER NOTICE : DS - 01/2020-21

Emergency Tenders are invited online from reputed Manufacturers / formulators / Authorized Distributors / direct importers for Purchase of (1) Rapid Antibody Test Kit for COVID-19 (2) Viral RNA Extraction Kit on Quantity Contract Basis. Interested bidders are requested to submit the tender through e-tender process. All tender documents can be downloaded free on the website: <https://gmscl.nprocure.co> & Tender Notice is available on <https://gmscl.gujarat.gov.in> and this office notice board.
Duration of downloading of tender document (online): -
03/05/2020 to 11/05/2020 upto 15:55 HRS.
Last date for submission (online): 11/05/2020 upto 16:00 HRS
Last date for submission of physical document:
12/05/2020 upto 16:00 HRS
Opening of Technical Bid Date (online): 13/05/2020 at 15:00 HRS
INF/60/20-21
MANAGING DIRECTOR

ANDHRA PRADESH MEDICAL SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
2nd Floor, Plot No. 9, Survey No. 49, IT park, Mangalagiri-522 503.
Ph No. : 91210 53550, Email : apmhdc@gmail.com

Short Tender Notice No. 1/APMSIDC/2020-21, Dated : 03-05-2020

APMSIDC invites tenders through e-procurement platform for COVID-19.

1. Procurement of Medical Equipment.
2. Providing isolation rooms.
3. Procurement of Drugs, Surgicals, Diagnostic / Lab and other consumables.
4. Construction of civil works.

For detailed notification and further details please visit the website <http://msidc.ap.nic.in> & www.tender.approcurement.gov.in.
APMSIDC will reserve the right to cancel the tenders at any time without assigning any reasons.
Sd/- Managing Director

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)
ITEM RATE Offer(s) in two part system are invited from reputed, resourceful and experienced parties meeting prescribed qualifying criteria for following work:

Sl. No.	Description of work and NIT No.	Tender Document available on B&R's Website	Due Date of submission of Bid
1.	Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Testing and Maintenance of Static Meter based Streetlight Controller (CCMS) for installed LED street lights in Maharashtra. NIT No: B&R / MDS / 71107 / EESL / ICCMS/MH/NIT/01 dated 04.05.2020	04.05.2020	18.05.2020

Interested resourceful Contractors may download the tender documents from Co's Website <http://www.bridgeroof.co.in>.
Corrigendum / Addendum, if any, shall be hosted in Co's Website <http://www.bridgeroof.co.in>.

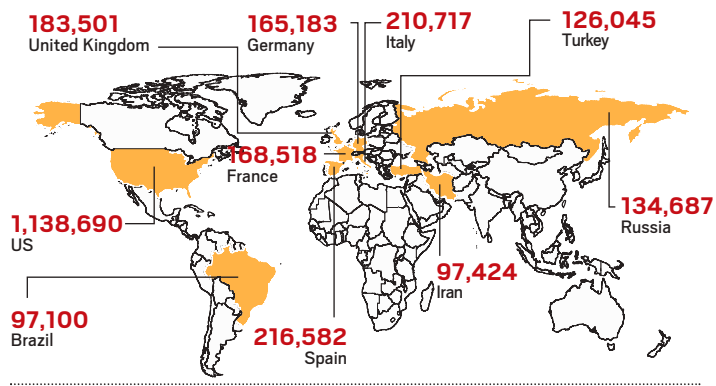


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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

THE WORLD



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 3,462,682 DEATH COUNT: 244,911

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11:00 pm on May 3

COVID DEATHS IN CANCER PATIENTS: HOW DANGEROUS IS THE VIRUS?



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

A NEW study in the US has assessed the mortality rate among cancer patients infected with COVID-19. Described as the largest study that makes this kind of assessment so far, it found people with cancer are much more likely to die from COVID-19 than those without cancer. Conducted by physician-researchers at Montefiore Health System and Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the study was published in the online edition of *Cancer Discovery*. The study involved 218 cancer patients who tested positive for COVID-19 from March 18 to April 8 at Montefiore Medical Center, New York. Of them, 61 died from COVID-19, a fatality rate of 28%, as compared to the overall mortality rate of 5.8% for COVID-19 in the United States (as per the World Health Organization). These patients were treated at a time when testing was mostly done in symptomatic patients who required hospitalisation. This, the re-

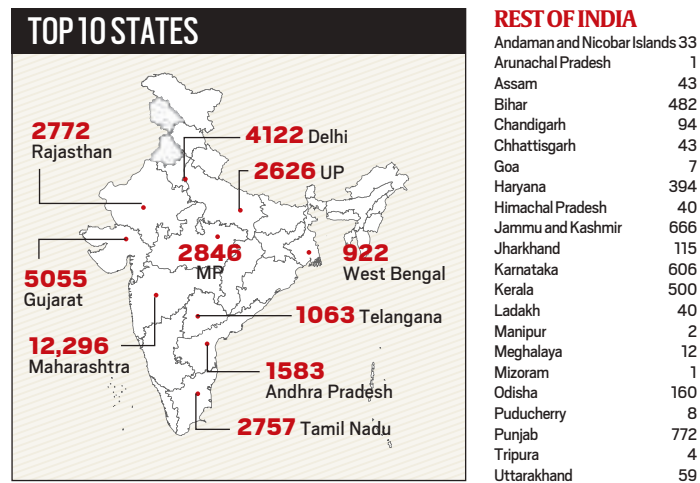
searchers said, may partially explain the high fatality rate within the study's cancer population. However, even when compared to mortality rates in non-cancer patients across New York City during the same time period, cancer patients demonstrated a significantly higher risk of dying from COVID-19.

As a group, COVID-19 patients with blood cancers, such as leukaemia and lymphoma, had the highest mortality rate: 37% (20 of 54 patients). For patients with solid malignancies, the mortality rate was 25% (41 of 164). Striking differences were observed among specific solid cancers: the mortality rate for patients with lung cancer was 55% and colorectal cancer was 38%, compared with mortality rates of 14% for breast cancer and 20% for prostate cancer.

"Our findings emphasise the need to prevent cancer patients from contracting COVID-19 and—if they do—to identify and closely monitor these individuals for dangerous symptoms," said Vikas Mehta, a co-lead author of the study, a surgical oncologist at Montefiore, and associate professor of otorhinolaryngology—head and neck surgery at Einstein. "We hope that our findings can inform states and communities that have not yet been so severely struck by this pandemic about the unique vulnerability cancer patients face."

Source: Albert Einstein College of Medicine

INDIA COUNT: 40,263 (1306 DEATHS)



REST OF INDIA	
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	33
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Assam	43
Bihar	482
Chandigarh	94
Chhattisgarh	43
Goa	7
Haryana	394
Himachal Pradesh	40
Jammu and Kashmir	666
Jharkhand	115
Karnataka	606
Kerala	500
Ladakh	40
Manipur	12
Meghalaya	2
Mizoram	1
Odisha	160
Puducherry	8
Punjab	772
Tripura	4
Uttarakhand	59

Union Health Ministry update as of 11 pm, May 3. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states/UTs with at least one case listed above. 10887 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 30 STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

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

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Spotlight on remdesivir

The debate over the drug continues. It has been given emergency approval for COVID-19 treatment in the US, even as a new study casts doubt over its efficacy. What is this drug, and what do the studies say?

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MAY 3

LAST WEEK, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave emergency approval to use the drug remdesivir for critical COVID-19 patients. This came days after Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), made a strong case for the drug. And yet, also last week, a study published in *The Lancet* put a question mark about the benefits of using the drug.

What is it about remdesivir that holds promise, and why is it debated?

What is remdesivir?

It was manufactured in 2014 to treat for Ebola, by US-based biotechnology firm Gilead Sciences. It has since been used to treat for MERS and SERS, both caused by members of the coronavirus family. This was, however, not with much success. Current research is looking at whether the drug's antiviral properties work against SARS-CoV2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 disease.

What is the basis of the hopes being pinned on remdesivir?

SARS-CoV2 replicates itself inside the human cell with the help of an enzyme called RdRp. When remdesivir is injected intravenously, it inhibits this enzyme and effectively blocks replication of the coronavirus. *The Journal of Biological Chemistry* published a study on April 13 concluding that indeed, the "drug is able to inhibit the virus" and prevent its further spread in human cells.

"Since January, our teams have been working day and night to determine whether remdesivir might work in patients with COVID-19. These efforts include collaboration with study investigators and governments on the various clinical trials. (The) news, that remdesivir might play a role in easing the burden of the pandemic, is the outcome we all hoped would be possible," Gilead Sciences chairman and CEO Daniel O'Day said.

Who all are studying it?

There are six major trials or studies under way for remdesivir. It is one of the lines of treatment being investigated under the Solidarity trials under the aegis of the World Health Organization (WHO). Other investigations include Gilead's own SIMPLE study, the US NIAID's trials, the French institute Inserm's DisCoVeRy study, and two clinical trials in China.

On its website, Gilead says it is collaborating with the US FDA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health and Human Services, NIAID and Department of Defense-CBRN Medical, the China CDC and National Medical Product Administration (NMPA), WHO, and researchers and clinicians across Europe and Asia to assess the antiviral properties of remdesivir.

The SIMPLE trial is looking at whether a five-day course of remdesivir works as effectively as a 10-day course. Phase-3 results showed that it is indeed so. The trial evaluated 397 patients hospitalised for severe COVID-19 infection. A spokesperson for Gilead said, "This shorter duration of therapy may enable patients to be discharged from the hospital earlier and allow health-care providers to treat more patients with the existing supply of medication."

What benefits have been found so far?

Initial trial results made public by NIAID found that mortality rate was 8 per cent in COVID-19 patients administered remdesivir, as opposed to 11.6 per cent in another arm of patients not given this drug. Recovery time improved from 15 to 11 days. The full trial results are yet to be published.

NIAID director Fauci, an immunologist

How remdesivir tricks coronavirus

KABIR FIRAUQUE
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

IN ALL the debate over the efficacy of remdesivir in treating COVID-19 patients, what has been clear is the way the drug acts—or is meant to act—against the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2. Remdesivir is designed to obstruct the stage of replication, when the virus creates copies of itself, followed endlessly by the copies creating copies of themselves. Research last month concluded that remdesivir indeed works this way, and a new paper last week described the exact mechanism of interaction between the virus and the drug.

How does replication take place?

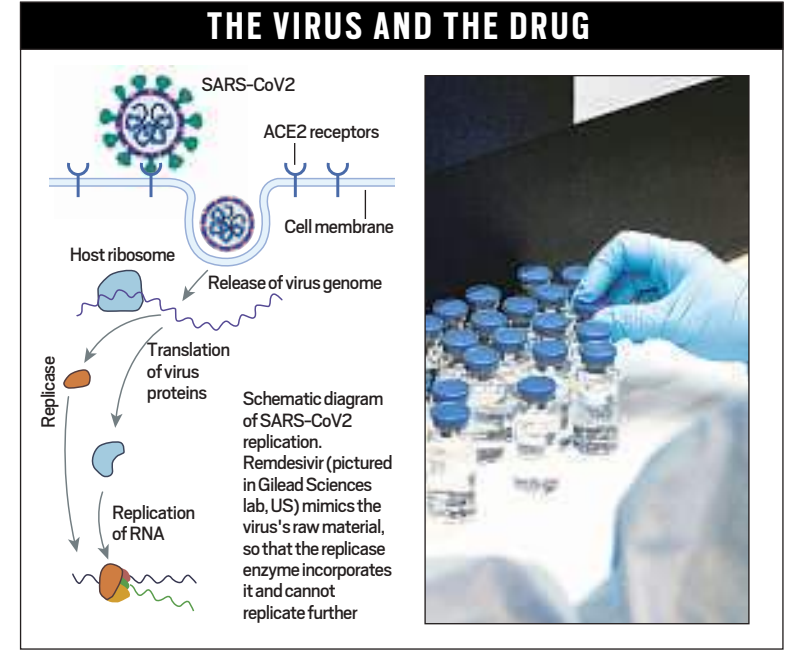
Once the virus enters the human cell, it releases its genetic material, which is then copied using the body's existing mechanism. At every stage of infection, various human proteins, virus proteins, and their interactions come into play. At the replication stage, the key viral protein at play is an enzyme called RdRp (an enzyme is a kind of protein that speeds up chemical reactions within a cell).

It is RdRp that makes the copies, by processing components of the RNA of the virus. University of Alberta researchers called it the "engine" of the virus in a paper last week, in which they described the action of remdesivir against this "engine". Again, researchers at the Max Planck Institute of Biophysical Chemistry in Germany described the same enzyme as the "copy machine" of the virus when they imaged the architecture of this "machine" in 3D.

In scientific literature, such an enzyme is called a polymerase (the 'p' is RdRp stands for polymerase) or a replicase. In any case, this is the enzyme that is targeted by remdesivir.

And how exactly does remdesivir target this enzyme?

In order to replicate, the copy machine processes raw material from the virus RNA, broken down by another enzyme



with that specific function. When a patient is given remdesivir—the inhibitor—it mimics some of this material, and gets incorporated in the replication site. With remdesivir replacing the material it needs, the virus fails to replicate further.

"These coronavirus polymerases are sloppy and they get fooled, so the inhibitor gets incorporated many times and the virus can no longer replicate," University of Alberta microbiologist and immunologist Matthias Götte said in a statement.

How far has this action been established?

This is what the University of Alberta researchers reported in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. Using insect cells, they expressed RdRp complexes of SARS-CoV (the coronavirus responsible for SARS) and SARS-CoV2 (which causes COVID-19). They found that an active compound in remdesivir inhibits the copy machines of both viruses with the same po-

Why is not everyone optimistic?

Some of the trials were limited in scope. Then there was the study in *The Lancet* on April 29, about a clinical trial of 237 COVID-19 patients in 10 hospitals in China. "In this study of adult patients admitted to hospital for severe COVID-19, remdesivir was not associated with statistically significant clinical benefits," it said.

The study found adverse drug reaction in 18 people and stopped remdesivir treatment prematurely in them. It said that there were adverse events in 66% of the remdesivir-treated patients.

Commenting on the study in *The Lancet*, the Gilead spokesperson said, "The study did not identify any new safety concerns with remdesivir treatment. Cardiac events (cardiac arrest or acute coronary syndrome) and treatment discontinuation due to respiratory failure were events associated with both remdesivir and placebo. The number of patients who completed the study was too low to enable any statistically meaningful conclusions. Data from fully-powered trials are needed to determine the safety profile of remdesivir as treatment for COVID-19."

To what extent is remdesivir being used in India?

Dr V Ravishanker, chief operating officer in Lilavati Hospital, Mumbai, who until last week had 25 COVID-19 patients, most of them on intensive care support, said doctors

in his team are trying ritonavir, lopinavir, and even immunosuppressant tocilizumab, but not remdesivir.

Previously, the same team had found similar results for remdesivir action against the coronavirus that causes MERS. The drug itself was designed to act against the Ebola virus, which is not a coronavirus.

As far as SARS-CoV2 is concerned, a paper by Chinese researchers last week has added to the emerging knowledge about the action of remdesivir.

What are these new findings?

Researchers from various institutions under the Chinese Academy of Sciences have imaged the high-resolution structure of the SARS-CoV-2 replicase complex, with remdesivir bound to it. They have published their findings in *Science*.

The structure shows where the virus's RNA template enters the copy machine, where remdesivir is incorporated, and where the process of replication is terminated. The Chinese researchers too used insect cells.

Dr Jalil Parker, a pulmonologist, said that ideally they wait for sufficient data from clinical trials before using a drug. "But we don't have many options right now, and we have to try newer drugs for patient with COVID-19. It is doctor's call whether or not to use the drugs before clinical trial results. I am open to its use."

Since January, investments have been made to ramp up production and establish a supply chain. Until January there was an inventory to treat 5,000 patients on a 10-day course. By March end, it was scaled up to 30,000 patients. By May end the company plans to produce enough stock for 1.4 lakh patients. Gilead has for now stopped meeting individual requests for supply under its Compassionate Use programme, except for pregnant women and children with severe infection.

The Gilead spokesperson said India is not on its Compassionate Use programme for the drug. "India is part of the large global study designed by the WHO—the Solidarity trial," the spokesperson said.

AC in the time of COVID: the apprehensions, and what the guidelines say

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

WITH SUMMER having arrived during an outbreak, a question being asked is whether people should be careful about using air-conditioners. A number of researchers have predicted that the novel coronavirus is unlikely to survive high temperatures.

Additionally, a study by Chinese researchers has concluded that droplet transmission was prompted by air-conditioned ventilation. Not many other studies, however, have associated AC use with coronavirus spread.

The government has issued general guidelines on the use of air-conditioners. These are limited to temperature and relative humidity in the context of the virus.

What are the guidelines?

The guidelines compiled by the Indian

Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air Conditioner Engineers (ISHRAE) say a temperature between 24-30°C should be maintained while operating ACs at home, and that relative humidity levels in the range of 40%-70% is considered most suitable.

ISHRAE cites data from a study which examined the transmission of the coronavirus in 100 cities of China. The study had indicated that high temperature and high humidity "significantly reduce the transmission of influenza".

"Studies conducted at various RH levels have shown that using viral culture methods low temperatures (7-8°C) were optimal for airborne influenza survival, with virus survival decreasing progressively at moderate Temperatures (20.5-24 °C) and further decreases at higher (greater than 30 °C) temperatures. As per some recent studies, SARS-CoV-2 has been found highly stable on surfaces for 14 days at 4°C; one day at 37°C and 30 minutes at 56°C was needed to



inactivate the virus," ISHRAE states.

What is the significance of the humidity range stipulated?

Relative humidity is believed to affect infectivity of the coronavirus. Moisture in the air plays a primary role in providing protection against respiratory infection. In the upper respiratory tract, moist surfaces with mucous layers collect larger particles before they enter the trachea and pharynx; in the lower respiratory tract, the bronchi and

alveoli trap small particles.

When we breathe dry air, the mucous membrane in the lungs also become dry; the fluid over the lining of the cells becomes more viscous, and cilia, the little hair that protects our lungs from deep settling of particles, are rendered dysfunctional so that particles settle more deeply in the lungs. Humidity levels of 40-70% are considered the most ideal range for humans to fight pathogens. ISHRAE also notes that studies indicate that 80% relative humidity tend to neutralise the COVID-19 virus.

The guidelines state that in dry climate, relative humidity should not be allowed to fall below 40%. Water evaporating from a pan kept should be kept in the room; this will increase humidity if it falls below 40%.

Among other guidelines, recirculation of cool air by room air-conditioners must be accompanied by outdoor air intake through slightly open windows and exhaust by natural exfiltration. "Fresh Air in-

take through a fan filter unit will prevent outdoor dust entry (containing high levels of PM10 and PM2.5 particles) and exhaust through kitchen and toilet exhaust fans kept operational," the guidelines state.

What is the study that linked COVID-19 with air-conditioning?

It was conducted by Guangzhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in an air-conditioned restaurant involving three family clusters. It concluded that droplet transmission was prompted by air-conditioned ventilation and the key factor for infection was the direction of the airflow. The study strongly recommended increasing the distance between tables and improving ventilation.

The researchers studied 10 positive patients from three families who had eaten in the same air-conditioned restaurant. The family A, which had earlier travelled to Wuhan, dined in the restaurant on January

24, while two other families—B&C—sat at the neighbouring tables. On the same day, one member (A1) of family A, experienced onset of fever and cough and went to the hospital; and on February 5, a total of 9 others (4 members of family A, 3 members of family B, and 2 members of family C) became ill with COVID-19. The study had found that the only known source of exposure for the affected persons in families B and C was patient A1 at the restaurant.

"Virus transmission in this outbreak cannot be explained by droplet transmission alone. Larger respiratory droplets (>5 microns) remain in the air for only a short time and travel only short distances, generally <1 m. The distances between patient A1 and persons at other tables, especially those at table C, were all >1 m. However, strong airflow from the air conditioner could have propagated droplets from table C to table A, then to table B, and then back to table C," the study concluded.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

KRISHI PRADHAN

Need of the hour is to maximise possibilities of agriculture, which has demonstrated its utility and resilience in trying times

THE YEAR 2019-20 saw India's agriculture sector grow by 11.3 per cent at current prices, more than the overall annual GDP increase of 7.9 per cent. According to NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand, this is the first time since 1980-81 when farm sector growth has exceeded that of non-farm by such a wide margin. But that's not all. The current fiscal — the April-June quarter, definitely — could see agricultural growth surpassing that of non-agriculture even at constant prices. Simply put, agriculture is back to being the economy's mainstay and, indeed, the only sector growing amid a nationwide lockdown. One indicator is wheat procurement. As on May 1, government agencies had bought 14.3 million tonnes (mt) of the new crop, equivalent to a minimum support price value of over Rs 27,500 crore, with another 20 mt likely to be procured by month-end. Farming activity being relatively unaffected is also captured by retail fertiliser sales rising 45 per cent year-on-year in April. And if the monsoon turns out normal as forecasted, things aren't looking that bleak for agriculture; contrast this with the zero domestic car sales last month.

Agriculture doing well is important both from the standpoint of inflation control (adequate supply of food, feed and fibre, along with low oil prices, makes it easier for the Reserve Bank of India to pursue an accommodative monetary policy) and reviving spending (farmers and rural labourers have higher marginal propensity to consume). But it is also a fact that the farm sector cannot support economic growth beyond a point. A NABARD survey for 2016-17 showed that only 43 per cent of the average monthly income of even the country's estimated 10 crore-plus agricultural households came from cultivation and livestock rearing. The growth of non-agriculture is, in other words, important for farming families themselves, many of which have members deriving incomes from manufacturing and service sector jobs. Many of the migrant labourers either stranded or returning from industrial centres and cities post-lockdown belong to rural farming communities. Given that not everyone can be gainfully employed in farms, it is a matter of time before they head back to work away from their homes.

That said, the need of the hour is to maximise the possibilities in a sector which has demonstrated its utility and resilience in trying circumstances. The focus should be on the coming kharif cropping season, especially ensuring timely availability of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, credit and other inputs. The latter includes labour and machines, whose movement was rightly exempted from lockdown restrictions. The government should seriously consider starting at the earliest special trains for labourers engaged in paddy transplantation and other agriculture-related operations. This is also the time to free farm produce trade by lifting all restrictions on stocking, domestic movement and exports. Let Indian farmers feed the world, not just India.

CHANGING COLOURS

Classification of red, orange, green zones, drawing of boundaries, has to be dynamic. States must play leading role

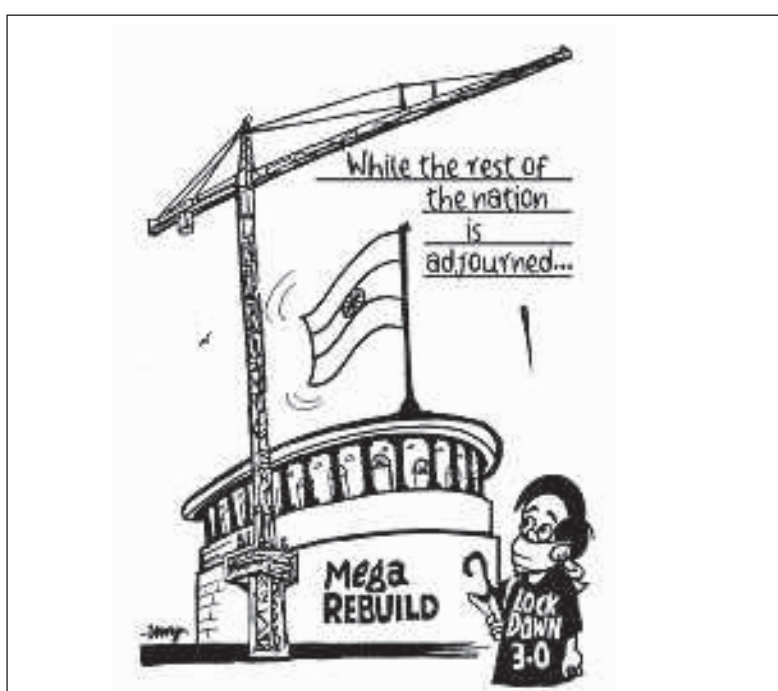
On May 1, the Union home ministry extended the nationwide lockdown — scheduled to end on May 3 — by two weeks. The third phase of the lockdown will, however, be less stringent than that experienced by the country in the past 40 days. In 603 of the 733 districts, designated green and orange zones, markets other than malls can re-open, factories and industrial units can resume operations, self-employed people such as domestic helps and barbers can go back to work, and e-commerce in non-essential items can recommence. But the fine print of the relaxation measures has left several states dissatisfied. Their grouse largely pertains to the red zones, the 130 districts which have been deemed as COVID-19 hotspots and therefore, placed under the maximum restrictions stipulated in the home ministry's directive. Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, for instance, has contended that several areas that have no COVID-19 cases, Nabha for example, have found themselves ineligible for relaxations because they happen to be located in red zone districts. The West Bengal government has also termed the Centre's assessment of such zones in the state as "erroneous". And Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has argued against designating entire districts as red zones — only the containment zones, areas with a high caseload in hot spot districts, should be subject to strident restrictions, he said.

That 319 districts, more than half the districts in the country — green zones — have not had a single COVID-19 case in three weeks does testify to the success of the lockdown from a healthcare standpoint. A further 284 districts do not have a high caseload, the orange zones. However, epidemiologists have consistently emphasised that lockdowns do not frame the endgame in the battle against the virus. Hotspots can change, the infection can recede from some areas and spread to new ones. Kejriwal, too, underscored the need to view the pandemic from such a dynamic perspective when he said that "what is a green zone today can turn red". The Centre does allow states to re-designate green zones as orange and red zones. It also allows them the freedom to classify red areas as orange zones. But it does not give them the flexibility to relax the lockdown in areas within the hotspot districts. The Delhi CM underlined the limitations of this approach when he asked: "If a district has 50 villages and 40 cases emerge in one, why should the entire district be declared a red zone?"

States and local authorities dealing with the infection at ground level are the best placed to understand its spatial vagaries. It's, therefore, imperative that they have a say in drawing the boundaries of the areas that have to be opened up. The details of the red, orange, green zone scheme need constant review and revision from such a perspective.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

The new capitalism

In the foreseeable future, politics will drive economic policies, not market-based rationality

IN 1920, JOHN Maynard Keynes, perhaps the most influential economist of the first half of the 20th century, wrote a famous passage, which could well have been written for our times. Worth citing at length, Keynes was speaking of how the First World War ended what we now call Globalisation 1.0 that lasted nearly a century till then.

"What an extraordinary episode in the economic progress of mankind, which came to an end in August 1914... The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity as he might see fit, and reasonably expect their early delivery upon his doorstep; he could at the same moment and by the same means adventure his wealth in the natural resources and new enterprises of any quarter of the world, and share, without exertion or even trouble, in their prospective fruits and advantages;... He could secure forthwith, if he wished it, cheap and comfortable means of transit to any country or climate... But, most important of all, he regarded this state of affairs as normal, certain, and permanent, except in the direction of further improvement, and any deviation from it as aberrant, scandalous, and avoidable."

No World War is likely anymore, as scholars of international relations continually remind us, thanks to nuclear weapons. But can COVID-19, instead, bring an end to what scholars call Globalisation 2.0, which began in the early 1980s and has lasted for four decades, an era when human beings, of a certain class, "could order by (the internet)... products of the whole earth... adventure wealth in any quarter of the world", and regard "this state of affairs as normal, certain and permanent"?

In strictly economic terms, globalisation is about the free movement of capital, goods and labour across national borders. As I wrote in these pages some time ago ("Globalisation in retreat", IE, November 30, 2017), labour flows were never as free as the movements of capital and goods. Capital and goods are disembodied; one does not necessarily see who produced them. Migrants are embodied, as it were. One can directly observe how ethnically, racially, religiously different from the mainstream they might be. Hence labour flows, if large, have nearly always triggered

right-wing politics of nativism in a way that the movements of goods and capital rarely have.

Donald Trump's unrelenting critique of globalisation predates COVID-19. He made non-white immigrants, especially Hispanics and Muslims, a special object of his political ire, but he was also vigorously against free trade as well as critical of businessmen who, in search of lower costs, had made China the destination of their accumulated investments, transferring jobs away from America's industrial heartland. He levied higher tariffs to curtail freer trade, and exhorted American corporations to bring capital back to the US. In Europe, a similar politics has been led by the UK, though less vociferously.

What will the pandemic do to this political thrust that had already become a reality in several major economies? In any realistic political sense, this question cannot be answered unless we pay special attention to how Globalisation 2.0 has benefitted China.

One might, of course, first wish to note that China was among the biggest sufferers of Globalisation 1.0 (1815-1914). In 1800, an estimated 33 per cent of the world's manufactures were produced in China. Defeats in two Opium Wars later, this share had gone down to 6 per cent by 1900. More significantly for now, China was far behind other economies in the early years of Globalisation 2.0. In 1980, it was the 48th largest economy in the world. In 1982, with GDPs at roughly \$200 billion, Indian and Chinese economies were similar in size.

In 2018, the last year for which we have systematic data, China, with a GDP of \$13.6 trillion, was the second largest economy in the world, behind the US (\$20.5 trillion), but far ahead of Japan (\$4.9 trillion), Germany (\$4.0 trillion), Britain (\$2.8 trillion), France (\$2.8 trillion) and India (\$2.7 trillion). In 2018, China was also the largest trading nation in the world. Its exports were worth \$2.5 trillion, substantially ahead of the US (\$1.6 trillion). And in 2018, China attracted over \$203 billion worth of net foreign direct investment (FDI), much more than Germany, Japan, UK, France as well as India (\$42 billion), and second only to the US (\$258 billion), showing how monumental foreign investment in China had become.

Given the current pandemic, even more

revealing are the data on medical equipment. For 50-80 per cent of its supplies, the US was dependent on China for protective surgical garments, plastic face shields, textile face masks and thermometers. Only for ventilators and hand sanitisers was the dependence less than 20 per cent.

No matter how much businessmen and economists argue that these trends are purely economic, only demonstrating how easy it is to manufacture at scale in China, the political leaders of the world, not simply in the West, can only view it with great concern and, if China threatens supply disruptions for critical materials, even as a national security issue.

The political winds are now independent of President Trump, who is clearly trying to scapegoat China to cover up his own bungling. Given all the doubts, right or wrong, about how China handled the information about the origins of the virus in Wuhan, the anger against China in world capitals is very palpable. Born of sudden and enormous suffering, such anger cannot but have an impact on the economics of globalisation.

We should not only expect that labour flows will now be more strictly regulated than before. But also more than ever before in recent decades, Western investors will also have to factor in political risks in their investment decision-making. Instead of chasing lower labour costs, they will either bring capital back to domestic shores, or geographically restructure their supply chains. For a whole range of goods, the global supply chains for all practical purposes became Chinese supply chains. That level of economic concentration is no longer politically sustainable.

For the foreseeable future, economic efficiency, the cornerstone of market-based systems, will have to go into a lower gear. Politics will drive new economic policies, not market-based rationality. Globalisation will not end, but it will be pushed into greater retreat. We are entering a new phase of capitalism.

The writer is director, Center for Contemporary South Asia, Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and Social Sciences, professor of political science, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University



RAHAMATHUNNISSA A

A CELEBRATION OF LEARNING

Ramadan marks the revelation of the Quran, which places knowledge above all

MANY THINK THAT Ramadan is a month of fasting and giving charity. But is it just for that? What is the actual reason for believers being commanded to observe fasting during this month? These are important questions and their answers will help anyone to utilise this time in a way that will benefit both believers as well as all of humanity.

The Quran says that it was during Ramadan that its revelation took place: "The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion." 2:185

There is no Ramadan without the Quran. It is an anniversary of the Book of guidance, which transformed the illiterate Arabs into the most cultured and civilised people within a short period — the shortest in human history. There was no magic. There were the guidelines sent through the Quran by Allah. Its first command was not to perform five times prayer or any spiritual activity. It was: "Read in the name of thy Lord who has created." 96:1 to 5

The Quran, in another part, tells that those who have knowledge and those who do not have knowledge are not equal.

The Quran deals with practically every subject related to human life and all branches of knowledge. Spending resources on the path to acquiring knowledge is encouraged

as an act of worship. If one has to travel to seek knowledge, he can even combine and shorten his five prayers or postpone the compulsory fasting.

The Prophet taught that the word of wisdom is the lost property of a believer and wherever he finds it, he is most deserving of it. This means that a believer should search for knowledge in every place possible. The following saying of the prophet encourages the pursuit of knowledge: "One who proceeds on a path in pursuit of knowledge, God makes him proceed therewith on a path to Paradise. And verily, the angels spread their wings for the seekers of knowledge out of delight. Verily, every creature of the heaven and the earth asks forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the ocean. The merit of the learned over the devout is like the merit of the moon over the stars on a full moon night. The learned are the heirs of the prophets, for the prophets did not leave behind a legacy of wealth but that of knowledge."

Teaching someone is considered as an "ongoing charity" — such a person gets rewarded continuously even after his death. Teachers and learned scholars are held in high regard in Islamic societies.

The Quran doesn't differentiate between worldly and spiritual knowledge. The longest verse in the Quran talks about the procedures to be followed and the importance of docu-

mentation while lending or borrowing money (2:282).

There are many verses in the Quran that can be used as foundations for different branches of knowledge such as astronomy, economics, politics, law, ethics, philosophy, biology, environmental science, geography, zoology, sociology, history and medicine. This is in addition to the guidelines and commands on spirituality and worship. Any branch of knowledge, as long as it benefits mankind, is considered holy. The Quran asks man to ponder and research the wonders of nature.

"Do they not observe the camels: How they were created? And the sky: How it was raised high? And the mountains: How they were fixed? And the earth: How it spread out?" 88: 17 to 20.

The Islamic world influenced medieval European life and culture in various fields. The European scholar Gerard of Cremona learned Arabic because of the "abundance of books in Arabic on every subject" and he translated 87 books from Arabic into Latin.

Ramadan is the time to revisit the verses of the Quran and do more research on how to boost the world economy after the pandemic passes, as well as other issues facing the world.

The writer is national secretary, women's department, Jama'at-e-Islami

MAY 4, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIRA ON ASSAM PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi declared in Bhubaneswar that those arrested in connection with the Assam movement would not be released "till the agitating organisations give a guarantee" that they would not resort to violence. Addressing an unscheduled press conference at the end of her one-day election tour of the state, Mrs Gandhi said that there was no point in releasing the leaders of the Assam movement when they were changing their stand every day. She reiterated that "it is not correct to say that the movement has been peaceful". Many people have been killed, she added. She expressed regret at the statements by the lead-

ers of the movement which she claimed had created panic among minorities.

BAHUGUNA'S SWITCH H N BAHUGUNA is likely to resign from Congress (I) and join the Congress, according to reliable sources. Bahuguna has already resigned from the party posts and his supporters have filed their nomination papers as independent candidates. They are being accommodated by the Congress. It is learnt that Bahuguna wanted party nominations for 35 of his men, 29 of whom were members of the dissolved assembly and had joined the Congress (I) along with him. The Congress (I), however, gave party tickets to

only nine members.

IMPHAL CURFEW NIGHT CURFEW HAS been imposed in the predominantly Nepali settlement of Kanglatandi and Kalapahar on the Imphal-Dimapur road, following tensions, official reports said. The reports said tension prevailed in the two areas lying near the foothills of Sadar Hills inhabited by Kuki tribals. Kanglatandi is a historic settlement of Nepalese ex-servicemen who manned an army ordnance base in Imphal during the Second World War. As many as 158 persons have been arrested in connection with the current violence in Manipur.



7 THE IDEAS PAGE

India's world

It can absorb shocks of pandemic, take the lead in reshaping global order



SUJAN R CHINOY

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has effectively exposed flaws in multilateral structures and highlighted the lacunae in national capacities, particularly in healthcare. Multilateralism has suffered retrenchment. The UN Security Council (UNSC) must be faulted for its egregious lack of action in March 2020 when China held the rotating post of the president. It will remain one of the great ironies of history that China, which has increasingly sought to play a global leadership role, actively suppressed discussions in the face of a monumental threat to the lives and security of millions globally. The withdrawal of nearly \$500 million worth of annual voluntary funding by the USA to the World Health Organisation (WHO) is a debatable move, notwithstanding the global consensus on the WHO's China-bias.

At a time when the UNSC, G20, G7 and the EU were inert, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood out with his initiatives to develop a joint response. In bringing SAARC together to fight the pandemic, Modi said "our neighbourhood collaboration should be a model for the world".

The rapid spread of coronavirus around the world has created fresh opportunities for dialogue. There is hope, and scope, for creating a new global compact. Contributions will be measured not in dollars alone, but in the leadership that countries exhibit — and their willingness to share ideas and resources to develop an international mechanism for monitoring, verification, early warning and cooperation among nation-states, including in vaccine development. Such a framework will have to look beyond the limitations of the WHO.

In light of COVID-19, there definitely exists a case for the greater scrutiny of "wet markets" in China, south-east Asia, and many other countries around the world. Roadside quacks across South Asia, too, are seen extolling the spurious curative powers of lizard oils and other extracts of protected species. Even the USA, which has enacted the Endangered Species Act in 1973, has not been able to eradicate animal farms that breed and trade exotic species. China operates commercial tiger farms for traditional medicine and south-east Asia does likewise with bears for bile extraction. All these activities increase the potential for zoonotic transmission of unknown, deadly viruses.

The need of the hour is to devise means that can deal more effectively with the illegal slaughter of exotic animals. Efforts must be made to strengthen the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a multilateral treaty with more than 180 member countries. There should be renewed focus not only on the illegal international trade that is already covered by CITES, but also the hazardous exploitation of exotic wildlife species within national borders. All signatory states, including China, must pass and enforce legislation to control the domestic consumption

of wild animals. Dubious "wet markets" and animal farms must be shut down.

India's record of legislation in conservation and enforcement of penalties for the killing and exploitation of protected wildlife is better than most. There is considerable scope for the Modi government to take the lead in proposing that CITES be given more teeth to conduct international scrutiny and inspections.

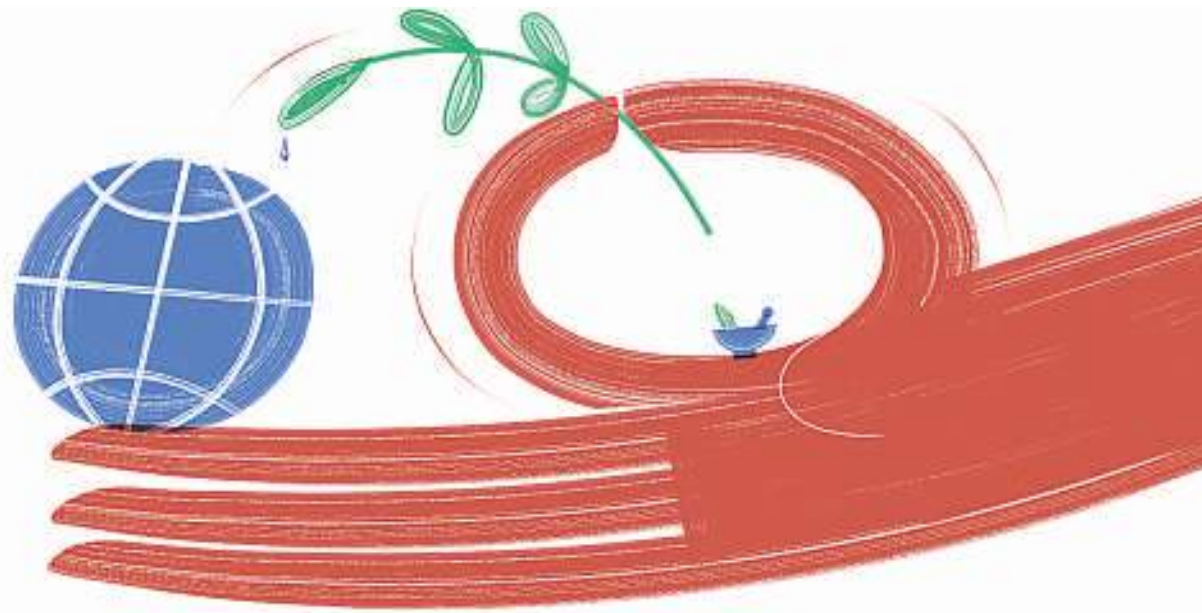
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought across a home truth: Wealth is unable to protect even the most affluent people from a silent killer. Individuals with higher immunity levels have a better chance of survival if afflicted with COVID-19. The ancient Indian practice of yoga is known to boost immunity levels through the cultivation of a healthy mind and body. This is the time to further reinforce the worldwide practice of yoga under the banner of the International Day of Yoga, also an initiative of Modi. India should plan for special virtual events on June 21 this year to encourage people around the world to practice yoga to promote holistic health.

As the world's largest producer and exporter of cost-effective generic drugs, India's readiness to ship the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to fight COVID-19 to others is a "Good Samaritan" act in consonance with the ethos of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". India is also in the race to produce a vaccine. If China is a "factory to the world", India has the potential to be a "pharmacy to the world". It can even take on a new and well-deserved moniker, that of *vishwa vaidya* (global physician). This provides an opportunity to promote ayurveda, which complements yoga.

At a strategic level, global opinion seems weighed against China, notwithstanding its efforts to salvage credibility by shifting the focus away from the origins of the coronavirus to the "superiority" of its system in tackling the pandemic. There is talk of the coronavirus having originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, with many theories about biological warfare programmes and accidental release. This provides an opportune moment to turn the spotlight on the inherent weaknesses of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1975. It is a disarmament treaty that does not prohibit the retention and use of biological agents, including coronaviruses, for prophylactic purposes which encompass medical research for diagnosis and immunisation. It has no verification protocol to deal

As the world's largest producer and exporter of cost-effective generic drugs, India's readiness to ship the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to fight COVID-19 to others is a 'Good Samaritan' act in consonance with the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. India is also in the race to produce a vaccine. If China is a 'factory to the world', India has the potential to be a 'pharmacy to the world'. It can even take on a new and well-deserved moniker, that of 'vishwa vaidya' (global physician). This provides an opportunity to promote ayurveda, which complements yoga.

C R Sasikumar



WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Big businesses will soon be asking taxpayers for even more financial support. Let's set out principles for who should get funds and how."

— THE GUARDIAN

Unheard and unseen

In our pursuit of economic growth, we have ignored the voices of India's informal sector for too long. This needs to change



RADHICKA KAPOOR

COVID-19 is causing havoc across the world, destroying both lives and livelihoods. Developing countries such as India are particularly vulnerable as their vast informal workforce, which has no labour, social or health protection, is woefully ill-equipped to cope with the medical and economic shocks of the virus. This is largely a consequence of the continued neglect of the informal economy over the years in the belief that it is a marginal or temporary sector where people subsist while they wait for formal jobs.

Statistics suggest that the size of the informal economy is far from insignificant. At the last count, 90.6 per cent of India's workforce was informally employed (Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2017-18). This estimate includes those who are employed in informal enterprises (unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises) as well as informal workers in the formal sector (workers in the formal sector who are not provided any social security benefits by employers). The previous employment unemployment surveys suggest that the share of informally employed has been persistently high.

Between 2004-05 and 2017-18, a period when India witnessed rapid economic growth, the share of the informal workforce witnessed only a marginal decline from 93.2 per cent to 90.6 per cent. While there was some decline in the share of workers employed in informal enterprises over this time period (from 87.4 per cent to 81.1 per cent), the share of informal workers in the formal sector increased from 5.8 per cent to 9.5 per cent. Hence, the total share of informally employed didn't change much. Looking ahead, it is likely that informal employment will increase as workers who lose formal jobs during the COVID crisis try to find or create work (by resorting to self-employment) in the informal economy. Also formal enterprises are likely to continue hiring informal workers as they seek more flexibility and attempt to cut labour costs to cope with the COVID-19 induced economic uncertainty.

Thus, informality is here to stay and there is an urgent need to place the informal economy at the centre of the policy debate. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneities in the informal economy and the various drivers of informality. Some self-employed persons choose to be in the informal economy voluntarily to avoid registration or taxation, whilst others do so out of necessity to eke out a subsistence living in the absence of alternative employment opportunities. Typically, few informal enterprises, except perhaps some survival activities, operate in isolation from formal firms. They source raw materials from and/or supply finished goods to formal firms either directly or through intermediate (formal/informal) firms. But they choose to remain in the informal sector as they are deterred by

the costs of formalisation or don't see much benefit from formalisation. On the other hand, the phenomenon of informalisation of wage employment in the formal sector is a consequence of formal firms trying to avoid payroll taxes and employer's contributions to social security or pensions to reduce labour costs.

The prevailing discourse on informality revolves around the recommendation that the informal economy should be formalised — a desirable objective indeed. However, given the multiple drivers of informality described above, a multi-pronged and comprehensive approach is needed to facilitate the transition. It requires creating more formal jobs through labour intensive growth so that informal workers can move to these jobs. Further, it requires registering and taxing informal enterprises. The Indian experience of compelling informal firms to register and become tax compliant through demonetisation and introduction of GST formalised them only in a legal sense. But formalisation processes are not simply about legal considerations, they are also about increasing productivity of informal enterprises and incomes of the informal workforce by providing them with technical and business skills, infrastructure services, financial services, enterprise support and training to better compete in the markets. Many people working in the informal economy have real business acumen and dynamism and could flourish if obstacles in the path to entrepreneurship were removed. This would enable an organic process of transition and many informal enterprises would welcome efforts to reduce barriers to registration and related transaction costs as they expect to reap the benefits of formalising.

Clearly, the transition from informality to formality is a complex and long term process, one that cannot be achieved overnight. The policy discourse on informality needs to focus not just on formalising informal enterprises but also reducing the decent work deficit in informal employment. This requires protecting informal workers by providing them a social protection floor, ensuring a set of basic working conditions such as adequate living wages, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces and increasing their collective representative voice. While, there is growing consensus around the need for each of these elements, there is little agreement on how this is to be achieved. Questions around the role of government and who bears the onus of protecting workers deserve careful consideration in the backdrop of the rising incidence of informal employment in the formal sector and the growth of the gig economy.

As we grapple with a health, economic and humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, the immediate need is to provide emergency relief to cushion the effects of the dual shocks of the virus and lockdown on informal workers by providing not just adequate income support but also free public provision of basic food items, other essentials and effective health services. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore the vulnerabilities and precarities of the informal workforce. It is apparent that in our relentless pursuit of economic growth, we have ignored the voices of India's informal sector for too long.

The writer is senior fellow at ICRIER



SANJIB BARUAH

SOUTH KOREA once featured prominently in what is now, thankfully, an obsolete debate on whether authoritarian governments can deliver better economic growth than democracies. The country was then held as an exemplary success story of export-led development under authoritarian rule. Whatever the wisdom of development experts, and of the "Asian values" ideologists at that time about a supposed trade-off between economic growth and liberty, the average South Korean citizen had a different view. A nation-wide democracy movement ended authoritarian rule in 1987 and inaugurated its current polity: The Sixth Republic.

Three decades later, a government made up of the generation that grew up protesting the US-backed military-authoritarian rule stands as an inspiring example of a liberal democracy successfully controlling a COVID-19 outbreak without ever imposing a lockdown. South Korea was one the world's worst-affected countries in February. On April 29, it recorded zero domestically-transmitted new cases; its four new cases were all tied to overseas travel.

This is an especially hopeful and instructive story when illiberal leaders of certain democracies are trying to exploit the pandemic to entrench themselves in power and stifle criticism of official high-handedness.

To be sure, democracy or authoritarianism per se has not been the determining factor in the ability to respond effectively to this crisis. One important variable has been the competence of those making key decisions

and the public's trust and confidence in them. The available legal regime shaping governmental responses has made a difference.

A number of democracies, notably the United States, have performed poorly. Yet, it is surely not accidental that New Zealand, Iceland, and Norway, whose leaders — all of them women — have won particular acclaim for their responses, are among the best performing democracies in the world.

There has been much well-deserved praise for the technicalities of the South Korean response: Extensive testing and rapid contact-tracing, the smart use of digital surveillance, and targeted mandatory quarantine only for those sick with COVID-19 or testing positive. But the basic democratic values widely shared among the current government and its supporters that undergird this strategy has not received the attention it deserves.

South Korea's state-of-the-art Infectious Disease Control and Prevention Act deserves particular attention. It enables the mobilisation of multiple state and non-state actors in a whole-of-society effort to stop the spread of infectious disease. As Brian J Kim points out, it empowers governmental authorities to act far more aggressively during a public health crisis than in many other democracies. They are able to collect private data of confirmed and probable patients, and to require telecommunications companies and police departments to share the geolocation information of those individuals. But the gov-

ernment has been using these powers primarily to foster public trust in its strategy.

In an unusual twist to the idea of the public's "right to know," the law requires authorities to disclose locational information on quarantined persons to the public, though, those under medical surveillance have to be eventually notified and the records destroyed. It also sets forth the obligations of the state to disinfect subways, buses and other public places and establishes the right of all citizens to receive free diagnostic and medical treatment for infectious diseases.

This law stands in remarkable contrast to India's antiquated Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897, invoked to give state governments the authority to enforce containment measures. Originally enacted during the plague panic of Bombay, it allowed the colonial authorities to put infected areas under a de facto state of emergency. The more recent Disaster Management Act of 2005, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked to impose a nationwide lockdown, was designed with national disasters and not a public health crisis in mind. Unfortunately, it too prioritises military-style command and control measures — not exactly conducive to nurturing public trust.

President Moon Jae-in's left-leaning Democratic Party won a landslide victory in South Korea's parliamentary elections last month, signalling strong public approval of the government's handling of the crisis. Its reliance primarily on the willing and self-motivated cooperation of the public, and not on the coercive powers of the state, has a lot

to do with the recent political history of South Korea.

President Moon, a former lawyer specialising in human rights and labour law, came of age during a wave of student protests against authoritarian rule. He was expelled from school and jailed for his role in those protests. Moon and other one-time pro-democracy student protesters are now members and supporters of the current government.

"Whenever democracy has fallen into a crisis," Moon told a reporter after being elected to office in 2017, "the Korean people have sprung up in rage."

Having been on the receiving end of authoritarian arbitrariness, the current generation of South Korean leaders appreciate the need to transcend what the University of Chicago-educated vice-health minister Kim Gang-lip describes as the "limitations of the conventional approach to fighting infectious disease." Gaining the public trust through transparency and quick information flow, he says, is central to his government's strategy.

It is far too early in the coronavirus saga to pronounce this or any other strategy successful. Yet, what this newly-energised and vibrant democracy has been able to achieve in the past few months holds important lessons for the rest of us — especially for the once lively, but now exhausted democracies of the world.

Baruah is professor of political studies at Bard College, New York, and author of the 2020 published, In the Name of the Nation: India and its Northeast

Pandemic and public trust

South Korea holds lessons for leaders trying to use crisis to consolidate power

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WITH DIGNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Going home' (IE, May 1). Opening a window for migrants to return home needs to be accompanied by ferrying them with dignity to their homes. Barely-type-in-human treatment should not be meted out to them. It may also happen that their own villages may be loathe to allow them back on misplaced suspicion that they may be carrying the virus. But their return must be ensured, as there is bound to be a backlash if financially and emotionally shattered people are put through more.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

OTHER LEADERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Labour's leader' (IE, May 1). The article claims that "BR Ambedkar laid the foundation for workers' rights and social security in India". Ambedkar was a vocal leader for workers' rights. However, the credit for "laying the foundation" in this regard goes to others. N M Lohndhe fought for the labour rights in the 1880s, leading the struggle for leave and reasonable working hours. There was a Madras Labour Union in the early 1900s. In the 1910s, Gandhiji mobilised the labour of Ahmedabad textile mills and fasted unto death for the labourers' rights. All these took place before the

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

formation of the ILP by Ambedkar. Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

BORN TO ACT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Lovely lover' (IE, May 1). Starting with *Mera Naam Joker*, for which he won the national award for the best child actor, Rishi Kapoor mesmerised fans throughout an illustrious career. He charmed the country in *Bobby*. Since then, also showed great versatility with films like *Mulk*. He was born to act. Parul Srivastava, Prayagraj

PANDEMIC WATCH



Pakistan PM Imran Khan said "we may have to live with the virus for six months or (even) a year". File

PAKISTAN

Over 19,000 cases reported, death toll 440

Islamabad: Pakistan's coronavirus tally crossed 19,000 on Sunday after 989 new patients were diagnosed in a 24-hour period. The Ministry of National Health Services said 23 patients died in this period, taking the total toll to 440. So far, 4,817 people have recovered from the virus, the ministry said. Out of the total 19,103 virus patients, Punjab has reported 7,106 cases, Sindh 7,102, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 2,907, Balochistan 1,172, Islamabad 393, Gilgit-Baltistan 356 and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir 67 cases. PTI

IRAN

Some mosques, schools to reopen today

Dubai: Iran plans to reopen mosques and schools in areas that have been consistently free of the coronavirus as President Hassan Rouhani's government starts to ease restrictions that were aimed at containing the outbreak. "Mosques will reopen in 132 low-risk or 'white cities' and towns from Monday. Friday prayer sermons will resume in those areas as well. However, all these steps will be taken by respecting the health protocols," Rouhani said. Iran's health ministry has divided the country into white, yellow and red based on the number of infections and deaths. REUTERS

BANGLADESH

Highest single-day spike recorded

Dhaka: Bangladesh registered its highest single-day increase in the coronavirus cases with 665 new infections in the last 24 hours, taking the total number to 9,455. Bangladesh also recorded two more deaths from the virus in the last 24 hours, taking the total death count to 177, the Dhaka Tribune reported. Directorate General of Health Services Additional Director General Nasima Sultana on Sunday said the health authorities have so far conducted 81,434 tests. PTI

Some nations ease curbs, others grapple as pandemic marches on

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME, MAY 3

FROM THE US to Europe to Asia, the easing of some coronavirus lockdowns brought millions out of their homes to enjoy the outdoors and warm spring temperatures. Yet the global pandemic is still slicing through the defenses of other nations, causing infections and deaths to march relentlessly higher.

New coronavirus cases in Russia exceeded 10,000 for the first time, reaching 10,633 on Sunday — nearly double the new cases reported a week ago.

A Russian epidemiologist, however, said the sharp increase in coronavirus cases reflected increased testing. Alexander Gintsburg of the Gamaleya Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology was quoted by the *Interfax* news agency as saying the increasing number of infections does not indicate a deepening pandemic, noting that testing has doubled over the past 10 days.

Russia has reported 1,222 virus deaths among 124,000 infections, numbers that health experts widely believe undercut the true toll of its outbreak. There was also worrying news from Afghanistan, where nearly a third tested positive in a random test of 500 people in Kabul.

China, which reported only two new cases, is seeing a surge in visitors to newly reopened



People at a beach in Hong Kong, Sunday. China, which reported only two new cases, saw a surge in visitors to tourist spots. Reuters

tourist spots after domestic travel restrictions were relaxed ahead of a five-day holiday that runs through Tuesday.

Nearly 1.7 million people visited Beijing parks on the first two days of the holiday, and Shanghai's main tourist spots welcomed more than 1 million visitors, according to Chinese media.

Many spots limited daily vis-

itors to 30 per cent of capacity or less to keep some social distancing in place.

Italians are counting down the hours until Monday, when parks and public gardens were re-opening nationwide for strolling, jogging or bike riding. But with sunshine and warm temperatures across the country, many were outside in force Sunday, walking down streets

and chatting on sidewalks.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has warned that if the rate of contagion starts rising again, such freedoms will be curtailed.

In Spain, many ventured out this weekend for the first time since its lockdown began on March 14.

"I feel good, but tired. You sure notice that it has been a month and I am not in shape,"

runner Cristina Palomeque said in Barcelona.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is under pressure to reveal how the country will leave the lockdown that began March 23. The restrictions are due to last at least until through Thursday, but with hundreds of deaths still being reported daily, it's unclear how the country can safely loosen the restrictions.

Pompeo on COVID: China has a history of infecting the world

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, MAY 3

US SECRETARY of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday said China has been responsible for the spread of disease in the past and must be held accountable for the coronavirus pandemic that originated in the country.

In comments likely to spark protests from Beijing and elsewhere, Pompeo said, "China has a history of infecting the world." He cited poor safety and security at epidemiological laboratories, including in the city of Wuhan where the virus was first reported.

He stressed that he had no reason to believe that the virus



Mike Pompeo

was deliberately spread but he ramped up already harsh US criticism of the Chinese for their response to the outbreak.

"Remember, China has a history of infecting the world, and they have a history of running substandard laboratories," Pompeo said Sunday on ABC's

This Week programme.

"These are not the first times that we've had a world exposed to viruses as a result of failures in a Chinese lab. And so, while the intelligence community continues to do its work, they should continue to do that, and verify so that we are certain, I can tell you that there is a significant amount of evidence that this came from that laboratory in Wuhan."

Pompeo appeared to be referring to previous outbreaks of respiratory viruses, like SARS, which started in China. But his remark may be seen as offensive in China given the history of US discrimination against the Chinese and people of Chinese origin dating to the 19th century.

British govt had contingency plan for my death, says Boris

REUTERS
LONDON, MAY 3

THE BRITISH government had a contingency plan for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's death as he battled COVID-19 in intensive care last month, he said in an interview with *The Sun* newspaper.

Johnson, 55, returned to work last week, a month after testing positive for COVID-19. He spent 10 days in isolation in Downing Street before he was taken to London's St Thomas' Hospital where he spent three nights in intensive care.

"They had a strategy to deal with a 'death of Stalin'-type sce-



British PM Boris Johnson

nario," Johnson was quoted as saying in Sunday's edition of *The Sun*. "It was a tough old moment, I won't deny it."

Johnson said that during the period when he was self-isolating in Downing Street, he had resisted going to hospital.

"I was in denial because I was working and I kept doing these meetings by video-link," he said. "...I said I really didn't want to go into hospital. It didn't seem to

me to be a good move but they were pretty adamant. Looking back, they were right to force me to go."

Johnson was admitted to a ward on April 5 and given oxygen via a face mask and a tube in his nose. "I was going through litres and litres of oxygen for a long time," he said. He was moved to intensive care on April 6.

At one point, doctors discussed invasive ventilation.

After Johnson was discharged, St Thomas' said it was glad to have cared for the prime minister, but the hospital has given no details about the gravity of his illness beyond stating that he was treated in intensive care.

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

Oli stays for now, China envoy had role in truce

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MAY 3



Nepal PM K P Oli

SHEDDING ITS image of being a reluctant player in the internal politics of Nepal, China has been playing an active role these past few days in Kathmandu's power games.

Ambassador Hou Yanqi, Beijing's envoy to Kathmandu, is being credited, in large measure, for the rapprochement at the top level of the ruling Nepal Communist Party and, in the process, saving the chair of Prime Minister K P Oli.

A crucial meeting of the nine-member party central secretariat ended Saturday night with Oli's victory after a 'let's go together as a united face' appeal by dissident leader and former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda — on Wednesday night, it was Prachanda who had used the same forum to ask Oli to resign.

In the past ten days, ever since Chinese President Xi Jinping had a 40-minute phone conversation with Nepal counterpart Bidhya Devi Bhandari, ostensibly to promise all support to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Ambassador Hou Yanqi has been very active — and visible.

President Xi had dropped broad political hints, lending support to Prime Minister Oli at a time when at least six of the nine central secretariat members had come out openly in favour of his exit as party chairman as well as Prime Minister.

"His Excellency the President of China expressed his happiness over the return of Right Honourable Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli to normal work schedule after his kidney transplant surgery and conveyed his best wishes to the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Nepal for his good health and hap-

piness," stated a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 27, hours after the phone conversation.

"It was unusual for the Chinese President to convey his message to the Prime Minister of another country through the President," a senior diplomat of Nepal, now retired, said. "After all, his happiness is also linked to his political success and defeat of dissidents," the diplomat said.

Between April 27 and May 1, an official holiday, Ambassador Hou Yanqi met President Bhandari, Prime Minister Oli, Prachanda and former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal — 15 minutes separated the last two meetings.

There has been no official word from any side about the meetings, but a highly placed source said Ambassador Hou Yanqi advised unity in the party and a stable government.

China has much at stake in Nepal given its involvement in developmental projects. Kathmandu is also a signatory to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

Incidentally, Prachanda's appeal for unity, following his call for ouster of Oli, took Madhav Nepal by surprise.

"I opposed Prime Minister Oli because I wanted the party to work under a system and as per norms and law and not as some one's pocket borough. Two chiefs can always be on one side, but not at the cost of party principles," said Nepal who declined to accept Oli's offer to be the third chairman of the party after he and Prachanda.

Rohingya at sea for weeks arrive on Bangladesh island

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DHAKA, MAY 3

AT LEAST 29 Rohingya refugees from a fishing boat floating in the Bay of Bengal for weeks have landed on an island in southern Bangladesh, officials said Sunday.

The refugees, including 15 women and six children, landed on Bhasan Char island on Saturday and are believed to be from one of several boats stuck at sea, said Tonmoy Das, local chief government official in Noakhali district.

Das said food, doctors and a team of 10 policemen were sent to the island to take care of the refugees.

An official from Bangladesh's Refugee Commissioner's office in Cox's Bazar district said the office was aware of the development. The official spoke on condition of anonymity.

Rights groups say hundreds of Rohingya are stranded on at least two fishing trawlers between Bangladesh and Malaysia. The refugees reportedly attempted to illegally reach Malaysia, but failed because of strict patrols to keep out the coronavirus.

Israel court hears pleas against Netanyahu rule

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, MAY 3

ISRAEL'S HIGH court heard petitions Sunday that seek to block Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from forming a government because he has been charged with serious crimes.

A panel of 11 justices participated in the highly anticipated session that was being portrayed by some as a watershed moment for Israeli democracy. The hearing was broadcast live.

If the court voids Netanyahu's ability to serve as prime minister, Israel could be plunged into political chaos, and it would likely trigger the country's fourth consecutive election in just over 12 months.

The justices are being asked to decide whether a prime minister can form a government while under indictment — something the Israeli legal code does not explicitly prohibit.

Netanyahu was indicted earlier this year on charges of accepting bribes, fraud and breach of trust. He has denied any wrongdoing. His trial was postponed due to restrictions after the coronavirus crisis erupted.

FANS SAY PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE GULF, CRITICS CALL IT EFFORT TO RESHAPE ARAB VIEWS OF ISRAEL

Jewish characters in Saudi TV show sparks debate among Arabs

THE NEW YORK TIMES
BEIRUT, MAY 3

IN A mud-walled village in the Persian Gulf, a Christian woman sheds tears of love for a Muslim merchant. But he is stuck in a miserable marriage to a woman who longs for another Muslim man. But she can't have him, because he is crazy about the local rabbi's daughter.

These tangles of interreligious intrigue unspool in a new blockbuster television series that has set off heated debates across the Arab world about the re-

gion's historical relationships with Jewish communities and the shifting stances of some of its current leaders toward Israel.

Fans laud the programme, set in the 1940s and 1950s, for highlighting an often overlooked aspect of the region's past — Jewish communities in the Persian Gulf — while providing a much-needed example of coexistence among different faiths.

But critics have blasted it as a blatant effort to reshape Arab views of Israel to pave the way for formal relations, or what many in the Arab world call "normalisation".

With the coronavirus shuttering mosques and the holy city of Mecca, this year's Ramadan, which began last week, was already bound for the history books.

But the virus's effect on the Islamic holy month is just one aspect that will be long remembered, a prominent Palestinian journalist, Abdel Bari Atwan, wrote this week.

The other reason this Ramadan won't soon be forgotten is because "it witnessed the largest normalisation campaign, driven by the Saudi media, with help from the government, and



A scene from the Saudi TV serial *Umm Haroun*. MBC Group via AP

coordinated with the Israeli occupation state," Mr Atwan said.

Suspensions that the historical TV drama, *Umm Haroun*, or "Mother of Aaron", is part of a state-sponsored push to sway opinions are widespread. The show airs on MBC, the Arab world's largest private broadcaster, but one ultimately controlled by the Saudi state.

The same network is also broadcasting a comedy programme that has made light of Arab attitudes toward Israel, further fueling a sense that both shows are mixing entertainment with propaganda.

While MBC denied that including positive depictions of Jews was part of any government mandate, this year's shows do coincide with a quiet but clear warming toward Israel among governments in the Persian Gulf.

Historically, animosity toward Israel and sympathy for the Palestinians were some of the few sentiments able to unite Arabs across the Middle East. But in recent years, wars, insurgencies and economic crises have left many Arab governments focused on domestic issues, pushing the Palestinian cause down the priority list.

At the same time, some Persian Gulf leaders have come to see Israel not as an eternal enemy, but as a potential ally against the shared threats of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia has spoken of overlapping trade and security interests between the kingdom and Israel, and an Israeli delegation is expected to participate in a world expo in the United Arab Emirates next year, although both Saudi Arabia and the Emirates lack formal diplomatic relations with the country.

9 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH

S&P 500 RALLIES 30% OFF MARCH LOWS

New York: The S&P 500 has rallied about 30 per cent off its March lows, fueled by monetary and fiscal policy designed to stimulate the economy after the United States ordered country-wide lockdowns to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. **REUTERS**

AFTER RECORD NET OUTFLOW OF ₹1,18,203 CR IN MAR; SENSEX REVIVES SHARPLY BY 14.4%

FPIs pause selloff mode, outflow drops 88% in Apr

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

IN A big relief to the capital markets, even as the coronavirus pandemic continues to hit economies and markets worldwide, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) significantly reduced the pace of outflows in April, after a record net outflow of Rs 1,18,203 crore in March 2020. In April, FPIs pulled out a net of Rs 14,858 crore from equity and debt markets.

According to data sourced from CDSL, FPIs sold a net of Rs 6,883 crore from the equities market in April and sold net holdings worth Rs 12,551 crore from the debt market.

They were, however, net positive investors in debt voluntary

Peak power demand down 26% in May despite easing of curbs

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

INDIA CONTINUES to face lower demand for power despite a partial easing up of the nationwide lockdown during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Peak power demand — the highest energy supply in a day across the country — dropped over 26 per cent in May so far, shows Power Ministry data.

May 1 saw a peak power demand of 131.40 GW being met, while 134.70 GW was the peak power supplied on May 2. By comparison, the peak power demand was 182.53 GW in May last year.

In April, too, the peak power demand dipped about one-fourth from the same month last year. The power demand during April has ranged between 116.89 GW (April 8) to 132.77 GW (April 30), and peak power demand crossed the 130 GW mark on April 24 (130.02 GW), April 29 (131.13 GW) and April 30 (132.77 GW), the data showed.

This means the overall peak power demand met in April stood at 132.77 GW, down from 176.81 GW in April 2019.

The relatively cool weather has played spoilsport in April as well as May, keeping power demand low during this time, an industry expert told PTI.

The low economic activity in the country during the lockdown, especially in the manufacturing sectors, has also played a role in the lower demand. Several companies in segments of the country's manufacturing industry are yet to restart operations despite easing of the restrictions in the last two months due to issues with liquidity and labour.

Industry bodies and analysts have expressed concern about

BRIEFLY

EPFO staff contribute to PM-CARES

New Delhi: Employees of retirement fund body EPFO have collectively contributed Rs 2.5 crore towards the PM-CARES Fund to support fight against the pandemic.

BoB disburses ₹2,300 cr to MSMEs

New Delhi: The MSME sector is high priority area and Bank of Baroda is taking various steps, including a Rs 2,300-crore financial support, to help the sector, executive director Vikramaditya Singh Khichi said.

'RCEP deal on track for signing'

Singapore: The RCEP trade deal is still on track to be signed by the end of 2020, Singapore's Minister of Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing said Sunday. **PTI**

FLOW OF FUNDS

	Equity	Debt	Debt-VRR	Hybrid	Total
Jan 20	12,122.58	-11,647.95	529.15	-46.29	957.49
Feb 20	1,819.83	2,096.76	2,637.25	2,416.38	8,970.22
Mar 20	-61,972.75	-60,375.81	4,164.77	-19.28	-1,18,203.07
Apr 20	-6,883.57	-12,551.68	4,032.53	544.18	-14,858.54
Total	-54,913.91	-82,478.68	11,363.7	2,894.99	-1,23,133.90

Note: Figures are in Rs crore; Source: CDSL

retention route (VRR) scheme that allows FPIs to participate in repos and also invest in exchange traded funds that invest in debt instruments. They invested a net of Rs 4,032 crore in debt VRR schemes in April.

The VRR channel is aimed at attracting long-term and stable FPI investments into debt mar-

kets, while providing FPIs with operational flexibility to manage their investments.

While net fund outflow of Rs 14,858 crore from capital markets in April is a significant amount, it is one-eighth of outflows seen in March when the pandemic started spreading in India and the Prime Minister an-

nounced a 21-day lockdown on March 24.

The outflow from the equity markets reduced from Rs 61,972 crore in March to Rs 6,883 crore in April. The sharp decline in outflow brought relief for equity markets and they staged a smart recovery, in line with other global markets. After witnessing a sharp fall of 23 per cent in March, the Sensex at BSE revived sharply by 14.4 per cent in April.

Experts say as the government has announced to significantly relax the lockdown restrictions in districts marked in green and orange, and also allow certain business activities in districts marked in red, it will restart some economic activity in the country that has come to a grinding halt. "While there has been rela-

ting economy would have also resonated well with investors." He further added that with selective relaxation in the lockdown and gradual opening up of economic activity in the country, foreign investors will be closely watching the developments on this front.

They would also start looking at the domestic economic indicators as well to see how the country manages its deficits, he added. "These are unprecedented scenarios; and with risk-taking going off the table, emerging markets like India may continue to witness similar trends for a prolonged period or until the time situation on the coronavirus front stabilizes," said Srivastava.

Online car sales may gain traction post-COVID-19: EY

Post the COVID-19 crisis, online car sales are likely to gain traction as customers would lean further towards contactless modes of purchasing, according to a report by consultancy firm EY



Digital heavy processes offering flexibility in consumer connect supported by lean dealer operations is bound to become the new normal in the near future

An integrated "phygital" platform with a digitally-enabled agile salesforce will become a critical success criterion to tap into select consumer segments

Source: EY/PTI

REASON

Fear of infection and lack of hygiene are likely to move people's preference back to personal mobility

EFFECT

This, in turn, is likely to reverse the trend of declining car sales

OUTLOOK

EY said automotive retail needs to become virtual, lean and flexible to align to the sudden accelerated change in consumer behaviour. Post the COVID-19 crisis, there is no denying that customers would lean further towards online and contactless modes of purchasing. Vehicles may very well fall in the same category too. While Indians are already more inclined towards researching online while buying cars, online sales are rare

due to limited awareness, options and flexibility

FALLOUT

One of the many fallout of the COVID-19 crisis is likely to be people's proclivity to own and travel in a personal vehicle rather than use shared mobility or public transport

Continued adherence to social distancing norms in a post-COVID-19 world

The path to purchase will continue to be influenced by digital enablers with some customer segments preferring a virtual path from awareness to closure

A contactless purchase journey could be a win-win situation for customers, OEMs and dealers

Credit risk funds see outflows of ₹11,134 cr in a week after Franklin Templeton crisis

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 3

MUTUAL FUNDS witnessed outflows of Rs 11,134 crore under credit risk funds in a week after Franklin Templeton decided to shut down six credit risk schemes on April 24 blaming the ongoing "liquidity crisis" in the market.

According to the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI), net redemptions under credit risk funds stood at Rs 2,949.49 crore as of April 24, and peaked at Rs 4,294.36 crore as of April 27.

"Thereafter, for the past three days i.e. on Tuesday April 28, April 29 and April 30, the net redemptions under credit risk funds stood at Rs 1,847.29 crore, Rs 1,251.17 crore and Rs 793.99 crore respectively," AMFI said.

EXPLAINED Risky credit risk funds

WHILE THE RBI's Rs 50,000 crore liquidity window has given some comfort to mutual funds, credit risk funds are most at risk if redemptions continue, particularly where funds have exposure to less liquid securities, such as unlisted securities and higher risk appetite through exposure to defaulted entities.

As the credit risk fund category had assets of over Rs 55,000 crore till March, over 20 per cent of the

funds was pulled out by investors in the last week of April alone. The overall debt segment had witnessed outflows of Rs 1.94 lakh crore in the month of March.

However, AMFI said net redemptions under credit risk funds, one of debt mutual fund scheme category, which constitute less than 5 per cent of total debt mutual fund AUM, are tapering off substantially, post RBI's announcement of special liquidity measure of Rs 50,000 crore for the mutual fund industry.

"All mutual funds have met the redemptions in the normal course of business. There is 81.5 per cent drop in net redemptions in credit risk funds category on April 30 from the peak net redemptions as on April 27, courtesy measures announced by the RBI," AMFI said. Nilesh Shah, Chairman, AMFI,

said: "Declining trend in net redemptions from credit risk funds is a welcome development, indicative of investors' comfort from RBI's special liquidity facility available to the MF industry. AMFI will continue to work with regulators for normal functioning of the market."

Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, the ninth largest mutual fund in the country, had given a big jolt to the investor community with its decision to wind up six yield-oriented managed credit funds with effect from April 23, 2020.

The six schemes — Franklin India low duration fund, dynamic accrual fund, credit risk fund, short term income plan, ultra short bond fund and income opportunities fund — have combined assets under management of around Rs 28,000 crore.

FROM PAGE ONE

Small services stare at end of road

and Meerut but the concern is identical. Earlier this month, Dhingra had to pull the plug on her Le15 Café in downtown Mumbai after 10 years in operations.

Before giving up the lease on the café, Dhingra had contemplated other options: renegotiating the café's rent to downsizing her team and operating as a delivery-only business. Yet, the "exceptionally high" costs of running a restaurant in Mumbai, coupled with a lack of customers, made it impossible to continue, she said.

But, more importantly, it was when she looked at the next six months that the prospects looked grim. "Most of our customers were tourists. That plus the onset of the monsoons would reduce footfalls. The bleed over the next six months is one we couldn't afford as a business," she told The Indian Express.

The owners of the 12-mem-

ber strong Elvis and Reema Salon in Greater Kailash-1, a popular standalone salon that would receive, on an average, around 500 clients a month before the lockdown, are not sure how much longer they can sustain themselves.

Reema Bhatia, co-founder, expects clientele to nearly halve if and when they reopen due to social distancing norms.

"Our major business comes from longer, more elaborate services, which we don't think anyone will want. They will want to come and quickly get minor services done and leave. We are getting some requests from our regular clients asking us when we will open up again, but even if we do, we don't expect all our customers to return," she told The Indian Express.

The salon has been struggling to pay its costs, which account for nearly 50 per cent of its revenues, because right now "there is no revenue, and we are a business that operates on daily earnings."

While the salon has some savings, costs like rent, electricity and water bills and salaries of its employees, have depleted its reserves. It expects to run out of savings in the next month or so, according to Bhatia. "All of a

sudden, when you don't get to work for two months, it sets you back," she said. "It is heart-breaking for me to even think about laying off some of my team. I can't do that, because where would they go? Even bigger salon chains won't be hiring during this time," she said.

For small enterprises, the problems are multi-fold - from credit availability to lack of working capital to issues in encashing their assets even if they were to shut shop.

Service sector firms in the downstream logistics business too are facing challenges. Aakanksha Bhargava, CEO of PM Relocations, a Gurugram-based packing and moving company with an annual turnover of about Rs 72 crore, said the drying up of working capital is a major challenge. This strain has resulted in a cash crunch for employers like Bhargava to pay salaries for April to her staff of 500 employees in 10 offices across the country. "Landlords are not waiving the rent by even a nominal percentage, forget about agreeing to delayed payments. So, there's pressure of payment of rents for offices and warehouses along with salaries when revenues have become zero," she said.

The event management seg-

Agriculture an exception, fertiliser sales jump 45% in Apr despite lockdown

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

AUTO COMPANIES did not sell a single car or two-wheeler in April as manufacturing plants and showrooms remained closed due to the nationwide lockdown, but retail sales of fertilisers jumped 45.1 per cent year-on-year in April to 20.56 lakh tonnes (lt).

Data from the Department of Fertilisers shows urea sales increased 36.2 per cent to 10.95 lt, di-ammonium phosphate 71.7 per cent to 2.97 lt, nitrogen-phosphorous-potash-sulphur complex fertilisers 81.4 per cent to 3.9 lt, muriate of potash 43 per cent to 1.33 lt, single super phosphate 5.6 per cent to 1.31 lt and compost 37.5 per cent to 11,000 tonnes.

The 45.1 per cent nutrient sales jump in April, however, does not seem to be a one-off phenomenon. As the table shows, fertiliser sales registered double-digit growth every month since November.

"The rabi (winter-spring) season was great for us because of an extended monsoon, which led to groundwater tables getting recharged and reservoirs being filled to near capacity. Farmers, therefore, planted more area. They now want to utilise the substantially improved soil moisture for the ensuing kharif season as well, which is reflected in the April sales," said a fertiliser industry executive.

The nationwide lockdown has clearly not impacted nutrient sales, partly because agricultural inputs were exempted from restrictions on movement, distribution or retailing. If anything, it may have helped.

"Just as with the panic buying we saw for foodstuff, dealers wanted to stock up in anticipation of kharif demand. We normally supply on 2-2.5 months credit to enable sales that peak only after June, but they actually lifted material on cash this time. Also, they feared that the rupee's weakening may cause prices of imported fertilisers and inputs to go up in the coming months," the executive said.

It is not only fertilisers; de-

The lockdown has not impacted nutrient sales, partly because agricultural inputs were exempted from restrictions on movement, distribution or retailing

mand for seed is also seen to be high. Till a couple of weeks back, there was concern over availability of seed, especially for cotton whose sowing has just started in Punjab, Haryana and north Rajasthan. Much of hybrid paddy, maize and cotton seed production is concentrated in the southern states. The Indian Express had earlier reported that both processing and transport of seeds to the consuming centres had been hit by the non-availability of labour and trucks.

"Seed processing plants are still operating at about 60 per cent capacity on account of labour shortages. But transportation issues have been significantly sorted out, particularly with the Railways stepping in. Of the estimated 90 lakh packets requirement of cotton seeds for Northwest India, 50-60 lakh have been moved in rail wagons from Salem (Tamil Nadu) to Bhatinda (Punjab). The rest have been delivered by trucks well in time for sowing," noted Ram Kaundinya, Director-General, Federation of Seed Industry of India.

Nursery sowing of paddy will begin in Punjab and Haryana after mid-May, while kharif plantings in the rest of India will take off with the arrival of monsoon in June. According to Kaundinya, transport of vegetable seeds - which takes place in 40-50 kg packets through surface courier services, as opposed to truck or wagon loads for others - continues to face bottlenecks, "but the overall situation is much better than what it was two weeks ago".

The most important thing at the end of the day, though, is that the farmer wants fertiliser and seed. There is no certainly shortage of demand here, which might not be so with cars and two-wheelers.

ALL-INDIA FERTILISER RETAIL SALES (LAKH TONNES)

	2018-19	2019-20	% Growth
Oct	48.37	45.17	-6.62
Nov	63.26	73.84	16.72
Dec	70.86	87.08	22.89
Jan	58.04	64.5	11.13
Feb	30.39	46.61	53.37
Mar	24.6	28.96	17.72
Apr	14.17*	20.56**	45.1

*April 2019, **April 2020.

Source: Department of Fertilisers.

representative said.

Other entrepreneurs have ensured that their the workers who chose to stay back are taken care of. Vipul Ray of Vadodara-based Elmex Controls, which counts Honeywell Automation and Rockwell Automation among its customers, is one such unit. "MSMEs are typically owner-driven companies, so the culture is more of a family business. While they may not be in a position to meet the government-mandated legal requirements, they meet their own moral requirements. They will see to it that medicines and ration issues are taken care of until things go back to normal," Ray told The Indian Express.

Until then, all eyes are on the Government. An entrepreneur in Mumbai speaks for all: "The Government is all in all, especially for small businesses which have to comply with a bunch of regulations and laws. Our appeal to the Government is you regulate everything, you decide on taxes, you say protect the livelihood of employees, what's your responsibility at this, our darkest hour?"

(Tomorrow: The Emergency Wishlist: Capital, safety net for labour, easing of curbs)

Additional reporting by Aanchal Magazine, Sandeep Singh

This (coronavirus) situation is a Test match on a very dangerous wicket. The ball is seaming and spinning as well — the batsman has very little margin of error. So, the batsman has to score runs and keep his wicket safe with this little margin of error, and win this Test match."

SOURAV GANGULY

HC declines to pass orders against DDCA ombudsman

THE DELHI High Court has decided not to pass any interim order to either remove the DDCA ombudsman or curtail his authority regarding affairs of the state cricket unit or its members.

Hearing two applications filed by Sanjay Bhardwaj and the Delhi and District Cricket Association, Justice Asha Menon declined to pass any order on a plea seeking to restrain ombudsman Justice (retired) Deepak Verma from exercising his authority. The court also did not deal with the application seeking direction "for removal/replacement of the current Ombudsman".

"As objections to the capacity of the appli-

cant to move an application on behalf of the DDCA have been raised and it has not been possible to hear all the counsel for the parties on the said aspect, it is considered appropriate to grant an opportunity to all parties to file their responses to both the applications," the order says.

"Let responses to the applications be filed through email by the non-applicants within a period of two weeks with advance copy to the counsel for the applicants, who may file rejoinders thereto, within one week thereafter with copies to the respective counsel for the non-applicants through their respective emails," the May 1 elaborates. **ENS**

Ministry mulls phase-wise resumption of national camps

SPORTS MINISTER Kiren Rijiju on Sunday said his ministry is devising a plan to ensure a phased resumption of national camps for Olympic-bound athletes by the end of this month but others might have to wait till at least September. Rijiju said the coronavirus-forced nationwide lockdown, which has been extended till May 17, forced his ministry to delay the resumption of the training camps at Sports Authority of India (SAI) centres. The lockdown was earlier meant to end on May 3. "The camps will start in a phase-wise manner. First we will start training in NIS Patiala and SAI, Bengaluru where athletes are based currently...by the end of this month," Rijiju said at FICCI's webinar titled 'Corona & Sports: The Champions Speak'. "The camps will be for those sports which have qualified for Olympics or the sports whose Olympic qualification is in future," he said. "We will relax things partially looking at the Olympics," he added. **PTI**

Tokyo adrift

In Japan, with Olympics uncertain, players return to their day jobs in middle of a pandemic

MIHIR VASAVDA
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

IF THESE were non-Corona times, Masaki Ohashi would have been in Berlin right now. With his Japanese teammates, he would have been practising alongside Germany, watching the hockey giants' showdown against India and preparing notes for the Olympics. The defender, instead, is in Tokyo. Hockey gear chucked in some corner of his apartment, putting Olympics on the backburner, and, in the midst of a pandemic-induced lockdown, returning to his day job as an assistant manager at one of Japan's biggest private security firms.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, athletes around the world have been forced indoors. Not in Japan, however. Despite declaring a state of emergency, the country, which has 14,877 cases as on Sunday, has not imposed a complete lockdown as seen in India and many Western countries. Businesses are still running, bars are open and, since they lack the legal powers to punish, the government can only ask people to stay home but they are not obliged to. So, half a dozen Japanese hockey players have to report for work daily — most of them in Tokyo and Osaka, the two most-affected cities till date — leaving coach Siegfried Aikman anxious for their well-being.

Like the Indian hockey team, Japan too continued with its national camp after the Olympics were postponed. However, unlike India, who have a boarding facility within their training centre, Aikman says they have to look after their own accommodation for the duration of the camp. So, after they were asked to suspend their training two weeks ago, the players returned to their respective homes. "When they go home, they have to work and earn their money," Aikman tells The Indian Express from the team's training centre in the city of Kakamigahara.

As is the case elsewhere in the world, all Japanese hockey players are amateurs, with nearly half of them still students. The rest have full-time jobs. Captain Manabu Yamashita, for example, worked for the company that made maps for Tokyo's under-



Half-a-dozen Japanese players are back to their day jobs in Tokyo and Osaka — two most-affected cities by Covid-19 — leaving their coach worried.

ground railway. Yamashita is between jobs right now. But there are some, according to Aikman, who work in schools while a few others, like Ohashi, work for 'big security companies'.

To make sure they remain healthy, the team management has come up with strict protocols. "We monitor them intensively. Every morning, they have to send us their reports, things like body temperature, fatigue level, muscle soreness, mental state and much more. We do it on a daily basis so we know exactly how they are feeling," Aikman says.

If something goes wrong, he adds, the player is directly sent to the hospital for a detailed check-up. The team has already had a couple of scares — while the camp was still going on, two players went down with normal flu and were isolated from the rest. Only once they recovered completely, were they allowed to join the rest of the group. Days later, one of Aikman's assistant coaches had to go into quarantine for two weeks after he came in contact with a staff member of his child's kindergarten, who tested positive. "So when these players go out for work, I am worried, of course," Aikman says.

It isn't just the physical well-being that

Aikman is concerned about. The uncertainty around the Olympics, which have been postponed until next year, has taken a mental toll on the players 'who were preparing fairly well' for the home Games.

Mental well-being

Under Aikman, a Dutch coach with Indian roots, Japan have blossomed. Not too long ago, they were on the fringes in Asia and barely a speck on the world hockey map. Aikman has turned them into a formidable unit, leading them to the Asian Games gold medal — and thus earning a rightful place at the Olympics rather than sneaking in as hosts — and turning them into a side that, on their day, can prove to be a banana skin for any team in the world.

To further improve themselves, Japan had set up joint training sessions and practice matches with Germany. It was a win-win scenario: for Japan, it was a chance to work on their skills while for Germany, bronze medalists at the Rio Olympics, it was an opportunity to get some game-time ahead of their twin Pro League matches against India, originally scheduled to take place late last month.

But as COVID-19 cases grew around the world, Japan's trip to Berlin was cancelled. Weeks later, the Olympics — that were sched-

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SIEGFRIED AIKMAN
COACH, JAPAN

uled to open on July 24 — were postponed by a year. "It has a huge impact not just on our schedule, but also on the mental state of our players because it is quite a long time," Aikman says. "It means some of our players, those who wanted to retire after the Olympics, they have to do one more year. Most of them have families, have children... most of them are getting to an age where they might not recover well. So the question is, if they make it to the next Olympics, will they still add the same value? That's something, I think, will be for all teams."

On the flip side, he says, the extra year also gives him the chance to work on things which he otherwise could not have because of lack of time. Given that all coaches and players will use the additional period to come up with new strategies and study their opponents even more closely, Aikman feels the level of competition in Tokyo next year could be 'stronger than ever'.

That is, however, if the Games take place at all. Last week, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that if the coronavirus spills over into 2021, they would have to call off the Games completely.

It's an 'uncertainty' Aikman has factored in while re-planning for the Games. But he insists it won't impact how they approach Tokyo 2021. "We don't know how the virus develops so the uncertainty that it might be cancelled... of course, it's one of the options. It's in our heads. But we have set targets till July next year and will work based on those targets. So, until they cancel, it's on."

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THOSE MONTHS, THOSE MINUTES

Forced into an unprecedented lockdown, sport is staring at an unfathomable despair. Indian athletes, though, have given the country reasons to rejoice in the past. The Indian Express looks back at a bunch of these memories.



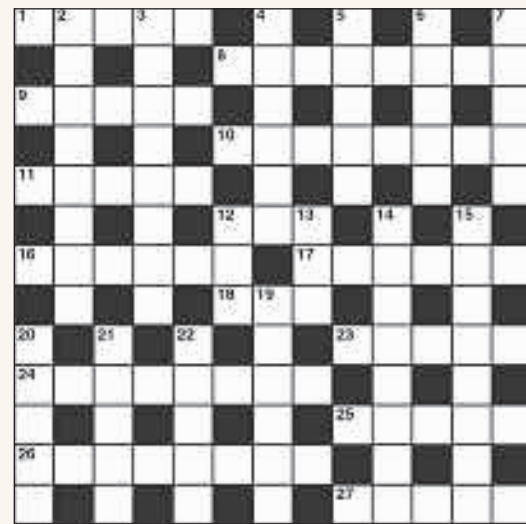
In a chat with ANDREW AMSAN, NEERAJ CHOPRA narrates his remarkable transformation story, from an obese teenager to a champion javelin thrower.

READ THE STORY ON
indianexpress.com

Germany's interior minister backs Bundesliga restart

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer on Sunday backed a possible restart for the Bundesliga season this month without spectators as the government prepares for a key meeting next week. Although Bundesliga clubs have returned to training in small groups, the league has been suspended since mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic and the government is to decide next week on a potential resumption of sports activities. The German Football League (DFL), eager for a quick restart, has submitted a health safety plan for games without spectators which includes regular testing of players. **REUTERS**

CROSSWORD 4108



ACROSS

- It goes to the head of state (5)
- Model may be a girl in love (8)
- The fall in steel production (5)
- Got better figure in a rush (8)
- Serious, but not grave (5)
- A pound could be a good investment (3)
- Sounds coming from fold or stable (6)
- Father in pain, but brave (6)
- His opposite number (3)
- Go surreptitiously as a snake disturbed (5)
- Food for people or horses (8)
- A lighthouse casts it across the vessel (5)
- Prevailing wet weather, we hear (8)
- Argentine flower of unusual petal design (5)

DOWN

- A check on the present demand for bread (4,4)
- Rather like a chat about a change of weather (8)
- Author uses an alternative water supply (6)
- Radiant girl returns west (5)
- Men go out to find underground spirit (5)
- Lose one's footing on a piece of glass (5)
- Growing or burnt timber (3)
- Where to buy a drink and some chocolate (3)
- There's some humanity in him, no doubt (8)
- Game that may disturb ant heaps (8)
- Make a mistake and run for it (6)
- Go hunting, we hear, for a bird (5)
- Tinned beef like this is poison (5)
- Notes about masonry (5)

Solutions Crossword 4107: Across: 1 Draw a blank, 6 Rasp, 10 Slight, 11 Contralto, 12 Knockout, 13 Tense, 15 Tourist, 17 Pickets, 19 Pestles, 21 Bolster, 22 Lupin, 24 Downpour, 27 Toothache, 28 Total, 29 Deed, 30 Present day. Down: 1 Desk, 2 Argonauts, 3 Attic, 4 Lockout, 5 Nonstop, 7 All in, 8 Professors, 9 Critical, 14 Stipulated, 16 lolanthe, 18 Entrusted, 20 Sidecar, 21 Bowlers, 23 Probe, 25 Piton, 26 Play.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLER WORDS

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

Adopt the _____; her secret is patience. - Ralph Waldo Emerson (4,2,6)

IRAEE



ABENTU



CGAOR



LUUCFP



SOLUTION: IRAEE: AERIE, CARCO, BUTANE, CLIFFUL
ANSWER: Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

SUDOKU 4199

Difficulty Level 1s

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

Difficulty Level

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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4198



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

The world may be spinning into hyper-space, but you are now going to have to keep your feet on the ground. From out of nowhere new responsibilities will appear, and you will be taking an organising role. Actually, new jobs could bring a great sense of satisfaction.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

A whole group of planets is now shuffling places, so it's difficult to be certain about anything. Probably the only truly positive piece of good advice today is to make more space for a creative hobby. I think you owe it to yourself to spend more time doing what matters, instead of what doesn't.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Mercury, the planet which just happens to be your personal ruler, is top of the list for important alignments today. Therefore, you may feel perfectly free to change your mind as often as you want — within reason. It's great when the planets give you permission to behave as you wish.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Important planets are aligned with your sign and, in some senses, you're still the centre of attention, but you probably feel that the real action is moving elsewhere. Only if you are utterly down-to-earth and reliable will you get what you really need.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

You may begin to think about putting much more energy into the financial arena. The fact that today's lunar influences focus on purely routine needs, may obscure the fact that there are long-term issues to be considered. Still, sometimes you just have to concentrate on day-to-day affairs.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Venus' emotional alignment is today compounded by Mars and complemented by the Moon. And that's just for starters! You should defy your reputation for being slightly reserved and shy of expressing your deeper feelings. Other people deserve to know what you really think.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Some people object to secretive behaviour, but it honestly looks as if you'll be doing everybody a favour if you keep yourself to yourself. The fact is that partners are just not ready to hear what you have to say. That's partly their problem, but it could also make things awkward for you.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

For some time now the planets have been warning about emotional confrontations at work, partly because the results could be costly. Seeing as the relevant aspects are climaxing over the next few days you should keep the peace unless you are prepared for the consequences.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23)

Travel and adventure plans are still strong, but there does seem to be an increasing sense of uncertainty or doubt. In point of fact the best vacation will be of a spiritual or subterranean nature, so you could be off on a very mysterious journey indeed.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Your financial prospects are still turbulent. It honestly now looks as if any social disagreement is likely to be triggered by money, or a dispute over who pays for what. Such things may easily be arranged in advance. A romantic fantasy is still bugging you, but there's nothing wrong with dreaming.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

That old planet Saturn is now being more helpful over a problem, which means that other people will be less inclined to blame you for their own lack of success. To be perfectly frank, you can probably do with a break, for partners' demands have been building up, unfairly in your opinion.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

The triple alliance of the Sun, Mercury and Mars indicates that you may now come out of your shell and share some of your special ideas and intuitions with people who are on your wavelength. There's nothing to be gained from keeping your ambitions to yourself.

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