

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | WEDNESDAY | 1 APRIL 2020

## WEATHER

Max: 37.3°C  
Min: 23.7°C  
RH: 31%  
Rain: Nil  
Forecast: Partly cloudy sky with haze. Max/Min temp. 37/24°C

## WORLD | 8

China may test Covid vaccine abroad

## BUSINESS | 9

PSBs' mega merger comes into effect

## TABLOID

Buying ventilators? It is sheer stupidity



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## CORONA COUNT

CASES 1397  
DEATHS 35  
TS: 96 06  
AP: 44 00

## WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

8,00,000  
DEATHS 38,540+  
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 183

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana  
Tithi: Chaitra Suddha Ashtami till 3.38 am (Thursday)  
Star: Arudra till 7.23 pm  
Varjyam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 11.55 am to 12.44 pm  
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm  
HJRI CALENDAR  
Shabaan 6,1441 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajar: 5.10 am  
Zohar: 12.30 pm  
Asar: 4.41 pm  
Maghrib: 6.35 pm  
Isha: 7.43 pm  
SUNSET TODAY 6.29 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.10 AM  
MOONRISE TODAY 11.48 AM  
MOONSET TODAY NA

## COUNTER POINT



You are lucky! You don't have corona, only swine flu, jaundice, dengue, HIV...

## IN BRIEF

### Only BS-6 fuel from today

Hyderabad: India will switch to cleaner BS-VI fuel from April 1, joining select club of countries. The new fuel contains just 10 part per million (ppm) of sulphur and reduce nitrogen oxide emissions considerably. The switch to cleaner fuel was planned in 2016 by the Narendra Modi government. Though public sector oil marketing companies meet April 1, 2020 deadline, auto companies got 10 day extension to sell vehicles that run on older BS-IV fuels.

### Euro chief warns EU's break-up

Brussels: Eurogroup president Mario Centeno warned the euro single currency could break apart if feuding governments don't bury the hatchet and agree on a rescue plan to help Italy and Spain. The warning came as the 19 members of the single currency still cannot agree on a rescue plan to reverse the impact of the coronavirus. — PTI

### Brokerages: Cut trading hours

Hyderabad: The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (Anmi), which represents nearly 900 brokerages, asked market regulator Sebi reduce market hours four hours from the current six hours 15 minutes. The brokerages body want the markets to from function from 10 am to 2 pm as against the present 9.15 am to 3.30 pm in view of national lockdown.

# Hyd has 603 Tablighi suspects

## Telangana reports 15 Covid positive patients; officials form teams to trace Markaz visitors

MADDEE DEEKSHITH AND JAYENDRA CHAITHANYA  
T. IDC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Telangana state registered a steep increase in number of coronavirus positive cases with the government on Tuesday announcing 15 new cases — the single largest jump in the state in one day.

All the cases announced on Tuesday were of people who had either visited the event organised by the Tablighi Jamaat at the Markaz mosque in Nizamuddin of Delhi between March 13 and 15, or relatives of those who attended it, health minister Etala Rajendar said in an official statement.

Tuesday's cases took the total Covid-19 tally so far to 96, of which 14 patients have been discharged while six others have died, leaving 76 active coronavirus cases under treatment as on Tuesday in different hospitals in the state. According to the government, in all, 1,030 persons from the Telangana attended the Markaz.

The immense impact of the Tablighi Jamaat organised events in Delhi on the spread of coronavirus in Telangana, sent state officials, including the police, scrambling to trace every one of the 1,030 persons and bring them to hospitals, or place them under home quarantine, along with members of their families and their other contacts. The government poured in manpower forming special teams that fanned out across all districts of Telangana for the purpose.

In the city itself, 200 special teams including the GHMC, revenue and police officials, fanned out to trace, locate and get 603 Markaz attendees from the city to book. "It did not help any that many of the addresses we had for these people were fake. It has been a Herculean task to locate them," an official said.

A senior police official said, "about 90 per cent of the people state-wide who visited Delhi for the religious event have been traced. Those with symptoms of Covid-19 were shifted to government hospitals and quarantine centres for treatment."

All put, official said, the total number of Covid-19 suspects in the state connected to Markaz visitors now may be in thousands. "But we have to identify and trace every one of them and check them for symptoms," he added.

In the city, GHMC officials were up and running early and formed 200 special teams to identify 603 persons from the city who attended Markaz. The teams inspected houses of 463 people and identified that 74 persons have been suffering from Covid-19 symptoms, apart from various other ailments.

■ Page 4: A large group returned from Delhi by road



People, who came for a religious gathering at Nizamuddin mosque, are being taken to a hospital for Covid-19 test in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

# Tablighi spreads Covid in AP

## AP adds 21 cases in 1 day; 711 people from AP visited Markaz

MD ILYAS I DC  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

The Tablighi Jamaat meet conducted by the Markaz masjid at Nizamuddin is turning into a disaster for Andhra Pradesh too. Twentyone new coronavirus (Covid-19) positive cases were identified in the state on Tuesday, taking the total to 44, out of whom 18 persons had returned from the meet.

Prakasam district tops the list, with 11 new positive cases, followed by Visakhapatnam (10),

Guntur with nine positive cases, Krishna (five), East Godavari (four), Anantapur (two), and one each registered in Chittoor, Kurnool and Nellore districts.

Adding to the crisis, people are falling for rumours wherein even non-coronavirus deaths in the family of any Delhi returnee is being related to Covid.

Besides this, people who met any of the Delhi returnees in various places in Guntur district are fearing community transmission and rushing

to the Guntur General Hospital for testing.

The Markaz meet was conducted from March 15 to 17 and was presided by Moulana Saadh, head of the Markaz mosque. Tablighi Jamaat leader Ikram Ali of Hyderabad supervised the programme.

State officials found 711 persons who attended the meet from Andhra Pradesh, in which officials traced whereabouts of 626 people and shifted them to quarantine. The search is on for information on the remaining 85.

The highest number of people who went to attend the Delhi meet are from Kurnool district (189), followed by districts of Guntur (88), Anantapur (73), Nellore (68), Prakasam (67), Kadapa (59), Krishna (43), Visakhapatnam (42), Chittoor (36), East Godavari (27), West Godavari (16) and Vizianagaram (three).

Many of these returnees transmitted Covid-19 to their family members, including their wives, and the officials have shifted them to quarantine.

## SC ASKS CENTRE TO PREVENT MIGRATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

A day after the Uttar Pradesh administration received flak for spraying migrant labourers with some unspecified chemicals, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that there is a possibility that three out of 10 migrant workers heading towards their villages are carrying the deadly novel coronavirus.

The court was also told by the Centre that now there are no migrant workers on the road, a submission contradicted by reports and images coming in on Tuesday. In its daily briefing, the Union home ministry said over 6.6 lakh stranded and destitute people have been housed in shelter camps across the country.

■ Full report on Page 5

# Centre to focus on urban areas

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

The Union health ministry on Tuesday said that cities and states with the highest number of positive cases are being treated as major hotspots of Covid-19 and the government is making all efforts to focus on them to contain the spread of the virus. But at the same time it emerged that till now only 42,788 people have been tested in the country so far for the deadly virus.

Since India recorded its first confirmed positive case in Kerala on January 30, this means that an average of 713 tests have been conducted every day in a country of 1.3 billion.

During the last 24 hours, 121 new confirmed cases and three deaths have been reported in India, taking the total confirmed cases to 1,397, and the death toll to 35. By late Tuesday evening, there

## MEDICAL GEAR EXPORT TO SERBIA KICKS UP ROW

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Ending a controversy on alleged export of protective medical equipment to Serbia in contravention of a ban, a government official said the consignment did not contain any item, whose export was prohibited. The official said 90-tonne consignment was purchased from vendors

in India by Serbia and was flown from Kerala to Serbian capital Belgrade.

The consignment reportedly includes "35 lakh pairs of sterile latex surgical gloves".

While the export of latex gloves was banned, the government official said the government had banned the export is on Nitrile Rubber (NBR) gloves.

According to reports from Europe on Tuesday,

"A second cargo Boeing 747 landed at Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade from Kerala, with 90 tonnes load of medical protective equipment bought by Serbia to combat COVID-19".

The reports said "the cost for the transport of the equipment was fully funded by the European Union."

■ Page 7: Cochin Port tweeted about export

were 1,238 active cases, 123 people have been cured while one left India.

The sudden spurt in cases in the last couple of days is being attributed to the Delhi mosque gathering in Nizamuddin where 24 have tested positive so far and health agencies have intensified contact

tracing of those who attended the event.

The government is facing severe criticism for having one of the lowest testing rates in the world. Over 200 scientists and members of the Indian academic community on Tuesday asked the government to rapidly enhance

testing facilities to detect Covid-19 in every region.

Defending the government, ICMR scientist Dr Raman Gangakhedkar said so far 42,788 samples have been tested for Covid-19 out of which 4,346 samples were tested on Monday, while the private sector screened 399 cases.

## Experts say TS would have seen fewer cases if suspects were traced earlier

# TS ignored Centre's warning on Markaz

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

A total of 257 people who attended a religious congregation at Markaz Nizamuddin in New Delhi a couple of weeks ago came to the Gandhi Hospital for testing on Tuesday. The testing was going on till late night as people were waiting for their turn. Of all the people who have come from different parts of Hyderabad, about 30 of

them are from one area.

It is suspected that this could lead to a cluster transfer of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in the state if a majority of them test positive. So far, most of these people do not have any symptoms. These people said they had been to the Markaz, but as they had no travel history to any foreign country, they did not suspect that they could have been infected by the disease. The congregation

was attended only by men, most of them middle-aged.

The prayer meeting is an annual event and they go there every year. Members claimed that all precautionary announcements made by the government were being followed at the meet, save the request not to hold congregations. Since there were no symptoms in any of them, none of them felt a suspicion that Covid-19 could strike the gathering.

They said they are now scared after being brought to hospital by health workers and the police. The queue to get tested was fairly long and only six people were allowed in the room at a time. The Gandhi Hospital got 15 teams ready for testing purpose and nasal swabs were taken.

There are a lot of questions, which are now coming to fore, especially after a note by Union home ministry which says that it had informed Telangana gov-

ernment about this risk on March 21.

If that was the case, experts are asking why did the Telangana government take so long to track these people. The Indonesians have recovered completely and are fine, which implies that had the rest been tracked on time, several lives could have been saved and any others would have been spared the infection.

■ Full report on Page 9

SHORT TAKES

**RAILWAYS MAKES TWO QUARANTINE COACHES**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The South Central Railway (SCR) on Tuesday completed the conversion of two coaches into isolation and quarantine coaches to help in the Covid-19 response effort. Officials at the Carriage Workshop at Lalaguda modified two non-AC coaches as prototypes. Each coach will have nine cabins of eight berths. Two of these cabins can be used as isolation cabins.

The cabins will have a mosquito mesh, stainless steel bottle holders and power sockets. The toilets have been modified for more regular use.

It may be recalled that the Indian Railways has asked all zones to submit designs for the conversion of coaches.

The Railways will consolidate all designs and pick the best features from them to create a uniform prototype. This prototype will be used across the country to augment health facilities being used for Covid-19.



A view of berths to be used as isolation cabins.

**300 CAMPS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS**

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar on Tuesday launched an awareness programme on Covid-19 by the traffic police at MJ Market.

Speaking to mediapersons on the sidelines of the event, Mr Kumar said the state government was working hard to combat the Covid-19 crisis. The public was extending cooperation to ensure that the lockdown is successful.

He said that there were no complaints of shortage of essentials in the city for the last five days. The GHMC has started supplying food packets particularly to migrant workers from Tuesday, he said.

The Chief Minister has ordered that nobody should remain hungry. With this directive, and with the coordination and all departments, including the police, local philanthropists, donors and NGOs, feeding programmes had started in every police station, Mr Kumar said.

In Hyderabad 300 pockets had been identified where migrant labourers stay. The city administration has given this programme top priority, the police commissioner added.

Mr Kumar said medical examinations had been completed on those who returned from other cities and foreign countries.

He requested the public that if any member of their family shows symptoms of viral infection, they should inform the Covid Control or dial 100 for the police.

"The health department will guide you. If necessary we will arrange facilities either at their home or at Covid treatment centres," Mr Kumar said.

The police commissioner said, "we have issued passes to agencies rendering essential services and the traders of essential commodities. The purpose is to ensure easy supply of essential goods." He requested that the passes not be misused.

The additional commissioner of police, traffic, has launched a special drive to curb misuse of passes and more than 45 vehicles have been seized so far, Mr Kumar said.

He clarified that the expiry date of passes has been extended for next week and there is no need for renew it.



Hyderabad Commissioner of Police Anjani Kumar launches an awareness campaign to control the spread of coronavirus.

**STATEWIDE HUNT FOR DELHI RETURNEES**

Government is searching for those who attended the Tablighi Jamaat meeting in Nizamuddin, Delhi

**53 from Nizamabad attended event**

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC NIZAMABAD, MARCH 31

The police in Nizamabad district are searching for people who had attended the Tablighi Jamaat meeting at the Markaz mosque in Nizamuddin, Delhi. Following directives from the state government, officials have been searching for the men who attended the religious programme as several people who did so have shown symptoms of Covid-19 or have tested positive for the disease. Fifty-three persons from

Nizamabad district are believed to have attended the Markaz meeting. One of them is being treated in Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad and another died in the Government General Hospital in Nizamabad. One person is reported to be still in Delhi. The address, contact numbers and other information of the rest is being collected.

People from Nizamabad, Armoor, Balkonda and other parts of the district attended the Markaz meeting. The health condition

of those identified is being keenly observed by medical teams. Information is also being collected about the people they have come in contact with.

A Muslim elder who did not want to be identified told *Deccan Chronicle*, that people from Nizamabad district regularly attend this religious meeting. Retired men particularly participate in Markaz meetings.

He said it will be difficult to find all those who have returned from Delhi and trace their contacts. It

should be up to those who attended the Markaz to approach hospital authorities and get tested, he said.

The district administration has tentatively identified around 200 persons who came in contact with those who participated in the Markaz meeting.

They hope to trace the rest during the lockdown period. Police, revenue, medical and health teams are searching for whoever attended the Delhi meeting from the district.



GHMC officials enquire about the people who attended a religious event Nizamuddin Markaz Masjid, New Delhi, between March 13 and 15.

**Search for 57 returnees in Karimnagar**

PULI SHARAT KUMAR | DC KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 31

Suspecting the risk of contracting Covid-19, officials are in search of around 57 members of erstwhile Karimnagar district who attended mass prayers held between March 13 and 15 at Markaz mosque in Nizamuddin, New Delhi.

The medical and health department alerted all districts to trace the persons who returned from the Markaz mosque.

The authorities of four districts — Karimnagar, Jagtial, Rajanna Sircilla and Peddapalli — intensified search operations to identify the persons in their respective districts by appointing special teams to quarantine all of

them. It is learnt from the health department that 57 members from erstwhile Karimnagar district visited New Delhi to attend prayers at the Markaz mosque. 25 are from Jagtial, 17 are from Karimnagar, nine are from Rajanna Sircilla and six from Peddapalli districts.

These 57 members from old Karimnagar district attended an ijtima (religious ritual) held in the middle of March every year in Markaz mosque in New Delhi.

Thousands of people from many parts of the state and even from abroad attend this ijtima and offer mass prayers. As the meeting was held before the outbreak of the pandemic, it is suspected

that many of them might have contracted Covid-19.

In view of that, officials of the four district are directed to identify the persons who attended the mass prayers and returned to their native places in erstwhile Karimnagar district between March 17 and 18.

Four members who visited the Markaz mosque were identified in Vemulawada of Rajanna Sircilla district and were sent to Sircilla government hospital to be tested.

Speaking to the *Deccan Chronicle*, Dr Mahesh Rao of Vemulawada said that receiving the orders from collector D. Krishna Bhaskar, medical teams were alerted and instructions to the employees related to health depart-

ment were given to intensify their search operations.

"With the information received from ASHA workers that four people had visited the Markaz mosque and returned on March 19, we went and identified them and after conducting primary medical tests on the four and on their family members, including those who came in contact with them, we sent 21 people to the main government hospital situated in Sircilla," Dr Rao said.

However, it is going to be an uphill task for the officials of four districts to trace the remaining 53 members from four districts along with others who had come in contact with them keeping in view the present situation.

**32 found by Adilabad riverside**

PILLALAMARRI SRINIVAS | DC ADILABAD, MARCH 31

The Adilabad police shifted 32 persons who were returning in a van to the state after attending a religious event at Nizamuddin in Delhi, at the state border and shifted them to the quarantine centre in Jagtial on Tuesday morning. Police shifted the vehicle with an escort from the Metpalli police.

It is learned that the police got the information of the arrival of several people who attended the religious event in Delhi and had camped at river

Penganga on the state border.

The police shifted the 32 persons in a special van and took them to Jagtial via NH-44 to avoid avoiding going through villages. The 32 persons belong to Korutla town of Jagtial district. At least six persons who had gone to the Tablighi Jamaat event at the Markaz mosque in Delhi's Nizamuddin have died of the novel coronavirus disease.

Meanwhile, the Adilabad police and medical and health department are looking for people from Adilabad district who had attended a religious event

in Delhi. Several people who were at the event were found to have symptoms of coronavirus and have been home quarantined. The police got information that 52 persons from Adilabad district had gone to Delhi to attend the religious event, but the police is not sure where they live.

Thirty of them have been home quarantined and it was after observing their health condition that the authorities are looking for the rest.

Some political leaders have objected to medical officers subjecting the Covid suspects to home quarantine and medical

tests. The medical department has also identified 40 persons from Nirmal district who attended the same event, and have quarantined them at home.

Another 10 people who attended the event have been identified in Mancherial district.

Those who are showing no symptom of the disease are asking to be allowed home from quarantine centres.

Officials are having a tough time tracing the whereabouts of people who have returned from abroad, since many of them are not staying at the addresses they gave.

**EFFORTS TO TRACE TJ VISITORS**

LOOK-OUT FOR 1,030

The Centre has sent a district-wise break-up of the people who attended the two-day religious event at the Markaz masjid in Delhi's Nizamuddin. 1,030 persons from TS attended the event.

**603**

**GHMC LIMITS**

- Nizamabad 80
- Nalgonda 45
- Warangal Urban 38
- Adilabad 30
- Khammam 27
- Nirmal 25
- Jagtial 25
- Sangareddy 22
- Karimnagar 17
- Ranga Reddy 13
- Mahabubnagar 11

- Bhadradi-Kothagudem 11
- Vikarabad 13
- Suryapet 10
- Mancherial 10
- Rajanna-Sircilla 9
- Mahabubabad 6
- Peddapally 6
- Jogulamba Gadwal 5
- Jangaon 4
- Nagarkurnool 4
- Yadadri-Bhongir 4
- Medak 2
- Medchal 2
- Mulugu 2
- Wanaparthy 3
- Jayashankar Bhupalpally 1
- Warangal Rural 1

- Foreign Workers of the Tablighi Jamaat, which held the Markaz event, spread in states as on March 21
- Tamil Nadu: 125
- Uttar Pradesh: 132
- Maharashtra: 115
- Haryana: 115

- TELANGANA
- West Bengal: 70
- Karnataka: 50
- Madhya Pradesh: 49
- Jharkhand: 38
- Andhra Pradesh:

**82**

- West Bengal: 70
- Karnataka: 50
- Madhya Pradesh: 49
- Jharkhand: 38
- Andhra Pradesh:

**25**

- Rajasthan: 13
- Odisha: 11

**19 from Warangal who took part in prayers traced**

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, MARCH 31

After six persons, who took part in a Tablighi Jamaat event in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi died on Monday due to coronavirus, officials of the erstwhile Warangal district have been alerted by the state government to identify all those who took part in the event.

Accordingly, various district administrations within the erstwhile Warangal district area have swung into action and started tracing those who had attended the Delhi meeting as well as those with whom the returnees had come into contact.

In Jangaon district three persons who attended the meeting have been traced. While two are asymptomatic one has been found to be symptomatic. All three have been shifted to Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad. One of the three owns a mutton shop in Veldhi village of Narmetta.

After coming back from the event, he worked in his shop for some days and people bought meat from his shop. Officials said 35 families in the village have been isolated.

In Warangal Urban district, of the 32 persons who

attended the event, 19 have been traced. District collector Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanthu said they have shifted these persons to an isolation ward and are looking out for the rest. In Mahabubad district three persons who attended the event have been quarantined since past two days ago.

Two persons of Mulugu, who attended the meeting, have completed their isolation period but are under observation by the authorities.

One person each in Warangal Rural and Jayashankar Bhupalpally districts, who travelled to Delhi to take part in the religious event, have been home quarantined.

None of the persons traced out so far in erstwhile Warangal district have shown any symptoms of coronavirus. Most of them have already been placed in quarantine and have undergone tests, which turned out to be negative.

Officials are in talks with community elders to trace out those who are not willing to identify themselves. Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao has also appealed to people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat meet in Delhi to voluntarily come forward for tests.

**Search on for 38 from Khammam, Bhadradi**

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC KHAMMAM, MARCH 31

Fear has gripped Khammam and Bhadradi districts following reports that 38 persons belonging to the two districts had attended the prayers held by the Tablighi Jamaat in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi.

Over 2,000 delegates from throughout India and abroad, including Indonesia and Malaysia, had attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin West area of Delhi from March 1 to 15. This area has now been sealed off following fears that some of those who attended the meeting may have contracted Covid-19.

According to details available, 27 persons from Khammam district and 11 from Bhadradi district attended the prayers. They were among the 1,030 people of Telangana hailing from various districts who attended the prayers.

Following an alert, the Khammam district administration identified and quarantined 10 persons on Sunday. District medical and health officer Malathi said tests were conducted and results that came out on Tuesday showed that none of them had contracted the coronavirus.

With this, Khammam district has retained its record of having zero Covid-19 cases. The DMHO said they,

however, have no information on the remaining 17 persons who reportedly attended the religious congregation in Nizamuddin.

Authorities of Bhadradi-Kothagudem district too have identified 10 of the 11 persons who attended the Delhi meeting. Five of them belong to Kothagudem, four to Manuguru and one is from Charla. Bhadradi district collector M.V. Reddy said the 10 persons disclosed their identity voluntarily and have been sent into quarantine. Tests have been conducted on them and their reports are awaited. Officials are searching for the remaining 17 persons in Khammam town and one in Bhadradi district. They are not available at the addresses given on their railway reservation application forms.

G. Venkateswarlu, a teacher of Khammam, said those missing must be immediately traced. "Many of us are hoping that the lockdown will end on April 14. We will be freed of tension if the remaining 18 persons are accounted for."

**Air India flight evacuates 38 German nationals**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

An Air India flight evacuated 38 German nationals (19 women, 17 men and two infants) from the city on a special flight from the Shamshabad airport on Tuesday. The flight had taken off from Chennai in the morning with German nationals based there. From Hyderabad, the aircraft flew on to Mumbai to collect more passengers and fly them to Frankfurt.

The passengers were made to pass through a fully-sanitised Interim International Departures Terminal, which was prepared for evacuation



German nationals, who were stranded due to the coronavirus lockdown, board a special flight for Mumbai, at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

measures such as these. Special screening and other safety measures were put in place, including thermal screening and mandatory social distancing via special queuing arrangements.

On March 28, the airport had handled another special flight to rescue IndiGo crew stuck in Hyderabad. The airport's cargo terminal is fully operational and is facilitating transport of essential supplies.

**1 booked for fake audio clip on virus**

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

A man who shared his conversation with a doctor from Apollo Hospital on Covid-19 on social media, describing it as a conversation between a reporter and a doctor, and created panic among the citizens, was booked by the Hyderabad cyber-crime police.

The fake audio clip was in circulation on social media platforms for quite a few days.

It contained a warning that the virus would infect several lakh of people if they failed to take precautions. The hospital authorities

lodge a complaint with the cybercrime police on March 27. The police said the investigation revealed that the accused recorded a casual conversation and circulated it through social media. Notices have been served on the accused.

THE FAKE audio clip was in circulation on social media platforms for quite a few days. It contained a warning that the virus would infect several lakh of people if they failed to take precautions.

**OTHER STORIES**  
**2,400 RETURNEES COMPLETE QUARANTINE**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD/KAMAREDDY,  
MARCH 31

Minister for roads, buildings, housing and legislative affairs V. Prashanth Reddy said that around 3,400 foreign returnees were home quarantined in Nizamabad district. Of them, 2,400 persons completed 14-day quarantine period without any symptoms of coronavirus infection, he said. The remaining 1,200 will also complete their quarantine soon, he said. The minister lauded the people for respecting the lockdown and staying indoors during the last week. He urged them to continue doing the same for the next fortnight too and cooperate with the officials in containing the spread of Covid-19.

Mr Reddy reviewed the measures taken to prevent the spread of the deadly virus in Kamareddy and Nizamabad districts on Tuesday. Government whip Gampa Govardhan, Jukkal MLA Hanmanth Shinde, district collectors A. Sharath, C. Narayana Reddy, Kamareddy SP N. Swetha, Nizamabad police commissioner Kartikeya and other officials took part in the meeting.

**91 PRISONERS RELEASED FROM AP JAILS**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 31

The Andhra Pradesh prison department has begun releasing prisoners on interim bail and emergency parole following the Supreme Court's suggestion on March 23 that states may consider releasing those facing jail term of seven years and below to decongest jails in view of spreading coronavirus.

In the first phase, 74 prisoners, including seven women, were released from the Central Jail in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday evening. Of them 53 were undertrial prisoners and 21 convicts. All the seven women are undertrial prisoners.

The central jail has 1,350 inmates as on date. Giving a break up, the jail authorities said among the undertrial prisoners, 47 were from Visakhapatnam district, two each from Vizianagaram and Srikakulam and one from East Godavari. Of the convicted prisoners, 15 were from Visakhapatnam, five from Vizianagaram and one from Srikakulam.

The prisoners were released in the presence of seventh additional metropolitan magistrate Jagadish Kumar and central jail superintendent S. Rahul.

"Only petty offenders were released as per the directions of the judge who went to the prison and decided on who should be released," said IG of prisons G Jayavardhan.

However, no ganja smuggler was considered parole, he added. The Vizag jail has around 600 ganja smugglers comprising half of the capacity and they hail from different parts of the country.

Andhra Pradesh has four central prisons located at Vizag, Rajahmundry, Nellore and Kadapa.

All central prisons hold over 4,200 prisoners (both male and female and convicts and under-trials).

These prisoners, however, will be under constant watch of jail authorities and will be tracked on a daily basis by special committees to ensure that they do not escape.

Telangana government is yet to form a committee to release the prisoners. Maharashtra and UP have announced the release of 11,000 prisoners each, West Bengal and Delhi have announced the release of 3,000 prisoners each. Punjab is set to release over 6,000 prisoners.

According to a report from Kakinada, as many as 73 remand prisoners were granted bail in East and West Godavari districts, out of which 17 were already released on Monday.

The remaining 55 will be released on Wednesday. Central jail superintendent of Rajahmundry Mr Srirama Rajarao said that the prisoners should again come to jail, after the expiry of their bail. He said that all arrangements were made to release them on April 1.

Meanwhile, East Godavari sub-jails officer Mr Tirupal said that already 17 prisoners were released from Kakinada (2), Prathipadu (6) and Tuni (2) jails. West Godavari sub-jails officer Mr S. Kishore Kumar said that seven prisoners were released from Tanuku (4) and Narsapuram (3) jails.

**Navami rituals to be as usual at Bhadradri**

Doordarshan, SVBC to broadcast Lord Rama's wedding

DC CORRESPONDENT  
BHADRACHALAM,  
MARCH 31

All the rituals and traditions to be followed during Lord Rama's wedding celebrations would be performed without any compromise at the Bhadrachalam temple even if devotees would not be present.

The priests are performing each and every ritual in a splendid manner. Lord Rama's wedding would be performed on April 2 and Garuda Dhwa Chitra Lekhanam was held in the temple on Tuesday.

The Garuda Chitram was tied to the Dhwa Sthambam by the priests.

It had been decided by the temple authorities that the wedding of the divine couple would be held on the premises of the shrine, instead of the Mithila Stadium on Thursday.



Garuda Dhwa Chitra Lekhanam was performed at Bhadrachalam on Tuesday, as part of Sitarama Kalyanam scheduled to be held on April 2.

On Wednesday, *Eduurkolu* will be performed and the authorities have made all arrangements for the fete. Due to the ongoing lockdown, only priests and higher officials are being allowed into the temple.

Doordarshan and SVBC have planned to broadcast

Sitarama Kalyanam programme on April 2 and the devotees can view the ritual from their homes.

**Corona lockdown: MLA sets up 15 food centres to serve meals to poor**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, MARCH 31

In view of the lockdown induced by the outbreak of pandemic Covid-19, Warangal East MLA, with the help of several philanthropists, set up 15 food centres in Warangal.

Minister for women and child welfare Satyavathi Rathod inaugurated the food centre near Pochamma Maidan on Tuesday. She appreciated the efforts of the MLA in providing food for the poor during the crisis.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA N. Narendar said 150 people will be fed at each centre every day.

"The people who are working in the frontline rendering services to the public like sanitation workers, doctors and the policemen are also welcome at these centres. We are taking all measures to prevent the spread of the disease in the district. The vegetable market has been shifted and set up in 32 acres at the Azamjahi mills ground so as to ensure the people maintain distance while buying the vegetables," he said.

The Minister and the MLA inaugurated Ready to Door android application which facilitates citizens to order groceries to their doorstep. The minister asked the citizens to make use of the application and receive groceries while remaining safe in their houses.



Minister Satyavathi Rathod and MLA N. Narendar distribute food packets to the sanitation workers after opening one near Pochamma Maidan in Warangal on Tuesday.

**Foresters distribute essential commodities to the poor**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, MARCH 31

Mulugu forest range officials on Tuesday distributed essential commodities to the poor to help them cope with the Covid-19 crisis situation.

Forest Range officer M. Ram Mohan Rao said a few needy people have been identified by the local forest beat officers with the help of the sarpanch and other local public representatives in certain forest interface villages and

given groceries, worth ₹500 each.

About 30 people, mostly daily wage labourers who were rendered jobless due to the lockdown, were among the beneficiaries identified by the forest officials.

Kottur of Mulugu mandal, Palampet and Burgupet villages of Venkatapur mandal have been selected for the distribution. The forest department believes that such gestures will help them muster the

support of the people in the villages to keep a check on the rampant smuggling of wood and poaching of wild animals in the forest.

Forest section officers A. Ramesh, V. Balaji, T. Venkanna, forest beat officers, B. Rathanalal, G. Raghuram, P. Bhagawan, D. Mamatha, Rajesh, Swathi, Laxmidevi, village sarpanches P. Venkateswarlu, D. Rajitha, Sarangapani and vice sarpanch Dilip were present.

**Police beat up 3 gamblers**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MARCH 31

The video showing the high-handedness of Mudigonda police against three persons who were arrested on allegations of playing cards has gone viral.

The lockdown following the outbreak of Covid-19 confined many people to their homes and in such a situation, people tried to play indoor games like chess, carroms, snakes and ladders.

Meanwhile, cops found three persons at Vanamvari Krishnapuram in Mudigonda playing cards in of the trio's house and wielding their lathis.

The video showed the cops beating one of the trio being beaten with stick several times.

Another person was injured in the legs after being thrashed. The police, it is learnt, beat the trio in front of their houses and their family members. Some of the family members reportedly raised objection to it and even asked them to file a case and then take action accordingly.

However, police paid no heed to their words and continued beating the trio.

P. Sarat, a resident of Mudigonda said, "It is not



A clipping from the video shows a cop beating one among the trio with a stick after finding that they were playing cards in a house in Mudigonda mandal on Monday.

correct to beat them even if they were found playing cards. People are getting bored sitting indoors throughout the day. Cops should not consider playing cards as a serious offence in such a crisis situation. Even if they felt the need to take action, they should book a case under the Gambling Act and then punish them."

Some of the people shot the police excess and sent it to various social media groups.

It went viral and many faulted the police for the act.

The police chief of Khammam city, who also watched the video, considered it a serious offence and issued orders on attaching the Mudigonda SI to the armed reserved section in Khammam.

**COPS DENY BEATING MINE WORKER**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, MARCH 31

A day after the Singareni workers boycotted duties and launched a protest against the police for beating up one of their colleagues when he was going home after work, the police claimed that it was not a police constable who beat him up.

Bhupalpally DSP A. Sampath Rao said the Singareni worker was beaten up by a person in civil dress and not a constable. "We are yet to find out who assaulted the Singareni staffer," the DSP said.



Bharatiya Janata Party state chief and Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar distributes masks and gloves to the staff of government hospital in Karimnagar on Tuesday.

**BJP, Congress oppose cut in salary to TS employees**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 31

Bharatiya Janata Party state chief and Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Tuesday demanded the government to withdraw its decision to cut the salaries of government employees and pensioners.

Mr Sanjay Kumar questioned that when the central government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, released a package of ₹1.70 lakh crore to rescue the poor and middle class people in the country what was the need to cut the salaries of government employees and pensioners. He reminded that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, on a number of occasions, said that Telangana was a rich state. In such a case, instead of declaring bonus to the health, municipal and police departments

● Cutting the salary of employees during crisis was criticised by the leaders of the opposition parties

● BJP state chief B. Sanjay wondered what was the need to cut when Modi-led government released ₹1.7L crore to rescue the poor

which are striving hard to combat Covid-19, cutting salaries 50 per cent will drive many families of the government employees into problems, he said.

Mr Kumar demanded the government to contemplate the issue and withdraw the decision.

Meanwhile, Congress party senior leader and MLC T. Jeevan Reddy, in a statement released here on Tuesday, opposed the decision of Telangana government of cutting the salaries of government employees and pension-

ers. Without consulting the government employees union and pensioners union and other parties, how can the government take such a decision to cut their salaries, he wondered.

Mr Jeevan Reddy said that Telangana is the first state in the country which took such a decision. Employees are the people who work hard to enhance the prestige of the government and if the government does not understand their problems, then, whom can they approach to speak about their problems.

Many people depend on the salaries and cutting 50 percent of that, especially in a crisis situation like this, will push them into more trouble. If the government itself reduces the salaries, then private organisations will not pay money to their employees, he added.

**Man involved in smuggling arrested, 2 tortoises seized**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 31

Taking advantage of the ongoing lockdown in the entire nation, a few people tried to smuggle rare and endangered species, star tortoises, in Karimnagar district.

The police, on Tuesday, nabbed one person involved in illegal sale of star tortoises.

According to the police, the accused, Sudhakar, a resident of Housing Board Colony in Karimnagar city, was indulged in the illegal business for the last few months.

On info from reliable source, police raided his house and seized two tortoises from his possession.

When the police enquired Sudhakar about the tortoises, he tried to convince them saying that they do not belongs to



One of the star tortoises seized from possession of the arrested in Karimnagar on Tuesday.

him. However, police took Sudhakar into custody and handed over the two star tortoises to the forest officials.

Star tortoises are an endangered species found in dry areas and scrub forest in India. These tortoises are popular in exotic pet trade which has made them an endangered species.

**Maharashtra, TS cops stopped labourers on entering the states**  
**Migrants cross Penganga**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, MARCH 31

Nearly 500 migrant labourers stranded on either side of Telangana-Maharashtra border wanted to go to their native villages on Tuesday. The migrant labourers crossed River Penganga which was having less water by walk to reach Telangana and Maharashtra side.

After reaching Maharashtra and Telangana, the labourers took vehicles to proceed to their villages. However, the Maharashtra police stopped the migrant labourers when they were heading to their native places in vehicles and same was the case with the Telangana police.

The police did not allow their vehicles into the respective state.

Many migrant labourers were found heading to their native places by walk even when it took them more than 3-4 days of continuous walk.

Following the sudden declaration of lockdown, migrant labourers and the poor suffered the most in the entire state getting stranded at different places.



Migrant labourers cross River Penganga by walk as it has less water and reach the other side of the border, Maharashtra, on Tuesday.

## SHORT TAKES

HALF SALARY,  
PENSION UNFAIR,  
SAY PARENTSHARLEEN MINOCHA | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The Telangana Parents Association (TPA) vehemently opposed the state government order to pay half the salaries and pensions of state employees and pensioners for March.

Nagati Narayana, state president, TPA in a letter to the Chief Minister over the issue said that it was irresponsible of the government to pass such an order during the lockdown.

"In the situation that we see today, the expenditure being incurred by the people is immense. Most of the salary and pension goes into paying rent and EMIs, stocking up basic essentials and fulfilling medical needs.

Families are facing financial problems. This order will defeat the spirit of the lockdown," he said.

Mr. Narayana, on behalf of the Telangana Parents Association, demanded that the government retire the order and pay full salaries and pensions.

SALARIES WILL  
NOT BE CUT BUT  
DELAYED: STATES.N.C.N. ACHARYULU | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The state government has clarified that it has not cut the salaries of its employees but has only deferred their payment.

It may be recalled that the Telangana government had earlier announced a cut in salaries of all government employees including All India Service (AIS) officers and public representatives including MLAs.

Employees and others thought that they will lose a part of their salary due to the government's decision.

According to an order issued by the state administration on Tuesday, the government is only deferring the payment of salaries, wages and allowances.

The order says due to the present crisis, the state government has decided deferment in payment of salaries from the month of March 2020, payable on 1st April. This order will be in force till a further order is issued in this regard.

Officials too have clarified that only a part of the salary will be paid for the month of March. The balance salary will be paid to all at a later date. Officials maintain that the government is not in a position to pay the full salaries at present due to financial constraints.

● OFFICIALS TOO have clarified that only a part of the salary will be paid for the month of March. The balance salary will be paid to all at a later date

## Workers angry with KCR over pay cut

Employees, families find decision unpalatable; move may also demoralise them amid Covid fight

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao to cut the monthly pay of state government employees by half has come as a shocker to employees. Though nobody has dared to challenge it, considering the war-like situation, the phlegmatic posturing by employees could not be considered as a red herring.

Through a late evening government order (GO), the TRS government announced a 50 per cent pay cut to 70 per cent of employees and pensioners — rest being staffers of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and outsourced employees. Even employees of PSUs, including the Singareni Collieries Company Ltd, would also be affected under the 50 per cent pay cut scheme, though the employees of electricity department might be exempted.

A ballpark estimate is that the monthly salary bill of Telangana runs to almost ₹3,200 crore. Excluding the electricity employees and outsourced employees, the salary outgo aggregates to about ₹2,850 crore. A cut by means the state government will save ₹1,400 crore a month owing to this decision.

Despite the Covid-19 being a global crisis and no one being immune to it, Telangana government staff find the pay cut an unpalatable decision, with employee and their families being furious at Mr Rao's decision. For almost all employees who depend on salaries, the equated monthly instalments (EMIs) of housing loan, car loan, personal loan, and in some cases, house rent, milk bill, grocery, cable TV bill, electricity bill, often empties the bank accounts where

salaries are deposited. There is still confusion over the announcement made by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman about moratorium or deferment on EMI payments, including if it applies from April 1, whether banks have calibrated their software to defer deduction of instalments towards loans through auto-debit mode.

There is also confusion whether it applies to personal loans and credit cards, and if individuals should apply to respective banks seeking to avail the moratorium. Most employees, who would receive only 50 per cent of salary, are keeping their fingers crossed.

A several staff union leader in Telangana, who requested anonymity say-

ing "this is not the right time to blame it on government", said it is employees who make any government scheme a success, though politicians take credit.

"Everybody perceived huge expenditure on Kaleswaram project and other irrigation schemes, close to ₹ 1.20 lakh crore, an investment to generate a permanent economic

activity. The service of employees in making this project a reality was not small. Yet, today we are being punished," he said.

Leader of another union said, "half pay would mean half work or half-hearted work. For that matter, every scheme launched by TRS government has been a big hit with wholehearted and full-fledged support of

employees. But, now they are pained as resources into exchequer ebbed for no fault of ours."

The state government employees were looking forward to amounts they might receive as arrears and enhanced monthly pay, once pay-revision commission submits its recommendations and the same were implemented.

The PRC would have to be implemented from July 1, 2018. Now, with Covid-19 casting its darkest shadow on prospect of implementing PRC, government employees are despondent.

"They are now feeling it would be enough if current salary hits their accounts without a cut, leave alone a revised and enhanced pay check," said a union leader.

The dole promised to government staff during elections includes enhancing retirement age to 61 and scrapping of Contributory Pension Scheme; now, these two are also unlikely to happen.

Employees are irked that Chief Minister Rao suddenly announced the decision to cut their pay. "He could have discussed options and cut pay by 25 per cent and cut expenditure on welfare schemes partially too," he said.

"The state is spending almost ₹25,000 crore for purchase of more than one crore metric tonnes of paddy and entire output of maize. If the state had purchased only 50 per cent of these two crops, it could have utilised the remaining ₹12,500 crore for other things," said a senior bureaucrat.

"CM Rao could have balanced other welfare schemes to maintain salary and pension bill. Instead, he forced his own machinery to sacrifice government staff earnings. Maybe employees would grudgingly hold their anger for now and uncork bottled-up anger later," he said.

A senior doctor wrote, "This is truly disgusting and demoralising the doctor fraternity. Instead of boosting our morale, the Telangana government is diverting our attention as we will not get our regular rightful salary. Scarcity of funds is only an excuse not to carry out their duties and appreciate those who are fighting day and night with minimal resources in hospitals."

The Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC) of health and medical department got into action as doctors demanded that government must be apprised of their work and their salaries must not be cut.

The TJAC explained that out-patient department is everyday seeing patients with cough, cold and fever and many of them are not revealing their travel and contact histories.

KCR says state is revenue surplus,  
why cut salary, ask Congress, BJPS.A. ISHAQUI | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The state Congress has strongly opposed the decision of the state government to cut salaries of government employees and slash pensions. BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar also vehemently opposed the decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

Mr Kumar requested the Chief Minister to reconsider his decision of paying only 50 per cent of salary to government employees, teachers and pensioners and deferring salaries and pensions to 10 per cent of Class IV employees and pensioners.

Expressing complete solidarity with Mr Rao's efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19, he pointed out that the Chief Minister had declared Telangana as a surplus revenue state.

He said, "I am unable to understand how could the state financial position deteriorated in less than 15 days of announcing of the lockdown."

He reminded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed paying of salaries to employees of

private and even unorganised sectors for the lockdown period. If the government cuts salaries, it is obvious that the private sector will take advantage of it, Mr Sanjay said.

Several Congress leaders including MPs Komatireddy Venkata Reddy and A. Revanth Reddy former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir, and TPCC treasurer Gudur Narayana Reddy, AICC official spokesperson Dasoju Sravan and TPCC spokesperson

Indira Shoban while opposing the state's decision said Mr Chandrashekar Rao was wrongly trying to take advantage of an epidemic to cut down the salaries of employees and pensioners.

They said that the move would demoralise the government staff which has been working relentlessly for the last 10 days to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the state.

They said that employees of all departments are involved in anti-coron-

avirus operations and the health, police, energy and municipal administrations departments are working round the clock basis to provide essential services to the people during the lockdown, employees of other departments are taking care of logistics and other managerial tasks. While demanding that the government issue a White Paper on the state finances and explain the sudden economic crisis, Mr Shabbir Ali said, "it will be a shock for all the employees to learn that they would be getting only 50 per cent of their salary this month."

He accused the government of forcing the employees to share the financial burden of war against coronavirus.

Mr Narayana Reddy said that the Chief Minister should first disclose the figures for funds spent by the state government to deal with the coronavirus and the estimated revenue loss to the exchequer due to the lockdown.

Mr Komatireddy Venkata Reddy reminded that during the announcement of lockdown, the Chief Minister had announced spending of ₹10,000 crores to combat Covid-19 as Telangana state is rich.

He questioned how could the state became poor within less than 15 days and be unable to pay the full salaries and pensions.

Dr Sravan said state employees who had retired depend solely on their pensions. If they get only 50 per cent of their pension at this crucial hour they would suffer mental agony and trauma.

Ms Shoban said that instead giving incentives to the employees who are on 24x7 duty since the outbreak of Covid-19, the move to cut salaries was inhuman.

Congress leaders demanded that the government withdraw the decision for and re-assure the employees they would not face any financial burden.

There is also confusion whether it applies to personal loans and credit cards, and if individuals should apply to respective banks seeking to avail the moratorium. Most employees, who would receive only 50 per cent of salary, are keeping their fingers crossed.

A several staff union leader in Telangana, who requested anonymity say-

ing "this is not the right time to blame it on government", said it is employees who make any government scheme a success, though politicians take credit.

"Everybody perceived huge expenditure on Kaleswaram project and other irrigation schemes, close to ₹ 1.20 lakh crore, an investment to generate a permanent economic

activity. The service of employees in making this project a reality was not small. Yet, today we are being punished," he said.

Leader of another union said, "half pay would mean half work or half-hearted work. For that matter, every scheme launched by TRS government has been a big hit with wholehearted and full-fledged support of

employees. But, now they are pained as resources into exchequer ebbed for no fault of ours."

The state government employees were looking forward to amounts they might receive as arrears and enhanced monthly pay, once pay-revision commission submits its recommendations and the same were implemented.

The PRC would have to be implemented from July 1, 2018. Now, with Covid-19 casting its darkest shadow on prospect of implementing PRC, government employees are despondent.

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"CM Rao could have balanced other welfare schemes to maintain salary and pension bill. Instead, he forced his own machinery to sacrifice government staff earnings. Maybe employees would grudgingly hold their anger for now and uncork bottled-up anger later," he said.

Revanth opposes CM's  
decision on salary cutIREDDY SRINIVAS  
REDDY | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

TPCC working president and Malkajgiri Congress MP Revanth Reddy has found fault with the decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao to impose 50 per cent cut in salaries of state government employees and pensioners.

In an open letter written to the Chief Minister on Tuesday, he opposed the decision, stating that it will demoralise employees, paramedical staff, doc-

tors and Class 4 employees and police, all of whom are on 24x7 duty following the outbreak of Covid-19.

The MP said: "The country is facing a calamity because of Covid-19. In such a crisis, the government should not take hasty decisions."

He regretted that on one hand, the government was appealing that people stay away from gatherings and maintain social distance. On the other, it has asked revenue officials to issue notices for land acquisition to build the

Pharma City complex in Ranga Reddy district. He said revenue authorities are holding a public hearing on April 3 in this regard.

Mr Revanth Reddy also questioned the irrigation department's move calling tenders on Monday for works to be undertaken for the third phase of lifting water from the Kaleswaram project.

"Is it time for tenders or conducting public hearing for land acquisition," he asked, appealing to the CM to re-think on the issues raised in his open letter.

There is also confusion whether it applies to personal loans and credit cards, and if individuals should apply to respective banks seeking to avail the moratorium. Most employees, who would receive only 50 per cent of salary, are keeping their fingers crossed.

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## Covid cricket



Youth kill time playing cricket in an open space near Jamai Osmania railway station on Tuesday.

—GANDHI

## Agents unwilling to carry medicines

KANIZA GARARI | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Police action against pharmaceutical company employees, drivers and staff ferrying medicines has raised serious concerns and transporters are not willing to carry medicines, medical equipments and other important medical devices. Those who are stuck on national highways, inter-state borders are not moving at all as police officials and local administrations are being violent.

Despite documents pertaining to medical equipment, devices and inventories of products being given

to them, the movement of vehicles is not allowed. Official letters from government departments are being demanded and providing them is not possible, say manufacturers. Company officials, manufacturers, stockists and distributors are talking to officials but it is of no use as the response is different at the ground level.

Due to the lockdown, inter-state borders are closed and convincing officials on both sides to allow the vehicles to cross over is a very difficult task of which most drivers are not capable of.

This has led to shortage of medicines, equipment and

devices in hospitals as well as with pharmacists. Stents, pacemakers for cardiovascular diseases and prescription drugs for withdrawal symptoms are not available in the market. Stockists are not supplying products as the people in depots are not reporting to work.

There is no public transport for them to travel. Despite the police issuing passes, they are not willing to come to work. Most of them are scared that they will be beaten up.

Similarly, those who live on inter-state borders are not able to come to work as they have to cross borders and that is a cumbersome

task. This has led to problems at the manufacturing level, delaying production schedules.

Interstate borders in south, west and north India are where major complaints have come, from manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies, as police and collectors are demanding permit papers from industry with government stamps.

This has made it very difficult as these materials are stuck at borders and pharmaceutical company officials who have negotiated on behalf of companies have also faced very rough behaviour from police officials.

## 2 nabbed for arson attempt

JAYENDRA CHAITHANYA  
T | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Two men from the city attempted to burn a religious place, an RTC bus and an ATM centre. They hurled petrol bombs at the religious place last week but there was no damage to property or life, said the Hyderabad police.

On March 14, some bottles of liquor were found at a place of worship in Madannapet. On checking,

Task Force Additional DCP G. Chakravarthy. "They closely observed the incidents in Delhi and at Shaheen Bagh. They also watched the recent riots in Delhi on social media applications. They were attracted to the speeches against the CAA and assumed that their community may be expelled from the country," Mr Chakravarthy said.

He said the accused believed that the Centre was suppressing the Muslim community and so

they hatched a plan to disturb the peaceful atmosphere in the city.

In the course of the investigation, police found that Arshad and Wasi were also involved in attempts to set ablaze an RTC bus at Kanchanbagh, an Axis Bank ATM kiosk at Chandrayanpet and a religious place at Madannapet, said the Additional DCP. He said further investigation is underway in all the three cases and the accused will be produced before a court.

Junior doctors in state-run  
hospitals get PPE, N95DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

It took a warning from the Telangana Junior Doctors Association to make the government aware that there is no personal protection equipment in Osmania General Hospital, Gandhi Hospital and Niloufer Hospital. On Tuesday personal protection equipment (PPE) and N95 masks were provided in all the three hospitals.

A junior doctor said, "We have been demanding these masks and PPE since the outbreak but no one was listening to us. Hospital superintendents are not forwarding our requirements to

department. There is a major communication gap between them. We were made to work but no protection was offered, which is not fair."

The 16 junior doctors and post graduates at Niloufer Hospital, who came in contact with a three-year-old child in the general ward who tested positive, are having mild symptoms of Covid-19. The first test has turned negative but they have been asked to stay at home. This exposure has also shown the lack of clinical understanding at the government level to diagnose the disease.

A senior doctor at Niloufer Hospital explained, "The

child is from the poor strata of society and is in an immune compromised state. The parents are running around for funds for medicines. How did the child get Covid-19?" This lapse has put the health officials on the alert and they have asked junior doctors to directly report to them if they find any suspicious cases or lapses in providing facilities.

The office of health minister Etala Rajendar has asked TJUDA to be in touch for all their problems. He asked TS Medical Services and Infrastructure Development Corporation to ensure that there are enough masks.

Two of the most commonly consumed varieties are Benishan and Rasalu. Districts like Karimnagar and Kurnool are hotspots for the Benishan variety of mango.

Official records show that mango plantation takes place on 2.8 to 3 lakh acres and bears 10 lakh metric tonnes of fruit.

"There are mangoes for pickles that are lying in godowns, said Mr S. Insrnam Ali, president, Mango Growers Association of India.

MANGO LOVERS  
HIT BY CLIMATE,  
LOCKDOWNDC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Mango production has undergone a slump this year as a result of a poor winter that affected the trees and now a shortage of manpower to pick the fruits in time has worsened matters.

"More than one-third of the area allocated for mangoes did not reap any yield this year. A majority of mango grown is of the pulp variety exported to the north for juices, jams and other products," Dr G.V. Ramanjanayulu, executive director, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture said.

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**SHORT TAKES**

**MAHA ANNOUNCES 8% CUT IN POWER TARIFF FOR 5 YRS**

**DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, MARCH 31**

The Maharashtra government on Monday announced an average of eight per cent electricity tariff cut for the next five years to help business and people tide over the Covid-19 crisis. While the industry has been given the highest benefits, farmers will have to contend with one per cent reduction in electricity costs, according to an official statement.

According to an official statement, the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission has approved a move to cut tariffs by an average of seven to eight per cent, which is first such measure in the past 10-15 years. New tariff will be implemented from April 1.

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government on Tuesday has decided to pay the salaries of the elected representatives and government employees in 'two installments' to combat financial crisis owing to the outbreak of coronavirus. The government alleged that the decision was taken as the Centre failed to pay its dues of ₹16,654 crore of the financial year 2019-20.

A Government Resolution (GR) issued later said that elected representatives including the chief minister, ministers and MLAs will get their salaries for March with 60 per cent deduction. The salaries of group A and B will be deducted by 50 per cent.

**COPS ASK BJP MLA IN WB TO STAY AT HOME**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 31**

An MLA in West Bengal has been allegedly threatened by the police to stay home or face action after he was found distributing food among people near his residence at CE Block in Salt Lake for the past three days amidst nation-wide lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic as the death toll rose to 3 with the total number of confirmed cases at 27 in the state.

On Monday evening a senior officer of the Bidhannagar North police station knocked the door Sabyasachi Dutta, the New Town legislator who recently defected from the Trinamul Congress to the BJP. He told him that he would not be allowed to step out of home further due to the lockdown.

Mr Dutta, who was also the Bidhannagar Mayor during his stint with the Trinamul, wondered, "Why can't I help the people in their need if the ruling party's leaders are doing the same?"

On Tuesday morning when he was about to go out of his residence, another cop visited and cautioned him that he would be booked in a case which may lead to his arrest.

Undeterred, Mr Dutta however vowed to go out to help the people.

"The threat and warning by the police reflect the state government's excesses," he claimed.

State BJP president and Midnapore MP Dilip Ghosh, also a resident of Salt Lake, rushed to Mr Dutta who later met a senior officer of the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate to allow his social work.

**WON'T GIVE MP FUNDS, SAYS AIMIM MP**

**Aurangabad, March 31:** Aurangabad Lok Sabha MP and Maharashtra AIMIM chief Imtiyaz Jaleel on Tuesday said his local area development funds were meant for his constituency and he would not hand it over to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund in view of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

He said there were many problems in his area that need to be tackled and he would use the funds, also called the Member of Parliament Local Area Development fund, for this purpose.

"I had got a call from the Union Urban Development ministry on Tuesday about handing over funds to the PM Relief Fund. I welcome the steps taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fight the novel coronavirus outbreak. But the MP fund is for constituency development," he said.

He said he would hand over a letter about his funds to the district and state administration in a day or two.

**TABLIGHI EVENT RINGS ALARM BELLS IN KERALA TOO**

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 31**

The death of a few due to Covid-19 who attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious congregation in Nizamuddin has prompted Kerala authorities to sound an alert in the state to locate people who returned from the Delhi event.

What is of concern for Kerala is the death of a retired professor who belongs to Melevettipuram in Pathanamthitta who died while taking part in the Nizamuddin event. M Salim died of cardiac arrest on March 24.

As the results of his samples are awaited, it cannot be said conclusively that he died due to Covid-19.

The funeral of the patient took place in Delhi as the body could not be brought to his native place because of the nation-wide lockdown.

After reports came in that ten persons who took part in the event died of Covid-19, 25 participants were tested positive and 700 have been quarantined, the Pathanamthitta district administration is not taking any chances.

Six persons who returned from Delhi after attending the event and two persons with whom he stayed in Delhi have already been put on home quarantine.

The district administration is preparing a list of people with whom Salim came into contact recently. All will be put under quarantine.

**Lens on 299 from Assam who went to Delhi event**

**MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 31**

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Tuesday said that a 52-years old person who travelled to New Delhi recently was detected positive for coronavirus.

In a social media post, the minister said that coronavirus positive patient was undergoing treatment at Silchar Medical College and his condition was stable. The minister, however, refused to divulge more details in this regard as detection of a positive case involves a series of exercise to identify and trace the persons who came in contact with the patient and quarantine them to check the spread.

The hospital sources said that patient is resident of Karimganj and had travelled to New Delhi recently. He was first tested on March 18 and thereafter his sample was sent to NIV, Pune which on Tuesday confirmed that patient was suffering from Covid-19.

In related development Assam government on Tuesday launched a search operation and sought help of citizens in tracing the whereabouts of 299 persons who attended

the religious congregation at Nizamuddin in Delhi.

Asking the citizens to voluntarily report themselves to health authority, Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in an appeal through various means including social media also asked people in neighbourhood either to persuade or report about the presence of such people on helpline number 104.

He said, "If there is anyone from Assam who attended the religious congregation of Tablighi Jamaat at Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi, please IMMEDIATELY

report voluntarily to the nearest government hospital or by calling Helpline no # 104. Please treat this as very important."

Pointing out that Assam government is now in possession of a list of persons, who were present in and around the hotspot near Nizamuddin Dargah the health minister said, "We've alerted district administrations to find out if these people have returned to Assam. We have also issued strict instructions to quarantine them if they are in the state."

The minister of state health Pijush Hazarika

told reporters, "We have received information that 216 persons from Assam had attended the religious congregation and out of them, 28 are from Nagaon district. The Nagaon district Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police told me that none of the 28 persons have returned to the district so far. But we are alert. The figure may go up. I appeal to the people who attended the Nizamuddin event and returned to the state to immediately voluntarily report to the nearest government hospital."

Meanwhile, Assam government on Tuesday decided to ease lockdown norm and said that construction of embankments and work in tea gardens and agricultural farms would be exempted from the ambit of the lockdown from April 1, that will free lakhs of people from the restrictions of social distancing.

The cabinet meeting also decided to allow all trucks carrying food items and other essentials stuck at Sri Rampur gate along the Assam-West Bengal border from April 1. Besides, the state government also allowed to open all factories producing rice, flour and biscuits.

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The house of a person who attended the religious congregation at a mosque in Delhi's Nizamuddin area being sanitised at Velladichivila near Nagercoil on Tuesday. - PTI

**3 FROM ODISHA WHO ATTENDED DELHI EVENT IN ISOLATION**

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 31**

Odisha government has identified three persons who attended the religious congregation at Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi. The identified persons have been kept under hospital quarantine while efforts were on to find if more persons had attended the event.

"So far we have identified three persons who attended the religious congregation and Hazrat Nizamuddin and they are currently under hospital quarantine. Our surveillance teams are working to find out if any more persons had attended the event. Family members of the identified persons have been kept under home isolation," Odisha government's Covid-19 chief spokesperson Subrato Bagchi said on Tuesday.

Mr Bagchi said the Covid-19 situation in Odisha was quite under control as there has not been any addition to the affected persons since March 26 and attributed the credit to the overwhelming support of the people to the lockdown call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"So far, 473 samples have been examined out of which three tested positive. However, we are not complacent nor do we think it's an achievement. We are taking all precautions to ensure that the disease does not assume serious proportions. Many of our cities and towns like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Puri, Bargarh and Jeypore have equal or more per-square-km population than Rome, New York and San Francisco," said Mr Bagchi.

Stating that 57 persons were kept under hospital quarantine, he said 11,575 people with foreign and domestic travel history were advised home isolation.

On Odisha's migrant workers stranded in other states, Odisha home secretary Sanjiv Chopra said senior officers were in touch with their counterparts in other states to ensure shelter and food to them.

In Jharsuguda, health minister Naba Kishore Das said the state government would set up Covid-19 hospital in all 30 districts.

**J&K bizman feared to be 'super spreader'**

**Man travelled by air, train and road; attended Delhi event**

**New Delhi, March 31:** A Srinagar-based businessman who attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin travelled by air, train and road to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and back to Jammu and Kashmir before he died of Covid-19, raising fears he may have infected many others along the way, officials said on Tuesday.

Among his possible victims is a doctor battling for life in a Jammu hospital.

The businessman died on March 26 in a Srinagar hospital, 19 days after he set off for the national capital.

He could have infected scores of people during his travels and about 300 people have been put under quarantine because of him, officials said.

Recapping his movements, they said he left by air from Srinagar to Delhi on March 7 to attend the congregation of the Tablighi Jamaat, an orthodox Muslim organisation at the centre of the coronavirus spread with 24 of the 2,000 odd participants testing positive.

Being referred to as a "super spreader" by some, officials said the Kashmiri businessman left Delhi on March 9 and took a sleeper coach of a train for Deoband, where he attended a meeting at the Darul Uloom seminary.

Two days later, on March 11, he took another train to Jammu.

Tracking the travel history of the man, who was in his mid-60s, officials said many of the passengers travelling with him in the trains have been put under quarantine after authorities dug out their details.

In Jammu, the businessman met up with his doctor friend and both addressed a religious congregation in a mosque in Samba on the outskirts of the city.

The two were together till March 16 and stayed at a lodge, since sealed, in Bari Bramhmana outside Jammu city.

The doctor, now in a Jammu hospital in a critical condition, belongs to Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, which has reported 55 cases.

As news spread about the death, officials began tracking his movements closely. He is believed to have spread the virus to at

least four people from Bandipora district who had attended his Sopore congregation and maybe more as well.

The passenger lists of the flights on which he travelled were also pulled out and every individual was picked up and put under necessary quarantine, they said, adding the two doctors who had examined him were also taken for quarantine.

Authorities across the country have swung into action to trace the contacts of those who attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, attended by hundreds of people, including from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said 1,033 people in Nizamuddin West have been shifted to various places.

"An estimated 700 people who attended this congregation have been quarantined while around 335 people have been admitted to hospitals," he told reporters.

Besides, all those who participated in the event are being screened.

**Migrants may be virus carriers, Centre tells SC**

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31**

A day after the Uttar Pradesh administration received flack for spraying migrant labourers with some unspecified chemicals, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that there is a possibility that three out of 10 migrant workers heading towards their villages are carrying the deadly novel coronavirus.

The court was also told by the Centre that now there are no migrant workers on the road, a submission contradicted by reports and images coming in on Tuesday of thousands of migrant workers stuck at borders, sleeping under flyovers, on footpaths, bus stands.

"We are trying to ensure that no migration is permitted. It would be risky for them and for the village populations. So far, rural India is unaffected by coronavirus but there is possibility of three out of 10 moving from cities to rural areas carrying the virus," solicitor general Tushar Mehta told the court, without specifying how this figure was arrived at, or what steps

were being taken to test and segregate positive cases from others.

Separately, the Union home ministry said in its daily briefing on Tuesday that over 6.6 lakh stranded and destitute people have been housed in 21,000 shelter camps across the country and over 23 lakh people are being provided with food at these camps.

The Supreme Court, hearing petitions seeking directions to provide food and shelter to migrant workers, told the Centre that with summer knocking there should be adequate water, including drinking water, food, beds, medicine and people should not face any force or intimidation at the camps.

"You will ensure that all those whose migration you have stopped are taken care of in terms of food, shelter, nourishment and medical aid," Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde told the Central government, represented by Mr Mehta.

CJI Bobde, heading the bench, also emphasised that shelters should be free from the use of force or intimidation.

**20,000 houses marked home quarantine**

**DC CORRESPONDENTS NEW DELHI, MARCH 31**

Over 20,000 houses have been marked as "home quarantine" by the Delhi government in the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak, Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal said on Tuesday.

Taking to Twitter, the LG said the number of food distribution centres will also be increased to ensure social distancing in the national capital.

Bajjal held a meeting with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Secretary Vijay Kumar Dev and Police Commissioner through video conference to discuss measures to combat Covid-19.

"It has been decided to

increase the number of food distribution centres from the present 500 to 2,500 so that social distancing is adhered to effectively. Home quarantine has to be strictly monitored. More than 20,000 homes have been identified by GNCTD for home quarantine," he tweeted.

In another tweet, the Lieutenant Governor said that the decision to increase food distribution centres was taken after reports that social distancing norms were violated at some centres.

"My advice to administration & police is to keep very strict watch on social distancing & home quarantine. Take deterrent actions for any violation & widely publicise. Separately, action to ramp

up medical facilities to be expedited," Lieutenant Governor tweeted.

**Another doctor tests positive**

Another doctor from a mohalla clinic in Delhi has tested positive for coronavirus.

A notice outside a community clinic in Delhi's Babarpur asked patients who visited the clinic between March 12 and 20 to quarantine themselves at their homes for the next two weeks.

This is the second such incident at a Delhi mohalla clinic in one week.

The clinic in Mohanpuri area of Majpur was closed and sanitised. The doctor's wife and daughter also tested positive for coronavirus. Soon

after the doctor was tested positive, a similar notice was put outside the Majpur clinic asking people who came in contact with the doctor to quarantine themselves.

The first doctor had contracted the coronavirus infection on March 21 from a 38-year-old woman from Dilshad Garden, who had visited the doctor's private clinic on March 12, with symptoms such as cough and fever.

It may be noted that Delhi has recorded nearly 50 cases in the last two days as the Covid-19 count crossed the 100-mark; two deaths have been reported from the city so far.

The chain of infection at Majpur started with a woman who returned from Saudi Arabia on

March 10, and visited the clinic with symptoms of Covid-19. The doctor was exposed to the virus when the 38-year-old woman visited the clinic on March 12, according to Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

Five days later, she tested positive. That day, the doctor was also admitted to the hospital.

According to information available, five more persons had tested positive for the virus from direct contact with the woman - her mother, brother and two daughters, and a relative who picked her up from the Delhi airport on her arrival.

Some 74 persons in her neighbourhood are also under watch.

**Not the time to find faults: Centre**

**New Delhi, March 31:** Amid apprehensions of substantial spread of Covid-19 after a religious congregation in Nizamuddin in the national capital left many infected with the virus, the Health Ministry on Tuesday said it was not the time to find faults.

The Delhi Police has cordoned off a major area in Nizamuddin West where many people showed symptoms of coronavirus and 24 have tested positive after taking part in a religious congregation that was attended by over 2,000 people.

"With respect to the Nizamuddin area, we all

need to understand and appreciate that this is not the time to do any fault finding. What is important for us is to take action as per our containment process in any area where a positive case gets reported," Agarwal said in response to a question on whether there was an "intelligence failure" on the administration's part to prevent the religious mass gathering.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said 1,548 people have been evacuated from Nizamuddin markaz (centre) here of which, 441 were hospitalised after they showed coronavirus symptoms.

## DECCAN Chronicle

1 APRIL 2020

### More vigilance needed to keep Covid-19 at bay

The sudden outbreak and detection of a large number of coronavirus cases that can be traced back to a thousands-strong religious congregation held in New Delhi's Nizamuddin area, that has already caused the deaths of at least 10 Indians and one foreigner in different parts of the country (including six in Telangana), is a warning on the perils of not taking "social distancing" seriously. At least 250 foreign nationals — including from virus-hit Malaysia and Indonesia — had come to attend the congregation hosted by the Tablighi Jamaat at its Markaz facility in the first half of March, many of whom were among the 1,500-odd people still there on Monday, when the city's health authorities swung into action and took at least 300 of them to hospitals. At least 24 of them have tested positive. True, the event was held before the lockdown went into effect in Delhi and the rest of India, but given the flurry of advisories early on cautioning people against gatherings of large numbers of people due to the virus threat, the actions of both the Tablighi Jamaat and the governmental authorities in allowing it to carry on was irresponsible, to say the least. The area was finally cleared on Tuesday morning, with the police moving 700-plus people to quarantine in different parts of the city, and a police case lodged against the mosque administration, but the damage has largely been done.

While the Tablighi incident is a wake-up call on the consequences of slackness in the face of a health emergency, the callous actions of those in authority in the face of the grave humanitarian crisis that we face — particularly the plight of migrants with no food or shelter who feel compelled to make the long trek homewards — is also a cause of great alarm. The shocking action of the municipal authorities in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh — in hosing down a large group of migrants on the move with a chemical solution described by some as "insecticide" — was brutal and inhuman, to say the very least. In the face of outrage in the social media after a video of the spraying went viral, and vociferous protests by Opposition leaders, the district magistrate of the area was forced to admit that the municipal authorities had "gone too far", but who will be held responsible for this horror? This was one more example, if any was needed, that the rights and protections that our middle classes take for granted — even in extraordinary times — do not seem to apply to the poor in India.

There was no real alternative to the nationwide lockdown that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi a week ago. Those who believe that it could have been avoided just need to look at the plight of New York — a shining symbol of the richest and most powerful country in the world — which now threatens to be the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic — to see what could have happened had India delayed any further. But our government failed to realistically assess the impact this measure would have on the most vulnerable sections of our population, and plan accordingly. Some steps are now being taken, but much more needs to be done.

### A political pardon

Sri Lanka refuses to be accountable to the world for the war crimes committed in the course of winning the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The decision of its president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to pardon the soldier R.M. Sunil Ratnayake is not only deeply disappointing but also sends quite the wrong signal to the UN and the world that the island nation will not bow to international opinion on respecting the law against war crimes.

The hand of the Rajapaksas, who returned to power last year, is behind this decision to exonerate the only soldier of five who had been sentenced to death for a war crime in the village of Mirusuvil in December 2000 where the Sri Lankan Army had killed Tamil civilians who had returned home to the Jaffna Peninsula to see the state of their village. The decision is seen to be linked to the parliamentary polls that were to be held on April 25, but which were postponed due to the global pandemic.

How exceedingly political the brothers — President Gotabaya and Prime Minister and former President Mahinda — can be is signified in their chauvinistic support for Sinhalese soldiers and their disregard of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations that has been fighting for accountability in war crimes. The island's history was punctuated with extreme violence in the three decade war against the Tamil rebels of the equally brutal guerrilla force of the Velupillai Prabhakaran-led LTTE. His own death, as well as that of his elderly father and his minor son, are thought to have been engineered in possible war crimes generally attributed to the command of Lt General Shavendra Silva, who was the Army Commander at the time of the final battle. If the soldier had not been pardoned, he would simply have stayed in jail as the nation has suspended executions, making it clear that the Rajapaksas are using him to make a statement of political intent in this selective exoneration.

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Subhani

## Overcoming effects of ill-conceived policies



Mohan Guruswamy

It has been three weeks since the World Health Organisation declared a Covid-19 pandemic. It's not the world's first coronavirus. We have had Sars, Mers, H1N1, swine flu and the like, some with much higher rates of fatality. But this is unique in its sweeping virulence. America's Centres for Disease Control (CDC) says the annual percentage of the US population infected with the flu is about eight per cent, which translates to 26 million people a year. Of these, the CDC estimates up to 60,000 persons die. It stands to reason that many more in India get afflicted by flu and influenzas each year, possibly with larger fatalities.

Given this knowledge and some very recent hindsight, it's time to sit back and objectively reconsider the draconian policy measures unleashed in India. The four hours to midnight order for a nationwide "curfew" to enforce social distancing has caught our public and administration woefully unprepared. The consequences of Covid-19 to the Indian economy and consequent loss of lives and longevity seems likely to exceed the loss due to any mass spread of the virus.

Epidemiological studies by several well-regarded institutions like MIT and the Global Virus Network (GVN) seem to suggest that this particular coronavirus is endemic in populated areas falling in the temperature band of 3-17C with a humidity between 51-79 per cent. These findings suggesting a correlation between latitude and incidence have the powerful endorsement of Dr Robert Gallo, famed virologist and GVN head.

Mind you, it's been just a few months that Covid-19 jumped species by

finding a home in human beings. Covid-19's natural reservoir seems to be bats, like the earlier coronaviruses Sars and Mers. But the fact remains the spread of Covid-19 has been faster in areas with colder climes.

The essential facts about Covid-19 is that while it is virulent, its fatality is around one per cent, and this is principally concentrated among the elderly and already ailing. Its symptoms are mostly akin to common seasonal flus often attributed to a change of season, etc. Covid-19 can only be confirmed by testing and the cheapest test costs about ₹5,000 each. Clearly, we cannot afford to test enough, which means we won't ever know how many are truly afflicted by the virus.

The average life expectancy of Indians is 68.7 years. The above-65 years cohort accounts for only about six per cent of India, which suggests that the incidence of fatality here will be lower. Bubonic plague has a mortality of over 80 per cent, while even diphtheria has a mortality rate of 32 per cent. Covid-19 is not a killer virus. In developed countries like the United States, Italy and elsewhere with substantially higher life expectancy, the 70-plus cohorts are much bigger. The mortality rate has been the highest in Italy, with about nine per cent. Almost 86 per cent of Italians who died were over 70. Italy has the second oldest population in the world after Japan, with over 23 per cent over 65. Experts believe this was the determining factor in its high fatality rate.

The goal of social distancing is a hugely unfulfilled aspiration. The poor in India live cheek by jowl, with densities

often exceeding 60,000 per square mile. India has over 410 million workers in the unorganised sector, the vast majority of whom are daily wagers making a little more than the prescribed official wage and often much below that. This working age cohort is mostly made up of younger Indians. The youthful age group (14-35 years) accounts for about 34 per cent of India's population. This cohort is about as much as the 35-65 years cohorts. Thus, even if the pandemic is real for India, the fatality due to it will be very low. The vast majority of Indians who might get infected by Covid-19 won't even know it.

Now assume that the Covid-19 pandemic will overwhelm India, and consider India's abysmal healthcare scene. We have six physicians; nine hospital beds and 13 nurses per 10,000 people. Nationwide, we have less than 40,000 ventilators and only 70,000 intensive care beds. This calls for a policy that will help stagger the load and allow many

immunity to build up without overwhelming the critical care system. Harvard's Yonatan Grad, professor of immunology and infectious diseases, and colleagues conducted research on how to prevent overwhelming the US healthcare system during the pandemic. This indicates the only possible method for dealing with the epidemic may be multiple "intermittent" social-distancing periods that ease up when cases fall to a certain level, and reimposed when they rise past a key threshold. As time passes, and more of the population gains immunity,

**The only possible method for dealing with the epidemic may be multiple 'intermittent' social-distancing periods that ease up when cases fall to a certain level, and reimposed when they rise past a key threshold**

they said, the restrictive episodes may be shorter, with longer intervals between them. Clearly, the nationwide simultaneous social distancing norms' imposition was ill-conceived.

The IMF has now announced a global recession due to disrupted supply chains and contraction of consumption. In India, consumption (C) accounts for 63 per cent of GDP. Given GDP is = C + I + G + (X - M), or GDP = private consumption (C) + gross investment (I) + government investment + government spending (G) + (exports - imports), the impact of the collapse of private consumption in the economy can be easily understood. Many respected analysts are agreed that it will be no less than 20-30 per cent in Q1. The government pledged to step up its spending by ₹1.7 lakh crores. We won't go into how this was arrived at now, but just consider how inadequate it is compared to the hit taken by consumption. The government clearly needs to do more. It needs to pull out all the stops to do this.

The question is: where is the money? Even if it sequestered 20 per cent of the cash reserves with our 100 top corporations, it will be substantial. The top 10 corporations alone have a hoard of over ₹10 lakh crores. (Reliance has cash reserves of ₹398,000 crores. TCS has almost ₹100,000 crores, ITC has ₹60,000 crores.) Our government's wage and pensions bill accounts for 11.4 per cent of GDP. Holding back only 10 per cent of this, or just the annual LTC, will fetch the Central and state governments over ₹2 lakh crores. It only calls for will and vision to accumulate the cash to begin reconstruction of a devastated economy. The pain cannot and must not be borne by the poorest alone. PM Narendra Modi has formidable communication skills, and he must use it now.

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.*

#### LETTERS

##### DISINFECTANTS

In these times of the coronavirus epidemic, it is correct medical procedure to spray disinfectant on visitors. This is not a new procedure. For centuries, disinfectant usage is being practised in every hospital across the world in one way or the other. Let there be no sentiments attached to this practice. Because of not carrying out such practices in the initial stages on foreign visitors, the entire world is suffering.

T. Satvik Rithika  
Secunderabad

##### EXEMPT PENSIONS

The coronavirus crisis has unsettled the financial position of not only Centre but also of all the states. CM K. Chandrashekar Rao's decision to pay reduced salaries is a step in the right direction to mop up revenues to meet medical expenditures. But to reduce the payment for pensioners is certainly unfair as it is already a hand-to-mouth situation for many of them with rising rents, living and medical expenses. They have no other means to survive except with the existing pensions with hand loans etc.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao  
Hyderabad

##### EXODUS TRAGIC

The exodus of migrant workers to their home states has added a tragic dimension to the Covid-19 related lockdown. The dread of starvation and the urge to seek refuge in the safety of home has overwhelmed their fear of catching the infection in the midst of their desperate journey. would they have embarked upon this arduous journey had the host states taken care of them when they had no income to meet their basic needs?

G. Thirupathiah  
Kothapet

##### Attempt on Basu's life: One held

PATNA, March 31 Mr Jyoti Basu, Marxist former Deputy Chief Minister of West Bengal, escaped unhurt after an unknown assailant had fired a shot at him at Patna railway junction this morning. But an officer of the Life Insurance Corporation, Mr Ali Imam, was hit by the bullet and was killed.

The assailant who Mr Basu pointed out made his escape in the large crowd gathered to greet the Marxist leader as he arrived from Calcutta.

Police later took into custody one man on suspicion. They also took possession of a car parked outside the staircase as also the car of Mr Ali Imam.



Zarrar Khuhro

There is nothing quite like a global pandemic to remind you of your own mortality, is there? All day long, we are subjected to an ever-increasing tally of infections and deaths, as if the whole world were glued to the scoreboards of a morbid, seemingly never-ending Olympics. At some point, you have to wonder if you too will end up as a statistic on a government chart. But, as singer Hank Williams lamented, "No matter how I struggle and strive, I'll never get out of this world alive," and while we will, as a species, survive this latest plague, it is also certain that, at some point, our individual lives will come to an end. After all, only two things are certain: Death and (depending on where you live) Taxes. Still, trying to forestall the inevitable has always been a human obsession, and it is no different when it comes to trying to outwit or dodge death itself. Over 2,000 years ago, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of united China, proclaimed a dynasty that "would last 10,000 generations". He

also expressed the desire to be around long enough to see it through. Seeing as the Qin state was also arguably the world's first proper police state, he simply ordered his governors to search for the elixir of immortality, and newly discovered records show a fascinating series of exchanges between an increasingly impatient emperor and "assorted awkward replies from regional governments who had failed to find the key to eternal life".

Qin Shi Huang died at the age of 49, but the quest continued for millennia, with subsequent emperors and noblemen remaining wedded to the idea of discovering the elixir of immortality, often with deadly results. Ironically, the elixirs brewed by Chinese alchemists were better suited to ending lives rather than prolonging them, containing as they did toxic metals and minerals such as mercury, lead and arsenic.

An even greater irony perhaps is that the experiments of one alchemist, who was using saltpetre in his concoctions, ended up blowing

up in his face, burning him and his entire house: he had not found the secret of immortality, but had in fact discovered gunpowder, which has played a major part in ending so many lives since then.

Of course, the quest did not start with the Chinese. The ancient Epic of Gilgamesh revolves around the mythical king's search for the plant that confers immortality, and millennia later we have the apocryphal quest of Ponce de Leon for the Fountain of Youth.

And today, we have medicine replacing sagas and superstition, and we have scientists looking to succeed where heroes and kings failed. The end-goal, however, remains the same: to defeat or at least delay death.

That is not to say some of these techniques are not inspired by legend and history. Bram Stoker's Dracula believed that "the blood is the life" and so did the real-life 'blood countess' Elizabeth Bathory, who reportedly bathed in the blood of young women to preserve her youth

and beauty.

In the modern iteration of this technique, a company called Ambrosia, led not by count Dracula, but by a Dr Karmazian, is infusing the blood of the young into the veins of the old, a process it claims can rejuvenate the recipient at the trifling cost of up to \$12,000 for two litres of a young person's plasma. While the US Food and Drug Administration has warned that this treatment has "no proven clinical benefit", effectively shutting down Dr Karmazian's business, the overall anti-aging industry is considered to be a safe investment bet, given that, according to Merrill Lynch, it is expected to reach a value of at least \$600 billion by 2025.

That is a lot of money, and so you can expect that a lot of different techniques are being tried right about now, such as organ replacement technologies, in which the most promising is currently the prospect of 3-D printing working human organs to replace failing ones. Nanotechnology offers another lifeline with two potential applications:

one is to use these microscopic machines to cure life-threatening diseases like cancer, delivering their payload directly to malignant cells. Similarly, custom-built nanobots are being designed that could actively work to remove the plaque that builds up in arteries leading to heart attacks and disease. Extend that concept and you could, sooner than you think, have armies of nanobots in your body repairing cellular damage in real time.

The most promising frontier for life-extending technology lies in the field of genetic research, where scientists are studying the genetic structures of long-lived species like whales, turtles and tortoises in an effort to unlock their secrets. As creatures age, their DNA strands become increasingly prone to damage and breakage, and learning to control that may prove to be a key to longevity. This is what the future holds, let us see if we live long enough to see it.

By arrangement with Dawn

Since millennia, man has strived to either defeat or delay death

**SHORT TAKES**  
**ARMYMEN TOLD NOT TO SHARE VIDEOS IN UNIFORM**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Indian Army on Tuesday issued an advisory asking its personnel not to share videos in uniform on social media sites as it can reveal their personal identities.

There have been certain cases in recent times where personnel from defence forces have been honey-trap by the Pakistan's spies on social media like Facebook. Last year, Indian Army was able to identify around 150 social media profiles of Pakistani spies which were using various modus operandi to try to trap its men.

"It has been noticed that serving Indian Army personnel are creating or sharing videos on social media giving their identity as also in Uniform. All personnel are advised to follow existing guidelines and refrain from such activities," said the advisory on Tuesday.

An army dossier last year had warned its men against honey-trap by Pakistan spies who create fake female profiles on social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. It had asked its personnel to avoid accepting friend requests from unknown people, avoid suspicious websites and not to take calls from or chat with unidentified people. It had advised its men to change the privacy settings on Facebook and other apps to "only friends."

**CONG ASKS GOVT TO SCALE UP COVID-19 TESTING**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Expressing apprehensions that India might soon enter the phase 3 of the Coronavirus outbreak, the Congress on Tuesday asked the government to scale up testing as advised by the World Health Organisation. It also demanded that a consolidated amount of ₹10,000 be put into Jan Dhan accounts of all vulnerable sections.

According to experts in the field of medicine, the situation on Tuesday points towards the country entering stage 3 of Coronavirus transmission, Congress Spokesperson Manish Tewari said addressing the media through video-conferencing.

"The only antidote to Covid-19 spreading is test, test and more test," he said adding that this is what has been advised by the WHO.

He noted that India was possibly one of the countries which has tested the least. "We have tested only 32 out of 10 lakh people. Compared to this, in England, 1,921 out of each 10 lakh have been tested, while in America the number is 2,600," he said.

Tewari also sought government intervention on the plight of migrant workers and landless labourers.

**U.P. AMBULANCE WORKERS GO ON STRIKE**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Demanding immediate release of pending salary and protective gear, the association of ambulance employees in Uttar Pradesh has stopped work from Tuesday afternoon. The association of 19,221 workers which includes pilots (drivers) and emergency technicians also alleged that their are not provided with basic protective equipment.

General secretary of ambulance employees association, Brajesh Kumar told this newspaper that employees are not paid salary since January and workers working on ambulance are exposed to infection due to lack of protective gear.

"102 and 108 emergency ambulance services in Uttar Pradesh are managed and operated by a private operator GVK — under contract with the state government. There are a total of about 4,500 such ambulances deployed across the state. 19,221 workers — drivers and emergency technicians — are posted to these ambulances are on contract with the private firm," Kumar added.

According to Kumar, ambulance workers do not have sanitisers, gloves or proper masks. "We have not received salaries for three months. When we go to fill oxygen, people don't allow us inside. We told the local chief medical officer to arrange better supplies but got no response. Our vehicles have not been sanitised either," said an ambulance driver.

**Kerala records second Covid-19 death**

Health officials on high alert as the deceased had no travel history; efforts on to trace origin of infection

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 31

Kerala recorded second death due to Covid-19 on Tuesday after a 68-year-old man, who had no travel history, succumbed to the infection at the Trivandrum Medical College Hospital.

The death of the Covid-19 patient Abdul Azeez has troubled the health authorities as he had not reported any travel history. Efforts are now being made to trace the origin of infection.

The state had reported its first Covid-19 death on March 28 when a 69-year-old man died at the Ernakulam Medical College.

The health officials have begun a detailed exercise to locate the primary and secondary contacts of the patient who was a retired additional sub inspector of police.

Azeez was admitted to the Trivandrum Medical College on March 23 after he developed symptoms of Covid-19.

He was in a highly critical condition since past five days and remained on

ventilator support till death. During the course of his treatment in ICU, the man suffered paralytic stroke and cardiac arrest.

What is bothering the authorities now is the lack of clarity on his travel details.

Before being admitted to medical college hospital, the patient had visited several places attended marriages, funeral ceremony, went to government offices to collect pension, took part in prayers in mosques.

The authorities suspect that he might have come into contact with people with infection during these events.

The authorities could not take much details about his travel because of critical condition.

His native village Pothencode and adjoining areas have been put under total lockdown and surveillance has been stepped up in areas bordering other panchayats.

Meanwhile, health minister K.K. Shailaja said the body of the patient would be buried complying with the World Health Organisation protocol.

**7 persons test +ve for virus, 1.63 lakh under surveillance**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 31

Seven more persons tested positive for Covid-19 in Kerala on Tuesday taking the total number of infected persons in the state 215.

Of the seven cases, two each were reported from Kasargod and Thiruvananthapuram, one each from Kollam, Thrissur and Kannur respectively. Baring one person, all contracted the infection through contact.

As on Tuesday 1.63 lakh people are under surveillance including 1.62 lakh under home quarantine, 658 persons admitted to hospitals including 150 on Tuesday.

Kasargod has the highest number of people in hospitals — 163 followed by Kannur 108 and Malappuram 102.

Of the 7455 samples sent for testing 6,380 have been

● **KASARGOD HAS the highest number of people in hospitals 163 followed by Kannur 108 and Malappuram 102.**

found negative. This was disclosed by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at a press conference after a high level review meeting. He said as of now there is no indication of community spread at the moment.

He said laboratories in the state had started collecting more samples with improvement in testing facilities. More samples are being collected and sent, reports being procured in time.

The Chief Minister said a special action plan would be implemented in Kasargod which is the epicentre of the infection. Panchayat level data will be collected of persons with fever, cough and res-

piratory problems. The samples of such persons will be taken and set for testing.

The facilities of Kasargod medical college has been improved by turning it into Covid Hospital. Kasargod central university has received the nod from ICMR for starting testing facilities.

Vijayan said the state is facing a problem in connection with the people who have returned from Nizamuddin in Delhi and Malaysia after attending the Tablighi conference. It needs to be examined whether such people have contracted the infection.

The police has conducted a detailed inquiry and with the help of district collectors have prepared list of people who participated in these conferences.

Required preventive measures will be taken at the district level.

**Oldest patients in state recover fully**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 31

Kerala's oldest Covid-19 patients Thomas, 93 and his wife Mariyamma, 88, have fully recovered from the infection.

The couple who contracted the infection from their son, daughter-in-law and grandson who returned from Italy on February 29, were successfully treated at the Kottayam Medical College.

Health minister K.K. Shailaja hailed the recovery of the elderly patients who had developed severe complications warranting ICU support during the treatment. Apart from cardiac problems, the elderly persons had blood pressure, hypertension and urinary tract infection. During the treatment Thomas had also reached a critical stage and was even put on ventilator support, however, due to the

deft handling by doctors and nursing staff, they could be brought back to life. One of the nurses who treated the couple contracted the infection. She has been extended all support from the government for treatment.

Meanwhile, Kerala police on Tuesday warned of arrest and cases against persons sending April fool messages pertaining to Covid-19 and lockdown.

Those found to be sending such messages will be arrested instantly.

In a statement here, state police chief Lokanath Behara said such fake messages intended to make fool of people, will be viewed seriously. Cases will be registered under relevant IPC sections as fake messages could cause distress and fear among the people. The people creating such messages, sharing and forwarding these on the social media would be taken into custody.

**COCHIN PORT TWEETED ABOUT EXPORT**

From Page 1

The European Union had announced the 93 million euro package for Serbia, which provides immediate as well as short and medium term assistance to help Serbia to fight Covid-19.

According to the Indian government notifications in the past few weeks, the items that are prohibited for export include N-95 masks, surgical masks, disposable masks, all ventilators, textile raw materials for masks and coveralls, NBR gloves and medical goggles. However, the items that can still be exported include gloves (except NBR gloves), surgical blades, PVC conveyor belt, plastic tarpaulin and certain kinds of breathing appliances as well as ophthalmic instruments and appliances.

On March 28, the Cochin Customs had tweeted, "Cochin Customs in action to clear a consignment of 35 lakh pairs of sterile latex surgical gloves to Serbia to support the global war against Covid-19".

It may be recalled that in a video-conference on Monday evening with all 130 Indian envoys posted abroad, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked the Indian envoys "whether we can source medicine, and other items" from abroad to tackle the situation. All envoys were directed by PM Modi "to identify in their countries of accreditation ... sources to procure medical equipment, for India's fight against Covid-19". All the Missions shared the situation in their countries and had also apparently highlighted the items which are available in that country which could be imported by India.

**Taking Covid head on**



Railway employees make sanitisers during a nation-wide lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic in Prayagraj on Tuesday. — PTI



Jail inmates stitch masks at Mathura district jail in Mathura on Tuesday. — PTI

**Migrants beat youth to death**

NAYEAR AZAD | DC  
with agency inputs  
PATNA, MARCH 31

A person was allegedly killed by a group of men in Bihar's Sitamarhi district for informing the health authorities regarding two migrants who returned from Maharashtra following the coronavirus lockdown.

The incident occurred in Madhuai village under Runnisaipur block on Monday.

According to reports, Bablu Kumar, 24, had informed the local health authorities that the migrants from Maharashtra could be infected with the deadly coronavirus.

Based on the information provided by the youth the health officials carried out extensive screening of both the suspects who were later released with the advice of home quarantine.

Sources said that the entire exercise angered both the migrants who along with their other friends attacked Bablu while he was on his way back home on Monday evening. He was later rushed to Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital in Muzaffarpur where he was declared "brought dead."

According to Sitamarhi SP Anil Kumar, the case against six persons was registered in Muzaffarpur under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and further investigation into the matter is underway.

"Case has been registered on the basis of the statement given by the deceased's brother. Two persons have been arrested and a manhunt has been launched to nab others. The case is being investigated from all angles as the matter could also be related to some local dispute", Sitamarhi

● **A CASE** against six persons was registered in Muzaffarpur under relevant sections of the IPC, further investigation into the matter is underway.

● **HUNDREDS OF** such migrants have defied restrictions imposed on their movement and are trying to reach their villages on foot

SP Anil Kumar said.

Thousands of migrants who work in other states have been returning to their homes after the union government imposed a 21-day national lockdown to prevent the spread of deadly coronavirus.

Fearing that migrants returning in large number may pose a threat of community spread the state government has set up isolation camps near the border to quarantine people who are reaching Bihar.

Reports, however, suggest that hundreds of such migrants have defied restrictions imposed on their movement and are trying to reach their villages on foot in the absence of any public transport.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday a person from Gopalganj district with a travel history to Dubai has been found infected with the coronavirus.

Pradip Das, Director of ICMR Rajendra Memorial Research Institute, which is conducting the bulk of coronavirus tests in the state, said the latest case was that of a resident of Gopalganj district who had returned from Dubai before the lockdown came into force.

According to health department reports, 1051 samples of suspected coronavirus cases have been tested in the state of which 16 have been found positive.

**Centre to ensure movement of trucks**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

After managing to contain the large-scale movement of migrant labourers/workers, the home ministry is working with states to ensure that thousands of trucks stranded on national and state highways with essential commodities are allowed to move.

A special team has been deployed in the centralised control room set up in the home ministry.

After tackling the issue of thousands of stranded workers walking back to their villages, next on the MHA's priority list is to ensure the smooth movement of trucks. State officials were asked to im-

● **A SPECIAL** team has been deployed in the centralised control room set up in the home ministry

mediately do a detailed survey of all trucks parked on highways and roads in their areas and identify those with important items.

"The issue now is to ensure supply chains of all essential commodities are fully functional and the raw material for them should reach the factories, else the production too will be hampered," a senior official said. The MHA is also working with the surface transport ministry to ensure that the toll for these trucks is waived.

**SCARE | CONTINUES MP Chief Minister expresses concern over spike in cases**

**Indore records 25 new cases in 24 hours**

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, MARCH 31

Indore, known as 'mini-Mumbai' of India, has turned new hotspot of coronavirus outbreak with the city witnessing a record 25 new Covid positive cases in the last 24 hours.

As many as 17 new coronavirus positive cases were reported in one day on Tuesday in Indore, taking the tally of confirmed cases in the city to 44.

On Monday, eight new Covid positive cases were reported in Indore.

"It is a matter of grave concern. We will enforce lockdown in the city stringently to bring Indore out of red zone of coronavirus

outbreak", a senior Indore district officer told this newspaper.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan also expressed serious concern over the spike in confirmed cases in Indore while reviewing the situation at a high level official meeting held here on Tuesday.

With this, the total number of coronavirus positive cases in MP rose to 64. Of the five deaths due to the virus reported in MP, Indore accounted for three deaths.

Meanwhile, one more Covid patient in the state succumbed to the virus on Tuesday taking the death toll to five in the state.

The patient died in AIIMS, Bhopal.

● **AT LEAST 31** people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious event in Delhi recently have taken shelter in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal.

● **THE ALERT** by Intelligence was issued in the wake of six devotees who attended the conference in Delhi succumbing to Covid-19 in Telangana recently.

Meanwhile, at least 31 people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious event in Delhi recently have taken shelter in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal, intelligence has alerted the MP government.

According to Intelligence sources, at least 107 devotees who attended the religious conference in Delhi have fled to MP after nationwide lockdown was declared on March 22. Out of them, 31 are currently staying in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal.

The alert by intelligence was issued in the wake of six devotees who attended the conference in Delhi succumbing to coronavirus in Telangana recently.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday convened a high level official meeting here to take stock of the situation in the wake of the development. He ordered to identify

each of the devotees who attended the conference in MP and quarantine them.

Sources said some of the devotees have fled to a village on the outskirts of Bhopal following the move to quarantine them.

In another development, the state government has initiated a probe to find out if any devotees who attended the religious conference held in Tablighat in east Pakistan in the middle of March this year have visited MP recently.

Meanwhile, the state government asked police to book the violators of lockdown under appropriate sections of Indian Penal Code, indicating to enforce the lockdown strictly.

**IN BRIEF**

**Pastor held for ignoring orders**

**Miami:** An evangelical pastor in Florida was arrested on Monday for "repeatedly" ignoring confinement orders intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus by holding services with hundreds of people, police said. Pastor Ronald Howard-Browne, 58, was arrested for unlawful assembly and violating quarantine orders while holding two services on Sunday in the eastern Florida city of Tampa, prison records show. The pastor "intentionally and repeatedly disregarded state and local public health orders, which put his congregation and our community in danger," tweeted Hillsborough County sheriff Chad Chronister.

**China's vaccine to be tested abroad**

**Beijing:** China, which is developing a vaccine for the deadly novel coronavirus, plans to conduct additional trials in other countries seriously hit by the pandemic if the ongoing trial in the country's virus epicentre Wuhan proves it is safe and effective, a Chinese researcher said. The first stage clinical trial for the vaccine was started in Wuhan on March 16 after authorities approved. It has been proceeding smoothly, and its results will be published in April, said Chen Wei, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

**AI tool can predict after virus effects**

**New York:** Scientists have developed an artificial intelligence (AI) tool that may accurately predict which patients newly infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 would go on to develop severe respiratory disease. The study, published in the journal *Computers, Materials & Continua*, also revealed the best indicators of future severity, and found that they were not as expected. "While work remains to further validate our model, it holds promise as another tool to predict the patients most vulnerable to the virus, but only in support of physicians' hard-won clinical experience in treating viral infections," said Megan Coffee, a clinical assistant professor at New York University in the US.

**After Bibi, Israel's army chief isolated**

**Jerusalem:** The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff, Lt Gen Aviv Kochavi, along with two of his senior commanders, went into isolation on Tuesday after a senior commander they came in contact with recently was tested positive for coronavirus, the army said. The development came a day after PM Netanyahu and his close advisers were placed under quarantine after an aide on Parliament affairs tested positive for virus. Lt Gen Kochavi, along with Home Front Command head Maj. Gen. Tamir Yadai and Operations Directorate Commander Gen. Aharon Haliva, had attended a meeting 10 days ago in which a commander in the reserves, who later tested positive for the coronavirus, participated.

**GREAT PYRAMID LIGHTS UP IN SOLIDARITY**

**Cairo, March 31:** Egypt's famed Great Pyramid was emblazoned Monday evening with messages of unity and solidarity with those battling the novel coronavirus the world over. "Stay safe", "Stay at home" and "Thank you to those keeping us safe," flashed in blue and green lights across the towering structure at the Giza plateau, southwest of the capital Cairo. Egypt has so far registered 656 Covid-19 cases, including 41 deaths. Of the total infected, 150 reportedly recovered. "The tourism sector is one of the most affected industry but our priority is health," said tourism and antiquities minister Khaled al-Anani, speaking at the site. Senior antiquities ministry official Mostafa al-Waziri thanked "all the medical staff who help to keep us safe." Egypt has carried out sweeping disinfection operations at archaeological sites, museums and other sites across the country. In tandem, strict social distancing measures were imposed to reduce the risk of contagion among the country's 100 million inhabitants.

**New York hospital doc prepares for the worst**

**This is going to be a long and drawn out battle says Patel**

**New York, March 31:** With the rapid rise of hospitalisations and a health system nearly at capacity, New York doctor Shomit Patel is preparing for the worst over the next few days, all while hoping he won't have to start choosing which coronavirus patients to treat. Just 10 days ago, only half of the 46-year-old internist's patients at Beth Israel — one of the Mount Sinai hospitals in Manhattan — were suffering from Covid-19. "We're not over capacity yet, but we're planning for it to go over capacity," he said, adding he thinks the hospital has "planned well." The wave of virus patients at Beth Israel corresponds to the one inundating New York City, which shot from 463 confirmed cases two weeks ago to 36,000 on Monday. "At the rate that I'm seeing, the peak could be anywhere from end of this week to sometime next

week," said Patel. Under extreme pressure for the past two weeks, he is preparing for the worst, even if "it's something that we hope we don't have to see." For Patel, the worst would be a situation similar to that in certain regions of Italy, where the health system is so overwhelmed that it can no longer take care of all patients. "You're gonna have to be

a little quicker in seeing and assessing and getting the treatment plan for each patient," Patel predicted, noting they "may have to double or triple the number of patients you're seeing." But, he added worriedly, "you can't really go more than triple the number of patients you're seeing in a day and provide effective treatment." In addition to the limitations of healthcare personnel, Patel is worried about a potential shortage of equipment, particularly of ventilators. New York governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City mayor Bill de Blasio talk daily about the need for the machines. "If you get a surge of patients coming in, and you only have a limited number of ventilators, you can't necessarily ventilate patients," Patel said. "And then you have to start picking and choosing." Outside of the hospital, Patel is also worried about transmitting the virus to his family. He lives with his 80-year-old father, who suffers from Parkinson's, and his aunt, who has cancer. "I don't want to come back here and actually give it to them because I don't think they would do well at all," he said. He maintains the minimum two meter (six-foot) distance and uses antibacterial wipes generously, while ensuring his relatives have enough food. "I stay pretty much in my room," Patel explained, "and then I'll go out there and periodically check on them." "If it's something that kicks in, then it goes down after it peaks, then we can sustain it for a little while," Patel said. "But all hands on deck for months on end is something that's hard to sustain." "This is going to be a long and drawn out battle." — AFP

**Hungary govt's sweeping powers sends alarm bells**

**Brussels, March 31:** European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen warned on Tuesday that coronavirus emergency measures taken by EU countries must be "limited", after Hungary's nationalist leader Viktor Orban took on sweeping powers. Brussels' top official did not single out Orban or Hungary by name in her statement, but it came a day after he adopted rule by decree, claiming extraordinary powers ostensibly to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. "The European Commission will closely monitor, in a spirit of cooperation, the application of emergency measures in all member states. We all need to work together to master this crisis" — URSULA VON DER LEYEN, European Commission chief. "That's why the Hungarian state of emergency and extraordinary measures are congruent with the treaties and Hungarian constitution and targeted exclusively at fighting the coronavirus," he insisted. "It upholds EU values, rule of law, press freedom." In a separate statement read out by her spokesman, Von der Leyen admitted: "Over the past weeks, several EU governments took emergency measures to address the health crisis caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus." "We are living in extraordinary times, and governments, in principle, need to have the necessary tools to act rapidly and effectively to

protect the public health of our citizens," she added. But, in a clear but unstated reference to events in Hungary, she insisted: "Any emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary and strictly proportionate. They must not last indefinitely." "Democracy cannot work without free and independent media," she said. Hungary is threatening prison sentences for journalists who publish what it deems "falsehoods" about the virus or the measures against it. Critics at home and abroad have condemned Hungary's "anti-coronavirus defence law", saying it gives Orban unnecessary and unlimited power and is a means of cementing his position rather than battling the virus. After declaring a state of emergency on March 11, the new law passed on Monday gives Orban the power to indefinitely rule by decree until his government decides the emergency is over. — AFP

**WHO WARNS 'FAR FROM OVER' IN ASIA AND PACIFIC**

**Jakarta, March 31:** The World Health Organisation warns that while attention has shifted to epicenters in Western Europe and North America, Covid-19 epidemics are "far from over" in Asia and the Pacific. Urging governments at all levels in the region to stay engaged in efforts to combat the virus, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Takeshi Kasai says, "This is going to be a long-term battle and we cannot let down our guard. We need every country to keep responding according to their local situation." He said the WHO realizes there is no one-size-fits-all approach but there are common tactics. "Those are: finding, isolating and testing case early, tracing and quarantining contact quickly, and putting in place multiple public health interventions to place physical distance between people to slow and stop transmission." Takeshi also cautioned that countries still need to prepare for large-scale community transmission. — AP

**CHINA REBOUNDS AS VIRUS CONTROLS EASE**

**Beijing, March 31:** China's manufacturing rebounded in March as authorities relaxed anti-disease controls and allowed factories to reopen, an official survey showed, but an industry group warned the economy has yet to fully recover. The ruling Communist Party is trying to revive the world's second-largest economy after declaring victory over the coronavirus even as the US and other governments shut down businesses. — AP

**Flag at half-mast**



The Italian flag flies at half-mast on the Altare della Patria, Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome on Tuesday as flags are being flown at half-mast in cities across Italy to commemorate the victims of the virus, during the country's lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Covid-19 infection, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

**Global death toll crosses 40,000**

**Madrid, March 31:** Spain recorded its highest single-day death toll from the coronavirus Monday into Tuesday as 849 people died. Spain's Health Ministry reported on Tuesday that it diagnosed 9,222 new cases of the virus and saw 849 deaths in a single day. The country has reported more than 94,400 cases of Covid-19 and nearly 8,200 deaths since the coronavirus pandemic began. Spain has the third most cases behind the US and Italy and has the second highest daily toll was 260, recorded on Saturday, with the number dropping to 180 on Monday. Some 25,150 people have now tested positive for the virus in Britain, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a daily increase of 3,009. Data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England and Wales on Tuesday revealed that the true toll could be 24 per cent higher. Britain reported a

record daily coronavirus toll of 381 on Tuesday, more than double the number of deaths posted in the previous 24 hours. "As of 5pm (1600 GMT) on 30 March, of those hospitalised in the UK, 1,789 have sadly died," the health ministry said on its Twitter page, up from 1,408 on Monday. The patients were aged between 19 and 98, and all but 28 had underlying health conditions, NHS England said in a statement. The country's previous highest daily toll was 260, recorded on Saturday, with the number dropping to 180 on Monday. Some 25,150 people have now tested positive for the virus in Britain, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a daily increase of 3,009. Data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England and Wales on Tuesday revealed that the true toll could be 24 per cent higher. Britain reported a

The government figures cover those who have been taken to hospital and tested for the virus whereas the ONS data is for deaths in the community where COVID-19 is suspected. Sierra Leone has recorded its first case of the new coronavirus, the government said on Tuesday, making it the latest African country to register an infection. In a televised press conference, President Julius Maada Bio said that a 37-year-old man who arrived in the country from France on March 16 had tested positive. The man had been quarantined on arrival in the West African state, Bio said. "It was not a matter of whether, but when. Ladies and gentlemen, the when is here," the president said. Sierra Leone had been one of the few countries in Africa to have reported zero cases, despite neighbouring Guinea and Liberia having detected infections. — Agencies

● **INDIAN-AMERICAN** former Barack Obama campaign staffer, Suraj Patel who is running in the Democratic primary for a Congressional seat in New York's 12th District, has been tested positive for coronavirus. ● **TANZANIA ON** Tuesday recorded its first death from coronavirus, a 49-year-old man who had underlying health issues, the health ministry said. ● **12-YEAR-OLD** girl confirmed infected with COVID-19 has died in Belgium, health officials said Tuesday. Fatality at such a young age "is a very rare occurrence," said government spokesman Dr Emmanuel Andre, adding that her death "shook us". ● **Country singer** Kalie Shorr says she has contracted the novel coronavirus despite being under quarantine. — AFP

**Europe sends medical gear**

**Berlin, March 31:** European nations have delivered medical goods to Iran in the first transaction under the Instex mechanism set up to evade American sanctions on Tehran, the German foreign ministry said Tuesday. "France, Germany and the United Kingdom confirm that Instex has successfully concluded its first transaction, facilitating the export of medical goods from Europe to Iran. These goods are now in Iran," the ministry said in a statement. The first successful transaction comes over a year after Britain, France and Germany announced the creation of Instex, months that have been marked by Iranian chafing against European delay. "Now the first transaction is complete, Instex and its Iranian counterpart STFI will work on

more transactions and enhancing the mechanism," Berlin said. Britain, France and Germany were among a list of countries that Iran reported receiving medical aid from earlier this month as it battles a serious outbreak of the novel coronavirus. On Monday, the number of cases in the country passed 40,000, and the government warned the epidemic could run for several more months and cost over 10,000 lives. Tehran's struggle to bring the virus' spread under control has been made more difficult by US sanctions. — AFP

**Russia's doctor who met Putin tests +ve**

**Moscow, March 31:** The head of Moscow's main coronavirus hospital who met with President Vladimir Putin a week ago has tested positive, he said on Tuesday, as the Kremlin announced the Russian leader's health was fine. Last Tuesday Denis Protsenko met with the Russian leader who inspected the Kommunarka hospital while wearing a bright yellow hazmat suit. But the 67-year-old Putin was also seen talking to Protsenko without any protective gear. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov swiftly told Russian news agencies that Putin took regular tests and there was no reason to worry about his

health. "Everything is fine," Peskov said. Protsenko said he tested positive but "felt quite well". Posting a picture of himself wearing a mask and green scrubs on Facebook, he said he self-isolated in his office and would continue to work. Protsenko has become a high-profile figure on the frontlines of Russia's fight against Covid-19, posting daily on Facebook to inform Russians about his hospital's work and patients. Over the past 24 hours Russian authorities have reported 500 new cases — the biggest daily increase so far — bringing the total tally to 2,337 cases and 17 fatalities. — AFP

**ROYAL | SPLIT**

**The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will hold on to their titles but will not be actively using them**

**Harry, Meghan bid formal farewell as royals**

**London, March 31:** Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle on Tuesday bid a formal goodbye to their role as frontline royals as they settle down to their financially independent roles in the US. Harry, who remains sixth in line to the British throne, had announced the royal split along with his former actress wife Markle earlier this year and, as per the deal struck with Buckingham Palace, they will now be in a 12-month transition period with the option for the prince to return to his frontline roles by March 2021.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will hold on to their titles but will not be actively using them or formally representing Queen Elizabeth II from April 1. "As we all find the part we are to play in this global shift and changing of habits, we are focusing this new chapter to understand how we can best contribute," they said in reference to their new roles away from the UK as the couple signed off as "Harry and Meghan" on social media. "What's most important right now is the health and wellbeing of everyone across the globe and finding solutions for the many

issues that have presented themselves as a result of this pandemic," the couple said in their final message on their Sussex Royal Instagram. "While you may not see us here, the work continues. Thank you to this community — for the support, the inspiration and the shared commitment to the good in the world. We look forward to reconnecting with you soon. You've been great! Until then, please take good care of yourselves, and of one another," read their farewell message, which indicates their return to social media under a more private capacity in the

future. On a more philosophical note, they referred to the "extraordinarily fragile" world as it undergoes the coronavirus pandemic. "Yet we are confident that every human being has the potential and opportunity to make a difference — as seen now across the globe, in our families, our communities and those on the front line — together we can lift each other up to realise the fullness of that promise," they add. Alongside, Buckingham Palace released a statement saying: "The Duke and Duchess of Sussex would prefer that in the

● **THEY WILL** now be in a 12-month transition period with the option for the prince to return to his frontline roles by March 2021. immediate weeks and months, the focus remains on the global response to Covid-19. "However, we recognise there are outstanding questions relating to their future beyond their household transition deadline." The statement reiterated that they would no longer use the name Sussex Royal for their charitable organisation, Instagram or website. — PTI



Picture of Prince Harry with Meghan Markle. — AP



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	29,468.49	3.62
Nifty 50	8,597.75	3.82
S&P 500*	2,637.55	0.41
Dollar (₹)	75.67	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	93.53	0.25
Euro (₹)	82.78	0.92
Gold (Oz)* (\$)	1,611.30	-0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	22.64	-0.53
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.138	1.014
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.693	3.279

\* As of 9:30 pm IST

## Core growth up 5.5%, highest in 11 months

Eight core sector industries recorded a growth of 5.5 per cent in February, highest in 11-months, mainly due to healthy expansion in output of coal, refinery products and electricity. The core sectors had expanded by 2.2 per cent in February last year and by up to 5.8 per cent in March 2019. In January this year, these sectors grew by 1.4 per cent. The sectors have 40.27 per cent weight in the IIP.

## Interest on small savings schemes cut by up to 1.4%

The government slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate and Public Provident Fund, by up to 1.4 per cent for the first quarter of 2020-21. Interest rates are notified on a quarterly basis. Term deposits of 1-3 years will now be fetching an interest rate of 5.5 per cent against 6.9 per cent while the five-year term deposit will earn 6.7 per cent against 7.7 per cent.

## Banks asked to give doorstep services to elders

The Reserve Bank of India said many banks are not extending doorstep services for senior citizens above 70 years and differently abled persons even after three years of it issuing advisories, and asked for "strict compliance" on the same by April 30. The directions assume significance as they come amid the Covid-19 pandemic, where the senior citizens have been marked out as the most vulnerable.

## Sebi fines 2 Yes Bank promoter entities

The Sebi imposed a penalty of Rs 50 lakh each on two promoter entities of Yes Bank for not making requisite disclosures pertaining to encumbrance of shares. The two entities are Yes Capital (India) and Morgan Credits. Yes Capital had raised Rs 630 crore from Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund in Sept. 2017. Morgan Credits had raised Rs 950 crore from Reliance Mutual Fund in April 2018.

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## Many public sector banks inform customers about relief Borrowers await clarity on EMI moratorium

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Even as borrowers groped in the dark about the repayment moratorium announced by the Reserve Bank last week, several public sector banks (PSBs) on Tuesday informed their branch heads and customers about the three-month moratorium on all term loans, including home, auto and crop loans. But private and foreign banks are learnt to have not begun the moratorium process yet.

With many getting payment reminders, confusion prevails among borrowers, term-plan investors and credit cardholders over implementation of the moratorium advised the central bank in view of the disruptions caused by the nationwide lockdown over coronavirus outbreak. Many borrowers, credit cardholders and mutual fund investors have



received SMSes from their lenders reminding them that they need to maintain sufficient balance on the due date.

A public sector bank official said such messages are being sent to customers as the moratorium decision has to be approved by the board of each lender but in many cases, the board meetings have not taken place due to the nationwide lockdown.

Moreover, the official said, customers who have to inform their banks that they want to avail of the moratorium benefit.

"Wherever there is a standing instruction, the customer has to inform the bank that he or she wants EMIs to be deferred. Otherwise, instalments will be deducted," a senior public sector banker said. However, over 13 public sector banks, including

State Bank of India, have started messaging their customers individually on their mobile number about the deferment of equated monthly instalments (EMI) for the months of March, April and May.

This comes at a time when many customers of banks, mostly rural farmers, are not being able to go to banks for payment of their loan dues on account of restrictions imposed due to the 21-day long lockdown.

A top public sector bank official said, "All the branch heads have been informed with respect to moratorium on all term loans. In case of those who have opted for electronic fund transfer for EMI deduction, they are given the option of availing the facility by informing the branch concerned through mail or other digital medium. However, banks on its own unilaterally cannot stop ECS payment.

## Foreign trade policy, export sops extended for one year

New Delhi, March 31: The government on Tuesday extended the existing Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20, including fiscal incentives for goods' exports for one year till March 2021, amid the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown to contain the virus spread.

The commerce ministry said that in view of the "unprecedented current situation" arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has decided to continue relief under various export promotion schemes by granting extension of the existing policy by another one year.

"The existing Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20, which is valid up to March 31 this year, is extended up to March 31, 2021. Various other changes are also made extending the date of exemptions by one year and extending validity of DFIA and EPCG authorisations for import purposes," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said in a notification. —PTI

## Centre to borrow ₹4.88 L cr in H1

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Amidst an unprecedented financial crisis due to the 21-days long lockdown in the country, the government on Tuesday said it would borrow Rs 4.88 lakh crore during the first half of the new fiscal.

Announcing the aggressive borrowing plan, Department of Economic Affairs secretary Atanu Chakraborty, however, said, "The government will borrow Rs 4.88 lakh crore in the first half of fiscal 2020-21 starting April 1 to shore up resources amid a war it is waging to contain economic fallout of coronavirus pandemic."

The government's gross borrowing target for the first half of FY21 is 62.56 per cent of the annual target. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had in her budget for 2020-21 pegged gross borrowing in the new financial year at Rs 7.8 lakh crore, higher

than Rs 7.1 lakh crore estimated in the current fiscal.

"The government has factored in higher spending due to Covid-19 outbreak and it will provide all necessary help for the health sector; for recovery of the industry and any stimulus needed for the economy," said Chakraborty.

Generally, the government raises funds from the market to fund its fiscal deficit through dated securities and treasury bills. The budget had pegged fiscal deficit at 3.5 per cent for the next fiscal, down from 3.8 per cent of the GDP in the current financial year.

"The loss of economic activity is expected to dampen tax collections in Q1 FY2021, which would constrain the cash flows of the central and state governments. Additionally, expenditure may rise sharply in H1 FY2021, especially if additional stimulus programmes are provided," Aditi Nayar of Ica said.

## Merger of 10 public sector banks takes effect today

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

Ten public sector banks will be amalgamated into four banks effective April 1.

The consolidation of the Indian public sector banking space was a long overdue process and key measure in improving transparency and accountability in banking operations. Apart from enhancing the lenders capabilities to meet capital adequacy norms, the amalgamation is likely to streamline banking operations, improve customer service and build economies of scale to build global competitiveness.

On August 30, 2019, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the merger of 10 PSBs into four entities. From Wednesday, the number of public sector

banks in India will come down to 12. There will be six merged banks—SBI, Bank of Baroda, Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India, Indian Bank in addition to six independent banks namely Indian Overseas Bank, Uco Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of India and Central Bank of India.

Anil Gupta vice-president and head financial sector ratings at ICRA Ltd said, "The merger of public sector banks is going to be beneficial in the long term as it will reduce redundancies within the public sector banking space. However, there could be a near term impact on the integration, credit growth and asset quality in the slowing economic growth and near term operational challenges post by Covid 19.

The impact of integration on asset quality, profitability and capital of the merging banks will be visible upon the declaration of the merged balance sheet which is likely to be disclosed by the end of May 2020."

Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC) and United Bank of India will be merged into Punjab National Bank (PNB) to form the second-largest public sector bank in the country, after State Bank of India (SBI) with the merged entity having 11,437 branches. Syndicate Bank will be merged into Canara Bank, which will make it the fourth-largest public sector lender.

Union Bank's big amalgamation with Corporation Bank and Andhra Bank will create the fifth largest PSU bank in the country.

Indian Bank will be merged with Allahabad Bank.

In a statement, Indian Bank assured customers of both lenders that they will not face any disruption in services. Similarly, in a statement, Union Bank of India said, "Post the amalgamation, the combined entity will have the 4th largest banking network in the country with more than 75000 employees, 9500+ branches and over 13,500+ ATMs."

Meanwhile post-enormous liquidity infusion and a steep 75 basis repo rate cut from the Reserve Bank of India, several public sector lenders name PNB, Indian Overseas Bank, Bank of India, Union Bank announced a cut in their MCLR and external benchmark linked lending rate.

## IndusInd deposits shrink by 10-11%

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

Shares of private lender IndusInd Bank crashed on Tuesday after the lender, in an investor conference call on Monday, disclosed that it saw an outflow of 10-11 per cent of its deposits—around Rs 22,000 crore—post the Yes Bank saga. Of the total fall in deposits since the December quarter (Q3FY20), 70 per cent was in state government deposits and 30 per cent in corporate deposits.

"The total deposits are lower by approximately 10-11 per cent. Almost 2/3rd of reduction is on account of government related accounts—this is largely related to general private sector bank stance. This will also result in lower CASA ratio, but reduce our dependency on this category for deposits in future. Some reduction is in the wholesale (deposits), possibly attributable to stock price fall. The retail



deposit reduction is least of the above categories," said IndusInd in the investor presentation.

However, the bank said that it has replaced bulk of these deposit outflows via longer duration refinancing / forex borrowings swapped to rupee, bank certificate of deposits, term money borrowings, repo of excess statutory liquidity ratio / non-SLR securities and call money. But analysts believe this should inch up funding cost in the near-term, weighing in on its margins. "Deposit traction will rebuild in April... We have enhanced a deposit category

by 25 bps to accelerate this," IndusInd Bank said.

The IndusInd stock closed 14.68 per cent down at Rs 351 on the BSE. The stock price has corrected steeply in recent days, owing to concerns about asset quality and strength of funding franchise. In the last five trading sessions, the stock hit 10 upper and lower circuits. However brokerages gave a buy rating on the stock.

"Near-term asset quality stress is inevitable due to lockdowns, mainly in cards, personal loan, MFI, real estate, loan against property, and vehicle finance, but moratorium should help limit NPAs... We believe that the bank's near-term performance will track its ability to manage Covid19-led disruption on its growth/asset quality. However, we maintain Buy with a revised target price of Rs 630, mainly due to its lower valuations," said Anand Dama of Emkay Global.

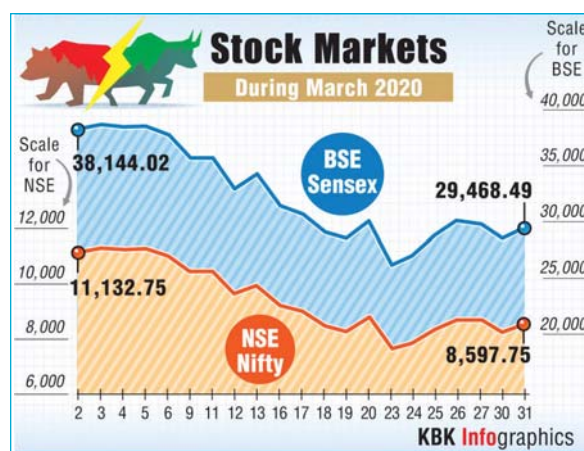
## Stocks bounce back, but indices lose 23% in March

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

Financial year 2019-20 concluded on a happy note with Sensex and Nifty-50 recouping most of Monday's loss with over 3.5 per cent gains but the benchmarks posted biggest monthly loss by 23 per cent each in March 2020.

Led by heavy buying by domestic institutions on the last day of the financial year, the Sensex gained 1028.17 points or 3.62 per cent closing at 29,468.49 while the Nifty-50 gained 3.82 per cent or 316.65 points closing at 8,597.75.

Domestic institutions were net buyers by Rs 3,576.23 crore while the foreign portfolio investors remained net sellers by Rs 3,044.94 crore, the provi-



sional data showed. Shrikant Chouhan, executive vice president-Technical Research, Kotak Securities said, "Nifty completely

reversed Monday's losses. We can call it a yearly and quarterly NAV (net asset value) management day for the market. Many large-cap stocks closed at the day's

highest level."

For the fiscal year 2019-20, the Sensex closed 23.80 per cent down at 29,468.49 (as against 38,672.91 on March 29, 2019) while the Nifty-50 closed 26.03 per cent lower at 8,597.75 (against 11,623.90 on March 29, 2019).

For the fiscal year gone by, the market capitalisation was down by Rs 38.75 lakh crore to Rs 113.48 lakh crore as compared to Rs 152.24 lakh crore on April 1, 2019.

However, the financial year closing saw big gains in index heavy weights on Tuesday led Reliance Industries (7.76 per cent), ITC (7.84 per cent), Hindustan Unilever (5.08 per cent), HDFC (4.34 per cent), HDFC Bank (3.48 per cent) and ICICI Bank (3.34 per cent).

S Ranganathan, head of Research at LKP Securities said, "Markets were up today led by key heavyweights and supported by Technology stocks.

Auto stocks continued to play the spoilsport ahead of the monthly numbers to be released on Wednesday which are expected to be weak. Today's trade witnessed spirited buying across sectors like Pharma & FMCG as the street moved funds towards defensives across companies who are likely to navigate through the lockdown with minimum damage."

The market volatility indicator India VIX index fell 10.29 per cent to 64.49 indicating significant reduction in daily market volatility in coming days.

## India, China may escape global recession: UN

YOSHITA SINGH  
UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 31

The world economy will go into recession this year with a predicted loss of trillions of dollars of global income due to the coronavirus pandemic, spelling serious trouble for developing countries with the likely exception of India and China, according to a latest UN trade report.

With two-thirds of the world's population living in developing countries facing unprecedented economic damage from the Covid-19 crisis, the UN is calling for a \$2.5 trillion rescue package for these nations.

According to the new analysis from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN trade and devel-



opment body, titled "The Covid-19 Shock to Developing Countries:

Towards a 'whatever it takes' programme for the two-thirds of the world's population being left behind", commodity-rich exporting countries will face a \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion drop in investments from overseas in the next two years.

The Unctad said that in recent days, advanced economies and China have put together massive government packages, which, according to the Group of 20 leading economies (G20), will extend a \$5 trillion lifeline to their economies.

It added that while the full details of these stimulus packages are yet to be unpacked, an initial assessment by the Unctad estimates that they will translate to a \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion injection of demand into the major

G20 economies and a two percentage point turnaround in global output.

"Even so, the world economy will go into recession this year with a predicted loss of global income in trillions of dollars. This will spell serious trouble for developing countries, with the likely exception of China and the possible exception of India," the Unctad said.

The report, however, did not give a detailed explanation as to why and how India and China will be the exceptions as the world faces a recession and loss in global income that will impact developing countries.

The Unctad estimates a \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion financing gap facing developing countries over the next two years. —PTI

## Unorganised retailers peg loss at \$30 bn

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Retail trade has incurred losses amounting to \$30 billion in the past 15 days, says a traders' body.

The unorganised retail sector, comprising 70 million small, medium and big traders and employing 450 million people, does a monthly business of about \$70 billion, said the Confederation of All India Traders.

Traders are likely to pay a higher than expected price for the lockdown, which has shuttered stores across the country. "The ramifications will reverberate for a longer time than expected," said Cait secretary general Praveen Khandelwal.

According to him, a large percentage of the Indian traders are too small to have enough surplus to survive a pandemic like this one. But they still have to pay salaries, rentals, taxes and other levies.

While 50 to 70 per cent kirana stores selling grocery and other food supplies are allowed to operate partially, a large portion of the unorganised retailers selling non-essential items is closed, said Ashish Jhina, co-founder, Jumbotail, an online wholesale marketplace.

The recovery from the economic stress will be slower as the demand from Indian consumers after the lockdown might be subdued. A large share of the consuming class will be cash strapped and hard pressed for disposable income. "Even after the epidemic, people will largely spend on essential items and hence recovery of stores selling non-essential goods will take time," said Jhina.



Further, the import cycle has been disrupted and traders may not have enough goods to sell even after the lockdown is lifted. Imports of finished goods from countries like China will take more time to normalise. Indian manufacturers, dependent on imported raw material and components, will take a long time to resume their operations.

Resumption of services will also take time due to migration of labour from cities to rural areas.

SHORT TAKES

Red Bull wanted drivers infected!

Vienna: Red Bull motorsport consultant Helmut Marko has admitted that he wanted the team's Formula One drivers to deliberately contract coronavirus before the potential start of the new season. The 76-year-old said his idea was to bring the team's senior drivers, Max Verstappen and Alexander Albon, together with the junior drivers in a training camp. "The idea was that we could organise a camp where we could mentally and physically fill this dead time," Marko told Austrian television channel ORF. "Then of course it would've been ideal for the infection to come," the 76-year-old added. "They are all young, strong men in good health. Then you would be prepared for whenever you start, and you would be ready for a very tough world championship," Marko further stated. Marko also admitted that his plan was "not well received". — AFP

Lancashire chief dies of corona

London: Lancashire county cricket club chairman David Hodgkiss has died after being infected by the dreaded coronavirus. He was 71. Although Lancashire did not give the exact reason of his death in their official statement, a club spokesperson told the 'Press Association' that Hodgkiss' death was "coronavirus-related." "Further to the announcement from his family, it is with great sadness that Lancashire Cricket announces the passing of its Chairman, David Hodgkiss OBE," the club said in a statement. According to reports, Hodgkiss had some prior health issues as well. Hodgkiss had been on the board at Emirates Old Trafford for 22 years, serving as a member, treasurer and vice-chairman before becoming the chairman, succeeding Michael Cairns in 2017. — AFP

Paine's wallet stolen from car

Melbourne: Australia Test captain Tim Paine's wallet was stolen from his car on Tuesday after he parked the vehicle on the street outside his home in Hobart to convert his garage into a gym. His makeshift practice area was just a day old when Paine woke up this morning to realise that his car had been broken into. "I've actually just turned the garage into a bit of a home gym and I want to hang the (stocking) off the bit where the garage door opens," he told 'SEN Breakfast'. "I figured if I can, I can work on my cover drive while I'm at it, but I've actually hit a bit of a snag today because I moved the car out onto the street only to wake up this morning to a text from NAB saying my credit card has been used. I went out and the (car) door was open and my wallet and a few other things had gone," Paine added. — AFP

SONY EXTENDS DEAL TO BEAM WWE SHOWS

Mumbai: Sony Pictures Networks (SPN) India Private Limited and WWE on Tuesday announced a five-year extension with an expanded broadcast agreement that will deliver WWE's weekly flagship programming and localised content in India and the Indian sub-continent, making SPN the exclusive home to WWE in-ring content across its television and digital platforms. As part of the agreement, SPN will have the rights to air Raw, SmackDown, NXT as well as WWE pay-per-view specials live on its sports and digital platforms in English, Hindi and regional languages. The expanded partnership also provides SPN the rights to WWE Network which hosts thousands of hours of content to be made available to audiences in India exclusively through SonyLIV, SPN's OTT platform. In addition and for the first time, SPN will curate content from WWE's extensive video library which includes live events, iconic matches, interviews with Legends, reality shows, documentaries and more, on its own platforms. WWE will also return to India with even bigger live events and Superstars will visit the region for promotional tours to engage with fans. — Agencies

FREEZE FRAME

Badminton body blocks rankings amid suspension

New Delhi, March 31: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Tuesday decided to freeze the world rankings, saying standings as on March 17 will be the basis for entry and seedings when it restarts the international calendar that has been thrown haywire owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a clamour for freezing the world rankings with Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B. Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H. S. Prannoy leading the way in expressing their concerns. "The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can announce it will freeze World Rankings and World Junior Rankings until further notice. The freezing of rankings will be backdated to Week 12, which is the week following the last international tournament that was played the YONEX All England Open 2020," BWF said in a release. "The ranking lists issued on 17 March 2020 will serve as a basis for entry and seeding into the next international tournaments although it is difficult to say at this stage when this may be." Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is also top-16. The BWF had suspended all tournaments post the All England Championships until April 12 due to the pandemic. These tournaments include big-ticket events like India Open (Super 500), Malaysia Open (Super 750) and Singapore Open (Super 500), apart from the three Continental Confederation championships. "Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the badminton community has experienced an unprecedented suspension to international tournaments from mid-March 2020 to the end of April 2020. The world body said it will take time to decide on the process of unfreezing the world rankings as it will depend on how the international calendar looks once things improve. "Following the announcement to reschedule the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games to 23 July to 8 August 2021, BWF will now also initiate a review process to confirm any impacts on the Olympic qualification system," BWF said. — AFP



People wearing masks walk past a countdown clock showing the adjusted time remaining for the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games, outside the Tokyo station on Monday. — AFP

Task cut out for Tokyo

Tokyo, March 31: The countdown clocks have been reset and are ticking again for the Tokyo Olympics. The model outside Tokyo Station, and others across the Japanese capital were switched on almost immediately after organisers announced the new dates — July 23 to August 8, 2021. The clocks read 479 days to go. This seems a long way away, but also small and insignificant compared with the worldwide fallout from the coronavirus. Then again, it's not much time to reassemble the first Olympics to be postponed since the modern games began 124 years ago; not for 11,000 Olympic athletes, 4,400 Paralympic athletes — and not for sponsors, broadcasters, the fans that have already bought tickets, and Japanese organisers and taxpayers who have spent billions, and will have to come up with billions more to pay for the setback. "I believe that these Olympics are going to have great historical sig-

NEXT YEAR'S ATHLETICS WORLDS MOVED TO 2022

Paris, March 31: The 2021 World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon (USA) will be shifted to 2022 to accommodate the re-arranged Tokyo Olympics, World Athletics said. The announcement came immediately after Olympics organisers said the 2020 Tokyo Games will now take place on July 23-August 8, 2021. That means the World Athletics Championships that were scheduled to take place in Eugene on August 6-15, 2021, can no longer be held on those dates. "We support the new 2021 dates for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games announced by the Japanese organisers and the IOC," World Athletics said in a statement. "This gives our athletes the time they need to get back into training and competition. Everyone needs to be flexible and compromise and to that end we are now working with organisers of the World Athletics Championships on new dates in 2022 for our World Athletics Championships," it said. — AFP

picked for 2020. Organisers are hoping to overlay the old plans with new plans, keeping venues in place, securing thousands of rooms in the Athletes Village, deploying the same volunteers, and letting people who bought tickets keep them. The summer date also avoids conflicts with the crowded North American and European sports schedules. But summer in Tokyo also means grappling with intense heat and humidity, the major worry for games organizers before the pandemic. "Obviously in the summer there might be typhoons and the heat problems. However, this situation is the same. We always had those problems so we will be prepared for those issues," Mori said. Though the international sports federations went along with the new dates, some like the International Triathlon Union preferred the cooler spring during Japan's cherry blossom season. But that was overridden by the easiest route to lining up venues. — AP

nificance," Yoshiro Mori, the president of the Tokyo organising committee, said after confirming the new dates. Mori, an 82-year-old former Japanese prime minister, also recalled there's no guarantee that the coronavirus pandemic will be under control a year from now. That includes the new dates for the Paralympics now set for Aug. 24 to September 5. "This is a prayer that we have and I do believe that someone is going to listen to our prayers," Mori said. After cursory talk about an Olympics in the spring, the new summer dates overlap perfectly with the same time slot that was

BWF eyeing new dates for Worlds

New Delhi, March 31: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) is in talks with hosts Spain to reschedule the 2021 World Championships after the Tokyo Olympics were pushed to next year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Huelva, a city in southwest Spain, is scheduled to host the 2021 Badminton World Championships in August but with the Tokyo Games now rescheduled to July 23 to August 8, BWF is looking for alternatives. "BWF is aware of the

need to reschedule the World Championships 2021 normally staged in August with suitable alternatives being discussed with hosts Spain," the governing body said in a statement. World Championships is an annual event with the exception of the Olympic year. P. V. Sindhu had won the World Championships title at Basel, Switzerland in 2019. The BWF has suspended all tournaments until April 12 due to the pandemic. — PTI



P. V. Sindhu in this file photo.

We want to train, Hima tells Rijiju

New Delhi, March 31: Confined to their hostel rooms at NIS Patiala amid the coronavirus-forced lockdown, some athletes, led by star sprinter Hima Das, have requested the sports ministry to allow them to train outdoors within the campus, which is out of bounds for outsiders right now. Deputy chief national athletics coach Radhakrishnan Nair, who is supporting the move, said that the Hima-led campers at the National Institute of Sports (NIS)

are expecting a reply from the ministry in a day or two. "Hima and some other athletes have written to the Sports Minister that they be allowed to train one or two hours a day in small groups at different times so that they can also practice social distancing while training at the same time," Nair confirmed from Patiala. "They have written to Rijiju that they be sent home if no training is allowed. (But) going home is not feasible as the coun-



Hima Das

try is in a lockdown and Prime Minister has said everybody should be where they are. "So, the ministry will not allow them to go back home but this outdoor training idea is feasible. We will know about it in a day or two," he added. Nair said he and other coaches have supported the idea as there is no risk of any camper contracting the dreaded coronavirus as nobody is coming in and going out of the facility. "We have 41 athletes at NIS and the track and field area is just 50m from the hostels. We can have small groups say eight athletes each and only one group will train at a time for one or two hours. All the athletes of a group will not do running or throwing together, one will run alone and finish it and then another will run after him or her. This way we can practice social distancing and be safe," the top athletics coach said. "Athletics is different. In many sports, the athletes utilise a small space but a runner or a thrower or a jumper covers a lot of distance and their cardiovascular system and physical strength has to be built continuously over a period of time," he added. — PTI

CORONA CONTRIBUTION

Athletes continue to donate money

Mumbai, March 31: Star India batsman Rohit Sharma has donated ₹80 lakh to fight the rapidly-spreading Covid-19 pandemic, saying the onus is on the citizens to help the country get back on its feet. Rohit, who is the vice-captain of the Indian ODI team, has donated ₹45 lakh and ₹25 lakh to the and CM's Relief Fund (Maharashtra) respectively. He has given ₹5 lakh to 'Zomato Feeding India', which is helping families affected by the ongoing national lockdown, and another ₹5 lakh to help aid the welfare of stray dogs. "We need our country back on feet & the onus is on us. I've done my bit to donate ₹45lakhs to #PMCAresFunds, ₹25lakhs to #CMReliefFund Maharashtra, ₹5lakhs to @FeedingIndia and ₹5lakhs to #WelfareOfStrayDogs. Let's get behind our leaders and support them @narendramodi @CMOMaharashtra," tweeted the elegant right handed batsman on Tuesday morning. NEERAJ GIVES ₹3 LAKH Asian Games gold medal-winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Tuesday donated a total of ₹3 lakh to the central and Haryana state relief funds to combat the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. Chopra is currently in self-isolation at the National Institute of Sports (NIS) in Patiala after flying back from a training trip in Turkey. "I have donated a sum of ₹2 Lakh to #PMCAres fund and ₹1 Lakh to the Haryana Covid Relief Fund. I hope we all can come together in our own individual capacities to bring relief during this time and help our nation

overcome this pandemic," the Commonwealth Games gold-medallist tweeted. Chopra, who hails from Panipat, has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics and is considered a strong medal contender. TT BODY CHIPS IN ₹5 LAKH The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) on Tuesday pledged ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the battle against the fast-spreading Covid-19 pandemic. "The TTFI, as a part of its social responsibility, decided to contribute in its own small way a sum of ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund," TTFI said in a statement. "A cheque for the amount was sent to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), which had requested all National Sports Federations (NSFs) to make contributions to the Fund," it added. AUGUSTA PLEDGES \$2m Augusta National Golf Club, which in most years would be preparing to host the Masters, announced on Monday it will give \$2 million to help fight the coronavirus pandemic in its region. This year's Masters, which was to have lured golfers and fans from around the world to the famed Georgia layout next week, was postponed indefinitely due to the global outbreak of the deadly virus. "It is our hope these gifts will help address the many challenges brought about by the coronavirus throughout the city of Augusta and the greater region. We believe Augusta National has an important responsibility to support and protect the community," Augusta National chairman Fred Ridley said. — Agencies

NEHRU STADIUM IS NOW A QUARANTINE FACILITY

New Delhi, March 31: The Sports Authority of India (SAI) said it is handing over the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium here to the Delhi government for using it as a quarantine facility for patients infected with the novel coronavirus. SAI handed over the stadium after the District Magistrate had on Monday day asked if it could be used for the purpose of quarantine. The Sports Ministry had on March 22 announced that facilities under SAI across the country will be made available for usage as quarantine facilities. More than 1,250 positive cases for the novel coronavirus have so far been reported across the country besides 36 deaths. — PTI

Flushing Meadows turns Corona Park

New York, March 31: The site of the US Open tennis tournament here will be used to build a 350-bed facility in an effort to provide additional medical infrastructure to the city as it battles the growing coronavirus outbreak. A report in The Wall Street Journal said that New York city's emergency management office plans to build a 350-bed facility at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. The report said construction could begin as early as Tuesday at an indoor training center at the facility, which has multiple courts and wide spaces, according to a spokesman for the US Tennis Association. The beds will likely be for patients who do not have Covid-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Additionally, the tennis centre's Louis Armstrong Stadium will become a commissary that will pack 25,000 meals per day for medical professionals and others. Construction may begin as early as Tuesday, a report in NPR media said. As public and private hospitals across the state come under immense

strain from the growing Covid-19 cases, officials are permitting setting up of temporary medical infrastructure at various sprawling spaces in New York. A 68-bed field hospital is being constructed in the city's Central Park to help enhance medical capacity. LORD'S OPENS UP FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS Custodian of cricket laws, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), has decided to provide parking and storage spaces available at the iconic Lord's cricket ground to the National Health Services (NHS) staff who are fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. "The close proximity of a number of hospitals to Lord's gives the Club the opportunity to assist medical staff so they can concentrate on their ongoing battle against the virus," the MCC said in media release. The club has provided 75 car parking spaces for NHS staff at the nearby Wellington Hospital, University College Hospital, and the Hospital of St John and St Elizabeth. — AFP

**the buzz**

Humour in times of distress

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# karimnagar CHRONICLE

WEDNESDAY | 1 APRIL 2020

**t'wood**

'Watching old, classic films'

5 >>



**“This is sheer stupidity and waste of resources. It’s like buying a fighter jet for whenever we may have a war even when one does not know how to fire a missile, let alone fly a plane”**  
**Dr Sundeep Lakhtakia,**  
 senior consultant, Asian Institute of Gastroenterology



**“Unless they have an intensivist — a specialist doctor handling ICUs — at home, it’s of no use. We just don’t have enough staff to run hospitals, let alone home ventilators”**  
**Dr Khizar Raof,**  
 Consultant Urologist, Olive Hospital




**“Buying an oxygen concentrator at home is acceptable, but a ventilator at home is not feasible. Ventilators also need an oxygen supply and compressed air, which is again not possible at home”**  
**Dr Chaitanya Challa,**  
 Challa Nursing Home



Forget sanitisers, masks, gloves and essentials; the latest COVID-19 reality is that the richie rich folks are buying ventilators for personal use at home, should the need arise. However, experts say it is a dangerous and foolish move because using a ventilator needs expert supervision

## Buying ventilators? It is sheer stupidity, say experts

SWATI SHARMA  
 DECCAN CHRONICLE

 Billionaire technology entrepreneur Elon Musk had recently taken to the microblogging site to tweet, “Yes. Just as with groceries, the panic is also causing hoarding of ventilators, preventing them from reaching the hospitals where they are needed.” Even though the Government of India, recently, prohibited the export of surgical masks and ventilators because of its


shortage in hospitals, the uber-rich are panic-buying and hoarding ventilators at home at the cost of ₹10 lakh. Ventilators are used for patients suffering from coronavirus to keep them alive if they struggle to breathe. But is this a sensible move? Experts including Dr Sundeep Lakhtakia, who is a senior consultant at Asian Institute of Gastroenterology, feel otherwise. “This is sheer stupidity and waste of resources. It’s like buying a fighter jet for whenever we may have a war even when one does not know how to fire a missile, let alone fly a plane,” he says. To begin with, those buying/hoarding a ventilator tend to forget that they will still need someone to manage the machine at home. Moreover, where will they find the necessary therapist or doctor to run the ventilator if it comes to that? For those wondering if it is, in the first place, possible to run a critical care patient privately at home especially in

the Indian scenario, Dr Khizar Raof, Consultant Urologist, Olive Hospital, shares his thoughts. “Unless they have an intensivist — a specialist doctor handling ICUs — at home, it’s of no use. We just don’t have enough staff to run hospitals, let alone home ventilators,” he cautions. Adding to the above thought, Dr Sunil Kapoor, senior Interventional Cardiologist, Apollo Hospitals, says, “It needs to be connected to a high-pressure oxygen line, which is available only in the ICU of hospitals.”

**PROCEDURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
 In addition to the above, ventilator settings also must be monitored and changed as per the patient’s need, depending on the patient’s condition. What’s more, the patient must be appropriately sedated to tolerate the ventilator. So essentially, the issue here is about how to set it up.

TURN TO PAGE 2

### WORD OF THE WISE

 Considering possible complications at this point, it is essential to use ventilators only in hospital ICUs for patient safety and better chances of their survival. It’s a scary thought to use ventilators at home, and it is a bad practice to hoard them at home. I believe it is something that needs to be reported to Government agencies so that such hoarders are taken to task,” warns **Sanjay Waghray, CEO, SS Associates.**



**THE SCORE KEEPERS SAY...**

# 'Ours is a thankless job'

Cricket scorers are an integral part of the game but are usually unknown. We speak with some, who articulate the challenges and neglect they face

**BIPIN DANI**

ICC has panels for umpires and match referees, who declare thousands of boundaries and verdicts on "outs" and "not out" decisions. However, there are no ICC panels for scorers yet, who record players' runs and wickets and are an integral part of the game.

"Yes, scorers should be recognised by the ICC. If one wants to improve perfection in the game, this system should be introduced," says Sejal Dave from Rajkot, one of the women scorers in the country.

Another woman scorer is Hemali Desai, who has been in the job since 1994, handling the pile of runs scored by legends in the middle. Sejal and Hemali, members of the BCCI panel, made history when both officiated in the Ranji Trophy finals (between Saurashtra and Bengal). While Sejal was the official scorer, Hemali was designated in the press box. But women scorers are a rarity in the country.

"Scorers perform the most important duties of maintaining all details of a given match. Unfortunately, this faculty is most neglected," chimes in Sharmila Thakur, another BCCI woman scorer.

**UNRECORDED RECORDERS**

Besides the women scorers, even a few cricket statisticians favour due recognition by the highest governing body of the game. "Cricket statisticians form the backbone of commentators and cricket websites, but they are often the most neglected lot," says C. Keshav Murthy, a renowned cricket statistician.

When asked for his opinion on why they are not a part of any panel, Keshav says, "Scorers are in larger numbers, which may have prompted the ICC to not form a panel. However, this suggestion should be welcome. BCCI and other cricket associations should step in and fight for it."

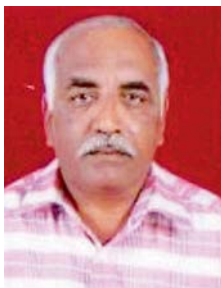
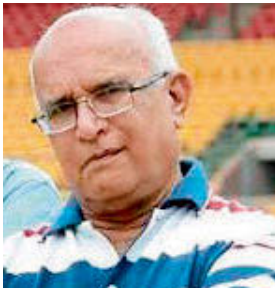
Gopal Krishna, another cricket statistician who has officiated in more than 100 international matches for the radio tells us that the BCCI has a graded panel for scorers. "But the ICC should have its own panel. It would be the best thing to happen for the game," he adds.

**UNSUNG BUT NOT DONE**

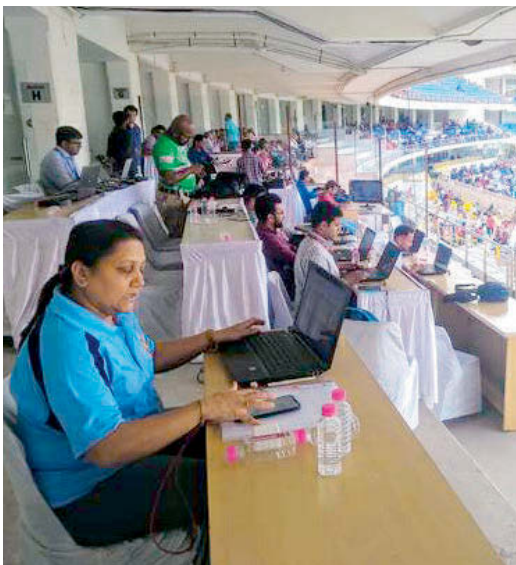
M. Nagaraj, another scorer-cum-statistician, feels a panel for umpires is necessary because they officiate in neutral countries. "Scorers are not required to be neutral as their main duty is only to record the happenings of the game, but yes, it is a thankless job," adds Nagaraj. "Scorers and statisticians working behind the scenes and their names hardly appear on TV



(above) Sejal Dave and Hemali Desai



(L-R) Gopal Krishna and M. Nagaraj



Score keepers on the job

or media."

Another Mumbai scorer, Vivek Gupte, adds to the sentiment.

"Ours is a thankless job! If Sachin Tendulkar has scored thousands of runs and Muralitharan and Shane Warne have grabbed hundreds of wickets. It is because we have record-

ed them

all correctly," shares Vivek, adding, "The BCCI has given us an iPad and an app. We record the matches, which gets instantly uploaded on the BCCI website. General public can view the live scores but nowhere are our efforts being recognised."

"Cricket statisticians form the backbone of commentators and cricket websites, but they are often the most neglected lot"

**C. Keshav Murthy, a renowned cricket statistician**

"Scorers perform the most important duties of maintaining all details of a given match. Unfortunately, this faculty is most neglected"

**Sharmila Thakur, a BCCI woman scorer**

If Sachin Tendulkar has scored thousands of runs and Muralitharan and Shane Warne have grabbed hundreds of wickets, it is because these score keepers have recorded them all correctly

## Buying ventilators? It is sheer stupidity, say experts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Adjustment of a ventilator is an hourly issue," explains Dr Chaitanya Challa, Challa Nursing Home. "A doctor has to be constantly present to adjust it. Buying an oxygen concentrator at home is acceptable, but a ventilator at home is not feasible. Ventilators also need an oxygen supply and compressed air, which is again not possible at home."

According to Dr K. Subba Reddy, Sr Consultant Critical Care, Apollo Health City, ventilating a patient requires the entire intensive care infrastructure. "Just buying ventilators and keeping them ready outside ICU settings is not advisable. Sometimes, they may require prolonged ventilator support," he adds. "Further, they require good doctors and nurses to take care of them. They may also require

"Just buying ventilators and keeping them ready outside ICU settings is not advisable. Sometimes, they may



require prolonged ventilator support. They require good doctors and nurses to take care of them. They may also require other organ support such as dialysis and multiple other consultants' involvement. Added to it all, they will require very close monitoring to wean off the ventilator. So, it is not possible to create efficient ICUs at home."

**OTHER VALID CONCERNS**

In government-run hospitals, it is very difficult to get vacant ventilators. In private hospitals, ventilators are available but are highly priced. So also, experts think it unwise and warn against anyone getting into an unnecessary panic-buying of ventilators during this time.

"COVID-19 infection results in respiratory distress syndrome in only 2-4 per cent of people. For instance, as of



now, there are 40 patients admitted in the COVID-19 ward of the Gandhi Hospital and not a single patient is on ventilator"

**Dr Sunil Kapoor, Senior Interventional Cardiologist, Apollo Hospitals**

worse, the government will take over all the ventilators. Even the ones in private hospitals," warns Dr Khizar Raoof. "They're already getting private medical colleges ready, and if the need arises, private hospitals will also become a part of the war against corona."

Dr Sunil Kapoor also reminds people that very few of the corona patients need ventilators in the first place.

"COVID-19 infection results in respiratory distress syndrome in only 2-4 per cent of people. For instance, as of now, there are 40 patients admitted in the COVID-19 ward of the Gandhi Hospital and not a single patient is on ventilator," elaborates Dr Sunil Kapoor.

# Disconnected from reality?

**With Bollywood celebs going all out with their workout videos in the face of the pandemic, it's debatable whether it's a way to connect with fans or being too self-indulgent at these times**

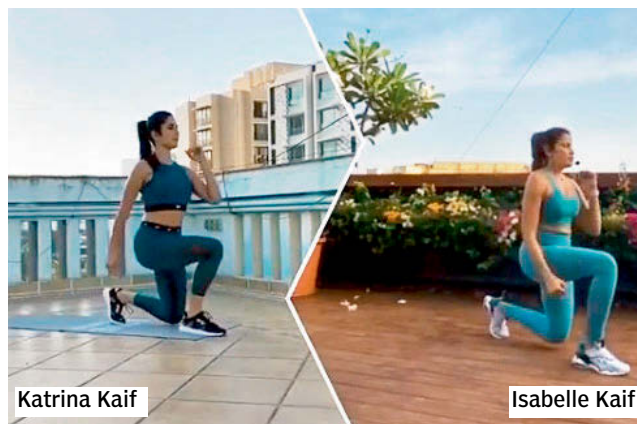
SHALKIE

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has opened a Pandora's box of challenges for those trying to curb its spread. 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' is the message en vogue being endorsed by almost everyone, including our favourite celebrities who have been posting videos and pictures on social media that mostly include their workouts, sun-kissed happy faces and daily chores of cooking and mopping in the absence of their house help and maids.

Probably as an aftermath of such images and videos, the choreographer-turned-filmmaker Farah Khan recently took to social media to highlight the privilege of her fitness-video-posting colleagues from Bollywood. In the video, which has gone viral on the Internet, the *Om Shanti Om* director says, "It's my humble request to all the 'celebrities' and 'stars' that please stop mak-

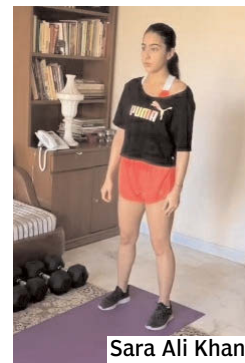


ing your workout videos and bombarding us with it. I can understand that you all are privileged and you don't have any other worries in this global pandemic except for looking after your figures. But some of us, most of us have bigger concerns during this crisis." Echoing the same, in what is a photoshopped image, Diljit Dosanjh superimposed his face on the popular Instagram celebrity Dude With Sign's image, in which he is carrying a sign board that says: 'Stop Posting Your Home Workouts'.



**I can understand that you all are privileged and you don't have any other worries except for looking after your figures, but most of us have bigger concerns during this crisis.**

—FARAH KHAN



At a time when film releases and film shootings have come to a halt, our B-towners, while under a lockdown, have been posting videos of them exercising at home as a means to staying relevant among their fans and followers. According to the image consultant Chhaya Momaya, "Celebrities are glamour-based, and the best way to show glamour is through your body. To remind their fans that they are still glamorous, and that they are still looking good, posting fitness video is a fantastic idea." Jacqueline

Fernandez, Katrina Kaif, Sara Ali Khan and Vicky Kaushal among others are some of the actors that have shared their slice of fitness routine on their social media. However, the question arises whether such a blatant display of cushioned privilege is the need of the hour.

According to the social media strategist Mayank Jain, these videos are not a display of privilege, as it encourages fans to stay indoors, which is the actual need of the moment. "With the deep penetration of the

Internet in our country, almost everybody, intentionally or unintentionally, follows their favourite celebrities. Now, because of the lockdown when people are asked to stay inside, it's right on part of the celebrities to upload workout videos or of them doing home chores because it influences people to stay back home," he says.

First one to react, Deepika Padukone, in a Hangout video, defended putting up exercise videos on social media. "I know a lot of people have a problem with exercise videos that are going up. But to be honest, putting up exercise videos — rather, exercising, not putting up videos — it's more about how you feel. It's not really about how you look." While there is a gaping gap between the privileged and the underprivileged in this country, the crisis has dawned on everybody. But it's the disproportionate effect of the crisis that's fuelling this debate.

Social media may have become a medium to find a semblance of normalcy for the celebrities, but they should also not ignore the harsh reality and do whatever they can to unburden the burdened, says image consultant Chetna Mehrotra. "One side is definitely to let people know that they too are equally a part of this entire lockdown. And the other part is that when you are an influencer, you need to validate and endorse what's happening with those who are less privileged. Now is the time when these celebrities can break the barrier and show that even though they are privileged, they are also not that privileged," she concludes.

## Deepika misses the Padukones

DC CORRESPONDENT

The ongoing lockdown has been hard on Deepika Padukone, who has been in Mumbai with her husband while her parents and sister are far away in Bangalore. The *Chhapaak* actress, who is extremely close with her family, says that the first thing she will do when the coronavirus pandemic ends is visit her family.

She said in a recent interview, "I was actually scheduled to travel to Bangalore to see them (family) and then leave for our schedule (Shakun Batra's film) — we were going to be out for like two months. I think that's probably the first thing I'll do, which is just go and see them in flesh and blood." While most of us are seeing this difficult time through with our families in real life, Deepika has to rely on technology to see her family.



## Hrithik Roshan: Textbook hero

DC CORRESPONDENT

Hrithik Roshan's life has not always been easy. Despite being born into the affluent Roshan family, he grew up with a stammer and an extra finger on his right hand, which others made fun of. He has also overcome scoliosis just before becoming an actor.

His story is now being told to students of Class 6 under the chapter of 'self confidence' in the textbook *Life and Values* imprinted by S. Chand Publications. The book is followed in the matric schools of Tamil Nadu as part of value

education for students.

While this news is lesser-known, a Twitter user shared: "Felt bored, so I was reading a textbook of my niece. I was surprised to see this page. This is from the value education textbook of class 6. Who else can teach self-confidence better than him? Proud of you @iHrithik sir @Hrftamilnadu @HrithikRules @HrithikInspires (sic)."

The WAR actor's life story has also been immortalised in international author Ben Brooks' book titled *Stories For Boys Who Dare To Be Different*.



# Humour in times of distress

Move over Mallika Dua. There's a new Youtuber in town. The burqa clad Nazma Aapi's political commentary has made Saloni Gaur a national sensation

**NAYARE ALI**  
DECCAN CHRONICLE

Saloni's twitter account has 98.3k followers and this charming college student's impersonation of Kangana Ranaut who she wickedly calls Kangana 'Runnout', has earned her 34.7k likes on Twitter. "I hope she likes it too. I have seen *Queen* multiple times and I believe Kangana is a great

actress," she quickly adds.

It is Kangana, who by default paved the way for Saloni's foray into comic videos. "I used to mimic her in school and my friends loved it," she concedes. This youngster straddles dual worlds. She studies economics and political science by day at her university and recedes into her hostel, to make comic videos. "Initially I only did voiceovers but one day a random video I made went viral and my friends suggested that I should show my face. So I bought this wig from Amazon as a part of my get up and everybody loved it. Everyone was making videos. When I joined insta I noticed that Mallika Dua was making videos. I did not know how to channel my thoughts into a video. My brother Shubham, who has appeared in Amazon Prime's *Hostel Days* and he's a Youtuber, guided me."

And that is how the demure housewife with fierce views became an instant hit. And the biggest high for her was, "When Kusha Kapila messaged me after seeing my video. I was on cloud nine that day," she says.

Nazma Aapi airs her views nonchalantly on everything from panic buying post corona virus to a *desi* mother-in-law's views post lock-



Screenshots of Saloni's hilarious videos. Saloni's latest video where she impersonates Sonam Kapoor will leave you rolling with laughter

tion has the ability to laugh at herself. Recounting an older video on Delhi's air pollution, she laughingly admits, "I look very poor in that video. I stay at a hostel in Delhi. I opened the door, it was so hazy, I just woke up, did not wash my face, used my phone camera and started shooting. I look so pathetic."

You've got to hand it to Saloni. She exudes remarkable self confidence when she says, "People ask me why I don't apply make up? So when I mimicked Sonam I put on the best *kurta* I had, to do justice to Sonam as she is a fashion icon. But *Nazmi aapi* does not require a makeover," asserts the girl who also doubles up as the background guy who comments in her videos. I am the guy in the background, I can imitate Jimmy Shergil too, so decided to do the male voice over."

Saloni who hails from UP modestly states she is not famous in her hometown but wickedly adds that her relatives are wary of her as she might just mimic them. "My *nani* refuses to speak in front of me as she is afraid that I will imitate her also," she laughs.

Saloni happily admits that none of her videos have generated any hate mails or comments. "I am very balanced and take care not to offend anyone in my social commentary."

The future looks bright as Saloni is currently doing collaborative videos and ads and will be venturing into radio soon. Speaking about the process of creating, Saloni says that working on filmi impersonations does not take time but when she dons the garb of Nazma Aapi, it takes her 2.5 hours to work on the script and shoot. "My parents are supportive. They told me to not target anybody and that is something that I am cautious about. My brother too was very supportive."

down. Like actress Sonam, who Saloni recently impersonated and even got an appreciated response back, the young sensa-

This youngster straddles dual worlds. She studies economics and political science by day at her university and recedes into her hostel, to make comic videos. "Initially I only did voiceovers but one day a random video I made went viral and my friends suggested that I should show my face. So I bought this wig from Amazon as a part of my get up and everybody loved it," says Saloni.



## Born on All Fools Day

This year, for the first time in many years, cricketer Murali Vijay will get to celebrate his birthday with his entire family around him. His parents are looking forward to it

**BIPIN DANI**

The right-handed batsman was born on April 1, 1984. Over the past several years he has been busy with IPL matches during this time, but the Coronavirus threat this year has disrupted all such schedules. "It (April 1 — All Fools' Day) is a special day and is celebrated throughout the world with laughter,"

the cricketer's father, R. Murali, said. He was speaking exclusively to DC from Chennai. "Usually, we all go to a nearby temple, but because of the Coronavirus crisis, the temples are closed," he said, adding, "we will have a



very simple celebration at his home." "Vijay stays half a km away from us.

Whenever he is in Chennai on his birthday, he comes to us for blessings. This year, we don't expect him to come to us with his three children. Instead, my wife and I will go to his house," he said. The family plans to spend quality time together. "April 1 is the Financial New Year in India and it will be a fresh start for both Vijay and the economy, said Murali.



The cricketer with his wife and kids

# Samantha to do a biopic

The actress will soon be working on an interesting project

✓ Samantha Akkineni, one of the top actresses in South Indian cinema today, has been approached for a biopic, which is to be directed by none other than senior director Singeetham Srinivasa Rao of the *Pushpaka Vimanamu* fame. A source tells us that Singeetham has planned to do a biopic on Bangalore Nagarathnamma, a Carnatic singer, cultural activist, social reformer, freedom fighter and courtesan. "The director has approached Samantha for the biopic, and Samantha has shown positive signs about taking up this film, and once the director gives a complete narration of

the story, she would like to finalise it," adds the source.

This is indeed a good opportunity for Samantha to be working with a legendary director such as Singeetham. We have learnt that the script of the film is ready, and once the industry is back to normal, the details of the film will be announced.

**Director Singeetham Srinivasa Rao has approached Samantha for the biopic, and the actress has shown positive signs about taking up this film**



## 55 years of a Tollywood legend

✓ He was called Andhra's James Bond, destined to become a superstar. Krishna has now completed 55 years in the Telugu film industry. His debut film *Tene Manasulu*, directed by Adurti Subba Rao, had released on March 31, 1965. The film, which was the first social film to be made in colour and had introduced Krishna and many other actors, was a huge hit back then. *Tene Manasulu* was also a huge musical hit, all of which ensured that it was a great debut vehicle for Krishna.

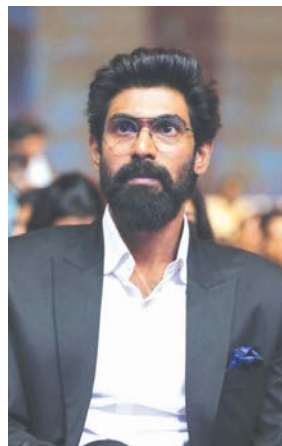
Krishna never looked back and became a huge star and one of the pillars of Telugu film industry, who is known to have introduced many techniques into the industry, too. The legendary actor's superstar son Mahesh Babu also recognised his father's journey and milestone via a post on Instagram. "My all time favourite #timelessclassic # *Tene Manasulu* (sic)," says Mahesh Babu.

## Balayya and Rana up for a remake

Actor Balakrishna hopes to remake the Malayalam hit, *Ayyappanum Koshiyum*



Balakrishna



Rana Daggubati

✓ The Malayalam film *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* has been a big hit. Now, word has it that our very own Balakrishna is showing interest in doing a Telugu remake of the film. The story revolves around the ego problems of a retired and influential military person and a police officer. In the Malayalam film, Biju Menon and Prithviraj played the two characters. We hear that Balakrishna looks interested in playing the retired military officer's role for the Telugu remake.

"Actually, Balakrishna wants to work with veteran director B. Gopal who was looking for a good subject. The former suggested this Malayalam film to Gopal. However, Sitara Entertainment had actually bought the remake rights of the film, and it is up to them whether they produce the film with Balakrishna," a source tells us. The film also needs another popular actor to play the cop's role, and Balakrishna apparently hopes for Rana Daggubati to do it. "Rana has also shown interest in doing the film, but he wants full clarity regarding the director and producer," adds the source. So, as we have it for the moment, if everything goes well, Balayya and Rana may soon act together in two powerful roles.

—Snippets by Suresh Kavirayani

# 'Watching old, classic films'

Actor Adivi Sesh, like everyone else, is in self isolation. He talks about how he's spending his time, being alone

SUBHASH K JHA

**Q How have you been coping with the lockdown?**

Initially, one was worried, but slowly you realise the best thing you can do is to isolate yourself. So, doing my best by isolating myself.

**Q How are you spending your time?**

Watching some scenes of what we shot for my next release *Major*, reading books I never would have read otherwise, and doing lots of exercise! Oh yes, forgot the movie bingeing part. Been on a classic spree — *The Godfather*, *Roja*, *Dalapathi* and many more. I have been watching all the old classics.

**Q Are you eating and sleeping more than usual?**

I keep falling asleep and it also makes me realise my adrenaline levels. Working on *Major* has been most satisfying, looking forward to getting back on set. About eating, as a kid I would eat more if bored, not now. Just don't do it.

**Q Your advise to your fans...**

It is important for all to understand that this is unprecedented in our lifetime. Many people still think of it as something "someone somewhere" is getting. Guys, stay in, be hygienic and please be vigilant specially about the young and the elderly. Monitor them but keep your distance. You never know, you could be a carrier and your body is fighting it just fine. Their bodies can't. Take this opportunity to do personal things you never would've done. We are all guilty of saying 'If only, I had the time' Well... you have the time now!

**Q Tell us about your next release.**

It's strange to put a halt to things right in the middle of *Major's* shoot. But the whole world is on pause. Can't wait to get back to working on this amazing story. Recently, for March 15, the birthday of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, we had some massive updates planned but postponed for obvious reasons. Will do them once the lockdown ends.

**It is important for all to understand that this is unprecedented in our lifetime. Many people still think of it as something "someone somewhere" is getting. Guys, stay in, be hygienic and please be vigilant specially about the young and the elderly**  
— Adivi Sesh







**CALVIN AND HOBBS** | Bill Watterson



**THE WIZARD OF ID** | Parker and Hartsd



**ARCHIE** | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



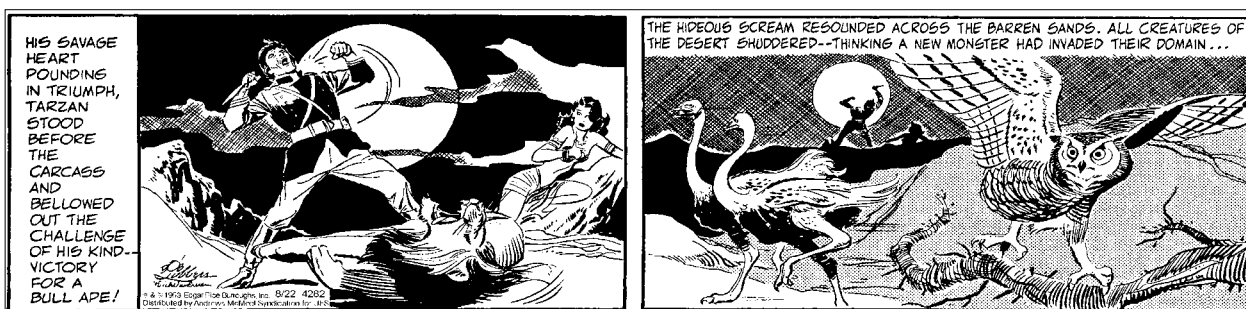
**BLONDIE** | Dean Young and John Marshall



**ANDY CAPP** | Reg Smythe



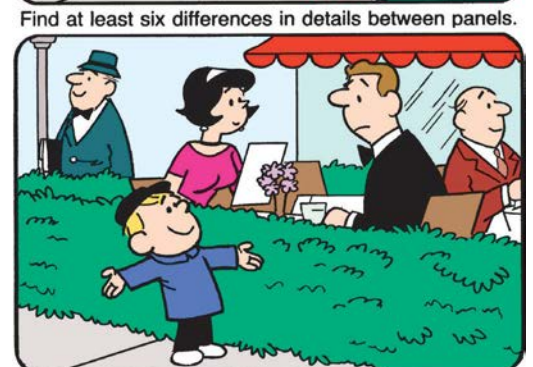
**TARZAN** | Edgar Rice Burroughs



**Dennis the Menace**



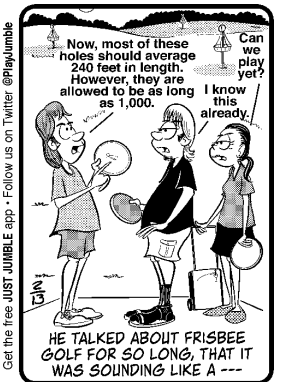
**hocus focus**



Differences: 1. Tie is different. 2. Aving is wider. 3. Boy's arm is raised. 4. Menu is longer. 5. Label is missing. 6. Boy's collar is smaller.

**jumble**

NUCKL  
TOARI  
DIRSUA  
YEPDES



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print your answer here:

(Answers tomorrow)  
Yesterday's Jumbles: AFTER UNCUT AFFIRM SESAME  
Answer: Illinois chose the slogan "Land of Lincoln" in 1955 in order to honor the respected — STATESMAN

# Kartik snubs Ekta?

The two were unable to agree on Kartik's fee, which is reportedly higher than Shahid Kapoor's fee



Apparently Ekta, who is not used to being turned down, has not taken this snub very well



**SUBHASH K JHA**

Rumour has it that Ekta Kapoor offered Kartik Aaryan a feature film, but he turned the lady tycoon down. Apparently the Queen of Soaps, who is not used to being turned down, has not taken this snub very well.

Some investigation into the royal snub reveals further details — “Kartik first offered her the age-old *ghisa-pita* excuse of *dates nahin hai*, shrugging his shoulders helplessly. But it seems Kartik and Ekta couldn't agree on the payment,” an informed source shares.

Ekta is known to not pay her actors unreasonable amounts of money. After a string of hits, Kartik's fee has shot up sky high. Apparently, goaded by his over-enthusiastic team, the *Luka Chuppi* star is asking for a fee higher than Varun Dhawan and Shahid Kapoor.

Maybe Ekta should approach him again now that the miserable failure of *Love Aaj Kal* is known to us all. If Kartik hiked his price after the hits, we would ascertain that he must have lowered it after the flop.

## Hera Pheri two decades later

With the cult classic film *Hera Pheri* completing 20 years after its release in March 2000, the buzz about a series revival is stronger than ever before. Starring Paresh Rawal as Baburao with Akshay Kumar and Suniel Shetty as Raju and Shyam, the film got two action heroes into comic roles, doing everything unheroic on screen and yet managing to entertain the audience.

“I cannot fathom the kind of response I still get about the film,” reminisces Suniel Shetty, who confirms that a remake is in the works. “The film is happening for sure. I won't know when,” he had told us recently.

“The first part had both of us, action heroes, doing comedy for the first time. We were shooting for the film in Chennai and we wrapped the



film in a single location in a lockdown kind of situation — that is how director Priyadarshan works,” the actor further reveals.

If one recalls, the second part never came close to being as funny as the original as most of the actors in the film tried to get loud and get the plaudits that only Baburao got in the film.

Producer Firoz Nadiadwala

— who last made *Welcome Back* — was last speaking to both Priyadarshan as well as Ahmed Khan to see who could direct the third part. Priyadarshan had directed the first part while Neeraj Vora directed the second part. Neeraj was to direct the third part of the film, but he expired. Earlier in 2015, they had planned the film with a partial change in cast with



“I cannot fathom the kind of response I still get about the film. The film is happening for sure

*Dostana* duo John Abraham and Abhishek Bachchan stepping in along with Suniel playing Ghanshyam, and Paresh retaining his Baburao slot. However, that did not happen.

—Sanskriti Media

## Alia's writing aspirations

Alia Bhatt is not just putting up videos of workouts and washing hands during the lockdown but is spending it bettering her craft. The actress is actually doing an online certification course on creative writing from an international institute.

“Alia comes from a very creative family and it is but evident that the actress — who was goaded into doing her own lines for her film *Sadak 2* by her father and director Mahesh Bhatt — has been taking the course. Alia is not really a writer, but she has also been putting together essays and other stuff, and will be writing a detailed script at the completion of the course. Her sister Shaheen is also a good writer, her half-sister Pooja is also a director like her father, and so it won't be long before we see her name in the credit list of films which does not fall under the starring category,” says an industry source.

Alia was slated to start shooting *Takht* with Karan Johar, but it has now been put on hold as the film was to have its schedules in Italy and Spain — two countries that have been heavily affected by COVID-19. Alia was to also do a photo shoot with the other women in the film, which got cancelled as the schedule has been indefinitely postponed till things normalise.

The actress was about to begin shooting for Rajamouli's film *RRR* as well, which has also been cancelled for the time being.

—Sanskriti Media

