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**DOMESTIC FLIGHTS START AFTER TWO MONTHS**

532 flights take off on Day 1: Non-metros see highest demand, Delhi-Patna most bookings

39,231 passengers flew on Monday, numbers set to increase, says Puri

PRANAV MUKUL

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

TWO MONTHS after they were grounded, 532 domestic flights crisscrossed the Indian skies Monday — the first day of resumption of air services.

Demand for non-metro routes is significantly higher than metro routes, with the Delhi-Patna route witnessing the highest number of bookings

INSIDE**SC LETS AIR INDIA FLY WITHOUT MIDDLE SEATS EMPTY TILL JUNE 6** [PAGE 7](#)

for the travel period between May 25 and May 31, according to information sourced from online travel agencies. The booking pattern is reflective of a trend which



At the IGI Airport in New Delhi on Monday. Tashi Tobgyal

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNNY



suggests bulk of the demand comprises those going to visit their homes or travelling for health-related procedures.

"From no domestic passenger flights till yesterday to 532 flights & 39,231 passengers today, action has returned to Indian skies. With Andhra Pradesh set to resume operations from tomorrow & West Bengal from 28 May, these numbers are all set to increase further," Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a tweet.

The Delhi-Patna route is **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

More troops to Uttarakhand after Chinese LAC build-up

UAV surveillance stepped up in Ladakh, mountain troops inducted

SUSHANT SINGH & MAN AMAN SINGH CHINNA
NEW DELHI, CHANDIGARH, MAY 25

AS FIELD-LEVEL talks to lower tensions along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh remain inconclusive, the Indian Army has increased its presence in Uttarakhand following reports of a Chinese troop build-up in an area on their side of the LAC.

And in eastern Ladakh, which is part of the western sector, the Army has inducted additional troops and has enhanced round-the-clock surveillance of the LAC through UAVs.

Sources told *The Indian Express* that the Army has also increased its presence along the boundary with China in Uttarakhand — part of the middle sector — following reports that Chinese troops have been deployed in increased numbers in the Guldong sector.

The Chinese build-up, sources said, was reported to have taken place over the last few days, following which the Army reinforced a brigade located in the area with additional units.

"Deployment ahead of Harsil has been strengthened due to reports of Chinese beefing up their

numbers in the opposite sector," a senior officer said.

In eastern Ladakh, sources said, the Army has started inducting more crews to operate UAVs for enhanced surveillance of the area. Extensive physical patrolling of the area is very difficult since "the rough terrain takes too much time, too many troops," sources said, but UAVs can provide regular updates on any Chinese movement along the LAC in Ladakh.

Fresh induction of troops, sources said, has taken place in Ladakh to strengthen Indian positions and create reserves.

Some of the specialist troops, sources said, have been moved from outside the theatre while other troops have been made available from "loop" battalions. Loop battalions refer to infantry units kept in an area pending their final induction or de-induction from posts in high altitude areas such as Siachen.

An official said reinforcements have already been provided to certain posts in Ladakh which are considered "critical" in case of sudden Chinese moves in the area. This, the official said, is based "on terrain, current Chinese deployment and our strategic vulnerabilities" — a pointer to the area around the **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Target 2 lakh tests daily, pvt lab share remains under 20%

Private labs complain of hidden cost, low volumes; 6,977 fresh cases

ABANTIKA GHOSH

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

HAVING MORE than trebled daily testing over a month, India is now gearing up to ramp it to 2 lakh a day. While the daily average has crossed 1 lakh tests, private laboratories, who fought long and hard to be allowed to test, have contributed to less than 20% of the total samples tested daily. This despite the fact that they make up almost 30% of the laboratory infrastructure.

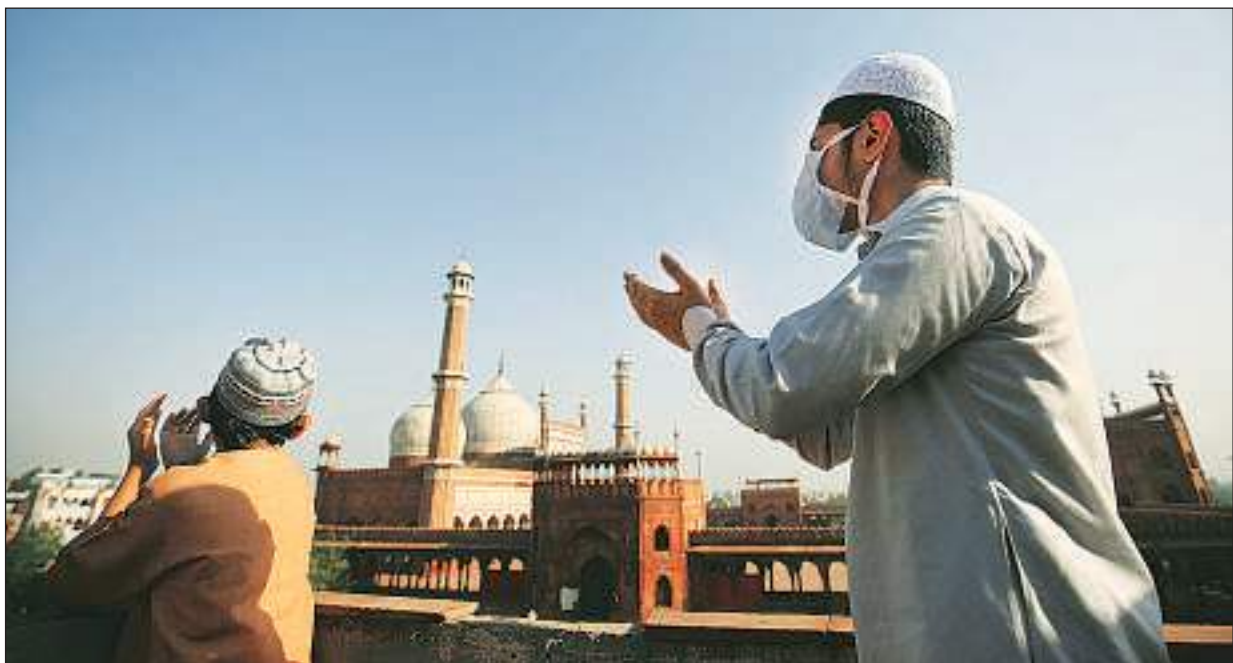
An analysis of testing records between April 16 and May 23 reveals that while tests in government labs went up by almost 270 per cent from 23,932 to 88,947, for private labs the figure rose more sharply, just under four times, from 4408 to 21450.

But as share of tests, on April 16, private labs did a little over 15 per cent of the total 28,340 tests done that day. And on May 23, that figure was just 19% of the total 1,10,397 tests.

INSIDE**WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION PUTS HCQ TRIALS ON HOLD** [PAGE 9](#)

Incidentally, the 178 private laboratories in the country make up 29 per cent of the total testing infrastructure. There are 431 government laboratories where Covid testing is currently taking place.

"India is currently testing about 1.1 lakh samples in a day and has the capacity to test about 1.4 lakh samples per day, which is being raised to 2 lakh samples per day... Most states have been working with National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP) to deploy TrueNAT machines for COVID-19 testing... No state has significant backlog of samples to be tested. More labs are being set up and **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



PRAY FROM HOME

Members of an Old Delhi family offer Eid prayers on the rooftop of their home on Monday. The Jama Masjid in the background has been closed since the beginning of the lockdown. Praveen Khanna

In Delhi, the share of private Covid beds occupied is double that in govt hospitals

ASTHA SAXENA

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

MORE THAN 75% of beds earmarked for Covid-19 patients in the capital's 10 private hospitals are occupied, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday. This is in stark contrast with government hospitals, where only a little over 38% of these designated beds are occupied.

Of the 677 beds for Covid patients in private hospitals, 509 were occupied on Monday, Kejriwal said. In government hospitals, 1,478 out of 3,829 beds

were occupied, he said.

"We issued an order on Sunday asking 117 nursing homes/private hospitals to earmark 20% beds for treatment of Covid-19 patients," the chief minister said. This was expected to add 2,000 beds at private facilities.

"At present, we have 4,500 beds in private and government hospitals in Delhi and around 2,500 are still available for patients," he said.

Until Monday afternoon, the capital had reported 14,053 cases of coronavirus infection, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Nurse's death: Colleagues say had to wear used PPEs

SOMYA LAKHANI

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

A DAY after a 46-year-old nurse at a private hospital in Delhi succumbed to Covid-19, her colleagues have alleged that the hospital made nurses "reuse personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves and masks".

On Sunday afternoon,



Ambika P K died on May 24

Ambika P K, a nurse at Kalra Hospital, died at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, where she **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Lockdown effect: Bail pleas of those booked under sedition, UAPA stuck

APURVA VISHWANATH

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

WITH COURTS across the country hearing only "urgent cases" through video-conferencing in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of bail pleas in cases involving serious charges such as sedition and under provisions of

the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) are stuck.

A pattern has been emerging in almost all the sedition cases slapped by the government during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens. From the case against 19-year-old Amulya Leona who was arrested on

February 20, to that of three Kashmiri engineering students who were arrested in Hubli, Karnataka, on February 15, from 19 people in Azamgarh arrested on February 5 to a UAPA case against Assam activist Akhil Gogoi, who was arrested on December 12 — courts have not prioritised these cases as **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

WORLD**JAPAN LIFTS EMERGENCY, ENDS RESTRICTIONS** [PAGE 13](#)**EXPLAINED****Older kids can follow rules**

IT IS easier to get secondary school (Class 9-12) children to follow social distancing norms and face-cover rules. Blended learning could split a class into two batches with each at home on alternate days. At least six feet between two students will ensure social distancing.

cer on the condition of anonymity.

The seating arrangement in a classroom will have to follow social distancing, which means two students will ideally sit six feet apart. This means that at one time, the entire student strength of one class or section will not be able to attend class together. Each class will have to be divided into batches of about 15 to 20 **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

THE EDITORIAL PAGE**THE LADAKH WARNING**By P STODBAN
[PAGE 6](#)**GUYANA**

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PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Balbir Singh Senior, the grand old man of hockey, passes away at 96

MIHIR VASAVDA

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

WHENEVER HE was asked to narrate his journey to greatness, Balbir Singh Senior could never find the right words. "It can't be explained," he often repeated. "It can only be experienced."

A goal-scoring machine from the days when hockey was played on grass, Balbir won three Olympic golds — 1948, 1952 and 1956 — and was India's most-

decorated athlete ever.

He passed away in Mohali Monday after a lengthy stay in hospital. He was 96.

A globally-recognised figure, whose contribution was acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2012, the soft-spoken, modest-a-fault legend was named among the world's 16 greatest icons, across all sports, who took the Olympic movement to lofty heights in the last 100 years.

Son of a freedom fighter,



BALBIR SINGH SENIOR
1924-2020



With his medals at home.
Express file

Balbir had a difficult initiation into hockey. He grew up in Moga, detesting the police who had jailed his father multiple times. The same police force, as fate would have it, would shape his hockey career.

The story goes that in 1945, the then Punjab Inspector General of Police, John Bennett, was so mesmerised by Balbir's play that he commanded his officers to recruit him. To avoid them, the young hockey player fled to Delhi and instead joined the Central Public Works Department team.

Days later, Balbir was handcuffed and brought back to

Jalandhar, where Bennett presented him with two options: be jailed or play hockey.

It was easy to understand why Bennett was desperate to sign up Balbir. He wasn't a great dribbler, at least not in the same league as Dhyan Chand, but he had other qualities. He was a team player, had a natural tendency to pass the ball around and score goals.

The following year, in 1946, Balbir led Punjab to their first national championship title in 14 years, forging a formidable partnership with inside-right Maqbool Hashmat. Then, months before Partition, Balbir combined with his other two

close friends, Ali Shah Dara (a gold medalist at the 1936 Olympics) and Muhammad Shah Rukh to help Punjab defend their title in Bombay.

By the time they returned home, however, things had taken a turn for the worse. Riots were on, homes were burning and Balbir, being a policeman, was on the streets, controlling violence. Dara and Shah Rukh had moved to Pakistan.

Balbir, Dara and Shah Rukh met at the London Olympics, representing different countries. Even without his usual allies, Balbir remained unstoppable. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Meanwhile, another meeting was held on Sunday at the field level between sector commanders of both the Indian and Chinese armies, but the talks remained inconclusive, sources said. It was their sixth meeting after Chinese soldiers moved into Indian territory at multiple locations.

3 THE OUTBREAK THE CITY

AIRPORT RESUMES FLIGHT OPS, WITH MASKS AND PPEs

At IGI airport, tales of homecoming after months

SUKRITA BARUAH & AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

AFTER A gap of two months, domestic passenger operations resumed in a limited way at Delhi Airport, with over 125 departures and 118 arrivals through the course of a day.

Terminal 3 of the airport looked very different from the always bustling transit space which had been closed in March, with the plan to make a third of pre-lockdown flights operational.

While all passengers were wearing masks and gloves, many had face screens while some were even wearing full PPE suits. A new addition to the departure gates were several small stands selling hand sanitisers for Rs 52, masks for Rs 12 and Rs 14, gloves for Rs 35 and PPE suits for Rs 640 and Rs 830.

With the first day of domestic operations coinciding with Eid-ul-Fitr, passengers included those who were happy at the thought of being reunited with their families before the end of the day.

"There are concerns about flying but my wife needs to join her new job at our hometown soon and I got the opportunity to be with my parents on the evening of Eid," said Mohammad Faisal, a doctor who works in Delhi, waiting for a flight to Varanasi.

Alex (29) had lost his job as an IT in-charge in an education institute during lockdown. He said he is now looking to shift base to Bengaluru in the hope of seizing



Passengers at IGI Airport, Monday. Domestic flights are operating from Terminal 3. Tashi Tobgyal

any early job opportunities.

"There are a lot of people like me who lost work during the lockdown and are hunting. I wanted to take the first flight to Bengaluru, where my brother lives, and start an early lookout for jobs because companies will have to start openings sometime again and I want to be among the first to grab them," he said. He had come to the airport from his hometown, Bareilly, after having paid Rs 7,000 for a cab.

Vikrant Rahi, a DSP with Chhattisgarh police, had made an ever longer journey to the airport. He had flown in on a morning flight from Raipur to take his wife and one-year-old daughter back to Chhattisgarh on an evening flight.

"My wife teaches in a school in Delhi. I've come to pick them up because she said that she needs help with our daughter. It is a bit stressful to travel with a child amid the coronavirus fears

but I don't see the situation getting better anytime soon, and both of them will be safer there than here," he said.

For many at the arrivals, Delhi was not the final destination. In fact, a large part of those who landed hailed from Uttar Pradesh, and they made up the bulk of passengers waiting in queues at private cab booths.

Several passengers tried looking for cabs on Ola and Uber apps but complained of lack of avail-

ability. Private cabs including Meru, Moga and a prepaid taxi stand were the only available options for those looking to make their way out of the airport. A cab towards Agra, for instance, cost anywhere between Rs 5,000-8,000 — with only two passengers allowed at a time.

The price was too steep for some. Twenty-year-old Munish Khan stood outside the arrival gate with two bags of luggage.

Stranded in Chennai since the lockdown, he is heading to Rampur in UP.

"I work in a private company and have been trying to come home since March. The first month, I survived on my savings, but soon money began to run out. I booked this plane ticket two days ago and now I have to look for a bus since there is not enough money for a private cab. I am relieved that I have made it so far. I hope to be home soon," he said.

Many left in the lurch as 82 flights are cancelled

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

EVEN AS hundreds of people moved in and out of Delhi through the airport on its first day of operations, many were left disappointed after multiple flights were cancelled following late communications between states and the Centre.

As many as 82 flights — departures and arrivals — were cancelled at Delhi airport on Monday. While the plan was to initially make a third of the pre-lockdown flights operational, some states requested the Centre to curtail the number, leading to cancellations. Flights to and from Mumbai, West Bengal and Telangana were among those cancelled.

While some passengers were notified last night about cancellations, giving them time to make alternate bookings, others found out only at the airport.

Tapan Sen (42) had arrived at New Delhi at 5 am after an overnight train from Jammu, where he had gone for work before the lockdown and had been stuck for two months. He had a late morning flight to Bagdogra in West Bengal, where his family lives.

AT IGI AIRPORT

118 Arrival
125 Departure
82 cancellations

■ All asymptomatic travellers told to monitor health for 14 days

■ Those showing symptoms to be isolated and taken in CATS ambulances to Safdarjung Hospital where their condition will be assessed

"Only when I tried to check in, I was told that the flight has been cancelled. I had not yet received any cancellation message from the airline," he said.

Some, meanwhile, got a message regarding cancellation on Sunday. "I was supposed to fly to Bhopal in the evening. I decided to contact the airlines after I couldn't check in online and was told that the flight was cancelled," said Rajesh Kumar, who was flying for personal reasons.

58-yr-old sanitation supervisor at AIIMS dies of coronavirus

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

A 58-YEAR-OLD sanitation supervisor at AIIMS, who had tested positive for Covid-19, died on Sunday evening. This is the second death reported from the medical institute in the past few days. Last week, a mess worker posted in the RPC canteen reportedly succumbed to the virus.

Heera Lal was a permanent employee of AIIMS and was posted in the OPD. Confirming his death, Dr D K Sharma, medical superintendent of the hospital, told *The Indian Express*: "Our sanitation inspector has passed away and he was Covid-19 positive. He was admitted to the trauma centre." Lal had been put on ventilator support.

At the trauma centre, four more Covid positive healthcare workers of the institute are undergoing treatment. So far, 156 healthcare workers — two faculty members, four resident doctors, 16 nurses, and other staff from the institute — have tested positive.

"The condition of the other four healthcare workers is stable. They are admitted in the ward," said a senior doctor from the JPN trauma centre.

Kuldeep Dhigan, general secretary, AIIMS SC/ST Employees' Welfare Association, said the supervisor had developed fever and mild respiratory discomfort following which he got himself examined at AIIMS.

"As he had no symptoms then, he was not tested for Covid-19. He underwent routine blood tests, was counselled and briefed about precautions to be taken and sent home," he said.

A resident of Noida's Khora Colony, he had been working with AIIMS for the last 33 years. According to sources, he complained of fever on May 15.

His son Prahlad Singh said: "My father then took leave for a few days but his condition worsened on May 19 and we took him to the AIIMS emergency department. He was immediately admitted. The next day, he was shifted to the trauma centre after he tested positive for the disease."

AMBIKA DIED ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Family wonders how to break news of nurse death to daughter

SOMYA LAKHANI
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

AS SOON as Akhil (22) landed in Delhi from Kerala on Monday evening, he rushed to see his 15-year-old sister Bhagyamol, who is alone and in quarantine at home in West Delhi's Rajouri Garden.

"As soon as I saw her, she started crying and asked how our mother is. I stood afar, held back my tears and told her she is in the ICU, she will get better and I will take them back to Kerala... I had to lie," said Akhil.

On Sunday afternoon, their mother Ambika P K (46) died due to Covid-related complications at Safdarjung Hospital. She worked as a nurse at Kalra Hospital in West Delhi's Kirti Nagar for over a decade, and lived in Delhi with her daughter.

Her husband Sanil Kumar works and lives in Malaysia, while Akhil is pursuing a career in the Malayalam film industry and lives in Kerala.

The last time Akhil spoke to his mother, she was being wheeled into the Covid-19 ICU

Ambika P K (46) died due to Covid-related complications at Safdarjung Hospital

at Safdarjung Hospital. He told *The Indian Express*, "She told me 'don't worry, I am going to the ICU... Come here'. She couldn't say anything more as she was having trouble breathing."

As Ambika battled the virus, her teenage daughter was put under home quarantine in their one-room rented house in Rajouri Garden. Taking care of her is one of Ambika's friends and colleague, who said, "I go to the house and drop off each meal, and tell her that everything will be okay. Poor child doesn't know her mother is no more, and it doesn't help that she is all alone inside. I call her every few hours and she only wants to know how her mother is."

Ambika's colleagues at Kalra Hospital remember her as a polite and hardworking woman who loved singing. Nursing offi-

cer Alice Raju recalled how the two women worked as medical staff at a hospital in Yemen in the mid 2000s before coming to Delhi. "She was ambitious, and easily adjusted in any department," said Raju.

Akhil said he hasn't been able to speak to his father a lot as he "breaks down" and is gutted that he is unable to return to Delhi from Malaysia anytime soon. Akhil will stay at an uncle's house three blocks away from his sister.

He was received at the Delhi airport by members of the United Nurses Association, who also held a citywide one-minute silence for Ambika across hospitals on Monday.

It was in January that the family was together in Delhi as they rang in the New Year. "If there was no virus and lockdown, she would have visited Kerala with my sister... I don't know how things changed so rapidly, I don't know what to tell my sister and when to tell her that our mother is dead. I never imagined a day like this would come," said Akhil.

No e-pass needed to travel to airport from Gurgaon

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MAY 25

THE GURGAON District Magistrate on Monday directed that people travelling from Gurgaon to the airport or train station, or vice versa, will not require a movement pass to cross the border as long as they have confirmed air or train e-tickets in their name.

In the order, the DM has stated, "Whereas the Government of India has decided to start the operations of domestic airlines from 25.02.2020 and trains from 01.06.2020 onwards and for this reason, the online ticket booking for the same has also started."

"...passengers who have a confirmed air/train e-ticket in their name shall be allowed to travel from the airport/railway station to their home/destination and vice versa. They will not require any movement pass for it. For this

purpose private cab operators such as Uber/Ola and other taxi services are allowed to operate," stated the order by District Magistrate Amit Khatri. The order further states that passengers have to book cabs "only for the above destination".

In Faridabad, similarly, Deputy Commissioner Yashpal Yadav clarified, "If people are looking to commute from Faridabad to the airport or vice versa, tickets will be more than enough".

Both Gurgaon and Faridabad had sealed their borders earlier this month, claiming that a large number of the coronavirus cases emerging in their districts were linked to Delhi.

Gurgaon has recorded 284 coronavirus cases so far, including 13 people who tested positive on Monday. Two people have succumbed to the infection so far.

Faridabad, meanwhile, has recorded 211 cases so far, with two more people testing positive on Monday.

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE DELHI Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), which has sounded off its staff that services may begin on a short notice of "24-48 hours", has decided to deploy full manpower across its network from Tuesday and begin preparations to run "double headway on all lines". Double headway implies that the frequency of trains will be high.

The Indian Express has learnt that the Metro plans to deploy customer facilitation agents at the station gates for thermal scanning of commuters. Token vending machines (TVMs) are likely to be disabled to discourage cash transactions, except in "unavoidable circumstances".

As the first step towards resuming services, DMRC has decided to deploy full manpower, including station controllers and housekeeping staff, from Tuesday, sources said. Cleaning of stations has also started.

Customer relations staffers have also been asked to show up for briefings on the new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that will govern services, as reported by *The Indian Express* on May 15.

"Frequency of trains across the lines on the first day of resumption of services will be at the maximum possible extent... It will be done for checking out the operational readiness per-



DMRC chief Dr Mangu Singh during an inspection last week.

haps. TVMs are likely to be disabled so that tokens and cash are not accepted. Overall, cash transactions are likely to be phased out entirely for the time being, except in unavoidable circumstances such as paying fines. Staffers have been told that services are likely to begin on a short notice of 24-48 hours," said sources.

Metro, like flight services which resumed on Monday, was under the list of restricted activities across India under the latest lockdown guidelines of the MHA. The Centre has, however, already shared with Metro operators across the country the SOP following which services will resume.

Under the SOP, the trains will stop for up to 30 seconds more than usual at stations to ensure social distancing among passengers boarding or alighting. Inside the trains, seating ca-

capacity will be limited, with 'do not occupy' stickers pasted on every alternate seat. Those standing will be expected to maintain a distance of at least a metre among themselves.

The SOP also underlines that "only asymptomatic passengers shall be allowed to enter stations". It adds that QR code-based tickets be linked with the Aarogya Setu app to ensure only "safe passengers" gain entry into stations once the restrictions on services are lifted. Metro operators have also been directed to make use of "Aarogya Setu App mandatory" for all passengers.

When contacted, a DMRC official said the decision to deploy all staffers is aimed to ensuring preparedness. "However, there are no directions so far from the government on resuming operations," the official said.

Days after opening border with Delhi, Ghaziabad seals it again

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NOIDA, MAY 25

WITH A sharp rise in cases over the last 12 days — 91 cases — the Ghaziabad administration once again sealed its borders with Delhi on Monday afternoon.

According to officials, majority of new cases were linked to those travelling back and forth between Delhi and Ghaziabad. As of Monday, Ghaziabad has 238 cases — the sixth highest in Uttar Pradesh — with 189 recoveries and two deaths.

"In consultation with the Chief Medical Officer and his team, it has been decided to seal borders with Delhi... Persons involved in essential services will not face issues," said Ajay Shankar Pandey, District Magistrate (Ghaziabad).

Earlier, the UP government had barred those travelling from Delhi's containment zones to Ghaziabad and had given the administration freedom to frame detailed guidelines.

Accordingly, in guidelines for



The administration cited a sharp spike in Covid cases in the past 10 days. Doctors, nurses will not require passes. Archive

Lockdown 4.0 issued on May 22, the Ghaziabad administration had said one can travel from Delhi to Ghaziabad (except those in containment zones) without restrictions.

Under the new order, doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and ambulances will not require passes and will have to present their ID cards at the border.

The Ghaziabad administration has also urged the Delhi government to maintain the 33% working rule for offices since thousands of Class IV employees travel from the district to Delhi. Government employees will be issued travel passes by their department which will be checked at the border, the order said.

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वाणिज्य एवं उद्योग मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार
SPICES BOARD INDIA
Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt. of India

COVID-19 & the Spice Industry

Currently, due to lockdown, 30000 Ha of cardamom cultivation in Kerala is estimated to be affected. Cultural and plant protection operations were hindered in the plantations due to restrictions imposed, creating inadequate labour resources seriously affecting the final round of harvesting, post-harvest operations, etc. The entire system of production and supply links were disrupted causing economic loss to the stakeholders in many ways. Farmers and traders were worried about the low demand, decline in price and deterioration in quality due to storage over long period. Spices Board developed a SOP to be followed in the cardamom plantations and proposed schemes/programmes for interim relief to various stakeholders in the industry, which has been submitted to the Ministry for concurrence and approval. The Board has successfully resolved the issues faced in the export of small cardamom to Saudi Arabia recently, and this has spurred a new wake in the sector to facilitate better price realization.

There have been many discussions on the medicinal properties of spices and the Board proposes for development of commercially viable nutraceutical products based on these properties to tap the opportunity to the most. Sustaining the production, export of spices, ensuring quality and food safety are of paramount importance currently. Hence, emphasis will be given on food safety in all nodes of the supply chain and production and exports of organic products. The Board is in the process of suitably modifying the existing schemes in this regard.

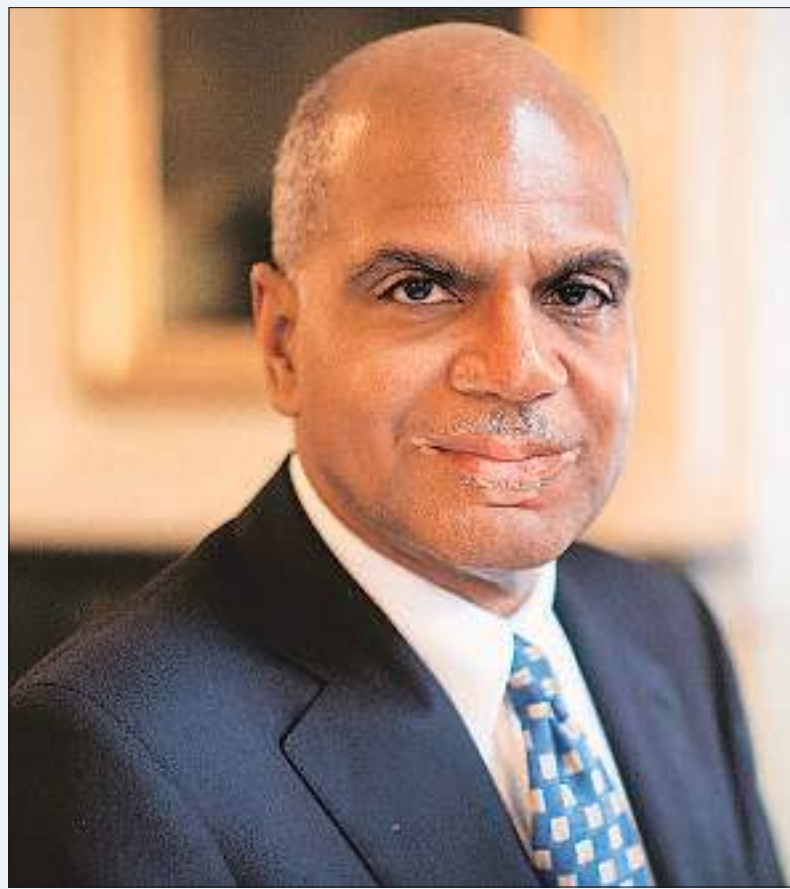
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Guyana

**54TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY TO BOOST FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19**

Message from the High Commissioner for Guyana

**H.E. Dr. David Goldwin Pollard,***High Commissioner to India, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh, and Ambassador to Indonesia*

Greetings from Guyana

What a difference another year has made! At the Independence Day Reception last year, I remarked on what a difference Guyana's fifty-third year of independence had made, particularly in relation to political developments at home. This fifty-fourth year, however, has shaken Guyana, India and the whole world!

How could one small virus in man have become one giant setback for mankind in such short order? A new coronavirus, unknown to medical science just six months ago, has become a pandemic that has now killed one third of a million people and infected more than five million.

"Social distancing", a behaviour previously unknown to most of us, is now our way of life as we fight to hold on to it. So, we do not mark the start of Guyana's fifty-fifth year of Independence with a grand reception but rather with the publication of this message about our country's progress. May you find some hope in Guyana's story during the past year.

First Oil

In December 2019, Guyana produced its "first oil" more than three months ahead of an already ambitious schedule. Our government had succeeded in delivering its key economic objective by enhancing and providing an environment of good governance and transparent practice that enabled the ExxonMobil-led oil consortium to achieve an engineering and technical milestone. ExxonMobil's country manager said, "This has been the best and most rewarding job I have ever had," as we moved from the initial discovery offshore to production in less than five years.

So, despite the global, economic ravages of the pandemic and the chaotic oil markets that have resulted, Guyana still expects to record GDP growth in excess of 20% this year. The country's medium term economic prospects remain good and our sovereign wealth fund will soon clear its first cheque.

General Elections

Voting in Guyana's General & Regional Elections on 2nd March, 2020 was orderly and peaceful. It was towards the end of the count that problems arose when the biggest electoral District 4, which includes the capital Georgetown, was being processed. Because of the disruption and administrative chaos that engulfed the District 4 count, no official declaration of the results was made.

A number of legal injunctions & challenges then ensued relating to the undeclared results, the process by which matters could be rectified and the

constitutional authority of the Guyana Elections Commission. Suffice to say that a national recount administered by the Guyana Elections Commission is now in progress under careful scrutiny by authorities from CARICOM (the Caribbean Community). It is being live-streamed and other arrangements for improved transparency are in place.

Three months after voting, the country is both tense and weary in equal measure. The widespread hope is that the results of an exhaustive electoral process, once announced, will confer a deserved degree of legitimacy on the next government.

Guyana – India

The strong collaboration between Guyana and India continued during the year. I would particularly like to acknowledge recent Indian support for Guyana's COVID-19 programme. It has been much appreciated.

There was also significant progress with a Line of Credit project on drainage & irrigation. Technical visits were exchanged and the required Indian manufactured drainage pumps have arrived in Guyana for installation there.

A Guyana-India Business Forum was launched and a delegation visited Guyana last autumn. A series of successful business interactions has led to activity in the Sugar and Gold mining industries and to real estate investments. There have been follow-up visits and, generally, a good platform is being built on which trade and investment opportunities can prosper.

Dr. Srinivasa, the new Indian High Commissioner to Guyana, took up his posting during the year. As luck would have it the visiting business delegation was able to join him for the commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's 150 birth anniversary in Georgetown.

On my own behalf, I was very pleased to join the visit by diplomatic Heads of Mission to Jammu & Kashmir in January which was hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs. After the events of 5th August, 2019, the visit was particularly informative and revelatory. It contributed substantially to Guyana's understanding of the impact of the constitutional changes made in Jammu & Kashmir last August.

Closing

Our world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic but not enough to loosen the close bonds of heritage, politics and development that bind us. We look forward to the undoubted challenges and opportunities to come and hope only that the Republics of India and Guyana continue to traverse them together in accustomed friendship.

ABHISHEK PATHAK

BORDERED BY the waters of the Atlantic Ocean to the north, Guyana occupies a key geographical position as the gateway to the Caribbean and South America. The country is an emerging economy with enormous untapped potential in its natural resources. Access to key export markets, an English-speaking population and affordable labour markets present investors with profitable avenues to do business in Guyana. The country offers investors a plethora of opportunities in many sectors including renewable energy, oil & gas, agriculture, forestry, mining, and tourism.

Through market-oriented reforms targeted towards opening of its economy, Guyana provides an investor-friendly environment in terms of stable macroeconomic policies, attractive investment incentives and a regulatory environment and corporate tax regime that does not discriminate against foreign investors. In fact, there are favourable incentives for FDIs including VAT exemptions, income tax holidays and reduced tariffs on imports.

Guyana has extensive renewable energy resources that suit the implementation of projects on a variety of scales. Hydropower sites already surveyed range from large-scale Gigawatt projects suitable for the national grid and export to neighbouring countries, to small and micro sized units. Lying only a few degrees north of the equator, Guyana's solar energy resource is par-



ticularly well suited for off-grid power for remote, hinterland communities, as well as rooftop installations in urban areas. Solar parks for power to the coastal grid would also integrate well with Biomass electricity from the large agricultural sector. The Green State Development Strategy has set an ambitious target of achieving a 100% renewable electricity supply for the National Grid by 2030.

Furthermore, the new Oil & Gas industry has moved from discovery in May 2015 to production in December 2019. With gross recoverable reserves of 8 billion barrels of oil-equivalent off-shore, the Stabroek Block is the most significant new oil find in recent years. Developed by ExxonMobil, Hess and CONOCO, it will likely power Guyana's GDP growth to above 20% this year on the way

to it becoming the next big oil producer in the Western world.

Guyana has extensive tracts of productive, agricultural land with existing large-scale production of rice, sugar and other crops. This resource presents huge opportunities for processed and semi-processed foods, high-value certified organic products, etc. In 2018, the Agriculture and Livestock sector represented approximately 11% of Guyana's GDP. Guyana also has vast forest resources covering more than 75% of its landmass. This is rather at odds with Forestry's comparatively small contribution of 3% to the country's GDP in 2018. There are clearly significant investment opportunities for sustainable development of this sector. In 2016, India was the single largest destination for Guyana's timber

products, closely followed by China.

The Mining & Quarrying sector represents a critical component of Guyana's economy, contributing 20.4% to GDP in 2018. In addition, the extractive sector accounted for approximately 42% of Guyana's total exports in 2018. With the substantial increase in gold prices in 2020, the gold mining business, in particular, will be of interest to investors. The country has garnered interest from the world's largest mining companies due to its location on the mineral-rich Guiana Shield.

Additionally, Guyana's unparalleled natural beauty coupled with its unique cultural heritage make it a favourite among South American countries in the Caribbean community. The country is home to many attractive tourist sites including the majestic Kaieteur Falls, the highest single-drop waterfall in the world, and the renowned St. George's Cathedral in Georgetown, reputedly the world's tallest wooden building. Abundant wildlife, numerous species of flora and fauna and spectacular birdlife were amongst the reasons why Guyana won the "Best of Ecotourism" Destination prize for 2019 at the ITB Global Travel Fair. The Government of Guyana is actively facilitating the development of this sector with investment opportunities that include development of the Kaieteur Park area as a major tourist destination, development of niche tourism markets and services to support ecotourism and adventure tourism, and the development of hospitality services to cater to international tourists.

Exploring business prospects in Guyana is a rewarding exercise

**Balram Adlakh,** *Managing Director,* Uttamenergy Limited

IN October 2019, I was part of a delegation from India exploring investment and business opportunities in Guyana. Our company Uttamenergy specialises in power plants utilising biomass and waste, and our business group is also a leader in the sugar industry—being a major producer of sugar in India, and also a supplier of machinery and equipment to some of the largest sugar complexes in the world. Guyana, an old-time producer of sugar that is going through a profound transformation in its economy, had been of great interest to us. We were honoured to be invited by the High Commissioner of Guyana to India to be a part of this delegation and witness the country first hand.

Since we had reached Georgetown with a couple of days to spare before our official meetings were to begin, my colleague and I took the liberty to venture out to the town. What immediately struck me was the freshness and diversity of Guyanese culture, and yet the pleasant familiarity it has to offer to visitors from India. A long-time admirer of Caribbean food myself, I wasted no time in finding a nearby roti shop to try out some curries and other Indo-Caribbean delicacies such as pholourie and dhaal puri. One can't help but think that the vibrancy of Guyana, evident from its diverse music and food, the many religions and therefore festivities, and the passion for cricket we witnessed since the Caribbean Premier League had been underway at the time, makes the country akin to India in many ways. Guyana being an English speaking country, the only one in mainland South America, also makes it easy for Indian visitors to comfortably get by there. Of course, there are deep and historic cultural



ties the two countries share.

The recent growth spurt witnessed by Guyana due to the anticipation and subsequent production of oil is being well utilised to bring about an overhaul of other industries as well, such as in the sugar and energy sectors. This makes India, the largest sugar producing nation, and our group which offers the most cutting edge technologies in both sugar and energy, very natural partners for Guyana. To our delight, in the subsequent days of our trip we found the country to be astoundingly rich in natural resources, including the ones our companies specialise in making use of. The sugarcane growing season for instance offers two crops per year instead of one, as is common in India, owing to the country being close to the equator and no other crops competing for land use. We observed that newly developed varieties of sugarcane can be used in Guyana to drastically increase yield and sucrose content, and high grade



sugar can be produced in the country to be exported throughout the Caribbean to start with, along with fuel ethanol and other value added products. We are keen to implement many of the lessons from our decades long experience in the sugar industry in India.

The resulting biomass incidentally turns out to be adequate in itself to generate green, renewable and carbon neutral power for the entire country, which is comprised of fewer than a million people. Not to mention, Guyana has a similar potential for power generation from waste husk from its rice mills, an abundant potential for solar energy due to its geography, as well as for hydro-electric power due to the many rivers which flow through the country.

The delegation included other representatives from Indian companies with business interests ranging from hospitality to mining. As we continued on our week long agenda, we had the chance to not

only visit the sugar estates, but also hear first hand from all major departments of the government about their policies and development plans for the future, and to interact with some of the local business owners about their successes and aspirations. We also made a day trip travelling eastward on the northern coast through to the county of Berbice where, besides interacting with businesses based in the region, we visited the beautiful Indian Arrival Monument, which was completed just last year. We continued onward to the countryside and eastern sugar estates till near the banks of the Corentyne river which forms the border with Suriname, before heading back to Georgetown. We all realised then what a large land mass the country comprises of for its small population, since we had only traversed but a part of its northern coast.

In what was a meticulously planned, extremely well organised and memorable trip, courtesy of the High Commissioner of Guyana and the Government of Guyana, we gained a new appreciation for the immense potential and scope of the partnership between India and Guyana. Be it in the sugar industry, or in other areas such as infrastructure or energy, Indian companies offer a very compelling value proposition to Guyana, albeit with a responsibility to deliver excellence which they must not take lightly. It's a matter of pride for Indian companies such as ours to be able to serve Guyana during this crucial phase in its development, and we look forward to being part of the Guyanese growth story.

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ADVERTORIAL



Guyana

54TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY TO BOOST FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

An occasion to thank Guyana and its friendly people



Air Marshal (Dr) Pawan Kapoor AVSM, VSM, and BAR (Retd), Vice-Chancellor, Lincoln American University

ON THE auspicious occasion of the 54th Anniversary of The Independence Day of Guyana, I, on behalf of the entire family of Lincoln American University, convey my spirited greetings and warm wishes to the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. When Guyana gained freedom on the historic day of 26 May, 1966, an independent nation's journey to growth and prosperity began, and to my delight, it continues. With over five decades of this journey, fuelled with efforts, dedication, mutual co-operation, and devotion of the Guyanese, Guyana has amazed the world with its distinct milestones. Growing literacy rates, better health and well-being of the Guyanese, industrial development, and promising economic growth are a testimony to Guyana's success story in



the making. In the capacity of Vice-Chancellor of Lincoln American University in Georgetown city, I feel immensely privileged, proud, and honoured to be a part of Guyana's growth story. The support that we, as an institution, have got from the Government of Guyana and all the Guyanese in pursuit of our mission to make medical education and



health affordable to the masses is priceless. Today, I take this opportunity to convey my gratitude to all the Guyanese for allowing us to make a positive difference to education and health in Guyana. So far, our Guyana campus is home to about 250 medical students from Guyana, India,

and other countries worldwide, who will step out as medical professionals in the times to come. I am confident that this new crop of doctors will surely make a difference to the health ecosystem of Guyana, for better. Together with our faculty, our students are deeply involved in local community healthcare related activities

ities and understand from the very beginning of their medical career that their services are for the community which gives them an opportunity to learn, grow and serve selflessly. The progress that Guyana as a nation state and Lincoln American University as a medical institution has made so far gives us ample grounds to feel proud and also the encouragement and motivation to do more and achieve greater heights. As we continue to work shoulder to shoulder, I am sure we will overcome the unexpected challenges that we and fellow human beings are facing today in terms of the global pandemic. The faculty, staff and students continue to support wholeheartedly the efforts of the Ministry of Health, Govt. of Guyana to contain and overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19. Our students have found a home in this aesthetic, beautiful, pristine country that is full of friendly people. This is the land which shall convert their dreams and aspirations into Reality. May this land of many waters and diverse cultures keep inspiring the world with its motto "One People, One Nation, One Destiny." May The Golden Arrowhead keep billowing in pride. May we keep moving forward together on our shared path of Guyana's development, prosperity, and even greater glory. With our best wishes, always. Toll free number: 1800 843 9595

Guyana is a haven for investment today



Termining Guyana as a 'home away from home', **Arun Jain**, Director, V.S. Infrastructure Capital Ltd and Founder President of Guyana-India Business Forum, tells **Abhishek Pathak** from The Indian Express group the country offers the Indian business community tremendous opportunities in the oil and gas, manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors, including IT

What motivated the establishment of the Guyana India business Forum?

Basically, our purpose of starting this forum was to explore business opportunities in Guyana whose huge untapped potential and similarities to our Indian culture are little known in India today. There is a lot of scope for integration between the two economies and business communities. The country's key geographic position in the Caribbean and South America combined with its natural resources, access to key export markets, English-speaking population and affordable labour present investors profitable opportunities to do business in Guyana. The country has a population of about 750,000 of which 40% are of Indian origin. The presence of such a large number of Indian-origin people affirms that India shares strong cultural ties with Guyana. In a sense, Guyana can be termed as a 'home away from home' for Indian investors. The country offers tremendous opportunities to investors as Guyana is into oil production and its economy is growing at the fastest rate in the world today. India should definitely set up a business chamber there to explore opportunities in oil and gas, manufacturing and the service sectors including IT. India's huge workforce, comprising skilled and unskilled workers, can be made to explore such avenues in Guyana. Clearly, the country has a lot of untapped potential which we wanted to explore through this forum.

What are the types of investment opportunities in Guyana?

Since Guyana is opening up its economy due to oil exports, the Real Estate prices in the country have started shooting up. This, in turn, has led to support for and development of the tourism, manufacturing and mining industries. These three industries together are propelling Guyana to newer heights and present abundant opportunities for Indian businesses to thrive in the country. In all these three verticals, Indians have a lot of expertise and the manpower to tap opportunities in Guyana. Given the right support, it will prove a superb avenue for Indian businessmen to unearth the plethora of opportunities that exist in Guyana. One of our members from Mumbai has already gained access to a concession in Guyana for gold mining purposes. Construction is another vibrant sector in Guyana right now and we should definitely capitalise on that. In fact, a construction company from Mumbai has acquired space to build a five-star hotel in Guyana and, even after acquisition of the land, its price shot up dramatically.

What are your thoughts about Indian participation in the sugar industry in Guyana?

Being one of the largest industries in India and Guyana both, investment in the sugar industry of Guyana should definitely be considered. In this regard, many of our members have visited Guyana as part of two delegations in a short span of six months, to assess the opportunities offered by this industry. They met with top sugar industrialists, government officials, ministers and the Indian High Commissioner to explore the possibilities. One Indian sugar group is looking seriously to acquire and invest in the sugar and power sectors in Guyana with an integrated approach.

A National Day Reception to remember

ON May 27th, 2019 the Cooperative Republic of Guyana hosted a reception at the ITC Maurya to celebrate its 53rd Independence Anniversary. The Chief Guest was Vijay Thakur Singh, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs.

Many Heads of Mission, Business Associates and Guyanese residing in India were present on the occasion to celebrate Guyana's National Day. The evening provided a glimpse of Guyanese's culture. There was music in the form of

steel-pan rhythms, soca, chutney, etc. The food included delicious Guyanese pastries like pine tarts and salaras. For connoisseurs of liquor, there were the famous El Dorado 12, 15 and 21-year-old Guyanese rums. With the continuous viewing

of videos of Guyana's natural wonders, its discovery of oil and its trade and investment possibilities, the invitees were treated to the wonders and beauty of Guyana, evident in its rich and bountiful resources, besides being offered an insight

into what it has to offer to the world. In summary, the event highlighted the warm and friendly ties between Guyana and India and, by extension, Guyana's relations with the diplomatic and business communities in India.



H.E. Dr. David Goldwin Pollard, High Commissioner of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to India with the chief guest, Vijay Thakur Singh-Secretary East, MEA



(L-R) The High Commissioner, his wife, Dr. Annabelle Pollard, the Chief Guest and First Secretary Esther Gittens



Playing of the National Anthem



Glimpse of Guyanese Culture — cultural diversity is a hallmark of present-day Guyana



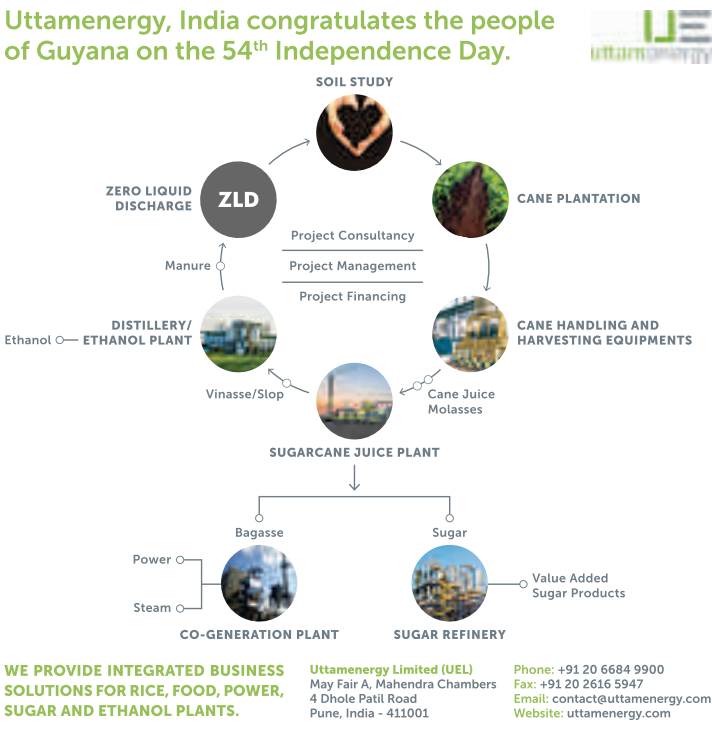
Glimpse of must-visit places of Guyana — South America's Biggest Little Secret



Display of Guyana's First Oil — Guyana is now an oil-producing nation



Display of Guyana's First Oil — Guyana is now an oil-producing nation





EID TREAT

Children buy ice-cream with the money they received as Eidi, at Shaheen Bagh on Monday. *Abhinav Saha*

JNU 'advises' students in hostels to leave, invites student union ire

ARANYA SHANKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE JAWAHARLAL Nehru University (JNU) administration on Monday "strongly advised" students still remaining on campus to return to their hometowns, now that train services have resumed.

JNU is a residential campus with a majority of students staying in hostels. Earlier in March, several students had left the campus after they were asked to vacate hostels by the administration and had taken temporary residence in the national capital.

Many such students later expressed a desire to return, saying the stop-gap arrangements they made were no longer feasible.

In a circular on Monday, Dean of Students Sudheer Pratap Singh said, "Many students re-



JNU is a residential campus with a majority of students staying in hostels. *Archive*

quested to stay back in hostels" earlier "due to non-availability of public transport during the lockdown".

"As is widely reported, the Indian Railways has begun to run special trains, and around 200

more trains are going to be started from 1st June 2020. The intra-state bus and taxi services have also been started by the state governments," the circular stated.

"As per the MHA, Govt. of

India and Delhi Government guidelines... the University has announced students can return to campus on or after 25 June 2020 and till then all academic activities are closed," it added.

The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) said the administration was "deliberately putting students' lives and safety at risk". "Since the administration itself acknowledges that the number of Covid-19 cases are increasing in Delhi, is it advisable that students venture out and put their lives at risk?..." the JNUSU said.

This, the JNUSU said, "not only puts the safety of students at risk, but also demonstrates that the JNU administration has abandoned all sense of responsibility towards its students in a manner that is not only shameful but also criminal".

Northwest DM office hacked for e-passes

New Delhi: The Delhi Police is on the lookout for unknown persons who allegedly hacked a computer in Northwest District Magistrate's office in Kanjhawala to illegally issue e-passes for interstate travel.

The fraud came to light after senior officials observed discrepancies in the number of passes issued and also noticed that someone had changed the password for the registration of e-passes. Delhi Police said they received a complaint from the DM Northwest office on Friday.

"Officers from the DM office said someone had forged e-passes by hacking into the office computer. They also suspect the role of office staff. We have registered a case against unknown persons under sections of the IT Act," said DCP (Rohini) Pramod Kumar Mishra.

Police are on the lookout for the illegal e-passes and suspect one of the staffers to have leaked information to the accused in exchange for money. They are questioning data operators and other staffers who work in the IT department.

The DM office has already pulled down the website as investigation is on. Meanwhile, a senior officer from SDM office in Kanjhawala confirmed that a complaint has been filed. The Northwest DM didn't respond to calls or texts seeking a comment.

Last week, there were over five cases where police caught men with forged e-passes or registration documents as they tried to leave Delhi. In these cases, police caught the accused after they scanned the printed e-passes during picket-checking. The passes didn't have correct registration and other details. **ENS**

SCHOOL ISSUED NOTICE BY DoE RESPONDS

Duty of govts to give laptops, net to EWS kids: School to HC

PRITAMPAL SINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

SANSKRITI SCHOOL in Chanakyaपुरi has submitted before the Delhi High Court that it is the "duty" of the Centre and Delhi government to provide equipment to economically weaker section (EWS) or disadvantaged group category students, enabling them to attend online classes.

The school said this in an affidavit filed in the High Court. It is among the 15 schools issued a showcause notice by the Delhi government's Directorate of Education (DoE) for not providing free laptops/iPad/phones with high speed internet to students from these categories.

The school also submitted that due to the circular from the Delhi government's Directorate of Education (DoE) to only charge tuition fee, schools have "severe restrictions on their cash flow, while most of the expenditure is continuing".

"Directing them (the school) to purchase video conferencing equipment for several students, while restraining their ability to collect fees and raise funding, would be impractical and illogical," the affidavit said.

The school, however, claimed in its affidavit that they have a mechanism in place — creating "WhatsApp groups for

EWS category students, creating special videos for them to clarify their doubts, and taking regular feedback from students as well as teachers to ensure doubt removal".

"... Constant efforts are made by teachers, counsellors and representatives of the school to reach out to students and their parents through phone calls, emails and WhatsApp groups," the affidavit said.

The DoE, however, has stated that it is binding on all private unaided recognised schools to ensure that students from the EWS or disadvantaged groups are not "deprived" of online classes.

The court was hearing a plea by an NGO, Justice for All, which sought to provide free laptops, tablets, phones to EWS children so they can access online classes.

The NGO, in its plea filed through advocate Khagesh Jha, said private unaided schools' decision to conduct classes via video conferencing would affect over 50,000 EWS students, many of whom cannot afford laptops, phones and high-speed internet.

Hearing the plea, the court on May 8 had sought replies from the Centre, Delhi government, New Delhi Municipal Council, MCDs and 10 private unaided schools.

Responding to the same, Sanskriti School said that "it is today well settled that the financial burden arising out of the re-

quirements of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, is to be borne exclusively by the State and Central governments."

The affidavit stated that the school "maintains impeccably high standards of education, and goes above and beyond the minimum mandate of the law to ensure that no child is left behind". They claimed that they are even extending help to students of classes IX to XII.

"At this stage, these efforts have resulted in 90% regular attendance of EWS children during the online classes, and as mentioned previously, each class is being recorded for later viewing and peers are reaching out over the phone..." the affidavit added.

It further submitted that "it is also important to remember that even during ordinary times, when there is no lockdown, schools rarely have 100% attendance due to varying reasons. In the present times, many of the parents may have gone back to their villages due to the ongoing migrant crisis..."

Amid the pandemic, all schools have moved their classrooms to the virtual space. However, as reported by *The Indian Express*, EWS students in private schools have across challenges such as no laptops and smartphones as well as no internet connection.

For cricket in Sonapat, Tiwari finds himself on sticky wicket

ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

DELHI BJP chief Manoj Tiwari and the Aam Aadmi Party engaged in a war of words after a video of the Northeast Delhi MP playing cricket in Haryana's Sonapat emerged on social media.

In the video, Tiwari was seen playing cricket on a privately-owned cricket ground in Ganaur, meeting people in a gathering and singing songs. AAP called the act "insensitive" while Tiwari said the party was "unnecessarily politicising this issue".

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said, "At this time of Covid crisis, the way Tiwari went to another state to play cricket, by violating lockdown norms, is an utterly insensitive act. Every day, thousands of poor migrant labourers are walking on the streets and many of them have lost their lives due to road accidents. Ignoring such a humanitarian crisis, how can an elected public representative go to another state to play cricket?"

Tiwari hit back saying that he has not violated social distancing or lockdown norms: "The



Tiwari (centre) said all norms were followed. *Twitter*

MHA permitted the opening of stadiums, without spectators. Based on that, I decided to play. All norms were followed."

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, he claimed: "I had gone there to meet a few people. AAP is unnecessarily politicising this issue as they want to hide the fact their MLA Prakash Jarwal is involved in extortion, which led to a doctor committing suicide."

He was referring to AAP MLA Prakash Jarwal, who was arrested in connection with the suicide of a South Delhi doctor last month. The family had levelled charges of extortion and harassment against the MLA, who has denied them.

Delhi BJP media in-charge Neelkant Bakshi said Tiwari went to meet someone in Ganaur, which is 30 km from Delhi, taking prior permission from police.

"Later, on the request of the owner of the ground, he went to see a cricket match. There was no plan to play. As spectators were not allowed, they offered him a chance to play," he said.

Bakshi added that the Delhi unit chief has been helping lakhs of people since the lockdown by distributing ration.

Four Haryana districts bordering the national capital, including Sonapat, have sealed borders due to spike in Covid-19 cases.

Simple activities, spoken English classes: How govt schools are keeping kids engaged

SUKRITA BUAUH
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

"TEACHER BANNED ke liye mujhe chahiye bhot saara confidence, bhot saari knowledge... sahi tarha sequence mein study karni hogi... apne parents ka support, teachers ka support, friends ka support," wrote Mansi, a class XII student at a government school in Janakpuri.

This was in response to a simple activity her teacher had sent her on WhatsApp — she had to think about what are the different things she requires to achieve her dreams. With children in Delhi at home for over two months now, schools across the city have been conducting teaching-learning online.

However, the Delhi government's education department has also been trying to engage students in its schools in different online learning activities outside of core academic curriculum — to varying levels of student engagement.

The activity that Mansi's teacher had sent her was part

of the Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC), a programme started by the government last year for students of classes IX to XII, which went digital around a month and a half ago during the lockdown.

Twice or thrice a week, students are sent links to YouTube videos explaining small simple activities such as 'Aap kaun se daron se dosti karna chahte hai' or 'Meri sapno ki duniya'. These are sent both through SMS to their parents' phones and through class WhatsApp groups. These are also posted on Instagram and Facebook pages created for digital EMC. Students send their responses on those WhatsApp groups, or even to the Instagram and Facebook handles, through drawings, edited images, videos or just text.

"So far, we have sent nine such activities and we have had between 20,000 to 36,000 students responding to them. Given the accessibility constraints of students in our schools, of course we cannot force them to take part but

they are participating very well. The early activities were lighter to engage them, but we are started towards those requiring more critical thinking," said project coordinator Sapna Yadav.

Each batch of students has been 1-1.5 lakh students.

Another online programme which students have been promoted to class IX and those who have completed class IX have been participating in is online mathematics fundamentals classes conducted by Khan Academy. Links to these classes are also sent every alternate day to their parents' phones, which lead to two-three instructional videos and two-three problems for them to solve online.

"We have been working on the feedback we have been getting on these. At the beginning, we had told the Khan Academy team that we would like to develop content in Hindi as that would suit our students. But what happened was that a lot of students actually found the chaste Hindi that was being used difficult to under-

stand, since the language used by teachers in classrooms is a mixture of Hindi and English. The subsequent content has been modified accordingly," said Shailendra Sharma, principal advisor to the education director.

Since mathematics has been identified as a weak point of students in their class X boards, these classes are intended to strengthen their fundamental concepts.

Students who are waiting for their board examinations to be completed have also had online spoken English classes organised for them with British Council. With the datesheets of their remaining exams released by the CBSE, these sessions are unlikely to extend beyond June 15 at most.

"These are not compulsory for students and sessions are not more than half an hour long. The point was to pick up new skills and be engaged during this time. The attendance has fluctuated between 40,000 and 83,000 out of around 2 lakh children," said an education department official.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER



MARTYR OF 206 CoBRA

SI/GD, Rajesh Kumar Bind of 206 CoBRA made the supreme sacrifice during a counter-Maoist operation in the area of Vill- Tamilwada, under PS- Chintagupha, Distt- Sukma (C.G), on 25th May, 2018. The CRPF proudly remembers the braveheart who laid down his life at the altar of duty while fighting with Maoists. His courage and bravery would remain an abiding source of inspiration for the Force.

IG & All Ranks of CoBRA

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : 05/2020-21 KWA/PHC/D3/TVM. CWSS to Vithura, Tholcodu villages - phase II - package II - supplying, laying, testing and commissioning of distribution network in zone III. EMD : Rs. 200000. Tender fee : Rs. 10000. Last Date for submitting Tender : 26-06-2020 03:00:pm. Phone : 0471-2322303. Website : www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in.

Superintending Engineer
PH Circle, Thiruvananthapuram

KWA-JB-GL-6-44-2020-21

IRCON INTERNATIONAL LTD
(A Govt. Of India Undertaking)
Website: www.ircon.org CN-14320015195G01003171

e-Procurement Notice

• Tender No: IRCON/2019/1955859/Pipeline diversion at Rangpo/2019/1955859, Date: 26.05.2020
• Tender for and on behalf of IRCON INTERNATIONAL LIMITED is invited. Interested bidders desiring to obtain the tender documents for the work of "Supplying, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of 63 pipe line along with water mains and the call of lines, construction of water tanks and making connection with all pipe line is place at the Rangpo Station yard with the task to divert and replace the water supply between Khanchanda to Rangpo yard (C) Sakin of Sanku Rangpo New 63 Rd line Project."

Estimated cost of work: Rs. 1,32,15,393.15%
Last Date & Time of e-Bid Submission: 30.06.2020 upto 15:00 Hrs.
For further details, visit www.etenders.kwa.kerala.gov.in or www.etenders.kwa.kerala.gov.in. General Manager/PH Rangpo IRCON International Limited "Sakshi", Sakshi Raj Lane, Kirti Nagar, P.O. Sakshi Road, Sakshi-124001. Contact No: 9913461916, 9913461917

नीलामी सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि ग्राम पंचायत मिरावटी खण्ड इन्डरी जिला, नूह (हरियाणा) को दो जोहड़ 1. बीरवाली 2. अमरोड वाली जोहड़ों को मछली पालन के लिए दिनांक 27.05.2020 को दिन के 10 बजे ग्राम सचिवालय पर 8 वर्ष के लिए मछली पालन हेतु पट्टे पर छोड़ रही है।

अतः इच्छुक व्यक्ति बोलीदाता मौके पर खुली बोली लगाकर बोली का लाभ उठावें। शर्तें निम्न प्रकार हैं:-

- जोहड़ की धरोहर राशि 25000/- रूपये मौके पर जमा करानी होगी।
- नीलामी की राशि नगद जमा करानी होगी।
- बाकी शर्तें मौके पर पढकर सुनाई जाएगी।

ग्राम सचिव रामकिशन (बबलू)
ग्राम पंचायत मिरावटी
खण्ड इन्डरी जिला, नूह
मो 9992177636

नीलामी सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि ग्राम पंचायत उलेटा खण्ड इन्डरी तहसील व जिला, नूह (हरियाणा) को तकिया वाली जोहड़ को मछली पालन के लिए दिनांक 28.05.2020 को दिन के 11 बजे स्कूल पर 8 वर्ष के लिए मछली पालन हेतु पट्टे पर छोड़ रही है।

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7 EXPRESS NETWORK

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



NOVEL CELEBRATION

In the absence of full-fledged celebrations on the first anniversary of the BJP's return to power, the party is trying to mark the occasion in a different way. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will write letters to 10 crore families, while party president J P Nadda will hold a Facebook live session with party workers across the country. The party will also organise interaction programs with various groups including digital media platforms. The Prime Minister's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat will be the major thrust of the campaign and the government's "success" in handling the Covid-19 crisis would be its high-light. The national leadership has already informed the states to get ready for these programmes.

NEW FACILITIES

Establishing Covid-19 testing facilities are slowly becoming events at which it is worth marking a presence for politicians. On Monday, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar inaugurated such a facility in his constituency of Morena in Madhya Pradesh. Now a coronavirus test can be done at the district hospital in Morena, Tomar tweeted. Ladakh MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal also inaugurated a Covid-19 testing laboratory at Chushot Yokma in his constituency. This is the first such lab in the newly created UT.

WELCOME MOVE

With various issues regarding availability of food for travelling migrants, especially on trains, coming to light, Railways got a helping hand from FMCG major ITC. Officers in Bihar's Danapur division got ITC to donate 1 lakh packs of biscuits and snacks to remote locations as part of its CSR initiative. With Shramik Special trains slated to run for many more days, officials said such help from the private sector was welcome.

Andhra HC orders govt to seize LG Polymers factory

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD MAY 25

THE ANDHRA Pradesh High Court has ordered the state government to "seize the premises of LG Polymers" at Visakhapatnam and not allow the directors of the company to leave the country without the court's permission.

A two-member bench of the court has barred entry on the factory premises except for those part of the committee appointed to probe the gas leak accident on May 7 that killed 7 people and injured over 500 others in the villages surrounding the factory.

It has asked the government to reply why the company was allowed to shift styrene gas to South Korea without the court's permission when a probe was pending, and who was responsible for it.

"We further direct that none

of the assets, movable or immovable, fixtures, machinery and contents shall be allowed to be shifted without the leave of the court," the order said.

The court, which took suo motu cognizance of the styrene gas leak, directed the government to inform it whether LG Polymers had taken permission to restart operations during the lockdown period.

The court also noted that explanations were necessary in the two PILs filed by petitioners.

The PILs alleged that LG Polymers has been operating without a valid environmental clearance, the inhibitor concentration, which controls runaway reactions, in the storage tank was not checked, the refrigeration system was not working properly, and that the radius of the vulnerable zone extended up to 6.3 km from the source.

Former Congress leader says Scindia will be by-polls face

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 25

THE SCHEDULE for by-elections to 24 seats in Madhya Pradesh is yet to be announced but a former Congress MLA — one of the 22 whose rebellion brought down the Kamal Nath government — has created an awkward situation for the BJP by claiming that the polls will be fought in Jyotiraditya Scindia's name.

Jaswant Jatav, the MLA from Karera constituency, credited the

Congress's stellar performance in the 2018 Assembly elections in the Gwalior-Chambal belt to Scindia, who is currently a BJP Rajya Sabha candidate from MP.

"If there was one leader who challenged Shivraj Singh Chouhan in the region it was Scindia. On the previous occasion Scindia won the seats singlehandedly, this time he and Chouhan will be on one stage," said Jatav after meeting Chouhan in Bhopal.

BJP leaders told *The Indian Express* that it had been conveyed to Jatav to watch his words.

How the states handled domestic flights on Day 1



Entering the Chennai Airport on Monday, and (below) exiting the Mumbai Airport.

PTI and Nirmal Harindran

PUNJAB

Punjab changed guidelines for handling arrivals at least four times. CM Amarinder Singh on Saturday said that all those landing on domestic flights will be in home and institutional quarantine for 14 days. On Sunday, the state said they would all be tested, and those testing positive will be sent for institutional quarantine. But there were apprehensions on testing so many passengers. On Monday, the government asked DCs to test randomly. When the DCs were yet to issue orders, the Principal Secretary Health issued revised guidelines, stating that all domestic travellers who are asymptomatic or test negative will be in home quarantine for 14 days. Symptomatic ones will be taken to a health facility for testing.

BIHAR

Airport authorities at Patna said only regular identity documents are required besides safety clearance by Aarogya Setu app. Passengers flying to Bihar will not have to undergo quarantine but can report at health desk of the airport in case of any uneasiness.

GUJARAT

A total of 13 domestic flights arrived and 15 left from Ahmedabad airport. At Surat airport, two flights arrived from Delhi and Hyderabad and departed for the same destinations. Three flights were cancelled. Passengers flying out were medically screened and quarantine stamp was inked on hands of passengers to states mandating quarantine.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

On day 1, three of the eight flights coming to Jammu from Delhi and Srinagar were cancelled. The first Air India flight with 27 passengers landed at Jammu airport around 8.40 am. Most of the passengers arriving here from Delhi were those who were stranded due to lockdown. Passengers' swab samples were collected for test, and were taken to different hotels for administrative quarantine for 14 days, or till their test returns negative. Six flights carrying 562 passengers arrived at Srinagar airport and 267 passengers departed from Srinagar airport. All passengers will be tested and kept in institutional or home quarantine. Those passengers who test negative will be sent home and those positive will be sent to hospital.

UTTAR PRADESH

Till 6 pm, six flights landed at Lucknow airport and seven departed to Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi. All counters were covered with transparent plastic sheets to ensure airport staff do not come in contact with passengers, who were screened for temperature and symptoms.

MAHARASHTRA

A total of 47 flights took off from Mumbai airport and arrived. The airport handled a 4,852 passengers, 3,752 departing and 1,100 arriving passengers from 14 places across the country. The highest number of departures was to New Delhi. Though airlines have been allowed to operate at 80% of aircraft's seating capacity, the first flight to land from Lucknow,



an IndiGo Airlines flight, had just 33 passengers. BMC doctors screened passengers, who were required to display status on Aarogya Setu app at the entry gate.

TELANGANA

Domestic passengers arriving on flights at Hyderabad were screened for Covid-19 symptoms before being allowed to exit the airport. Symptomatic passengers are sent to institutional quarantine for 7 days after taking samples. If the person tests negative, the individual can go home but should remain in home isolation for 7 days. Passengers were put through intense screening before check-in.

ANDHRA PRADESH

When flights resume from Tuesday, the government will test all arriving passengers. All fliers have to obtain e-pass before booking tickets. Asymptomatic passengers from hotpot states will have to undergo institutional quarantine for seven days and be allowed to go home after testing negative. Asymptomatic passengers from low incidence zones will be in home isolation for 14 days and their swab samples would be taken at the airport. **ENS**

Gowda skips quarantine after flight to Bengaluru, says he has immunity

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MAY 25

UNION MINISTER DV Sadananda Gowda who flew to Bengaluru from Delhi on Monday didn't undergo the institutional quarantine mandatory for all fliers from 6 hotpot states, claiming he had immunity granted by his ministry.

Gowda, the Union minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers, and former Chief Minister of Karnataka, said he had exemption from quarantine as his Pharma Ministry was part of essential services.

Under Karnataka's quarantine rules for arrivals by domes-



Union Minister Sadananda Gowda

tic flights from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, all passengers are required to be in institutional quarantine for seven days followed by seven days of home quarantine if they are asymptomatic for the virus.

As the controversy began to blow up with Congress questioning violation, Karnataka's department of health and family welfare modified its standard

operating procedures for quarantine of inter-state passengers, granting exemption from quarantine to ministers and government officers on duty.

The minister—away from Bengaluru since lockdown began—left for his home soon after arrival at the airport and was scheduled to attend meetings with elected representatives and ministers on Covid-19 situation through the day.

"I did not want to burden the chequer by using a private aircraft or a chartered flight and so I came by a regular flight today. There is an exemption from quarantine that is available to me as minister for the pharma sector," the minister told reporters.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PATNA, MAY 25

THE PARENTS and brother of a CPI-ML leader in Bihar's Gopalganj were shot dead late on Sunday evening. The attack, in which the leader, J P Yadav, sustained injuries, is suspected to be the fallout of a political rivalry.

Police have booked JD(U) MLA from Kuchaikot Amrendra Pandey, his brother Satish Pandey and Satish's son Mukesh Pandey. Satish and Mukesh have been arrested and the MLA is being ques-

SC allows Air India to fly without middle seats empty till Jun 6

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE SUPREME Court Monday allowed Air India to fly non-scheduled international flights without having to keep a seat empty between two passengers till June 6. The Centre and the national carrier had argued that flights were already booked and discontinuing the middle seat suddenly would lead to a logistical nightmare as one-third of bookings would have to be cancelled compounding problems for stranded passengers.

The bench was hearing an appeal by the Centre and AI challenging the May 22 interim order of the Bombay High Court which had asked Air India to adhere to the Centre's March 23 circular. The circular had said that allocation of seats be such that a seat is kept empty between two passengers.

"We are of the considered view that the petitioner — Air India should be allowed to operate the non-scheduled flights with the middle seats booking up to 6th June, 2020. However, after that the Air India will operate non-scheduled flights in accordance with the interim order to be passed by the Bombay High Court thereafter," a bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and Hrishikesh Roy ordered.

The court did not appear en-

thused about Air India's decision not to leave seats empty between passengers given the Covid-19 situation. At one point, it told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, "You should be worried about the health of citizens, not the health of commercial airlines..." Appearing for the petitioners, Mehta pointed to the difficulties in implementing the Bombay HC direction. "There was a flight from here to US, people came because they had pre-bookings. Keeping vacant seats comes with procedural issues... family sits together... airports are different," the SG said.

"There are numerous flights everyday carrying thousands of passengers and dropping of such passengers would create massive logistical, international and visa-related issues," he said pointing out the Bombay HC order would require AI to cancel one-third of the bookings. The HC order "ignores the gradual strategy of the Executive in dealing with the issue at hand", he said.

While Mehta submitted that the March 23 circular was only for domestic flights, the Bench did not seem to agree with him. "What are you saying? Have you read it or not? As your circular says, it said, it is for both domestic and international," it said.

The SG said before March 23, India had stopped all international operations and that the

March 23 circular has now been superseded. "We are not doubting your circular," said the CJ. Mehta said there was a meeting of medical and aviation experts on May 4 following which an SOP was issued on May 5. Keeping the middle second seat vacant would serve no purpose while air circulation is already there inside the aircraft, the SG said quoting the experts.

The Bombay HC order came following a plea by an AI Pilot Decan Kanani who urged the court to direct the airline to ensure compliance of the March 23 circular in the interest of public health and safety.

On Monday, the SC remanded the matter to the Bombay High Court and asked it "to pass an effective interim order after hearing all concerned on the date fixed i.e. 2nd June, 2020...or soon thereafter".

"At this juncture, we would consider it necessary for the High Court to arrive at a prima facie finding regarding the safety and health of the passengers qua the Covid-19 virus, whether the flight is scheduled flight or a non-scheduled flight," the Supreme Court said.

It said "The Director General of Civil Aviation is free to alter any norms he may consider necessary during the pendency of the matter in the interest of public health and safety of the passengers rather than of commercial considerations".

India, Israel to share tech knowhow on Covid fight

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

PRINCIPAL SCIENTIFIC Advisor to the Prime Minister, Professor K VijayRaghavan, held discussions with Dani Gold, Head of the Directorate of R&D in Israel's Ministry of Defence on scientific cooperation between the two countries to address Covid-19.

The discussions were also attended by Israel Ambassador to India Dr Ron Malka and Indian ambassador to Israel Sanjeev Singla and officials of CSIR and DRDO.

The discussion is the first of a series of meetings which will take place over the coming weeks to exchange technology and scientific know-how to combat Covid-19.

"I'm proud to connect brilliant minds from India and Israel

so they can jointly develop life changing solutions for the whole world, and especially in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic," Dr Malka tweeted.

CSIR DG Dr Shekhar Mande said the meeting was more of an ice-breaker. "We will be collaborating on a number of aspects of the pandemic. The areas are still being worked out and we will get a clearer picture as the meetings progress."

Officials in the Ministry of Science and Technology said Monday's discussions were centered around research and development for rapid diagnosis, based on big data and AI technology "to enable a rapid return to normal".

A Ministry statement said the discussions on Monday are "a part of the vision of the Israeli and Indian Prime Ministers for a wide ranging scientific cooperation" between the countries.

Priyanka to Yogi: Does UP have 10 lakh cases?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

CONGRESS GENERAL secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday took a dig at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for his remarks on returning migrants from other states testing positive.

"Hear the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's statement. According to government statistics, approximately 25 lakh people have returned to Uttar Pradesh. According to the Chief Minister, 75 percent of those who have returned from Maharashtra, 50 percent of those



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

who came from Delhi and 25 percent from other states have been infected with coronavirus," she tweeted.

Priyanka asked whether the CM meant that there were more than 10 lakh people in UP who are infected with coronavirus. "But his government's data shows that the total number of infected people in Uttar Pradesh is 6,228...", she tweeted.

Migration to be theme of next Bihar polls: Kushwaha

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MAY 25

Rashtriya Lok Samata Party president and former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha has said the Bihar government "stood exposed on migration" and that it would be the "dominating theme of the coming Assembly polls".

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Kushwaha said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had been allowing migrants into the state "reluctantly" and suggested that the state should have offered mi-



Upendra Kushwaha

grants the option of staying back by giving them Rs 10,000—an estimated expense on transporting and keeping the migrant at a quarantine centre.

"After chief ministers of some states started calling back migrants, Nitish came under pressure. The way he dealt with the

migrants' issue is not at all satisfactory. Quarantine centres are just places to herd people. No social distancing is being followed."

Kushwaha said the state had been transporting migrants to quarantine centres, giving them clothes and other items besides food. "Estimated expense on a migrant from journey on train or bus to his stay at a quarantine centre is about Rs 10,000. Had the government offered this amount to a migrant, he could have met his expenses in another state and stayed back. This could have also prevented the spread of the virus."

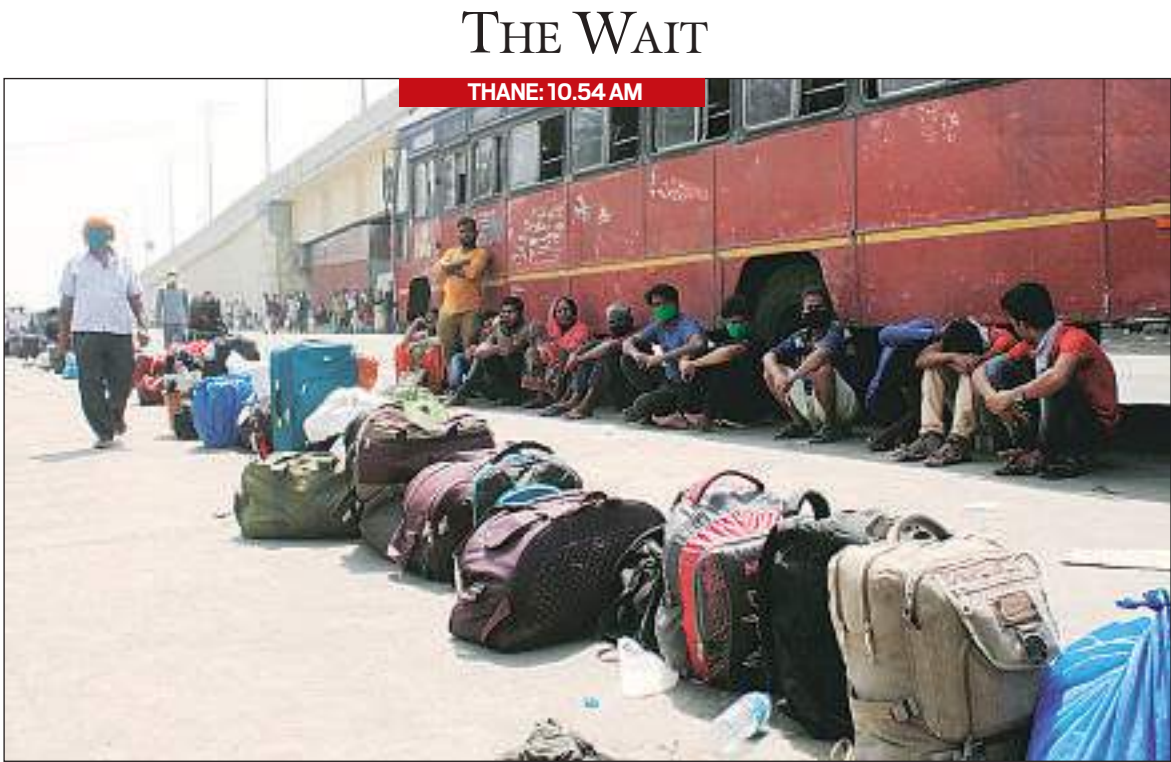
He, however, added, "It's one's right to come home. Who can stop them from coming back?"

Asked if the Opposition's response during Covid crisis had been minimal, Kushwaha said it was only because they had to adhere to lockdown norms.

Bihar Information and Public Relations minister and JD (U) spokesperson Neeraj Kumar responded: "What we could gather from our interactions with the migrants is that they wanted to come home to be with their families. It's only because of a caring government that they wanted to return."



Migrants in an auto-rickshaw they hired to reach Ambala Cantonment station, in Patiala on Monday. Harmeet Sodhi



Migrants wait for buses to Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar, in Thane Monday. Deepak Joshi



Mohammad Aslam from Bihar's Muzaffarpur waits in queue at a health screening centre in Delhi Monday. Only after screening can he board a Shramik Special train. He hopes to make the journey home on Eid. Tashi Tobgyal

MAHARASHTRA

3 dead inmates in different jails positive: govt to HC

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MAY 25

THE STATE government informed the Bombay High Court on Monday that three prisoners who died — one each in Yerawada, Talaja and Dhule prisons — were found positive for Covid-19 after death.

State Inspector General of Prisons Sunil Ramanand, in an affidavit, stated that three more inmates have been found positive in Dhule district prison and are under treatment.

Earlier this month, 158 prisoners and 26 staff members tested positive for coronavirus in

Mumbai's Arthur Road Jail.

The state's submission came after the HC, on May 19 directed the state to file a comprehensive response to the pleas raising concerns over several inmates and jail staff testing positive and seeking relief for prisoners across jails.

According to the state's reply, while the total capacity of Maharashtra prisons is 24,000, current population in prisons as on May 10 was 34,000.

The pleas had sought from the state to ensure the inmates have free access to protective gear, hand sanitisers and soaps. An NGO, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUC), and others had moved the HC seeking the relief.

Classifieds

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to general public at large that my client **Madan Lal S/o Banwari Lal & Veena Devi W/o Madan Lal** both R/o- H. No. BB-77, Gali No.3, Subhash Basti, Nali Karim, Pahari Gali, Delhi-55 has severed her all Relations and disowned her son (1) **Jai Bhagwan (Rocky)** & his wife **Ratna** and (2) **Rahul** & his wife **Kumkum** from all her movable & immovable properties due to their misconduct and bad activities. My client and his family members shall not be responsible for any wrongful and illegal act in future. Any person(s) deal with them shall be self responsible.

S.K. Gupta (Advocate)
Ch. No. D-209, Karkardooma Court, Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

I declare that my clients namely **Mr. Mukesh S/o Shri Lakhmi Chand and Mrs. Babita W/o Shri Mukesh both R/o L-93, J.J. Colony, Shakurpur, Delhi-110034**, wants to disown his/her son namely **Mr. Sagor** from self acquired movable and immovable property for future all actions, & above said statements are true and correct in the best of my knowledge & belief.

Place: **New Delhi**
Date: **21.05.2020**
Shama Rani (Advocate)
Enrolment No. D-843/1992

PUBLIC NOTICE

(A) Unit No. KCA 202 along with 3 Parking Unit bearing Nos. PB2048/PB2049/PB2050, DLF King's Court, W Block, Greater Kailash – II, New Delhi was allotted in the name of Mr. Ravinder Kumar Sarine S/o Mr. Shanti Swarup Sarine R/o N-240, Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi 110048 and Ms. Vaani Gaur, Granddaughter of Mr. Ravinder Kumar Sarine, R/o N-240, Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi 110048.

(B) Unit No. KCA 206 along with 3 Parking Unit bearing Nos. PB2051/PB2052/PB2053, DLF King's Court, W Block, Greater Kailash – II, New Delhi was allotted in the name of Mr. Ravinder Kumar Sarine S/o Mr. Shanti Swarup Sarine R/o N-240, Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi 110048 and Mr. Ishaan Sarine, Grandson of Mr. Ravinder Kumar Sarine, R/o N-240, Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi 110048.

Mr. Ravinder Kumar Sarine has expired on July 24, 2013, intestate, leaving behind his legal heirs viz. Mrs. Shukla Sarine (wife), Mr. Ishaan Sarine (grandson) and Ms. Vaani Gaur (granddaughter).

The legal heirs have agreed to allotment of Unit No. KCA 202 in the name of Ms. Vaani Gaur and Unit No. KCA 206 in the name of Mr. Ishaan Sarine

Accordingly, the name of Ms. Vaani Gaur and Mr. Ishaan Sarine is being noted in DLF's record in respect of the captioned unit no. KCA 202 & KCA 206 respectively. If anybody has any objection to this, he or she may approach M/s DLF Luxury Homes Ltd, 2nd Floor, DLF Gateway Tower, R-Block, DLF City Phase-III, Gurugram (Haryana) or Mrs. Shukla Sarine, N-240, Greater Kailash Part-I, New Delhi within 21 days of publication of this notice.

'If we don't find solution soon, staying in will tell on the health of elderly'

CK MISHRA, Secretary for Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and chairman of the empowered group on availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine facilities, speaks to **ABANTIKA GHOSH** on how India ramped up its testing capacity and the need to facilitate the return of the elderly to a normal life



How did we ramp up testing like we did?

Testing was a challenge because the organisations involved were not best used to it. They were largely involved in research work. We decided to broaden the base, kept on expanding the definition of the person to be tested by revising the protocol. We now had a larger pool to test. Second, you need a laboratory. You cannot construct one overnight so we pooled resources — all medical colleges, DST, DBT, CSIR, central universities. We converted research labs into testing labs. Then we opened up the private sector. We have above 600 labs now. At that point, nobody would have thought we could get to this number.

Without getting into the math, the fact remains that the private sector contributed at a critical time. Because of this convergence, we managed one lakh tests per day...

Are there concerns on this?

The eastern part of India still has constraints to testing and the needs are increasing. Therefore, we are looking at newer ways to provide additional support to states like Bihar, UP, West Bengal and Odisha. The problem is that there is a certain technical requirement for a molecular diagnostic lab to be set up and the normal choice is a medical college because it has the trained manpower required for this. There are districts in these states where this is an issue. We are, therefore, making TruNaat machines available in these areas and activating medical

WITH
CK MISHRA
CHAIRMAN, EMPOWERED GROUP ON AVAILABILITY OF HOSPITALS, ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE FACILITIES

colleges and private laboratories...

In the diabetes capital of the world, how long are we going to keep old people at home?

Vulnerability is the most critical thing in this entire exercise. If you are looking from the fatality point of view, to keep the mortality down, you have to protect the segment most vulnerable. That takes us to the old and the comorbid. They are most likely to get seriously infected and likely to be heavily dependent on hospitals. Therefore, the current advisory is to stay home. This cannot go on forever. Ultimately, the diabetic patient is working somewhere, we have to medically find a solution or a safety protocol for him to start living a normal life. If we don't find a solution soon, the fact that they are cornered in a room in the house is going to tell on their health.

We seem to be on a significant growth trajectory

88% cases asymptomatic, 84% deaths had comorbid conditions: TN Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, MAY 25

IN TAMIL Nadu, 88% of the Covid-19 patients were asymptomatic and 84% of the deaths were due to comorbid conditions, said state health minister **C Vijayabaskar** on Monday.

Tamil Nadu with a total of 4.21 lakh tests, the highest in the country, has 17,082 cases and has reported 118 deaths. And Chennai, with 548 cases on Monday, has registered 11,131 cases so far.



"We did 11,735 tests on Monday. We will continue this aggressive testing strategy because that alone helps us to get effective data about infection in the state to devise strategies for treatment protocols," said Vijayabaskar.

According to the minister, an "aggressive testing strategy, early

WESTERN RAILWAY-AHMEDABAD DIVISION

RAISING OF FOB

E - Tender Notice No. 01 of 2020-21 dated 21.05.2020 Sr.No. (01) E-Tender No DYCE-BR-ADI-001-2020-21; Name of work:- Raising of FOBs at Dhrangadhra-Sankhyali, Bhachau, Gandhidham -1 & Gandhidham-2 for electrification of Mahesana-Virangan-Sankhyali section of Western Railway under jurisdiction of SSE(Br)ADI of Ahmedabad Division; Approximate NIT Cost: ₹ 1,17,61,409.53; EMD Cost: ₹ 2,08,800.00; Closing date & time of e-tender:- Date 19.06.2020 at 15.00 hrs. Office Address: Dy. Chief Engineer (Bridge), Ahmedabad, Opp. Sabarmati Meter gauge Railway Station, Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, Gujarat - 380005; Website for participating e-tender: www.treps.gov.in

Like us on: facebook.com/WesternRly

VIVEK DESHPANDE
NAGPUR, MAY 25

AFTER THE family of a 78-year-old Hindu man, who died of a heart attack on Saturday, reportedly refused to perform his last rites, some Muslim youths from a local organisation lit his pyre on Sunday.

While the man died of a heart attack, his wife is undergoing

treatment for Covid-19 at Akola Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH). Prashant Rajurkar, head of the sanitation department of the Akola Municipal Corporation, said, "The man's son, who lives in Nagpur, refused to accept the body and perform the funeral. So, a local Muslim organisation, Akola Kutchhi Memon Jamaat, took over. On Sunday, some Muslim men lit the pyre..."

BJP member, former minister's wife die of Covid, Gujarat toll 891

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AHMEDABAD, VADODARA, MAY 25

DRADITYA Upadhyay (62), an active BJP member and a former BJP cabinet minister's wife were among the 30 in Gujarat who died of the Coronavirus on Monday. The death toll rose to 891.

Upadhyay, an active member of the BJP for two decades and a member of its doctors' cell, was an orthopaedic surgeon. He died at Sterling Hospital in Ahmedabad. He was admitted to the SVP Hospital for more than two weeks before he was shifted.

His wife, Dr Pallavi Upadhyay, a gynaecologist and former corporator from Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's Gomtipur ward and a member of BJP's doctors' cell, is admitted at Sterling Hospital along with their son, both of whom have tested positive. Pallavi is also BJP's Bapunagar ward president.

Madhuben Thakore, wife of a former BJP cabinet minister Madhubhai Thakore, also succumbed to Covid-19 on Monday. Madhubhai is currently the Ahmedabad district BJP secretary. He and three of his family members are in quarantine. Both

deaths were confirmed by BJP spokesperson Bharat Pandya.

Former AMC standing committee chairman and BJP media cell member Jayantilal Parmar, 75, also tested positive. He was admitted to SVP Hospital on Saturday and his results came back positive on Monday.

A well-known builder from Ahmedabad also died of coronavirus on Monday, while assistant sub-inspector Girish Barot succumbed on Sunday. His was the second death reported from the Krishnanagar police station. Sources from the real estate business said the builder had multiple co-morbidities and had been ailing for some time.

With 403 new cases, including one of a person not from the state but tested there, Gujarat's total shot up to nearly 14,500 on Monday.

Narmada district reported three new cases, including that of an 11-year-old girl, taking the district total to 18.

The three who tested positive had accompanied a 10-year-old boy from Mayashi village in Nandod taluka who tested positive on May 21 upon return from Ahmedabad, earlier.

Gandhinagar saw four new cases and three deaths.

International air passengers push up Andhra's case count

SREENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD, MAY 25

ANDHRA PRADESH has recorded a sharp uptick in the number of returnees from the Gulf countries testing positive for Covid-19.

On Monday, 62 international passengers who arrived in special Vande Bharat flights to the state tested positive, and a majority of them were from Kuwait. Of those who tested positive, 41 are from Kuwait, 3 from Qatar and 1 from Saudi Arabia. So far, 85 people have tested positive.

In Telangana, six people who returned from the Gulf tested positive on Sunday.

About 700 people in seven flights have returned to Andhra Pradesh from the Gulf countries since May 22. The first Vande Bharat mission flight with 149 passengers landed at Tirupati on May 22.

The Gulf evacuees testing positive is another worry for the health officials who are grappling with cases linked to the Koyambedu vegetable market in Chennai, which was a Covid-19 hotspot.

On Monday, 7 new cases

linked to Koyambedu were reported. Like in many other states, a large number of people on the move have tested positive in Andhra Pradesh as well, but this has not led to a surge. The total number of confirmed infections in the state, now at 2,644, has been growing at a slow pace. The growth rate is just above 2% now, well below the national average of around 5%.

Like international passengers, who are screened and tested at the airports and then sent to quarantine facilities for 14 days, the government has decided to test all arriving domestic air passengers from Tuesday and prescribe a 7-day home quarantine.

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister (Health) AK Srinivas said passengers may choose between free government quarantine facilities or paid accommodation at hotels with which the state tourism department has tied up.

The state has scaled up isolation wards, quarantine facilities and beds in Covid-19 hospitals in eight districts — Anantapur, Kurnool, Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna, East Godavari, and Visakhapatnam—as a spike in cases are expected with the resumption of trains and flights.

CORONA WATCH

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Lockdown extended in three districts

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh government has authorised all district magistrates to extend the coronavirus lockdown beyond the current phase ending May 31 and three District Magistrates (DMs) issued orders to the effect for their areas. Hamirpur and Solan DMs ordered Monday that the curfew will be extended up to June 30. In Shimla, the district magistrate issued orders extending restrictions imposed on March 24 under section 144 up to June 30. PTI

NAGALAND

First Covid case detected: Official

Kohima: Nagaland reported its "first" Covid-19 cases on Monday, when three people who recently returned to the state from Chennai tested positive, a health department official said. The Nagaland government has not counted a person from the state who tested positive for coronavirus on April 13 in Assam. He later recovered from the disease. Two men and a woman, all in their 20s, tested positive for COVID-19 and they are now undergoing treatment in Dimapur and Kohima, said a senior official. PTI

KERALA

62-yr-old dies of Covid, state deaths now 6

Kozhikode: A 62-year-old woman Covid-19 patient from Kannur died at a hospital here on Monday, taking the toll due to the disease in Kerala to six, officials said. The woman died around 10 PM at the Kozhikode Medical College Hospital where she had been under treatment after testing positive on Friday. "She was shifted to the medical college on Friday after she was tested positive for coronavirus. Earlier, she was under treatment for neurological disease at a private hospital here," District Medical Officer Dr V Jayashree said. PTI

9 EXPRESS NETWORK

2 militants gunned down in Kulgam encounter

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MAY 25

TWO MILITANTS were killed in a gunbattle with and security forces in south Kashmir's Kulgam district on Monday, police said.

According to the Jammu & Kashmir Police, the encounter took place at a village in the Khud-Hanjipora area early on Monday. Security forces had received inputs about the presence of militants in the area late on Sunday night, officers said.

"As search parties drew closer to the suspected house, the terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the search party. The fire was effectively retaliated, in which two terrorists were neutralised," a release by the Jammu & Kashmir Police said.

According to the police, the

identities of the militants and their affiliations are being ascertained. "The operation was clean — no collateral damage," the police said.

According to police sources, two pistols and a grenade were recovered from the slain militants. "We didn't recover any heavy weapons from them," said an official.

Soon after the encounter broke out, local residents allegedly threw stones at security forces, leading to clashes. "The stone-pelting was controlled," said a senior police officer.

Dr Nazir Chowdhary, the Medical Superintendent of the SMHS Hospital in Srinagar told *The Indian Express* that they had received four people with pellet injuries from Kulgam. "Four pellet cases were received from Kulgam today. Their condition is stable at present," he said.

Hideout in govt official's shop busted, say J&K police

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MAY 25

THE JAMMU and Kashmir Police on Monday said that they have busted a hideout in a shop owned by a senior government official in south Kashmir's Pulwama.

The family of the officer, however, rejected the allegations, saying it was not a "hideout", and that the searching party didn't recover anything.

A J&K Police spokesperson said on Monday that joint forces busted a hideout from a shop owned by Nazir Ahmad Wani at Bellow Dhargund in Pulwama. The police release issued on Monday has come two days after the forces conducted search at the official's house.

Wani is presently posted as Naib Tehsildar in Tehsil Pulwama. In April, he had submitted a written complaint after his driver was assaulted by police in Pulwama. "During the search in the area,

the joint team busted a hideout in a shop belonging to one person identified as Nazir Ahmad Wani, son of Abdul Ahad Wani, resident of Bellow Dhargund. The joint team were able to recover incriminating materials, including huge quantity of arms and ammunition, from the hideout," said the release.

Police said that it has been found during the investigation that Wani was providing "logistic support" to militants. "Officers during the course of investigation learnt about Nazir's involvement in providing logistic support to the terrorists. He also revealed that he is a Govt employee and is presently posted as Naib Tehsildar in Tehsil Pulwama," the police release said, adding that they have registered a case and investigation is underway.

The officer's family members said they deal in pesticides and it was a cold storage area and not a hideout. Wani and his elder son are in police custody, the family members said.

Pigeon 'carrying coded message' caught flying along IB in Kathua: Cops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, MAY 25

VILLAGERS ALONG the International Border in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district on Sunday captured a pigeon suspected to be carrying a coded message, police said on Monday.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Kathua, Shalinder Kumar Mishra said the pigeon was flying over Manyari village in Hiranagar sector along the IB and had flown in from the Pakistan side.

The villagers have handed it over to the police who are working to decipher the "coded message", written on a ring attached to one of its legs, Mishra told the media. One of the wings of the pigeon was marked red, sources said adding that the ring was also red in colour.

Such activities along the border fence have to be viewed seriously in view of past experiences, Mishra said to reporters.



Police are working to decipher the 'coded message' written on a ring attached to its leg. *ANI*

Man booked for sedition over Facebook post on Adityanath

Lucknow: A man was booked in a sedition case lodged at Prayagraj's Shiv Kuti police station for a Facebook post, in which he allegedly made an objectionable comment against Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The complaint was lodged by Sub-Inspector Amrita Singh on Saturday, based on which the FIR was lodged. It states, "... (He) used abusive language against Yogi Adityanath... Through his Facebook ID, he is trying to disturb peace in the country and is disrespecting honourable CM Yogi Adityanath..." Prayagraj SSP Satyarth Aniruddha Pankaj told *The Indian Express*, "During the investigation, we will know about the accused. Our Cyber cell teams are collecting his details." **ENS**

SOLIDARITY TRIAL

WHO suspends allocation of patients to HCQ arm for now

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

IN THE light of emerging evidence, the World Health Organization has temporarily suspended allocation of patients in the hydroxychloroquine arm of the Solidarity Trial. A call will be taken once the existing evidence has been reviewed. Patients who were randomised to the HCQ arm earlier will complete their treatment. The decision was taken in an extraordinary meeting of the executive group of the Solidarity Trial on Sunday.

The decision comes in the wake of a series of trials being reported which did not find any benefit of HCQ being used in Novel Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) patients. India, however, continues to use the drug for prophylaxis among health and

other frontline workers and family members of Covid positive patients. It, along with azithromycin, continues to be India's drug of choice for treatment of severe cases.

The executive group of the Solidarity Trial reportedly decided to err towards a "conservative approach" and implement a temporary suspension of random allocation to the hydroxychloroquine arm within the Solidarity Trial while the review of evidence occurs. This was done without any associated judgement on whether or not there is evidence of harm, benefit or lack of benefit caused by hydroxychloroquine. The extensive review of the evidence will be conducted by mid-June.

Among the evidence considered while taking the decision is a study, published in *The Lancet* last week, that said that while no benefit was found for Covid, the

known side-effect of HCQ of fluctuations in the heart rate was noted. "We were unable to confirm a benefit of hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine, when used alone or with a macrolide, on in-hospital outcomes for COVID-19. Each of these drug regimens was associated with decreased in-hospital survival and an increased frequency of ventricular arrhythmias when used for treatment of COVID-19," the researchers reported in *The Lancet*. Another study earlier this month in *The BMJ*, too, said that while the drug did not seem to give significant positives in COVID patients, "Adverse events were higher in hydroxychloroquine recipients than in non-recipients."

However, in a small study published in the *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents* on March 17, French scientists reported: "Twenty cases were

treated in this study and showed a significant reduction of the viral carriage at D6-post inclusion compared to controls, and much lower average carrying duration than reported of untreated patients in the literature. Azithromycin added to hydroxychloroquine was significantly more efficient for virus elimination."

Hydroxychloroquine is a drug used in the treatment of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. It is also used for the prevention of malaria and its treatment; it is a derivative of the anti-malaria drug chloroquine. Lately, its role is being investigated in the treatment and prevention of Covid-19.

The Solidarity Trial is a multi-country trial anchored by WHO in which the efficacy of various therapeutic options such as remdesivir, Hydroxychloroquine, rionavir and lopinavir are being tested.



Clouds loom over the statue of Ahom general Lachit Borphukan on the Brahmaputra in Guwahati on Monday. *PTI*

30,000 affected in Assam floods, more rain predicted

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, MAY 25

EVEN AS Assam battles the Covid-19 pandemic, five of its districts have been inundated by floodwaters after incessant rain. More than 30,000 people and 9,804 animals have been affected in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Darrang and Goalpara.

On Monday, the Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) in Guwahati, predicted heavy rainfall in the Northeastern region for the next five days. It issued a red warning—extremely heavy rainfall—in Kokrajhar, Baksa and Chirang districts for the next two days. Rain—medium to heavy—is expected in other parts of the state too. "The rain will continue as per the forecast for five days," said Dr Sanjay O'Neill Shaw of RMC.

According to Pankaj Chakravarty, State Project Coordinator, Assam State Disaster Management Authority,

the flood situation is under control.

"Yes, waters will rise but the situation is not very bad till now," he said, "All rivers aren't flowing above danger levels. It is only when all rivers flow above danger level that we have something to worry about."

Currently, the Jia Bharali in Sonitpur district and Puthimari in Kamrup district are flowing above the danger level.

As per a release by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, 8,941 people have been shifted to 33 relief camps in the Goalpara district. These are the first camps set up as per the Assam government's new guidelines keeping in mind the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This time the camps are more spaced out. Where there would be one camp before now there are two so that social distancing norms can be followed," said Varnali Deka, Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara district, where 8,941 people are currently in the camps — either

school buildings or community halls. "Our team has checked all the people for temperature, those with symptoms are isolated and put in health centres," she said adding that masks and sanitisers have been provided to the evacuees. The SDRF and NDRF have rescued 400 people from Goalpara so far.

As per the ASDMA release, 579 hectares of crop area has been destroyed, roads and bridges were breached, and erosion was reported in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Udalguri districts.

On Sunday, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal directed all Deputy Commissioners to set up separate cells to carry out relief and rescue operations since "the State government is fighting against COVID-19 and flood and erosion simultaneously."

On Monday, Assam reported its highest single day COVID-19 spike so far, with 147 cases reported till the evening. The total number of reported cases in the state are 539, out of which *470* are active.

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 25

MEMBERS OF an outfit founded by former VHP chief Praveen Togadia have ransacked a movie set resembling a church that was erected near a Shiva temple on the banks of Periyar river near Ernakulam. The location is a venue for the annual Mahashivaratri festival. Later on Monday evening, police arrested Rashtriya Bajrang Dal leader Ratheesh Malayattoor.

After an uproar over social media against the film set, a group affiliated to the Antarashtriya Hindu Parishad (AHP) and its youth wing Rashtriya Bajrang Dal reached the set with hammers and ransacked it.

The set for the Tovino Thomas-starrer Minnal Murali was put up on land owned by the Kaladi local self-government body. According to panchayat president Thulasi Bai, the set was put up in March with permission from the panchayat but the shooting was delayed owing to the lockdown to curb Covid-19.

AHP state general secretary Hari Palode said in a Facebook post, "We have decided to pull it down. Swabhimaan should be defended. When such a structure was erected at Kaladi sandbanks in front of Maha Deva, we had objected to it. We don't have a habit of pleading before others. Congratulations to all Bajrang Dal

China to evacuate its citizens facing 'difficulties' in India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

CHINA HAS decided to evacuate from India its citizens, including students, tourists and businessmen, who are facing "difficulties" in the country and want to return in the wake of Covid-19.

The Chinese embassy put out a notice on its website Monday, asking those keen to return home to book tickets in special flights.

The move comes in the wake of India becoming the 10th worst-hit country by the virus — nearly 1.40 lakh people in India have been affected. The coronavirus, which was first reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December, has spread to over 190 countries, infecting over 54 lakh people and claiming the lives of 3.4 lakh. India had evacuated around 700 Indians from Wuhan in February.

The notice by the Chinese embassy said the people opting to return home will have to accept all quarantine and epidemic preven-

tion arrangements during the flight and after entering China.

The notice in Mandarin said people treated for coronavirus infection or having symptoms of the infection like fever and cough in the last 14 days should not board the special flights.

"Through the unified arrangement of the ministry of foreign affairs and relevant departments, the Chinese diplomatic and consular missions in India will assist international students in India, tourists, temporary business visitors who have difficulties and are in urgent need to take a temporary flight back home to China," according to the notice.

It suggested that people from some other countries may also be evacuated. The notice said the cost of flight ticket and quarantine in China will have to be borne by the evacuees. "If your body temperature exceeds 37.3 degrees (inclusive) before boarding or if you have suspected symptoms, you will be refused boarding by the airline," the notice said.

Assam: Two held for beating vegetable vendor to death

ABHISHEK SAHA
GUWAHATI, MAY 25

TWO DAYS after a vegetable vendor in Assam was beaten to death by five people—an incident that was given a religious colour on social media—the police arrested two of the assailants and prima facie rejected rumours that it was a "communal" killing.

The assault took place at Hajo in Kamrup (Rural) district after the bicycle of the vendor, 40-year-old Sanatan Deka, hit a two-wheeler. Those riding the two-wheeler started beating up Deka and were joined by three of their friends, three senior police officers told *The Indian Express*.

Local residents helped the police identify the accused, following which two of them were nabbed on Monday.

On the social media, unverified claims about the incident being a "communal mob lynching" carried out by "outsiders" started doing the rounds since Sunday night.

The three police officers mentioned above denied there was any mob. One of them said: "There were two main accused who killed the victim. It started because of a traffic accident."

Kamrup SP Partha Sarathi Mahanta said the police were looking into all the aspects of the case. He added that appropriate action would be taken if any communal link was found.

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has announced a one-time financial relief of Rs 2 lakh for Deka's family.

Locusts enter Jaipur localities, officials say more likely on way

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, MAY 25

LARGE SWARMS of locusts on Monday overran several residential localities of Jaipur. This month is the first time since the early 1990s that locust swarms from Western Rajasthan have made their way into Jaipur, said officials from the Agriculture Department, adding that similar swarms of the crop-devouring insects would likely be seen in the coming days.

"Since the last one year, locust swarms have resulted in serious losses for farmers. We believe this time the swarms came all the way to Jaipur because the locusts couldn't find any crop to consume—most of the crop has already been harvested," said BR Karwa, deputy director at the Agriculture Department.

"On May 22, similar locust swarms had entered Jaipur. This was the first instance since 1993 that locust swarms entered the city," he said.

The swarm, originating in North-West Pakistan, passed through Barmer and Jaisalmer



A swarm of locusts in a residential area in Jaipur. *Rohit Jain Paras*

districts before arriving at Jaipur through Nagaur and Sikar.

"The locusts went over localities such as Vidhyadhar Nagar and Shastri Nagar before flying towards Dausa. There were lakhs of locusts coming from western Rajasthan after originating in Pakistan," said Karwa.

He added that the state government, along with the Centre, had deputed several teams to control the locust attack through

the spraying of pesticides.

"After staying in Jaipur for a few hours, the swarm went towards Dausa. Generally locust swarms arrive during winters but this time it has started early. We are expecting more such swarms in the coming days," said Karwa.

Locust attacks have been a major concern in Rajasthan since last year, with swarms damaging large portions of crops.



New Delhi



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2020

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
CITIES FORCE GROWTH, AND MAKE MEN TALKATIVE
AND ENTERTAINING, BUT THEY MAKE THEM
ARTIFICIAL. — RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

AGAINST WORKERS

UP government bid to take on power to give permission for employment elsewhere ill serves those it professes to protect

A T A WEBINAR on Sunday, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath spoke about the problems of those who have to move out of the state to earn their livelihoods. He announced that a "Migration Commission" will be established to help workers who have returned to the state amid the lockdown. The Commission will find ways to guarantee social security to workers, provide them jobs according to their skills. The CM also criticised other states for not taking care of workers from UP during the lockdown. For sure, the salience of welfare schemes for migrants — insurance, legal support, unemployment allowance — and the need for better employment avenues for them, cannot be overstated. The UP CM's stated concern for the dignity of workers from the state in workplaces in other states is also welcome. But a relevant intervention on an important issue framed by the ongoing public health emergency assumed a problematic overtone when the UP CM said: "Without our permission, our people cannot be taken by other states". Quite simply, what the chief minister has proposed is against the interests of the workers he is professing concern for. It also goes against a fundamental tenet of the Constitution: Clause d and e of Article 19 guarantee citizens the right to move freely throughout the country.

The public exchange on the issue of the stranded and vulnerable migrant workforce has thrown up several questionable and unseemly interventions so far. More than 20 lakh migrants have reportedly returned to UP in the two months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a nationwide lockdown dried up their sources of livelihood. While the UP government did mobilise buses to ferry back stranded migrants, a large number of them have had to undertake arduous journeys to return home. Earlier this month, the UP government sparred with the government of Maharashtra over logistics for the returning migrants. Last week, it engaged in a battle of one-upmanship with the Opposition Congress over buses to transport workers back to the state. Unfortunately, on this issue, the Adityanath government does not seem to be an exception. Buses from Jharkhand have reportedly been turned back from the Bengal border, the Bihar government gave only a reluctant nod to bringing migrants by Shramik Special trains, Jharkhand has accused Chhattisgarh of sending back people who tested COVID-19, and it took a public uproar for the Karnataka government to revoke its order cancelling trains for migrants.

The UP government can be said to be attempting to use the emergency created by the pandemic to give itself undue powers over its citizens. The decision of workers to return to their worksites, or not, is best left to them. Of course, the home states may have legitimate worries about their working conditions. Negotiations between states should inform efforts to create and strengthen social security for workers — not unilateral, unconstitutional decisions.

THINK SMARTER

Smart Cities Mission, which was to approach urban planning creatively, perpetuates the traditional neglect of health

OF ALL THE lessons that the pandemic has taught a civilisation that had become improbably confident of its beliefs, perhaps the most unsettling is that the most technologically capable nations cannot protect the lives and health of their citizens from a medieval plague. It follows that a political culture and economic system invested in the ideal of ever-increasing GDP must invest more in the health of its citizens, who power the engine of growth. Historically, India has hesitated to invest adequately in school education and health, the twin foundations of a mature society, and these sectors remained neglected even by the reforms process. Now, it appears that even the newest innovation for optimising spaces and communities for growth, the Smart Cities Mission, hasn't understood the foundational importance of health.

The figures are appalling. Only 1.18 per cent of the 5,861 projects okayed since 2015 are for augmenting infrastructure and capability in health. In fiscal terms, they account for only 1.03 per cent of the volume invested by the Mission. Plumbing an abyssal nadir in the importance accorded to health, this is even lower than the shamefully inadequate 1.6 per cent of GDP which the states and the Centre together set aside for health in 2019-20. For comparison, the total health expenditure in the US in 2017 was 17.9 per cent of GDP, of which the state contributed over 8.5 per cent. Of the 30 municipal jurisdictions which account for 79 per cent of cases, 17 are smart cities — and, of them, only seven have invested Mission funds directly in health. Hotspots like Jaipur and Surat have no health projects at all under the Mission.

As the Mission clarifies on its website, a smart city has no absolute definition. The term originated among Western planners to describe a city which uses Internet of Things data to optimise its services. The Indian ministry of housing and urban affairs mentions this aspect in only one of the eight features it lists for a smart city. The rest focus on urban planning strategies for quality of life, such as reducing pollution and improving land use. Health is mentioned only in one point, which discusses urban identity conferred through local economic activities like making sports goods and hosiery, and providing medical facilities. Health is not acknowledged as the substrate of productivity. We can only hope that the pandemic drives the point home, and the Mission pivots to health.

THE QUIET LEGEND

Balbir Singh was the cunning craftsman, a no-frills pragmatist, for whom only goals, gold medals and team-work mattered

IN A RARE television interview three years ago, Balbir Singh Senior, three-time Olympic gold-winning hero, who died on Monday, explained the guiding philosophy of his life and career: "Invisibility is my comfort zone." To remain invisible on the field is perhaps the biggest virtue of a centre forward, to slip between the lurking defensive lines and wriggle through lashing sticks. In a team of artistes, in an era of when high-speed dribbling was romanticised, Balbir was the cunning craftsman, a no-frills pragmatist for whom only goals, gold medals and team-work mattered. The cloak of invisibility he so proudly wore was arguably the reason he remained anonymous for most of his lifetime, and why he's scarcely romanticised like the other great stylists of the game.

It's a sporting altruism: The lens of history is unkind to men who step away from the limelight. It prefers the showstoppers, not the hardworking, self-effacing players who might have been no less indispensable in shaping history. Like Jorge Burruchaga was to Diego Maradona, like Vava and Didi to Pele, like Arthur Morris to Donald Bradman. Or like Balbir Singh to Dhyan Chand. They were all heroes, but myth-weavers did not knit sparking halos around the heads. It's not that Balbir could not dribble or reverse-flick, but that he thought those were redundant to his function and role.

So while historians consider the eight goals Dhyan Chand stroked in the Berlin Olympics (1936) final as the pinnacle of Indian hockey, the five Balbir scored in India's 6-1 thrashing of the Netherlands in the 1952 Games was arguably tougher. It arrived at a time when hockey had evolved considerably and against a much stronger and rugged Dutch team, who despite losing the final is credited as a founding father of modern-day hockey, which is decisively more athletic than artistic. But forget them not, for without their sweat, sacrifice and selflessness, history would have been less historic, legends would have been merely men. Balbir, the man fond of self-deprecation, was a true legend.



P STOB DAN

AFTER DOWNPLAYING the border stand-off for over two weeks, the government has finally dismissed China's accusations of the Indian Army crossing the Line of Actual Control. Instead, the PLA has intruded into the Indian side of the LAC, disrupted normal patrolling, and destroyed posts and bridges on the Galwan Nala at Chang-Chenmo.

Looking at the issue only from the LAC angle would be a mistake. Remember, in the wake of the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A, there was a sudden outburst from Beijing over making Ladakh a Union Territory (UT). China described India's move as "unacceptable", undermining its "sovereignty" — even raised the issue at the UNSC. India dismissed China's assertion, termed Ladakh's new status as an "internal matter" having "no implication for India's external boundaries or the LAC with China".

While India has pursued its core national interests in J&K, China's response was strategic — a shift that may have a lasting imprint on geopolitics. We have been harping on the "differing perception" theory of the LAC for decades, but in reality China has been gaining control over a massive "disputed territory" in Eastern Ladakh since the 1980s.

The Chinese first made encroachments into the 45-km long Skakjung pastureland in Demchok-Kuyul sector. This resulted in local Changpas of Chushul, Tsaga, Nidar, Nyoma, Mud, Dungti, Kuyul, Loma villages gradually losing their winter grazing that sustained 80,000 sheep/goats and 4,000 yak/ponies every winter.

Ladakh's earlier border lay at Kegu Naro — a day-long march from Dumchele. Starting from the loss of Nagsang in 1984, followed by Nakung (1991) and Lungma-Serding (1992), the last bit of Skakjung was lost in 2008. The PLA followed the nomadic Rebo routes for patrolling in contrast to Indian authorities restricting Rebo movements that led to the massive shrinking of pastureland and border defence.

By the 2000s, the PLA's focus shifted to desolate, inhospitable Chip Chap which remains inaccessible until end-March. After mid-May, water streams impede vehicles moving across Shyok, Galwan, and Chang-Chenmo rivers leaving only a month and a half for effective patrolling by the Indian side. No human beings inhabit here, a 1962 war site, an entry point into Ladakh for the Uyghurs and Tibetans. Local Ladakhi personnel

As China intrudes across LAC, India must be alert to larger strategic shift, a lasting imprint on geopolitics

manned the posts here, but patrolling in the 972 sq km Trig Height area has been lax.

Easier accessibility allowed the PLA to intrude into Chip Chap with impunity during July-August — its regulars usually spent a few hours before crossing back. But, during the 21-day Depsang stand-off in 2013, when Burtse became a flashpoint, the PLA set up remote camps 18-19 km inside Indian territory.

The Shyam Saran Report of August 2013 made a chilling revelation of India having lost 640 sq km due to "area denial" set by PLA patrolling. The government denied the report, but Chinese soldiers virtually prevented Indian troops from getting access to Rakinala near Daulat Beg-Oldie (DBO) where the IAF re-activated the world's highest landing strips in 2008. This plus the reopening of Fukche and Nyoma airbases perhaps provoked the PLA's intrusion in Depsang.

The army denied that Ladakh had shrunk. Change in the river course was cited as a reason for the loss of 500-1,500 metres of land annually. India's stepped-up construction activities may have provoked China into accusing India of altering the LAC position. Despite topographical challenges and corruption, the BRO has lately fast-tracked the 260 km long Shayok-DBO road construction that probably triggered the PLA intrusion in early May sparking the current Galwan stand-off.

Towards the south at Pangong Tso, forces had physical scuffles over area-denial for patrolling at Sirijap on May 5-6 and on May 11. The situation remains tense at Sirijap's cliff spurs and also at the Tso, where troops are chasing each other in high-speed patrol boats. Clearly, intrusions are part of China's never-ending effort to push Indian troops westward of the Indus and Shyok rivers and reach the 1960 claimed line.

Out of the 857 sq km long border in Ladakh only 368 sq km is the International Border, and the rest of the 489 sq km is the LAC. The two traditional disputed points included Trig Heights and Demchok. At eight points, the two sides have differing perceptions — Samar Lungpa 176 sq km, Depsang Plains 972, Hot Spring 38, Changlung 13, Kungkula-Phobrang 5, Sarjap 129, Spangur 24, and Dhumsale 25 sq km. But lately, China has raised two fresh dispute points at Pangong Tso 83 sq km and at Chumur where it claims 80 sq km. The old dispute sites were at the end point of Pangong Tso and at Chushul — the 1962 battle-site.

The Sirijap range on the northern bank of the lake remains most contested, from which several cliff spurs jut out — the "finger series" 1 to 8. India's LAC claim line is at Finger-8, but the actual position is only up to Finger-4. The Chinese are asserting further west to claim 83 sq km here. The PLA has built a 4.5 km long road to prevent patrolling by Indian troops. The PLA's road network from here extends to Huangyangtan base located near National Highway G219.

Further south in Demchok, China claims some 150 sq km. The PLA has built massive infrastructure on its side, moved armoured troops into Charding Nalla since 2009. Tibetan nomads pitch tents on Hemis Monastery's land throughout 2018-2019.

In Chumur, China claims 80 sq km and probably wants a straight border from PT-4925 to PT-5318 to bring Tible Mane (stupa) area under its control. For India, holding of Chumur is critical for the safety of the Manali-Leh route. Remember, the PLA demanded removal of India's fortified positions in Burtse (2013) and Demchok and Chumur (2014) for its retreat.

Overall, the pattern shows the PLA's desperate design to snatch the lake at Lukung through a three-pronged strategy of attacking from Sirijap in the north, Chuchul in the south and through the lake water from middle. This is the key chokepoint from where the Chinese can cut off Indian access to the entire flank of Chip Chap plains, Aksai Chin in the east and Shayok Valley to the north, which means that Indian control is pushed to the west of the Shyok river and south of the Indus river, forcing India to accept both rivers as natural boundaries. And once China gets control of the southern side of the Karakoram it can easily approach Siachen Glacier from the Depsang corridor and meet at Tashkurgan junction from where the CPEC crosses into Gilgit-Baltistan.

That would be disastrous for Indian defence, leaving the strategic Nubra vulnerable, possibly impacting even India's hold over Siachen. China's access to Changla-pass through Lukung and Tangtse would threaten the entire Indus Valley. It is quite possible that China is eyeing the waters of the Shyok, Galwan and Chang-Chenmo rivers, to divert them to the arid Aksai Chin and its Ali region.

The writer, a former ambassador, is an expert on India-China affairs



SOWMYA DECHAMMA C C

My 13-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter were as eager to get back from New York city as much as they had looked forward to being there. The story of my homecoming sounds quite crass when I read the stories of migrant workers waiting to return home. It took the intervention of the Karnataka High Court to order the government to pay for the travel of the migrants who had no work, no pay and no money to get back to their dear ones. It did not matter to many in high places that they were dying of exhaustion on their walk back home, or being run over on railway tracks and highways.

As I write this from an institutional five-star quarantine facility in Hyderabad, our biggest revolution is against the hotel management and with the government orders — asking for some fresh air to be let into our air-conditioned rooms. Coronavirus has made this much clear: We have one set of people fighting to be out in Hyderabad's summer air, and there is another set, numerically much larger, whose only possession perhaps is the will to walk hundreds of miles in the hot sun towards their homes.

Most people quarantined in our hotel are aged/middle-aged, upper-caste parents returning from the US, the land where the migrants' dreams come true. I may not have their caste and moneyed capital, but they do not

MIGRATION: OURS AND THEIRS

Some journeys are about choice, others are forced displacement

have my cultural capital. Yes, I know their caste. Many make it a point to tell their second names, indicating their caste. I also had people asking me if I was vegetarian, or well, Brahmin. These parents whom I interact with are not fluent in English, they are scared of conversing with the management or the doctor or the police stationed 24/7 at the hotel. Some rely on me (and my children) to navigate technology, fill forms in English, and to talk to whichever authority. But yet, they were able to meet the exorbitant cost of the ticket from the US to India, choose the "premium category" of quarantine, and even bicker about the food served to us. As we wait to receive the food served outside the room in the hotel corridor, conversations range from how many children each has in the US to what is served in the other hotels where their acquaintances are quarantined, and how suffocating it can get inside AC rooms. We even ventured to ask for biryani on Eid.

Do I need to contrast these US-migrant dreams with dreams of migrants' stories of homecoming within India? The protagonist of the Indian-American dream is not a migrant-worker. Theirs is largely a story of choice. This cannot be the story of the worker-migrant, more often than not belonging to the so-called lower castes and to Adivasi communities, displaced from their homelands multiple times for various reasons, the most popular reason being that of the 'greater common good', without choice or voice.

lar reason being that of the "greater common good", without choice or voice.

I was anxious about returning from New York, where I had gone on a fellowship. I kept writing to everyone I could, from the ambassador of India in the US to friends, about repatriation flights. The Indian embassy always replied. Was this kind of efficiency available to the migrant-worker? What about the blue-collar Indian workers in the Gulf? I know that in Jordan and Singapore, workers from India are struggling in dormitories. It was only in early May, nearly two months after the lockdown, when the economy started opening up, that the Shramik trains started running. Where and how did those who travelled in these spend the last two months? That they had to wait in the scorching sun with luggage on their head for buses to take them to the railway station, that they were hosed down with chemical disinfectants while booking their tickets, that they waded through the Yamuna in the hope of reaching home, that there was no water and many times the packets of food given to them were stale, that their dismembered bodies lay on the rail tracks, while some of us fought to be let out for some fresh air says a lot about the society we are.

The writer teaches at the University of Hyderabad



MAY 26, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM UNREST
THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT called the army out in the Barpeta sub-division of Lower Assam, in an obvious show of force, in view of the observance tomorrow of "demand day" by the Congress (I)-backed All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) and "Barpeta bandh" called by the Barpeta District Students Union. According to Assam chief secretary, troops have been called out and para-military reinforcements rushed to Barpeta. The AAGSP and the AASU have, in the meantime, accused the government of inciting communal violence in the state by encouraging the minorities to launch a counter-agitation.

SOUTH KOREA RIOTS
THE SOUTH KOREAN foreign ministry urged all foreign embassies in Seoul to get their nationals out of Kwangju area "as soon as possible", a US embassy source said. The recommendation was issued as anti-government demonstrators and South Korean military forces continued their tense vigil behind barricades in the riot-battered provincial capital. More than 100 persons were killed in anti-government rioting there last week following the imposition of martial law and censorship throughout the country and arrests of several leading politicians.

HERAT ATTACKS
RADIO KABUL CONFIRMED urban guerrilla attacks in the strategic Afghan city of Herat, about 110 km from the Iran border. The Pashto-language broadcast followed numerous reports that rebels controlled key sectors of the western provincial capital, including the water supply, and of heavy clashes between the insurgents and Afghans and Soviet forces holding other parts of the city. Kabul Radio claimed that anti-government forces raided the Herat provincial police headquarters, killing an undisclosed number of soldiers. Total rebel losses were not disclosed but it said one terrorist was shot.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The contagion of fear

Paranoia has been constructed around COVID-19. It is fuelled by lack of education, erosion of science and scientific temper



SHAH ALAM KHAN

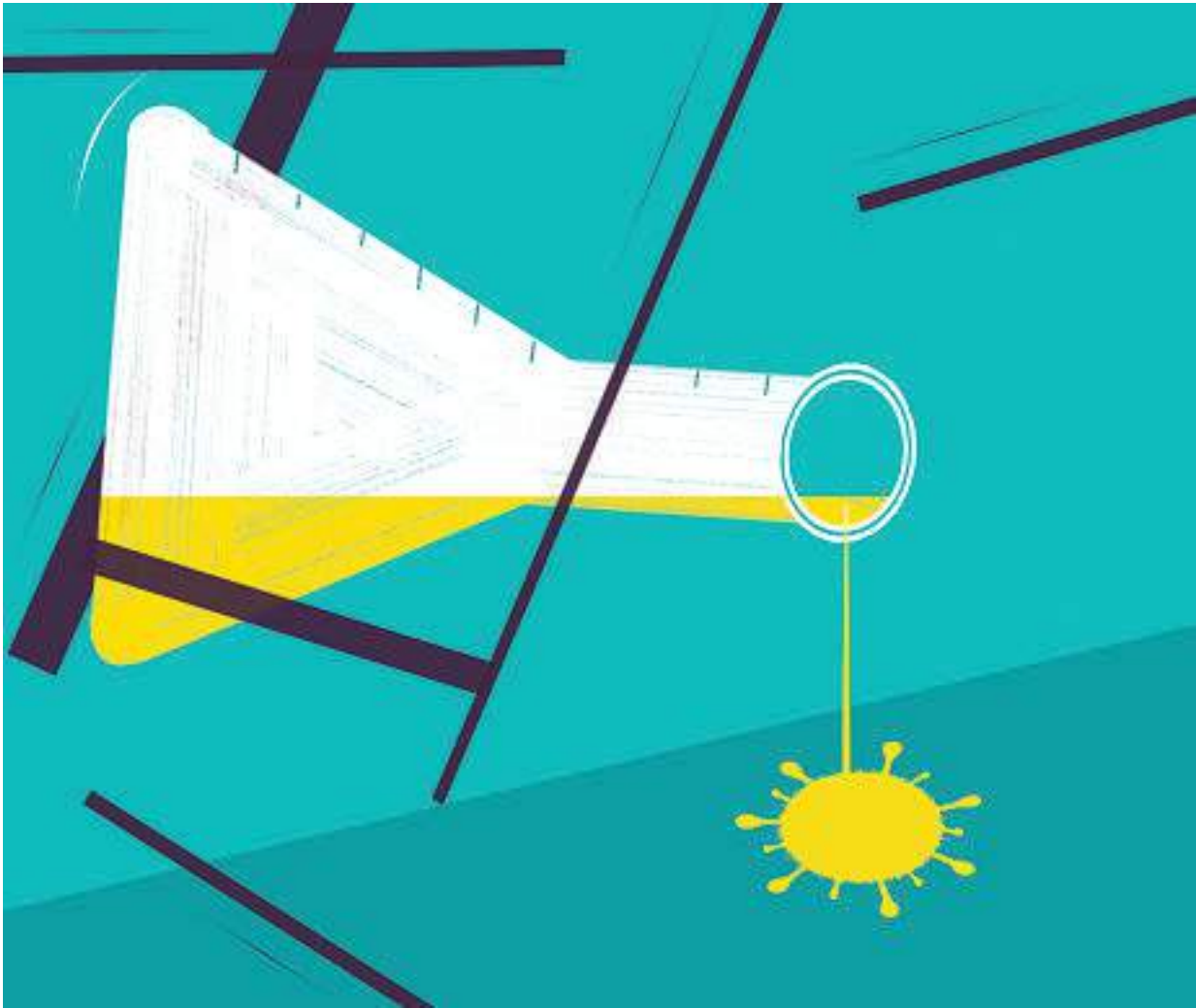
IN HIS NOVEL, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, published in 1722 after the bubonic plague devastated Europe, author Daniel Defoe writes about families forced into quarantine due to an infected family member. He states that it was generally from such houses that dismal shrieks and cries of poor people were heard — they were terrified and even frightened to death, by the sight of the condition of their dearest relations, and of being imprisoned as they were. In an interview to the *New York Times* in 1988, author and Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez said: “Plagues are like imponderable dangers that surprise people. They seem to have the quality of destiny.” Defoe’s nearly 400-year-old account and Marquez’s definition of destiny seem to have returned to haunt the world as we struggle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pandemics and the measures taken to control them invariably lead to severe mental stress, as has been shown by many scientific articles. Enough scientific literature is available to show that the disease and the so-called remedy — the lockdown — caused significant mental stress to the people subjected to it during the ongoing pandemic. This stress can translate into different kinds of action. In deeply traditional and religious societies like ours, compounded by the paucity of education, scientific temper and logical thinking, these actions can be extremely treacherous.

On April 24, a 34-year old man was reportedly attacked in Kalyan, Maharashtra, on the suspicion of being a COVID-19 patient. He died, following the attack. In another case, a 25-year-old man was injured in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, on the suspicion of being a COVID-19 patient. Similar incidence of violence against people suspected of harbouring the notorious virus has been reported from all around the country. Besides the general public, doctors, nurses and other health personnel have also been targeted. Junior doctors from my hospital have been issued notices by their landlords, requesting them to vacate their rented accommodation because of the neighbourhood’s hostility. All in all, it didn’t take long for the COVID-19 pandemic to take the shape of a stigmatised, contagious beast in India. This needs to be carefully evaluated and understood because, sadly, it is a reflection of the society we have become.

The stigma attached to COVID-19 in India is not without reason. We have a penchant to attach stigmas to various phenomena. Besides ill-founded traditions, the commonest stigmas go with diseases. People with mental health issues, neurological diseases like epilepsy, physical disabilities, tuberculosis, skin disorders and leprosy are shunned, mistreated and not considered equals by our society.

But the stigma attached to a pandemic with high infection rates is unique in many ways. It’s unique because it comes from extreme fear. The paranoia which has been constructed around COVID-19 in the last three months has made matters worse. The hasty lockdown and the unfortunate migration of the poor out of cities on foot have



C.R Sasikumar

only compounded the fear. The poor migrant has unsurprisingly carried hatred against us, the citywallahs, and fear of the disease to wherever he went in the hinterland. The general public remained ill-informed or misinformed on many aspects of the disease. The undemocratic lockdown, even if it can be argued as being necessary, led to further strengthening of a notion that we are dealing with a disease which was so contagious and so lethal that it can lead to the death of anyone who comes in contact with an infected person. It was unfortunate that the government puffed its chest in claiming that this was the strictest lockdown in the world. Visuals of police atrocities in implementing the lockdown played their part in fortifying the notion that we are dealing with a disease “worth the stigma”. I believe that the strictness of the lockdown played its part in inducing fear in the minds of the general public, thereby attaching more stigma to the disease.

In the initial phase of the lockdown in Delhi, the government started a process of marking homes of people advised to be in quarantine or homes with actual patients. This is an old practice, which is still prevalent in many European countries. But such a “marking out” in a country like ours reinforced the fear around COVID-19. There are better and more discreet methods to implement a quarantine. In Kerala, which has the best results in the country in terms of containing the disease, ASHA workers were deployed and tele-counselling services were provided to families with suspected infected patients or those under quarantine.

The role of educating the masses cannot be overemphasised during such an outbreak. An effective way would have been to use the village health workers in a door-to-door

Scientific or logical behaviour is both culturally derived and individually ingrained. Unfortunately, the last few years have seen a sequential erosion of science and scientific temper in our country. Sadly, this erosion has been accelerated by the unscientific rhetoric from the highest offices of the executive. Even sadder is the silence of the scientific community on this erosion. The lack of scientific thinking has been unabated even in the times of the COVID-19.

campaign. In this respect, the Kerala government’s initiative, called “Break the Chain”, is worth a mention. The campaign aimed to educate people about the importance of personal hygiene and simple methods like hand washing techniques.

Scientific or logical behaviour in society evolves over time. It is both culturally derived and individually ingrained. Unfortunately, the last few years have seen a sequential erosion of science and scientific temper in our country. Sadly, this erosion has been accelerated by the unscientific rhetoric from the highest offices of the executive. Even sadder is the silence of the scientific community on this erosion. The lack of scientific thinking has been unabated even in the times of the COVID-19. Promotion of Ganga jal and *gau mutra* as a cure for COVID-19 and the concomitant misinformation, rumours and speculation about the pandemic on social and other media, have only added to further confusion and fear.

There is a subtle difference between caution and fear when it comes to containing a pandemic of this scale. Caution helps in salvaging the self while fear consumes both the self and those around us. Stigmatisation comes from fear. If we want to come out of the ruins of this pandemic and from the consequences of the lockdown, we have to remove fear and stigma from this awful disease. We have to let our minds be governed by science, and not fakery. We must remember that illnesses are as old as civilisation and our only hope in fighting diseases lies in our undeterred faith in science and reason.

The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception to this thumb rule.

The writer is professor of orthopaedics, AIIMS, New Delhi. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The government has justified its decision to reopen by saying that Pakistan’s figures are ‘much better than countries in the West’ and that perhaps populations in South Asia have some miracle, unproven immunity.” — DAWN

The Pashtun question

As it ponders engagement with Taliban, Delhi cannot turn away from the complex geopolitics of the Pashtun lands



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

DELHI NEEDS TO look beyond the question of engaging with the Taliban and focus on the larger Pashtun question that once again promises to shape the geopolitics of the north-western Subcontinent. The question of a direct dialogue with the Taliban was beginning to gain some relevance as the group’s effective control of territory in Afghanistan expanded in recent years. It has acquired some immediacy after the Donald Trump Administration announced plans for a significant drawdown of its forces from Afghanistan and signed a peace deal with the Taliban earlier this year.

Renewed public interest in the question was triggered earlier this month when the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, called on India to open a political conversation with the Taliban. The interest was further amplified by a signal from the Taliban that it is eager for a productive relationship with India.

Those calling for direct engagement with the Taliban say that Delhi can’t ignore such an important force in Afghan politics. Opponents say there is no reason for Delhi to join the international stampede to embrace the Taliban. If and when the Taliban becomes a peaceful entity and joins the quest for a political settlement with Kabul, they argue, Delhi should have no objection to direct talks.

For all the interest it has generated, the question of Delhi opening a dialogue with the Taliban is a tactical issue focused on when, how and on what terms.

But the Taliban remains an important sub-set of the larger and more strategic Pashtun question that holds the key to India’s enduring interest in Afghanistan: Promoting a peaceful, independent and a sovereign Afghanistan that is not a subaltern to the Pakistani army.

Two basic issues define the Pashtun question and will have a huge bearing on Afghanistan’s political evolution after the impending drawdown of the US forces from the country.

One is the problem of reconciling the interests of multiple ethnic groups in Afghanistan — the Pashtuns who constitute nearly 42 per cent of the population. The sizeable Afghan minorities include 27 per cent Tajiks, 9 per cent each of Hazaras and Uzbeks.

Irrespective of the nature of the regimes in Kabul over the last four decades — the

communist government in the 1980s, the mujahideen and Taliban rule that followed in the 1990s and the post-Taliban coalition that took charge in 2002 — constructing a stable internal balance has been hard.

That problem will acquire a new intensity as the Taliban stakes claim for a dominant role in Kabul. But has the Taliban learnt to live in peace with the minorities? The Taliban, an essentially Pashtun formation, had brutally crushed the minorities during its brief rule in the late 1990s. There are some indications that the Taliban is now reaching out to the minorities but it is some distance away from winning their trust.

The problem of constructing internal balance in Afghanistan has been complicated by Pakistan’s meddling, which is driven by unrealistic ambition and unreasonable fear. Pakistan would like to have the kind of hegemony that the British Raj exercised over Afghanistan. Neither can Pakistan replicate that dominance nor are the Afghans willing to concede it to the Pakistani army.

Pakistan’s ambitious talk of strategic depth is accompanied by worries about its Pashtun minority. There are more than twice as many Pashtuns living in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. The Pashtun population is estimated to be around 15 million in Afghanistan and 35 million in Pakistan.

Although Pashtun separatism has long ceased to be a force in Pakistan, Islamabad finds the Pashtun question re-emerge in a different form. Pakistan can’t really bet that the Taliban will not put Pashtun nationalism above the interests of the Pakistani state. The Taliban, for example, has never endorsed the Durand Line as the legitimate border with Pakistan. It is by no means clear if Pakistan’s construction of the Taliban as a conservative religious force has obliterated the group’s ethnic character.

Meanwhile, Islamabad’s quest for control over Afghanistan over the last four decades has heaped extraordinary suffering on the Pashtun people on Pakistan’s side of the Durand Line. As the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement seeks a peaceful redressal of its demands for basic human rights, Pakistan has unleashed massive repression.

Pakistan’s expansive military and political investments in Afghanistan have not really resolved Islamabad’s security challenges on its western frontier. If an Afghan triumph eludes Pakistan, Delhi can’t escape the complex geopolitics of the Pashtun lands. That the Taliban wants to talk to India and Pakistan brands Pashtun leaders as Indian agents only underlines Delhi’s enduring salience in Afghanistan.

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



MANU CHANDRA

WHIRLPOOLS CAUSE TREMENDOUS disruption on the surface. Water churns menacingly, creating a pull that drags anything caught in its current below the surface, and then basically leaves it there, disoriented. If the person caught up in a whirlpool does not panic and has phenomenal lung capacity, the chances are he/she will rise to the surface, battered and petrified, but alive. And, some distance from where they went under.

This is where a large chunk of my industry — the restaurant industry — finds itself now. Stories about how restaurants may be breeding grounds for the virus, or how air-conditioners propagate the disease, abet a trust deficit that has already formed in the minds of the average customer.

The toll on the restaurant business has, by now, been well documented, especially in countries like the US, where data suggests that the hospitality sector accounts for nearly a third of the unemployment numbers. At last count, reportedly about 7.5 million people have claimed unemployment benefits — a huge number, millions, from the leisure and hospitality sector alone. These numbers are so stark and devastating that little needs to be said about the calamitous consequences they will have on the industry at large.

A table for none

We will return to an altered landscape of restaurants, with more love, affection

Contrary to popular belief, the restaurant business operates on razor-thin margins: Fixed costs are high, rentals are first-world whilst prices charged are third-world, and bills get paid because of a rolling debt model. A complete shutdown for even a week is disastrous, and 60 days is the equivalent of a meteor strike.

Many businesses in this sector will be unable to weather this storm, with estimates about the number of places that will have to close down in the next six to eight months ranging from 20-35 per cent. This will be a body blow for a very large, young working population, most often migrants, who travelled for work because their home states just didn’t have the opportunities. With social distancing norms in place, and the distinct possibility that restaurant occupancy will be dictated by municipal authorities, carrying the levels of staff one did pre-COVID will now be untenable.

What will also fundamentally alter is the restaurant experience, at least for some time. These are places built to be social hubs, where constant interaction and service played as much of a role as the ambience and food. With these factors largely removed from the equation, conversations with servers speaking to you from behind

a protective face screen, handing out disposable menus with plastic-wrapped cutlery, to a table of only four people, dining out will become functional, not experiential as it was designed to be.

Restaurants now have no choice but to innovate to bridge the wide gap that this reduction in footfalls will create. Many new trends are emerging globally: Meal kits, cocktail mixes, online cooking classes and vouchers for the future — anything to prevent the business from sinking deeper. Delivery seems to be the war cry for everyone, but let’s be honest: A business that works on cost models designed to thrive only when its seating capacity is leveraged to the maximum cannot survive on delivery alone.

“Contactless” dining, the new catchphrase used indiscriminately by tech companies that relied heavily on our business, is something that will take hold for a long time. Dining can never be contactless, but the moniker is being used to sell a new era of tech-enabled eating out option, with little human interaction.

Real estate will be rationalised because boom-time windfalls will not exist — there just won’t be any takers. State governments, which relied heavily on revenues that these

businesses generated, will need to rethink their previous bullying and, frankly, bizarre policy decisions for the hospitality sector.

There’s an optimist in me, however, who, after nearly two months of getting used to daily birdsong and clean air, believes that this too shall pass. That, whilst the overall impact and financial hit to our ecosystem will have long-lasting effects — one which many will not be able to survive — the social animals that human beings are, their return to busy bars and bustling eateries will only be natural.

Inevitably, there will be a cure, a vaccine, something that reminds us that while we are a lot more fragile than we’d imagined, nothing can prevent us from being around one another, eventually. The last 60 days have also been a reminder of the importance of the hearth, the respect for ingredients, the tribulations of taking to the stove daily, the joys of sitting around a table, and ultimately, the reverence people who do this every day need to be given. We will return to an altered landscape of restaurants, but with a lot more love and affection towards them.

The writer is chef partner with the Olive Group

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CLASSROOM FIRST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Ease of learning’, (IE, May 25). Smart classes and online education have been a part of the Indian education system but due to a lack of infrastructure and support, they couldn’t become widespread. This pandemic has forced the system to explore online education. While online education familiarises students with modern technology, conventional classrooms still remain the best form of learning. Children not only learn social skills, but develop leadership qualities by performing the role of a monitor, prefect and head student of the school.

Rahul Maheshwari, Kanpur

UNPREPARED

THIS REFERS TO the reports, ‘Covid wake-up call: Health infrastructure only 1 per cent of Smart City projects’ and ‘Whistleblower behind Gujarat HC order: No PPE kit, mask, gloves... can be in big trouble’ (IE, May 25). They reveal the lack of political will and hollow claims about the disaster preparedness of hospitals. But for the whistleblower’s letter to the high court, the truth would not have come out. And instead of responding to the substantive issues Gujarat Health Minister Nitin Patel is harping on his age and risking visits to hospitals at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is using tele-conferencing to interact and guide.

L.R Murmu, Delhi

REFORM BODIES

THIS REFERS TO THE article, ‘Rebooting the world’ (IE, May 25). Since World

IDEAS ONLINE

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● **THE RISK PERCEPTION: KANCHAN MUKHERJEE**

● **REPURPOSING MGNREGA: ASHWINI KULKARNI AND PRAMATHESH AMBASTA**

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War II, the esteemed institutions responsible for international peace, healthcare and education have been struggling. It’s the high time that these institutions, both global and regional, transform themselves and play a positive role in the global community in the post-COVID world.

Ankit Singh, Prayagraj

TALK IT OUT

THIS refers to the editorial, ‘Unquiet front’ (IE, May 25). An eerie unease on the Indo-China borders following the longstanding controversy over territory close to the Line Of Actual Control (LAC), doesn’t portend well for mutual and bilateral interests. The current tensions could jeopardise regional peace. Hence, both the neighbours need sincere and serious deliberations in order to wriggle out of these territorial complications. At a time when we face a common threat, diplomacy and friendship must prevail.

Azhar A Khan, Rampur

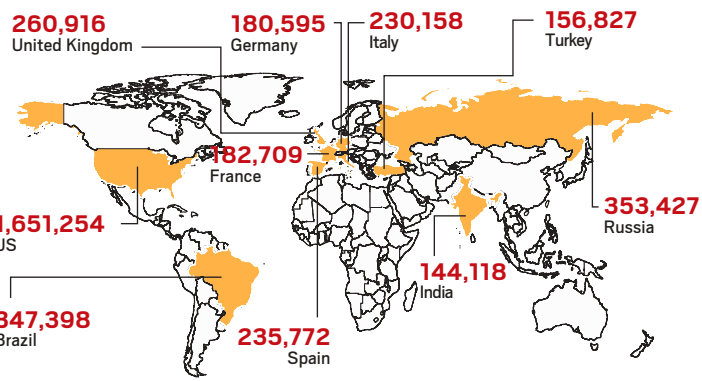


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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

THE WORLD



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 5,453,784 **DEATH COUNT: 345,886**

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11 pm on May 24. **JHU's India tally and Health Ministry's tally (below) may not match as these are accounted at different times.**

Strokes in Covid-19 patients: 4 studies capture trends

HOW FREQUENT, and how severe, are strokes among Covid-19 patients? A series of papers in the journal *Stroke*, published by the American Heart Association, examines trends from four countries. The broad findings:

- The rate of strokes in Covid-19 patients appears relatively low; but —
- A higher proportion of those strokes are among younger people;
- The strokes in Covid-19 patients

are often more severe compared to strokes in people who do not have the novel coronavirus, while global rates for stroke hospitalisations and treatments are significantly lower than for the first part of 2019.

One study, covering New York between March 15 and April 19, found that out of 3,556 hospitalised Covid cases, 32 patients (0.9%) had ischemic stroke. They compared those 32 Covid patients to those admitted only with stroke (46 patients) and found that the patients with Covid tended to be younger (average age 63) versus non-Covid stroke patients (average age 70). Strokes among the Covid patients were more severe (based on a stroke scale) and these patients were

more likely to be dead at hospital discharge (63.6% vs. 9.3%).

Another study, from Hong Kong, reported delays in the time from stroke onset to hospital arrival. Between January 23 and March 24, the onset-to-arrival time in Queen Mary Hospital was about an hour longer in 2020 compared with 2019 (154 minutes vs 95 minutes).

A study from China found that in February 2020, hospital admissions related to stroke dropped 40%, compared to the same time period in 2019.

A fourth study, from France, found that between February 15 and March 30, there was a 21% decrease (844 in 2019 vs 668 in 2020) in overall volume of ischemic patients receiving mechanical thrombectomy during the pandemic compared to 2019. Additionally, there was an increase in the amount of time from imaging to treatment overall — 145 minutes in 2020 vs 126 minutes in 2019; this increased by 30 minutes in patients transferred to other facilities for treatment after imaging.

SOURCE: AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

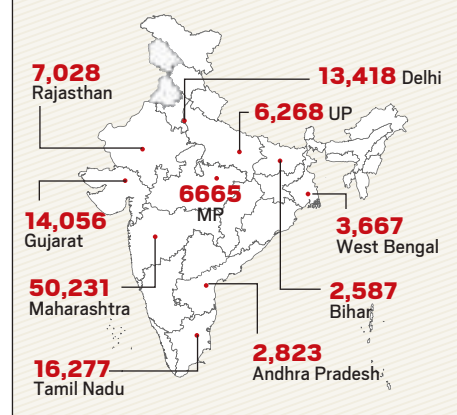


PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

INDIA COUNT: 138,845 (4,021 DEATHS)

TOP TO STATES



REST OF INDIA

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	33
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Assam	378
Chandigarh	238
Chhattisgarh	252
Dadar Nagar Haveli	2
Goa	66
Haryana	1184
Himachal Pradesh	203
Jammu and Kashmir	1621
Jharkhand	370
Karnataka	2089
Kerala	847
Ladakh	52
Manipur	32
Meghalaya	14
Mizoram	1
Odisha	1336
Puducherry	41
Punjab	2060
Sikkim	1
Telangana	1854
Tripura	191
Uttarakhand	317

Union Health Ministry update as of 11 pm, May 25. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states/UTs with at least one case listed above.

57,721 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 32 STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

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

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

What can go wrong with styrene?

On May 7, a leak of styrene gas in Visakhapatnam left 11 dead and affected thousands. A leading scientist discusses the compound, health implications, and possible causes for the leak, based on what is known



SWAMINATHAN SIVARAM

Based on what we know, what could have happened in Vizag on May 7?

Let me first summarise what we do know. The plant was under start-up after a lockdown of 40 days. The tank that leaked had a capacity of 2,400 tonnes, with 1,800 tonnes of styrene present at the time. The operators were checking the storage tank, and it has been reported that one of the valves in the tank was probably not handled well. It also appears that there was a technical glitch in the refrigerator unit of the tank. From videos and photos taken immediately after the accident, copious amounts of white dense vapours are seen gushing from somewhere at the bottom of the tank.

Now, a bit about styrene. It is actually a colourless liquid, and not a gas. Styrene exists as a single molecule, but is unstable and has a high propensity for auto-polymerisation, meaning it tries to combine with itself to make long chains, especially at temperatures over 65°C. This process is exothermic, that is, a lot of heat is released during auto-polymerisation, and can become uncontrollable.

For these reasons, styrene is always stored at relatively low temperatures (between 15°C and 20°C). This is to avoid inadvertent polymerisation and the resultant generation of heat. A small amount of another chemical — called an inhibitor — such as para-tertiary-butyl-catechol is also added to stored styrene in order to prevent polymerisation. Despite these precautions, in geographies or seasons that have significant temperature differences between night and day, small amounts of styrene vapourise when the temperature is high, and then condenses on tank roofs, walls, or fittings, when it cools down. The inhibitor exists only in the liquid phase, and thus styrene vapours don't have the inhibitor mixed in them. So, in condensed styrene stuck on walls, roof or fittings, there is nothing to prevent auto-polymerisation. This often leads to a plugging of pressure relief valves in the tank or in the pipelines.

Now based on all this information, here is what I think could have happened in Vizag:



Smoke rises from LG Polymers, Visakhapatnam, site of styrene leak on May 7. AP

Due to the long shutdown, it is possible that slow polymerisation of styrene in the tank had begun, especially where it might have been in condensed state. This probably went unnoticed. In addition, there have been reports that some valves had failed to function at the time of start-up, probably because of choking, and it is quite possible that the process adopted for declogging these valves might have resulted in them giving way, and the liquid styrene leaking out. As the liquid streamed out of the small orifice, it would have led to a sudden turbulence and mixing in the tank, which in turn could have led to violent polymerisation. This probably resulted in an increase in temperature inside the tank, facilitating the vaporisation of styrene, and these vapours escaping. And because the refrigeration system had also malfunctioned, there was nothing to control the rise of temperature inside the tank.

An alternative hypothesis is that styrene condensate formed on the roof and walls of the tank might have fallen into the liquid, and could have become the reason for initiation of polymerisation.

Now, the fact that long storage, lack of refrigeration, or depleting inhibitor content leads to slow polymerisation is not unknown. It happens occasionally, and is detected during routine monitoring of the storage tank. If timely intervention is not made, it could lead to a runaway explosive condition. I do not think that kind of explosive condition existed in the Vizag

tanks at the time of the accident. Otherwise, the result could have been far more catastrophic, as the tank itself could have ruptured.

The accident revived memories of Bhopal. As someone who handled the aftermath of the Bhopal leak, do you see parallels?

I think it is unfair to compare this accident with the leak of methyl isocyanate (MIC) in Bhopal. MIC is far more poisonous and toxic. The concentration of MIC that is classified as immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) is just 2-5 parts per million, whereas for styrene, this is 700 ppm. MIC's biological response in human beings is similar to that of hydrogen cyanide. It blocks the functions of haemoglobin in the blood.

The only thing for which I can speak of both in the same breath is that both accidents were avoidable with a little extra care.

Does this suggest an element of negligence in the Vizag accident?

All accidents have an inherent element of negligence. It is often said that an accident is a consequence of confluence of 95% unsafe acts and 5% unsafe conditions. Several standard precautions seem to have been missed. A standard practice is to analyse the contents of the storage tanks daily for oxygen, inhibitor and polymer concentrations. The temperature inside the tank also needs to be monitored regularly, and kept as low as possible, with con-

tinuous refrigeration. These checks are even more important during long plant shutdowns. Inadvertent polymerisation of styrene gives us enough notice and warnings, as temperature rises very slowly. Even in the absence of an inhibitor, it takes about 25 days for the temperature in the tank to increase from 20°C to 30°C. So periodic monitoring is all that is required to ensure safety.

Industry has been handling styrene for decades now. There is no documented record of a major styrene-related accident anywhere in the world. Some minor accidents involving rail car containers and road tankers have been reported. One of the biggest incidents reported was an explosion in a shipping tanker in a South Korean port last year. This is true of the industry in India as well. India imports close to 1.5mn tonnes of styrene annually and processes it into several products we use daily.

What does styrene do to the body?

Styrene has low oral toxicity and moderate inhalation toxicity. Styrene vapours are an irritant to eyes, gastro-intestinal tract, mucous membranes, and respiratory tract. But long-term health effects of styrene are very small. There is no evidence that it induces any kind of cancer. Most of the symptoms of exposure to styrene are reversible.

What does the Vizag accident say about industrial safety standards in India?

In recent years the record of process safety in the chemical industry has significantly improved, thanks to technology, automation and IT. India has some unique problems that we need to address quickly. A lot of our chemical manufacturing is in the small and medium sectors, whose ability to invest in industrial and environmental safety as well as occupational health is limited. Several of our manufacturing plants are ageing and reluctant to invest in capital either to revamp or scrap/rebuild, and that is a matter of concern. Urban populations have encroached on spaces that were originally demarcated for industry, including the buffer (and green) zones that all chemical industry was mandated to follow. There is also an increasing tendency to skip long-term training and skill development by resorting to casual labour in the operational area. The chemical industry will face severe shortage of skilled operating personnel in the years to come.

Dr Swaminathan Sivaram is a former director of National Chemical Laboratory, Pune. He spoke to **Amitabh Sinha**

Now online, a map tracking migrants, real time

SEEMA CHISHTI

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

INDIA OBSERVATORY, an open-source database, has come up with a GIS-enabled dashboard that includes an India map reflecting the movement of migrants in real time on their long journeys, often on foot, along with facilities and relief organisations on their routes.

The platform, a collaboration with Anand-based Forest Ecological Security (FES) as its main nodal point, is called CoAST India (Collaboration/Covid Action Support Group). It draws information from 55 organisations on the ground, mostly in villages, and aims to make such data available so that it would enable governments and small local civil society groups to be of assistance.

The map matches "time and spatial data, on administrative facilities in the area, transportation and healthcare facilities of an area

and summaries, on the fly, in real time of people passing by," said Jagdeesh Rao, CEO of FES,

From ecology to migration

India Observatory was set up in December 2019, with FES focused on ecological issues about forests, water bodies, conservation, etc. that needed "a bird's eye view or a satellite's vision". "We had started getting an ability to track natural habitat for all of India. We had data over 1,800 parameters which we mapped... But when Covid-19 broke out, hundreds of persons came forward and we decided to recraft the site to take into account movements of people, we formed a group called RCRP (Rapid Community Response to Covid). Placing all the information we have about resources and infrastructure on the ground, along with needs of people passing through or stopping over, needing food, financial support, medical care or facing any other threat, we have a proper grid available, updated

regularly. So a click on the map can tell us of the people who are travelling, the issues they have and the resources of the area. The local groups can reach them and provide support."

The governments of Jharkhand and Kerala shared data that enabled the map to get off the ground. On April 15, an Ecological Web of India became functional as the Migrant Map as they moved. Azim Premji Foundation, LibTech, IIIT Bengaluru, and the PHIA Foundation, and volunteers with the Stranded Workers Action Network and Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (RRA) Network, helped found this. The data started with recording thousands of distress phone calls received, and was plotted on to a map.

What it contains

Four elements are sought to be brought together: location of migrants and vulnerable people, their specific needs, location of key infrastructure on the way which can dou-

ble up as a rest-centre, or quarantine space and location of relief and rehabilitation providing NGOs and civil society organisations.

Rao emphasises the importance of open-source data at a time of crisis like this so that small groups that are efficient in small areas can help mitigate the disaster and not wait for big organisations or governments alone to make the moves.

Former ISRO chief A S Kiran Kumar, at a panel in Hyderabad where India Observatory was launched on December 3, 2019, spoke of the importance of developing geospatial data and the importance of it being available to all, government, civil society and industry, to enable its best use. But most data held by the National Disaster Management Authority or the Survey of India is usually treated as "strategic" and is not available to the public at large.

The map is available free in 12 languages at <https://dp.observatory.org.in/content/migration-route-covid-19>.

In uncertain times, how search for 'normal year' leads to data vacuum

HARISH DAMODARAN

NEW DELHI, MAY 25

IN 2009-10, the National Sample Survey Office (now National Statistical Office or NSO) conducted a large sample survey of Household Consumer Expenditure (HCE). This survey, usually carried out once in five years, was repeated in 2011-12. The reason: 2009-10 saw India suffer both a severe drought and the aftereffects of the global financial crisis. 2011-12 was a "normal" year like 1999-2000 and 2004-05, "free" from any major economic downturn.

2011-12 not just yielded the HCE survey data used for estimating poverty lines and ratios: Households with consumption expenditure below a certain level, which is state-specific and different for rural and urban areas, are considered poor. That period produced a surfeit of information also from the 2011 Census, NSSO's Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS), and the Rural Development Ministry's Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC). Policymakers and researchers were, simply put, spoilt for choice with regard to official data availability.

Contrast these to the present times

where there's a virtual data vacuum. The NSO did carry out an HCE survey for 2017-18, but the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation did not release its results citing "data quality issues". Instead, it proposed back-to-back HCE surveys in 2020-21 and 2021-22 "after incorporating all data quality refinements".

The 2020-21 survey is supposed to start from July, which looks unlikely given the novel coronavirus-induced situation. "It is a massive exercise due to the size of the sample (1,01,651 households in 2011-12) and also questionnaire (covering the consumption of around 300 food and non-food items). The field investigators go to remote areas and spend roughly 2 hours with each household. Nobody can risk it this time, so we'll have to wait for the 2021-22 survey," said Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician of India.

But it's not just the HCE survey.

What else is uncertain

The Census is scheduled to be conducted in February-March 2021. Prior to that, the first Houselisting & Housing phase — which looks at the amenities and assets possessed by households along with the condition of homes — was to take place dur-

ing April-September 2020. There were question marks over the launch of this phase even before the lockdown, especially as it was clubbed with the update of the National Population Register opposed by many non-BJP-ruled states.

With Covid-19, there is a remote chance of the Houselisting & Housing phase taking off immediately. The houselisting operation is crucial for carving out enumeration blocks or specific areas that are allotted to each of the 30 lakh-odd field functionaries tasked with collection of Census information. "We have postponed all the activities till further orders," an official spokesperson told *The Indian Express*.

The same goes for the SECC, whose individual/household-level data, unlike that of the regular Census, isn't confidential. The government has used the SECC-2011 database for identifying beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (rural housing), Ujjwala (LPG connection), Saubhagya (household electrification), Ayushman Bharat (health insurance) and other welfare schemes. But SECC-21, too, cannot be undertaken without the demarcation of enumeration blocks as part of the Census houselisting operation.

Even assuming the current uncertainty to be temporary, the considerable time lag before the release of the next HCE survey, Census and SECC findings leaves very few, relatively recent, sources of primary survey data available for enabling informed policymaking. Yes, there is the Agriculture Census 2015-16, the NABARD All-India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2016-17, and the NSO's 2017-18 reports on social consumption (health and education) and access to drinking water and sanitation. But they don't answer basic questions: Has poverty in India fallen and by how much since 2011-12? Is consumption of protein-rich foods and vegetables growing at the same rate as in the previous decade? Do official production estimates for milk or horticultural crops square up with HCE data on household consumption?

What this can lead to

The economic crisis, particularly post lockdown, further complicates matters. With neither 2020-21 nor 2021-22 set to be "normal years", any official survey may throw up distorted results, such as a dramatic drop in HCE. The upcoming Census could also give a distorted picture with re-

gard to migrants, whose share in India's population rose from 29.9% to 37.6% between 2001 and 2011.

"The Census considers a person a migrant if he/she, on the date of enumeration, is at a place different from his/her place of birth. In an unusual year such as this, where many migrant workers have gone back to their villages, you might end up with something different from the actual overall decadal trend," noted Sen.

Mahesh Vyas, managing director of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), believes the government should continuously do surveys without waiting for normal years. "Finding there is becoming increasingly difficult. In 2016-17, there was demonetisation. In 2017-18, it was goods and services tax. 2018-19 and 2019-20 were apparently normal, but this year you again have lockdown," he pointed out.

The NSO's more recent Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) have broken new ground by producing annual estimates of employment and unemployment in rural and urban India (as opposed to the five-yearly EUS till 2011-12), along with quarterly figures for only urban areas. But so far, only the PLFS for 2017-18 has been released.

For 2018-19, quarterly data for urban areas is available till January-March 2019. The one significant trend these reveal is a drop in the proportion of India's population aged 15 years and above currently employed or seeking work — the labour force participation rate (LFPR) — from 55.9% in 2011-12 to 49.8% in 2017-18.

CMIE, which is a private data provider, has been compiling all-India weekly LFPR and unemployment rates since January 2016. Its Consumer Pyramids survey claims to cover 174,405 households in four-month periods, more than the 102,113 that the NSO's 2017-18 PLFS did over one year.

"We do about 43,600 households in a month and 10,900 every week... We are able to generate reliable weekly rates. Our estimates are consistent with the trend captured by the PLFS. Post lockdown, we have seen both falling LFPR and rising unemployment rates," added Vyas.

But CMIE's sample households are also selected from enumeration blocks that are based on the Census. "If the next Census shows new towns with higher population growth, our sampling frame has to reflect that. And enumeration is something that only the government can do," said Vyas.

13 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



A migrant worker in Singapore looks out outside his room. *Reuters*

SINGAPORE 344 new cases, mostly foreign workers

Singapore: Singapore on Monday reported 344 new Covid-19 cases, a majority of them foreign workers living in dormitories, taking the nationwide tally to 31,960 as the country is gearing up to lift the "circuit breaker" imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Out of the new infected cases, 340 are foreign workers residing in dormitories, the health ministry said. With this, the total number of cases in the country by noon on Monday reached 31,960, it said. **PTI**

UNITED STATES Travel ban imposed on Brazil

Washington: US President Donald Trump on Sunday further limited travel from the world's coronavirus hotspots by denying entry to foreigners coming from Brazil, which is second to the US in the number of confirmed cases. Trump had already banned certain travelers from China, Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland and, to a lesser extent, Iran. He has not moved to ban travel from Russia, which has the world's third-highest caseload. **AP**

SOUTH KOREA Govt plans to send masks to adoptees abroad

Seoul: South Korea plans to send 370,000 face masks to tens of thousands of South Koreans adopted in the West to help them weather the coronavirus. The Foreign Ministry said its diplomatic missions will work with dozens of international adoption groups to distribute the masks in 14 countries. South Korea has been a major source of babies for adoption in the West since the end of Korean War. According to official figures, there are around 167,000 adopted South Koreans living abroad. **AP**

Japan lifts state of emergency, ending nationwide restrictions

AGENCIES
TOKYO, MAY 25

JAPAN ON Monday ended its state of emergency in the Tokyo area and the northern island of Hokkaido, moves that completed the lifting of nationwide restrictions and ushered in the beginning of a new phase in the country's response.

Experts on a government-commissioned panel approved the lifting of the emergency in Tokyo, neighbouring Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama prefectures, and in Hokkaido to the north, which had remained under the emergency declaration after it was removed in most of Japan earlier this month.

The measures were lifted for most of the rest of the country earlier after a drop in the number of new coronavirus cases led officials to step back initial requests for most businesses to close and individuals to stay home.

The Japanese government does not have the legal authority to impose a lockdown on the country and had instead asked for the public's cooperation in curbing the virus's spread. The state of emergency began in Japan's urban areas in early April before expanding to the rest of the nation by the middle of the month.

The results were more suc-



A public screen shows Japan PM Shinzo Abe speaking at a press conference Monday, lifting the state of emergency in Tokyo and four other remaining areas on Monday. *AP*

cessful than anticipated, defying predictions that the country's densely populated capital would experience a disaster comparable to what has taken place in New York. As of Sunday, the country had recorded 16,500 coronavirus cases nationwide and 830 deaths, some of the lowest mortality rates among major economies.

Addressing the nation after

the announcement, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called on the public to continue taking measures to defend against infection, asking them to avoid crowded places.

"We need to make a new normal. Let's change our thinking," he said, warning that "We can't continue to live and work in the way we've done until now."

As businesses reopen, the au-

thorities and medical experts counsel that the country must remain vigilant against the threat of a second wave, which could quickly undo progress in controlling the coronavirus's spread.

Japan, with about 16,600 confirmed cases and about 850 deaths, has so far avoided the large outbreaks that have been experienced in the US and the Europe despite its softer restrictions.

Nepali citizens coming from India spreading virus: Oli

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MAY 25

NEPAL PRIME Minister KP Oli on Monday said World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines regarding the mandatory testing of those crossing international boundaries have been violated, with citizens crossing over from India spreading the virus.

A large number of Nepalis — their numbers are not yet known officially — have sneaked into Nepal, in groups or alone, in defiance of the government's blanket order that no Nepali was allowed to enter the country during the nationwide lockdown in place since March 24.

Many of these were migrant labourers living in India.

In an address to the nation, which was telecast live, Oli Monday said Nepalis from India have entered the country without following the WHO guidelines, "thus spreading the epidemic".

Oli said as per the advice of the experts Nepal would be extending the testing facility, covering at least two per cent of the total population, along with proper quarantine arrangements for the needy.

The Prime Minister also said that he had spoken to many head of the states and governments, and they had assured him that Nepalis in those countries would be taken care of. "The

Highest one-day surge reported

Kathmandu: Nepal on Monday registered its highest single-day spike in the coronavirus cases with 79 new infections, taking the total Covid-19 tally to 682 in the country, health officials said.

Nepal, which has extended its nationwide lockdown till June 2 to contain the spread of the coronavirus, is among the nations that has the least number of cases of the virus with four deaths.

The total number of people infected by the novel coronavirus has climbed to 682 in Nepal after 79 cases were reported, the highest number of confirmation of virus transmission in a single day, according to the Ministry of Health and Population. **PTI**

government is making necessary arrangements to facilitate their return back home," he said.

Last week, Oli had sparked controversy at home and in India for stating in parliament that the "Indian virus" was "more lethal" than the one from China and other countries affected by Covid-19.



IN REMEMBRANCE

Former US Vice President and Democratic nominee Joe Biden with wife Jill after laying a wreath at the Delaware Memorial Bridge Veterans Memorial Park on Monday. Biden was making his first public appearance since mid-March for Memorial Day, which honours the men and women who died while serving in the US military. AP

Sid Mukherjee on New York panel for economic recovery

New York: Pulitzer Prize-winning Indian-American physician Sid Mukherjee and compatriot higher education leader Satish Tripathi have been named by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo among members of a commission that will focus on plans to jumpstart the state's economy hit by the pandemic.

Cuomo Sunday announced that the state's Blue-Ribbon Commission, chaired by former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, will also focus on improving telehealth and broadband access using new, innovative technologies.

The 15-member commission will include Mukherjee, Tripathi and other eminent leaders namely Rockefeller Foundation chair Richard Parsons, Ford Foundation president Darren Walker and Cornell University president Martha Pollack and IBM chair Ginny Rommety.

India-born Mukherjee is a hematologist and oncologist and an assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University Medical Center. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 2011 for *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*. **PTI**

Putin back in Kremlin, Russia looks to ease lockdown in some regions

REUTERS
MOSCOW, MAY 25

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin made a rare lockdown appearance in the Kremlin on Monday after officials said improvements in the coronavirus situation may allow Russia to re-open some tourist resorts soon and relax restrictions in many regions.

Russia, which has reported the world's third most coronavirus cases, confirmed 8,946 new infections on Monday, bringing its nationwide tally to 353,427. Officials reported 92 new deaths, pushing the toll to 3,633.

Moscow, Russia's worst-hit region, is entering its ninth week of lockdown. Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has said it is too early to lift restrictions but allowed state registry offices to open in the capital from Monday.

Russia's borders remain closed, as are schools and most non-essential shops, but Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin urged Russians on Monday not to travel abroad on holiday this summer.

Anna Popova, head of Russia's consumer health regulator, said 44 of Russia's over 80 regions were in a position to relax lockdown restrictions.



Children return to schools in Australia's New South Wales on Monday. *Reuters*

As schools reopen, Australia state urges parents to work from home

REUTERS
SYDNEY, MAY 25

AUSTRALIA'S MOST populous state on Monday urged locals to continue working from home despite schools reopening as the number of coronavirus cases slows.

Australia has reported just over 7,100 COVID-19 infections, including 102 deaths, well below figures reported by other developed countries.

With fewer than 20 new COVID-19 cases most days, Australian states are pressing ahead with a three-stage plan to remove most social restrictions imposed by July.

In New South Wales (NSW), which includes the city of Sydney, children returned to full-time face-to-face learning on Monday, allowing many parents to return to offices — although lawmakers urged those who could to stay home to avoid putting pressure on the transport network.

"I am very pleased that the system hasn't been overwhelmed," said NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian told reporters in Sydney.

"People are listening, making informed decisions, and that is the way we would like it to continue."

Reopening schools is a central part of reviving Australia's economy.

With international borders likely to remain closed for

While the federal government has devised a plan to reopen the national economy, the implementation is left to state leaders

months, Prime Minister Scott Morrison is also pressing locals to begin holidays locally to help support Australia's tourism sector.

But state squabbles continue to simmer.

While the federal government has devised a plan to reopen the national economy, the implementation is left to individual state and territory leaders, who come from opposing political parties and have different views on how much unrestricted movement should be allowed.

Around 120 million domestic overnight tourists spent a record A\$80.7 billion (\$52.79 billion) last year, according to government data, accounting for almost half of all tourism spending.

The differences between states also threaten to delay reopening travel between New Zealand and Australia.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden said both countries are developing protocols, but it would be unlikely to begin until Australia allows free domestic travel.

China reports 51 new Covid-19 cases, mostly in Wuhan

KJM VARMA
BEIJING, MAY 25

CHINA HAS reported 51 new coronavirus cases, including 40 asymptomatic infections, majority of them in the contagion's first epicentre Wuhan, where over six million tests have been conducted in the last 10 days, health officials said on Monday.

The country's National Health Commission (NHC) said that 11 new imported cases were reported on Sunday.

While no new domestically-transmitted Covid-19 cases were reported in China on Sunday, 11 imported cases were reported, the NHC said in its daily report.

Out of the 40 new asymptomatic cases, 38 were reported in Wuhan, which is currently undergoing mass testing of its over 11.2 million people after a spike in the asymptomatic cases.

Currently, 396 people with asymptomatic symptoms are under medical observation in China, including 326 in Wuhan, according to the health

authority.

Wuhan, which earlier had over 50,000 cases between January and March, started a campaign on May 14 to expand the nucleic acid testing in order to better know the number of asymptomatic cases or people who show no clear symptoms despite carrying the virus.

According to the latest figures released by the Wuhan municipal health commission, the city conducted more than 6 million nucleic acid tests between May 14 and 23.

Hong Kong bar association looks to challenge China law in courts

KJM VARMA
BEIJING, HONG KONG, MAY 25

CHINA'S PROPOSED new security law to firm up its control over Hong Kong could run into problems in courts, the city's Bar Association has warned, stressing that Beijing has no legal authority to enact its national security law for the former British colony.

In a strongly worded statement, the Hong Kong Bar Association also expressed concern over suggestions that mainland security agencies would be set up to safeguard national security within the city, saying it was "entirely unclear" how that arrangement would comply with Article 22 of the Basic Law, which stipulates Beijing departments not interfere in local affairs.

A draft bill on establishing and improving the legal system and



A protester is detained by police on Sunday. *Reuters*

enforcement mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to safeguard national security was tabled in China's National People's Congress (NPC) on Friday. It is expected to be passed on May 28.

The bill is regarded as a political bombshell as China has decided to bypass local Legislative Council to bring about a new na-

tional security law tailor-made to take control of Hong Kong which has been witnessing mass protests by pro-democracy groups since last year demanding autonomy and freedom from Beijing.

"It is entirely unclear how the proposed agencies set up in the HKSAR will operate under the laws of the HKSAR, whether they will be bound by the laws of the HKSAR, whether they have the power of enforcement, and whether such powers as exercised will be limited by the laws currently in force in the HKSAR," Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* quoted the Bar Association statement as saying.

"This is unprecedented. The public must be allowed the opportunity to properly consider and debate about proposed laws which affect their personal rights and obligations," the statement read.

EU's top diplomat urges 'robust strategy' toward China

Berlin: The European Union's top diplomat has called for the bloc to have a "more robust strategy" toward China amid signs that Asia is replacing the United States as the center of global power.

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell told a gathering of German ambassadors on Monday that "analysts have long talked about the end of an American-led system and the arrival of an Asian century".

Borrell said the pandemic could be seen as a turning point in the power shift from West to East, and that for the EU the "pressure to choose sides is growing".

He said the 27-nation bloc "should follow our own interests and values and avoid being instrumentalised by one or the other". **AP**

Crashed PIA plane's pilot ignored 3 warnings to lower altitude: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KARACHI, MAY 25

THE PILOT of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA)'s crashed plane ignored three warnings from the air traffic controllers about the aircraft's altitude and speed before the landing, saying he was satisfied and would handle the situation, according to a report on Monday.

The national flag carrier's PK-8303 tragedy on Friday, in which 97 people were killed and two survived, is one of the most catastrophic aviation disasters in the country's history.

The Airbus A-320 from Lahore to Karachi was 15 nautical miles from the Jinnah International Airport, flying at an altitude of 10,000 feet above the ground instead of 7,000 when



Sindh governor Imran Ismail and Pakistan's aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar at the site of the crash. *AP*

the Air Traffic Control (ATC) issued its first warning to lower the plane's altitude, Geo News quoted an ATC report as saying.

Instead of lowering the alti-

tude, the pilot responded by saying that he was satisfied. When only 10 nautical miles were left till the airport, the plane was at an altitude of 7,000 feet instead

of 3,000 feet, it said.

The ATC issued a second warning to the pilot to lower the plane's altitude. However, the pilot responded again by stating that he was satisfied and would handle the situation, saying he was ready for landing, the report said.

The report said that the plane had enough fuel to fly for two hours and 34 minutes, while its total flying time was recorded at one hour and 33 minutes.

Pakistani investigators are trying to find out if the crash is attributable to a pilot error or a technical glitch.

The probe team, headed by Air Commodore Muhammad Usman Ghani, President of the Aircraft Accident and Investigation Board, is expected to submit a full report in about three months.

14 ECONOMY



RUPEE

₹75.95



OIL

\$35.81

Brent crude as of 2300 IST

SENSEX: 30,672.59 ▼ 260.31 NIFTY: 9,039.25 ▼ 67.00 NIKKEI: 20,741.65 ▲ 353.49 HANG SENG: 22,952.24 ▲ 22.10 FTSE: 5,993.28 ▼ 21.97 DAX: 11,291.56 ▲ 217.69

Domestic equity, currency, commodity and bond markets were closed on account of Eid-ul-Fitr; International market data till 1900 IST

COVID-19 EFFECT
LABOUR LAWS

Legal hurdles, trade union opposition force some states to pull back major changes

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

FACED WITH the prospect of legal challenges, states are beginning to swiftly backtrack on the labour law changes they had pushed through less than a month ago. After the Uttar Pradesh government's withdrawal of its order extending the daily working hours, Rajasthan too has withdrawn its order extending the working hours to 12 hours from 8 during the lockdown against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The move also comes close on the heels of the Madhya Pradesh government last week amending its proposed changes to labour laws, citing the need for legal consent before workers are asked to work overtime.

The pullback by Rajasthan is crucial given that it was the first state to have extended daily working hours from 8 hours to 12 last month, after which at least nine other states including Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Odisha followed suit. Subsequently, states such as UP, MP and Gujarat went ahead and brought ordinances to amend labour laws to effectively provide a blanket suspension of these laws over a three-year period citing the need to attract investments, a move which has invited criticism and could see potential legal challenges in the days ahead.

Amidst these changes, 10 trade unions — including Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) — registered an initial complaint with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on May 14, terming these moves as "an attack on human and labour rights", asking for ILO's intervention on "the extremely precarious and regressive moves" for the working class in the country. The ILO, in its response dated May 22, said it has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue.

"Please allow me to assure you that the ILO-Director General has immediately intervened, expressing his deep concern at these recent events and appealing to the Prime Minister to send a clear message to central and state governments to uphold the country's international commitments and encourage engagement in effective social dialogue", Karen Curtis, Chief, Freedom of Association Branch, International Labour Standards Department said in the letter.

On Monday, the 10 trade

COMPLAINT
FILED WITH ILO

■ Amidst sweeping changes in labour laws by states, 10 trade unions filed a complaint with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on May 14

unions lodged a second complaint with the ILO flagging the "retrograde anti-labour exercise of the Government of India towards virtual nullification of most of the substantive laws in vogue in the country by the Government of India through the state governments".

"This exercise has been aimed at total abrogation of the provisions of not more than eight hour-working day and Right to Freedom of Association and Right to Collective Bargaining," they said in their complaint, attaching the orders and notifications by the various states proposing changes in labour laws.

The unions urged other states to follow Rajasthan in withdrawing the changes. "AITUC welcomes the decision of Rajasthan government to withdraw its earlier decision of increase in working hours from 8 to 12 hours which was meant for three months. AITUC would urge the other state Governments to follow the suit and withdraw all the changes being effected in the labour laws during Covid-19 lockdown period. The economy would pick up if workers, the key components to provide their labour be it skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled in manufacturing, productions, and services are taken on board for ensuring them justice for workplace safety, health measures, proper wages, eight hours of working as per existing norms and social security coverage etc.," Amarjeet Kaur, General Secretary, AITUC, said.

While UP and MP had opted for a suspension of labour laws for 1,000 days, as many as ten states — including Rajasthan, Punjab, Odisha, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, MP, Haryana, Assam and Gujarat — have allowed extension of working hours to 12 through issuance of orders under the Factories Act.

On May 15, however, the UP government, in a communication to the Allahabad High Court following a notice for a public interest litigation, withdrew its earlier order regarding extension of daily working hours in industrial units to 12.

APPELLATE TRIBUNAL CALLS ORDER 'AN UNTENABLE ONE'

NCLAT sets aside NCLT order on making MCA party in all IBC cases

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

IN A relief to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) set aside an order of the Principal Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) which had directed that the MCA be made a party in all cases filed under the Section 7, 9, and 10 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

A three-member Bench of the NCLAT held that the NCLT order asking the Ministry to be made a party in all IBC cases, without giving the MCA a chance to present its side would have directed that "serious miscarriage of justice, besides causing undue hardship".

"In short, the impugned order making it applicable throughout the country to all the Benches of the National Company Law Tribunal is an untenable one and the said order suffers from material irregularity and patent illegality in the eye of law. As a logical corollary, this Tribunal sets aside the

EXPLAINED

MCA can have more time for policy formulation

THE NCLT ruling in November was called by many as counterproductive as it would have required the MCA to keep track of thousands of IBC cases without it being a party to the case, thereby cutting down on its time for the formulation of new policies.

With the NCLAT quashing the tribunal's order, it is likely to send a signal to adjudicating authorities to stick to the rule book in case of IBC cases, experts said.

impugned order," the NCLAT said.

The Principal Bench of NCLT had, on November 22, directed that the MCA as well as the central government be made a respondent party in all cases of insolvency as well as Companies Act filed across the country. The adjudicating authority had then observed that the same was needed so that authentic records of companies undergoing insolvency are made available by the officers.

The said directions were pas-

sed by the NCLT in a case where despite repeated reminders from the tribunal, the Registrar of Companies had failed to update the master data regarding the status of the company under the IBC.

In its response, MCA officials had initially said that the NCLT order would increase the workload of the Ministry. Later, the MCA had moved the NCLAT challenging the jurisdiction of the lower tribunal and said that "rule making power" was the exclusive domain of the

'40% travel, tourism cos staring at complete shutdown'

Around 40% firms in travel and tourism sector face complete shutdown, a report by BOTT Travel Sentiment Tracker said

81%: Firms that have lost their revenue up to 100%

35.7%: Travel and tourism companies that are likely to witness a temporary shutdown

78.6%: Companies that expect the government to create a tourism relief fund immediately



Effects of lockdown on sector:

- Pay cuts
- Deferment of salaries
- Termination of contracts

15%: Companies that have seen revenue slide up to 75 per cent

38.6%: Travel companies that are going for job cuts

~49%: Companies that are deferring capital expenditures

37.6%: Firms that are considering job cuts amid uncertainty

Source: BOTT/PTI

Despite lockdown curbs, wheat procurement surpasses last year's level

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

NOTWITHSTANDING THE restrictions in place due to COVID-19 lockdown, procurement of wheat by government agencies has exceeded last year's figures of 341.31 LMT to touch 341.56 LMT till May 24 during Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2020-21, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said on Monday.

However, procurement has been sluggish in Uttar Pradesh, which contributes a substantial quantity to central pool. This year, the procurement started from April 15 due to the lockdown.

The Ministry had set wheat procurement target of 407 LMT during RMS 2020-21 against which 76.41 per cent (341.56 LMT)

has been procured so far.

Among four major states, Punjab has procured 125.84 LMT wheat - 93.21 per cent of its target of 135 LMT - till May 24. Madhya Pradesh too has procured 113 LMT wheat - 81 per cent of its revised target of 140 LMT - and its target has been revised upward from 100 LMT to 140 LMT.

However, in percentage terms, the procurement has been slightly lower in Haryana - 70.65 LMT or 74.37 per cent of its target of 95 LMT.

According to the Ministry's statement, procurement in Haryana started "little late" on April 2020. But the pace of procurement has been much lower in Uttar Pradesh, which has procured a quantity of just 20.66 LMT or just 37 per cent of its target of 55 LMT.

March: India cuts exposure to US govt securities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, MAY 25

AFTER INCREASING the holding of US government securities for two straight months, India sharply trimmed its exposure by a staggering \$21 billion to \$156.5 billion in March.

The latest holding is also the lowest in 11 months. In April last year, the same stood at \$155.3 billion, according to data from the US Treasury Department.

The Reserve Bank of India buys these bonds.

Japan had the highest exposure to the American government securities with holdings to the tune of \$1.271 trillion, followed by China with \$1.081 trillion and the United Kingdom with \$395.3 billion.

Physical EGM by SBI contradicting rationale behind lockdown, says IiAS

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 25

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTOR Advisory Services (IiAS), an investor advisory body, has come down heavily on State Bank of India (SBI) for calling a public gathering — extraordinary general meeting (EGM) — of its shareholders at its auditorium on June 17, 2020 at a time when the country is grappling with the rapid growth in COVID-19 infections.

In a report, IiAS said the bank

HDFC posts 22% fall in Q4 net, provisions rise on COVID-19 impact

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 25

MORTGAGE FIRM Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) has posted a 22 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 2,233 crore for the quarter ended March 2020, compared to Rs 2,862 crore in the same quarter of the previous year, as it witnessed a tepid growth in the second half of March.

It has reported an increase in provisioning, including impact for COVID-19, at Rs 1,274 crore (Rs 398 crore for COVID-19). The HDFC board has proposed a final dividend of Rs 21 per share as against a final dividend of Rs 17.50 the previous year.

"We had robust growth until March 15 but had tepid growth in second half of March. We could hardly do much business in the second half of March which is otherwise very busy period," said Keki Mistry, vice chairman and CEO, HDFC.

However, last year, net profit included dividend received in Q4 at Rs 537 crore and profit on sale of investments of Rs 321 crore. With dividend distribution tax

"We could hardly do much business in the second half of March which is otherwise very busy period"

KEKI MISTRY

VICE CHAIRMAN AND CEO, HDFC

being abolished, some of the subsidiary companies of HDFC did not pay interim dividend, it said. Besides, there was a profit on sale of investments at Rs 321 crore last year.

Gross NPAs stood at Rs 8,908 crore, equivalent to 1.99 per cent of the loan portfolio. Individual NPAs have risen slightly because collections suffered after lockdown. NPA levels are expected to come down after the situation normalises, Mistry said.

Total individual loan approvals grew by 14 per cent in volume terms and 12 per cent in value terms. Disbursements grew by 7 per cent. The average size of individual loans stood at Rs 27 lakh. As of March 2020, the loan book stood at Rs 4,50,903 crore as against Rs 4,06,607 crore in the previous year, representing a growth of 11 per cent.

BRIEFLY

Depository a/c shares can be used as margin

New Delhi: Sebi said shares in depository account, which may be pledged or repledged, can be used as margin for another three months till August 31.

₹11,052 cr GST refund claims cleared

New Delhi: The Central Board of Indirect Taxes said it has sanctioned GST refund claims worth Rs 11,052 crore in 47 days.

Prices of N-95 masks fall by up to 47%

New Delhi: Leading manufacturers and importers of N-95 masks have reduced prices by up to 47 per cent after regulator NPPA stepped in to ensure the availability of this respiratory protection device at affordable rates in India, the Centre said Monday.

KMB cuts rates on savings deposits

Mumbai: Kotak Mahindra Bank (KMB) on Monday slashed the interest rate on savings deposits by a further 0.50 per cent. PTI

Lufthansa, German govt ink rescue deal

London: The German government and the country's major airline Lufthansa, which has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, have reached a preliminary deal on a 9 billion euro (\$9.8 billion) bailout. REUTERS

Beijing wants US to withdraw export sanctions on Chinese cos

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, MAY 25

CHINA DEMANDED Monday that Washington withdraw export sanctions imposed on Chinese companies in the latest round of a worsening conflict over technology security and human rights.

The foreign ministry accused the Trump administration of interfering in China's affairs by adding eight companies accused of playing roles in a crackdown in its Muslim northwestern region of Xinjiang to an export blacklist.

Washington also imposed controls on access to American technology for 24 companies and government-linked entities it said might be involved in obtaining goods with potential military uses. The US decision violated basic norms of international relations and harmed China's interests, said a ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian.

Former EAC-PM member Rathin Roy at E-XPLAINED session today

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

WITH THE Indian economy's growth rate expected to contract in the ongoing financial year as COVID-19 pandemic presents challenges for health, growth, migration and employment, providing fiscal and monetary breathers for the economy would be crucial as the country tries to pick its pace towards a slow path to growth.

Rathin Roy, director at National Institute of Public Finance and Policy and former member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (EAC-PM), will join an E-XPLAINED session on Tuesday to understand the challenges and the options that India needs to consider and exercise, and the trade-offs involved in the medium to long term, with various research outfits projecting a recessionary crisis this year worse than in 1979-80.

Roy — who also was a mem-



Rathin Roy, director at National Institute of Public Finance and Policy and former member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. File

E-XPLAINED
by The Indian EXPRESS

ber in the committee chaired by NK Singh which reviewed the FRBM Act — had in an interview

with *The Indian Express* in April termed the pandemic situation as a "warlike economy", advocating massive transitory increase in healthcare financing and had pointed out the need for medical equipment and personnel to execute the measures that are needed to identify, diagnose, and treat those seeking medical attention.

He had also highlighted the importance of maintaining the supply chain and the need to spend money on integrating unutilised supply chains along with providing decent surroundings and counselling, communication facilities, and government services to migrant workers.

Protection of national wealth and alleviation of loss of national income as far as possible through wage support, compensatory payments to those operating their own businesses and services were the two key measures Roy had listed out as the fiscal requirement for the country to deal with the pandemic.

[BALBIR SINGH SR | 1923-2020]

There was no one quite like him

A prolific goal-scorer, lionheart, father figure and good Samaritan, Balbir Singh Dosanjh's teammates, the players he coached and old friends recall the qualities that set him apart.

NITIN SHARMA

CHANDIGARH, MAY 25

61 games, 246 goals

THE AMATEUR nature of hockey and the minimal upkeep of its stats book mean it is nearly impossible to know the exact number of goals Dosanjh has scored in his entire career. But if the records maintained by hockey statistician BG Joshi are anything to go by, then the overall numbers will be staggering. Sample this: in the 61 international matches he played between 1948 and 1956 (which include the three Olympics and the overseas tours in 1954 and 1955), Dosanjh scored an eye-popping 246 goals.

In the three Olympics that he was a part of, Dosanjh played eight matches and scored 22 times, including the five goals in the final of the 1952 Games, a record that stands even today. But perhaps the most impressive stat that encapsulates the beastly nature of the Indian team of that era comes from the 1956 Olympics, where India scored 38 goals in the tournament and did not concede even once. The team, led by Dosanjh, opened the campaign with a 6-0 win over Great Britain, then defeated Afghanistan 14-0 and concluded the group stage with a 16-0 win over the USA. The semifinal and final were won by an identical 1-0 margin against Germany and Pakistan respectively.

These are just his numbers from select international tournaments. One wonders what his career record would look like!

Team man

It was his relentless pursuit of perfection that made Balbir Singh Dosanjh special. His teammates often joked that Dosanjh would take home a new ball every day after training, practice with it against the wall by himself, and in the evening, he would give them the worn-out ball to play. Hitting against the wall made his ball control exceptional, even



Balbir Singh Sr breathed his last in Mohali on Monday. *Express archive*

on rough and unfriendly surfaces. That, in turn, helped him control the passes in tight spaces inside the 'D' and score goals.

But it wasn't a one-man show. Udhham Singh and KD Singh Babu would use their skills and technique to set him up with goal-scoring chances. And Dosanjh would never mess it up. "He had no match in the 'D'," recalls Gurdev Singh Kular, his teammate from the 1956 Olympics team. "He ran like a lion

inside the 'D' and would evade tackles from the defenders. During the Melbourne Olympics, he told me that if I could give the ball as accurately as he wanted, he could continue playing for another five years. He acknowledged the contribution of the midfielders and that made him the best."

Team builder

Former India captain Aslam Sher Khan

feels because Dosanjh experienced the trauma of partition, he was 'always above religion'. "He was a proud Sikh but at the same time, also respected other religions," Khan, who was one of the key players of the team managed by Dosanjh, says.

An incident from the 1975 World Cup has stayed with Khan all his life. Khan did not get a chance to play in the league matches of the World Cup. During the semifinal against Malaysia, Dosanjh and coach Bodhi were involved in an animated discussion over whether to replace Michael Kindo with Khan.

Dosanjh wanted the substitution to take place, and Bodhi was against. Dosanjh's argument prevailed and he held Khan's face in his hands and said, 'ja beta, aaj tera khuda hi bharat ko bacha sakta hai.' Khan scored and India reached the final, where they defeated Pakistan to win their first, and so far the only, World Cup title. During the tournament, Dosanjh had also made a common prayer room for all players and had replaced the usual team chant of 'jo bole so nihai' (since it resonated more with players from Punjab) with 'jo bole so hai, bharat mata ki hai'.

Selfless Samaritan

During the Indo-China war in 1962, Dosanjh went up to the then Punjab chief minister Pratap Singh Kairon and offered his three Olympic gold medals along with other medals for the national disaster fund. "He had no savings and told the chief minister that he is giving his biggest asset to the country," recalls 79-year-old SK Gupta, one of Dosanjh's oldest friends. "Kairon kept the medals on his insistence but later returned those medals to him."

Years later, when Sports Authority of India requested him to share his memorabilia for a proposed sports museum, Dosanjh handed them everything except the three Olympic golds. SAI, it was revealed decades later, had misplaced all his belongings and the museum never saw the light of day.

Werner bags hat-trick as Leipzig trounce Mainz

Striker Timo Werner bagged a hat-trick as RB Leipzig thrashed Mainz 5-0 to climb back to third in the Bundesliga and keep their dwindling title hopes just about alive.

Balbirs and the Senior

COL BALBIR SINGH KULAR

THERE HAVE been six Balbir Singhs who played for India. One played for Punjab Police, the other represented Railways, and then there's me. All three of us won the bronze medal at the 1968 Olympics. Before us, Balbir Singh Junior was a part of the 1958 Asian Games gold medal-winning team and then there was Balbir Singh Randhawa who played several international tournaments in the 1960s. At our peak, four Balbirs played together for India in one team at a tournament in Madrid – the ones from Railways, Punjab Police, Randhawa and me. For each one of us, the aim was to make our name for the country. But we always knew our name would come after Balbir Singh Senior.

I first saw him play at the National Championships in Jalandhar in 1956. I had just started playing junior-level hockey and would watch in astonishment how Balbir Singh Senior would march into the 'D' by dodging the defenders all by himself. I would tell my friends to watch his footwork and agility – I still wish there were more videos of him for youngsters across the world to see why he was the best player in the world inside the 'D'. His biggest strength was to adjust his body position depending on how the goalkeeper was positioned. He knew how to balance his body and execute a shot from difficult angles and minimum space. That made him a goal machine. Years later, when I worked with him (I was the coach and he was the chief coach of the national team) I asked if he felt people were right in saying that players like Udhham Singh and KD Singh Babu were much better than him in technique and it was them who made him look good.

Even after all these years, his passion for hockey remained undiminished. I feel lucky to share my name with him. There may have been six Balbir Singhs who have played for India. But there will always be one Balbir Singh Senior.

(Balbir Singh Kular was a member of 1968 Olympics bronze medal-winning team and a former India coach. He spoke to Nitin Sharma.)

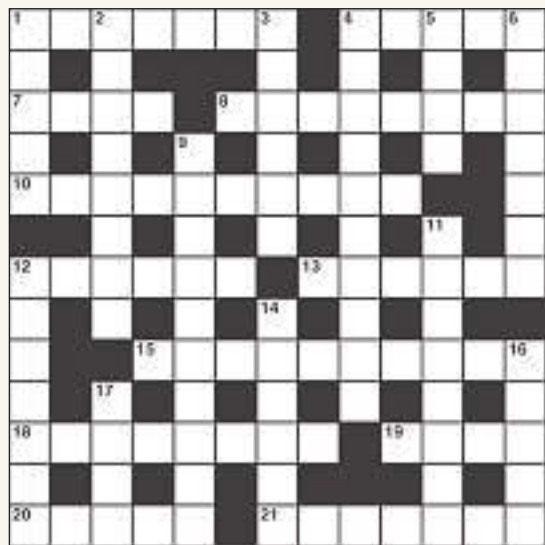
LUCKY 13!

INDIA HAD named an 18-member squad for the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki: two goalkeepers, three defenders, five midfielders and eight forwards. Those days, shirt numbers were handed out in playing order. That meant Balbir Singh Dosanjh ended up getting the number 13. During the team's acclimatisation trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, prior to the Games, a young girl pointed out to him that 13 is considered an unlucky number. "Thirteen in north Indian languages is pronounced as tera, which is also a form of addressing God, 'I told her,'" Dosanjh wrote in his autobiography. "For me, this is a lucky number. I dedicate my performances to the One Above." Dosanjh wasn't sure if the girl understood his logic. But there were signs, he wrote: the number plate of the van that took them to the stadium for the first match of the Olympics added up to 13 and in the whole tournament, India scored 13 goals.

"Associated with the number 13, I have a host of memories that will linger forever in my mind," he wrote in his book. "My house #1534, my office #562, my private car #3163 and my office car #2902, all add up individually to make 13. To round it all, I had a court case going regarding my seniority in the Sports department. The record files sent to the court were 13 in number. And I won the case. Who says number 13 is unlucky!"

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

CROSSWORD 4127



ACROSS

- Make a speech against decimal conversion (7)
- Jack-in? Not exactly (5)
- Points to a top-class manuscript (4)
- Nutty wafers (8)
- Be like others and keep up with a court action (6,4)
- Was abusive, yet guarded? (6)
- One may take it as a safe place (6)
- Mistake one cannot make twice (5,5)
- Clear advice to anyone tending a dirty knife-wound (5-3)
- One bound on a crest of a wave, we hear (4)
- Celebrated reply to unlucky Edward's proposal (5)
- So 'Tripe!' crushed a witty reply (7)

DOWN

- If all plants were this, there would be no great variety (5)
- Express dissatisfaction with a break in service (8)
- Doctor Flower is depressed (6)
- Mathematician made riches in a way (10)
- Nothing to write, to be frank (4)
- Leaving things late? (7)
- Put on guard from a combination of fear and wonder (10)
- Lodgings for money in America (8)
- Polish picture showing Italian river (7)
- Assessor breaks a rule after five (6)
- Steal a firearm (5)
- Furnished for the season (4)

Solutions Crossword 4126: Across: 1 Cattle truck, 9 Greeted, 10 Cupid, 11 Ivan, 12 Traverse, 14 Sector, 16 Grades, 18 Thesplan, 19 Spar, 22 Marks, 23 Hirsute, 24 Sports clubs. Down: 2 Akela, 3 Tots, 4 Endure, 5 Recovery, 6 Capered, 7 Against time, 8 Adversaries, 13 Composer, 15 Clear up, 17 Paths, 20 Plumb, 21 Oral.

JUMBLED WORDS

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

Secret thoughts and open _____ will go safely over the whole world. – Scipione Alberti (11)

DMAEE



CHNOT



EEVNUU



AADICC

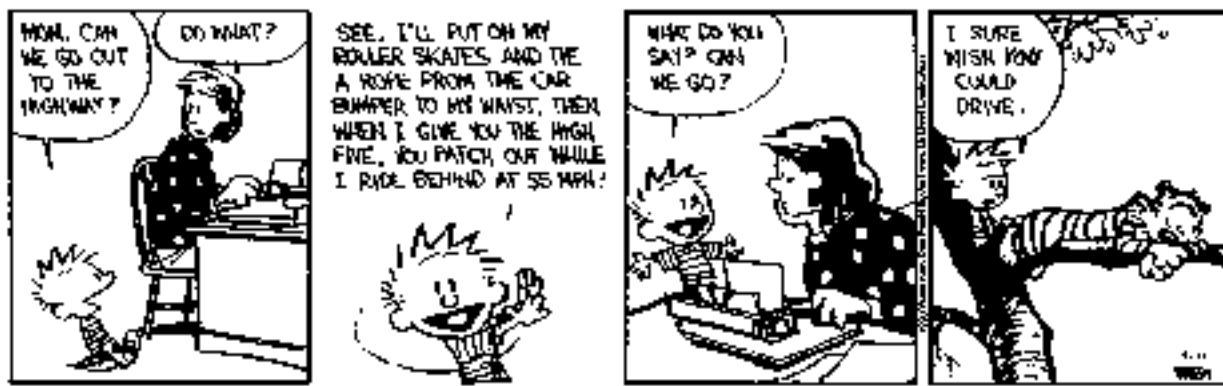


SOLUTION: EDENMA, NOTCH, UNFURN, CACADA
Alberti: Secret thoughts and open countenance will go safely over the whole world.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



SUDOKU 4120

Difficulty Level 5s

Instructions

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

Difficulty Level

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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4119



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Today's stars certainly pack a punch in a small way, and everything depends on what you say – and how you say it. All joint financial arrangements need to be treated with exceptional diplomacy, especially if you want to pick up the best bargains.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

You are not alone in experiencing powerful financial patterns, but your situation is much easier than some other people's. As far as you are concerned it is all just a matter of completing the job in hand – and of making the right decisions. Mind you, that's easier said than done.

GEMINI (May 22 - Jun 21)

Allow other people more leeway and give them plenty of space to make their own choices. In point of fact, you may be obliged to come second-best, which could be useful because it will expose you to less risk. You may come first when the time is right, and after you have made the necessary preparations.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Astrologers say that you have an excellent memory, and now is your chance to prove it. Someone will make a mistake based on their misunderstanding of the past, and you should be on hand to correct all errors and offer your usual impeccable advice. Old friends provide the best support – as you probably know.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

You must choose between facing up to an extremely awkward domestic or family situation and putting all such considerations behind you in the continuing quest for endless pleasure. There must be a middle way, but it may be another few months before you work out what it is.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

You can be remarkably secretive when the mood takes you. One thing other people must not know is what you are really doing. But neither should you let them become unduly suspicious. As usual, everything you achieve will be directed towards the common good.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

When other people misunderstand you, they normally do so in a big way. Right now, their mistake may be to imagine that you are much more confident socially than you really are. Disabuse them of this notion now, and admit to yourself that you really could do with some help.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

If you are going for any sort of professional advancement or promotion, success beyond your wildest dreams is within your grasp, but only if you're patient. You must prepare your ground with care and trust that, whatever the outcome, the future is on your side.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

There are people who have not been pulling their weight, and this is why you are now doing more than your fair share. It may be time to don your preacher's garb and offer such types fair advice on fulfilling their responsibilities. Don't be too pompous, though.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

A number of financial cycles are now reaching a turning point, so this will not be an easy time. My advice now is to cash in your winnings so far, and only gamble with funds that you can afford to lose. And don't gamble with someone's feelings either, or you'll risk a major regret.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

Some people may be all smiles one minute, in floods of tears the next, behaviour which will probably extend over the whole of the next week. In some cases, there will be little you can do beyond offering gentle reassurance. Besides, it's good for people to get things off their chest.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Work is costing you more and more in terms of time and energy. This is as it should be, for the stars indicate that you may stretch yourself to the limit. The best support in this, as in all matters, comes from close friends. Spiritual feelings will be a valuable pointer to improvements in personal areas.

China has not set a specific economic growth target for 2020 for good reason



Tourists admire the skyline view of Lujiazui area at the Bund in Shanghai, east China, Jan. 6, 2020. (Xinhua/Wang Xiang)

CHINA decided not to set a specific annual economic growth target for 2020. It is a wise, farsighted and responsible decision to cope with complicated domestic and global situations.

The new narrative in the government work report submitted Friday to the country's national legislature reveals the leadership's down-to-earth principle of adapting to the uncertainties and immense difficulties

caused by the coronavirus epidemic and the global economic recession.

The epidemic has taken a heavy toll on the Chinese economy in the first quarter, as the gross domestic product shrank 6.8% year on year.

Although the economy is sure to see a rebound with the government's supportive policies, China must take full account of the difficulties, risks and uncertainties and

heighten the sense of urgency.

The targets set by the Chinese government this year are more flexible and feasible, featuring a concept of sustainable development model that never seeks short-term gains at the cost of long-term benefits.

The report highlights the importance attached to promoting employment, giving full play to market entities and improving people's livelihoods.



A train runs past the bridge over Yachi River during a trial operation of Chengdu-Guiyang railway in southwest China's Guizhou Province, Dec. 2, 2019. (Xinhua/Liu Xu)

The employment must be stabilised with over 9 million jobs being created this year, as the report notes, highlighting the concept of putting people first.

The year 2020 marks a special year for China, as the country is in its final push to eliminate absolute poverty and build a moderately prosperous society in all respects. It means the government must provide adequate housing, medical and other public

services to the people.

The fact that no specific target was set does not mean China has abandoned its resolve to achieve steady growth in the face of daunting difficulties. To achieve these goals, China must unwaveringly stick to its policy of reform and opening up.

The new narrative demonstrates China's resolve to become more realistic, flexible and farsighted, with the vision of innova-

tive, coordinated, green, and open development that is for everyone.

The Chinese economy still has bright prospects. Despite a foreseeable fall in its GDP growth rate, China is expected to see its economy expand this year, and a robust rebound in 2021, according to the International Monetary Fund's latest World Economic Outlook report.

No specific target is a good target.

China's "two sessions" to secure nation's "Xiaokang" victory



Aerial photo taken on May 14, 2020 shows a view of the county seat of Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous County in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. (Xinhua/Lu Boan)



People work at a factory of Baoding Technology Co. Ltd. at Tangqi Town in Yuhang District of Hangzhou City, east China's Zhejiang Province, Feb. 16, 2020. (Xinhua/Xu Yu)

■ The third session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, opened on Thursday.

■ This year's "two sessions" are expected to highlight the nation's final push in poverty alleviation and completing the building of a moderately prosperous society, or "Xiaokang," in all respects.

■ National lawmakers and political advisors in China are also expected to discuss how to strive for improved performance in all areas of economic and social development as epidemic prevention and control becomes regular practice.

China on Thursday raised the curtain for its annual political high season after an over-two-month postponement as the country has turned the tide on the COVID-19 epidemic.

The top political advisory body started its annual session Thursday afternoon in Beijing, kicking off the "two sessions," a major event in China's political calendar that also includes the annual gathering of the national legislature to open on Friday.

This year's sessions are expected to highlight China's final push in poverty alleviation and completing the building of a moderately prosperous society, or "Xiaokang," in all respects.

Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders attended the opening meeting of the third session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held at the Great Hall of the People.

"The year 2020 marks the concluding phase for China's endeavour to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects and deliver on the 13th Five-



A firefighter conducts disinfection at the Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan, central China's Hubei Province, April 3, 2020. (Xinhua/Cheng Min)

Year Plan," Wang Yang, chairman of the 13th CPPCC National Committee, told more than 2,000 political advisors at the meeting.

The country's poverty alleviation tasks are near completion, as the number of impoverished people fell to 5.51 million at the end of 2019 from 98.99 mil-

lion at the end of 2012.

Wang called on political advisors to fulfill their duties focusing on coordinating epidemic control and economic and social development to make contributions to winning the battle against poverty and completing the building of a moderately prosperous soci-

ety in all respects.

Facing mounting uncertainties both at home and abroad, national legislators and political advisors are expected to offer insights on how to secure the goal-achieving victory and lay good foundations for future development.

Fairness and equality will be highlighted in this crucial year during discussions on "Xiaokang"-related topics such as housing, health and medical care, according to Xin Ming, a professor at the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

This year's "two sessions" are expected to garner more attention from home and abroad as they shed light on how the country will march toward its centenary goal while navigating COVID-19 ravages.

China has, through arduous efforts, achieved decisive results in curbing the epidemic and public health will be high on the agenda during the sessions.

Lawmakers and political advisors are also expected to discuss how to strive for improved performance in all areas of economic and social development as epidemic prevention and control becomes regular practice.

"China demonstrated great vitality in its systems and I have great confidence in our nation's development despite uncertainties for the future," said Zhang Shuibao, a member of the CPPCC National Committee and head of the School of International Project Management at Tianjin University.

On Friday, Premier Li Keqiang is expected to deliver a government work report to the legislative session, which will be closely watched since it will offer a series of solutions and new policy indicators in terms of how the world's second-largest economy is handling the fallout of the COVID-19 epidemic and global economic recession.

Also on the agenda is the deliberation of a draft civil code. Once adopted, it will help boost the modernisation of China's system and capacity for governance, said Wang Yi, dean of the law school at Renmin University of China.