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FIVE DELHI DOCTORS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19; TWO ARE FROM MOHALLA CLINICS



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INDIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH IS LIKELY TO SLOW DOWN TO 4% THIS FISCAL YEAR



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THERE IS CONSTANT LEARNING AND UNLEARNING FOR ACTORS: MANISHA



UNLOCKING THE LOCKDOWN

CENTRE, STATES WORK ON COMMON EXIT STRATEGY FOR A STAGGERED RE-ENTRY OF POPULATION; 960 FOREIGNERS BLACKLISTED AS COVID-19 CASES CROSS 2,500

NEW DELHI: The Centre and states must have a "common exit strategy" for a staggered re-entry of population when the three-week national lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus ends, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has advised chief ministers.

His remarks came as the number of COVID-19 cases continued to rise, taking the total tally to 2,547, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday. India has registered 62 deaths due to COVID-19 so far, while 162 patients have been discharged. Nationwide, 66,000 samples have been tested so far, which includes repeat tests on patients to confirm health status.

Modi said it "can't be business as usual" after the lockdown and safeguards would have to be taken, said media reports quoting a government statement.

"The prime minister outlined that the common goal for the country is to ensure minimum loss of life. In the next few weeks, testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine



should remain the areas of focus," said a government statement about the meeting.

Modi asked the states to brainstorm and send suggestions on the lockdown exit strategy. He highlighted the necessity of maintaining supply of essential medical products, availability of raw material for manufacture

of medicines and medical equipment.

In another key development linked to the spread of Covid-19, four Americans, nine British and six Chinese nationals were among the 960 foreign Tablighi Jamaat activists who were blacklisted and their tourist visas cancelled by the Union Home

Ministry.

The foreign Jamaat members, who are currently in different parts of the country, some of whom have tested positive for COVID-19, also include 379 Indonesians, 110 Bangladeshi, 63 Myanmarese and 33 Sri Lankan citizens.

As many as 77 Kyrgyzstan, 75 Malaysian, 65 Thai, 12

HIGHLIGHTS

- The common goal for the country is to ensure minimum loss of life. In the next few weeks, testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine should remain the areas of focus
- Modi asked the states to brainstorm and send suggestions on the lockdown exit strategy
- Around 400 COVID-19 positive cases and about 12 deaths in the country were found to have links with the Nizamuddin Markaz

Vietnamese, 9 Saudi and three French nationals were also among those Tablighi Jamaat activists who were blacklisted and their visas cancelled, a government official said.

Action against the foreign Tablighi Jamaat members were taken after over 2,300 activists, including 250 foreigners of the Islamic organisation were found to be living at its headquarters located at Delhi's Nizamuddin despite the 21-day lockdown imposed to check the spread of coronavirus.

More than 300 of these Tablighi Jamaat activists have tested positive for COVID-19 while others have been put in different quarantine centres.

At least 9,000 people had participated at a congregation at the Nizamuddin Markaz last month after which many have travelled to various parts of the country for missionary works. So far, around 400 COVID-19 positive cases and about 12 deaths in the country were found to have links with the Nizamuddin Markaz. **AGENCIES**

Price cut for CNG, piped cooking gas in Delhi, adjoining cities

NEW DELHI: The price of CNG used in automobiles and cooking gas piped to household kitchens was on Friday cut by 7 per cent in step with a reduction in input natural gas prices.

Indraprastha Gas Ltd. (IGL), the retailer of CNG and piped natural gas in the national capital and adjoining areas, said CNG price in Delhi will be cut by ₹3.20 to ₹42 per kg.

In adjoining Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad, the reduction would be ₹3.60 to ₹47.75 per kg. IGL, in a statement, also announced cut in its domestic piped natural gas prices by ₹1.55 per standard cubic meters (scm) to ₹28.55 per scm in Delhi.

Piped natural gas in Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad would be ₹28.45 scm, a reduction of ₹1.65 per scm from ₹30.10.

This is the second reduction in rates in six months. CNG price was on October 2, 2019, cut by ₹1.90 per kg in Delhi and by ₹2.15 per kg in Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad.

On that day piped natural gas rates were cut by ₹0.90 per scm in Delhi and by ₹0.40 in neighbouring towns in Uttar Pradesh.

The latest reduction fol-



lows the government cutting the price paid for natural gas produced from domestic fields by 26 per cent to USD 2.39 per million British thermal unit effective April 1.

Natural gas gets converted into CNG on compression and is also supplied for lighting cooking stoves through pipes.

IGL said the revised CNG price in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh would be ₹56.65 per kg, in Karnal would be ₹49.85 per kg and in Rewari and Gurugram would be ₹54.15 per kg.

In Rewari, the applicable price of domestic PNG would now be ₹28.60 per scm, which has been decreased by ₹1.55 per scm.

IGL sells PNG to over 9 lakh households in Delhi and over 4.5 lakh households in Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and Rewari in Haryana. **AGENCIES**

Identified: 20 existing, 22 potential hotspots



NEW DELHI: The Union Health Ministry has identified 20 existing and 22 potential hotspots of COVID-19 in the country and asserted that although there is no evidence of widespread community transmission, containment measures will require large human resource.

The Ministry said this in an advisory on human resource management of COVID-19 to provide guidance to the States on manpower that can be mobilized for the management of the disease along with possible role assignments and their training requirements.

"Although there is no evidence to widespread community transmission, 20 existing and 22 potential hotspots have been identified. The containment measures to break the cycle of transmission and clinical management of those affected would require large human resource," it said in the document.

The advisory stressed on capacity building, stating that identified human resource needs to be trained online using online training programs developed by the Ministry. **AGENCIES**

Lockdown costs economy \$4.64b each day

- THE ENTIRE 21-DAY LOCKDOWN WILL RESULT IN A GDP LOSS OF ALMOST \$98 BILLION
- IMF HAS ALREADY FORECAST A RECESSION FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IN 2020
- THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR 15% OF GVA, IS LIKELY TO SEE CONTINUING ACTIVITY

NEW DELHI: The unprecedented nationwide lockdown that shut businesses, suspended flights and stopped all modes of transport will cost the Indian economy almost USD 4.64 billion every day and the entire 21-day lockdown will result in a GDP loss of almost USD 98 billion, Acuite Ratings & Research Ltd said on Thursday.

The rapid spread of Covid-19 has not only disrupted the global economy but also triggered a partial shutdown in many parts of India from early March and an almost complete shutdown from March 25.

"While the countrywide shutdown is scheduled to be lifted from April 15, 2020, the risks of prolonged disruption in economic activities exist depending on the intensity of the outbreak," the credit rating agency said in a statement.

The ongoing disruption, it



said, will have a significant economic consequence across the world and also in India.

IMF has already forecast a recession for the global economy in 2020. Acuite Ratings believes there is a risk of a contraction of April-June (2020-21 fiscal) GDP to the extent of 5-6 per cent, with Q2 (July-September) also likely to post modest growth in a best-case scenario.

It expects the overall GDP growth for FY21 (April 2020 to March 2021) to be in the band of 2-3 per cent which takes into account a significant economic revival in the second half of the financial year.

Sankar Chakraborti, CEO, Acuite Ratings & Research, said: "Acuite Ratings estimates that every single day of the nation-wide lockdown will cost the Indian economy al-

most USD 4.64 billion. Consequently, the 21-day lockdown will result in a loss of GDP of almost USD 98 billion."

Stating that the ratings agency employed multiple methods to assess real GDP estimates for Q1 FY21, he said there is a significant risk that it may contract up to an extent of 5-6 per cent as compared to a pre-Covid growth estimate of 5 per cent. In such a lockdown scenario, the sectors that are most severely impacted are transport, hotel, restaurant, and real estate activities.

"In our opinion, there would be at around 50 per cent GVA (gross value added) loss in these sectors, which account for around 22 per cent in overall GVA, in Q1 of FY21," it said.

On the other hand, the services that are expected to see enhanced activities during this crisis are communication, broadcasting, and healthcare.

But with a 3.5 per cent share, their contribution to the overall GVA is small. The impact of the lockdown is also fairly severe on industrial activities which is set to witness significant contraction in Q1 except in the pharmaceutical, gas and electricity and medical devices which account for around 5 per cent of GVA, it added.

Unlike the services sector, the industry, however, can manage demand to some extent with inventory drawdowns until the resumption of production. Karan Mehriishi, Lead Economist, Acuite Ratings & Research said: "The agricultural sector which accounts for 15 per cent of GVA, is nonetheless, expected to see continuing activity even in the lockdown period; however, the allied activities are partly impacted as livestock and fisheries are experiencing mute demand due to the Covid-19 concerns." **AGENCIES**

World Bank gives India \$1b to tackle pandemic

WASHINGTON: The World Bank on Thursday approved \$1 billion emergency financing for India to tackle the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed 76 lives and infected 2,500 others in the country.

The World Bank's first set of aid projects, amounting to \$1.9 billion, will assist 25 countries, and new operations are moving forward in over 40 nations using the fast-track process, the bank

said. The largest chunk of the emergency financial assistance has gone to India — \$1 billion.

"In India, \$1 billion emergency financing will support better screening, contact tracing, and laboratory diagnostics; procure personal protective equipment; and set up new isolation wards," the World Bank said after its Board of Executive Directors approved the first set of



emergency support operations for developing countries around the world, using a dedicated, fast-track facility

and bolster economic recovery. The broader economic program will aim to shorten the time to recovery, create conditions for growth, support small and medium enterprises, and help protect the poor and vulnerable. There will be a strong poverty focus in these operations, with an emphasis on policy-based financing, and protecting the poorest households and the environment **AGENCIES**

for COVID-19 response.

In South Asia, the World Bank also approved \$200 million for Pakistan, \$100 million for Afghanistan, \$7.3 million for Maldives and \$128.6 million for Sri Lanka.

The World Bank said it is now working to grant up to \$160 billion over the next 15 months to support measures to tackle the pandemic which will focus on the immediate health consequences

Best practices and technology to help contain coronavirus

INDIA SEEKS TO LEARN FROM CHINA, SOUTH KOREA AND GERMANY

NEW DELHI: India is looking at South Korea, Germany and China for procurement of cutting-edge technology and adopting best practices being followed by them in successfully containing the spread of coronavirus amid looming risk of the country entering

the community infection stage of the pandemic.

Indian missions in these three countries have been tasked to immediately identifying possible areas of cooperation and engage with relevant authorities for procurement of medical equipment and technology.

The move comes as India saw rapid increase in number of positive coronavirus cases in the last few days.

The need for looking at best practices, innovations, scientific breakthroughs and medical equipment to fight the pandemic was highlighted extensively by Prime Minister



Narendra Modi during a video conference he held with heads of 130 Indian missions on Monday. Government officials said India is specifically looking at South Korea's ap-

proach of widespread testing and significant use of digital tracking of suspected cases to contain the pandemic. The South Korean model of 'trace, test and treat strategy' has received global recognition. Unlike majority of the countries dealing with the pandemic, South Korea has not resorted to any lockdown and allowed business and economic activities to go on as usual.

As China managed to flatten the curve of new infections after reporting over 80,000 cases and 3,300 deaths, India is also looking at China along with a very few other countries to procure medical

equipment and technology to cater to expanding demand of medical infrastructure across the country.

"We have to prepare for the future requirement. That is why we are scouting global markets for best available technology and medical equipment," said an official.

The Indian embassy in Beijing has been tasked to coordinate with relevant authorities in China for procurement of medical equipment.

On multiple occasions, China said that it was ready to extend possible assistance to India in dealing with the pandemic. Officials said India

is in touch with a number of suppliers in China for immediate procurement of 10,000 ventilators. India has recorded over 1,600 positive cases of coronavirus and at least 38 deaths so far. Globally, the virus has infected more than 850,000 people and claimed around 42,000 lives.

Officials said India is also examining Germany's efforts to check the pandemic. The leading European nation has asked several of its car manufacturers to produce ventilators and other medical equipment to deal with rising cases of the infection.

The Indian envoy in Wash-

ington is coordinating with the Trump administration for cooperation in laboratory tests for the virus infection, sources said.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke over phone to discuss a coordinated effort by India and the U.S. to respond to the pandemic.

Earlier on March 14, the two top diplomats discussed ways in which India and the U.S. could cooperate to address this global challenge. The number of those infected by the deadly disease surged to 164,000 and fatalities crossed 3,100 in the U.S. **AGENCIES**

ALSO READ | PANDEMIC BLAMED FOR SLOW PACE OF MANUFACTURING ACTIVITY * P4 | GROFERS TO HIRE 10,000 FOR WAREHOUSES, DELIVERY * P4

Five doctors test positive for Covid-19

THE INFECTED INCLUDE TWO FROM AAM AADMI MOHALLA CLINICS; ONLY ONE OF THEM GETS INFECTION WHILE TREATING PATIENTS

NEWDELHI: At least three doctors of different Delhi hospitals and two doctors from Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics have tested positive for COVID-19 in the city, according to officials.

But only one of the doctors has been confirmed to be infected while treating patients.

A resident doctor from the Biochemistry Department of the Safdarjung Hospital tested positive for COVID-19 on March 26, according to hospital sources. Her husband, a senior resident doctor in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Hospital, Pusa Road, later tested positive. He works in the Paediatrics Department and they are residents of south Delhi.

While it is alleged that the doctor working at the Safdarjung Hospital contracted the infection while treating COVID-19 patients, the hospital hasn't confirmed it. According



to sources, she is a third year postgraduate student of the Biochemistry Department.

Also, another doctor working at the Delhi State Cancer

Institute has tested positive for COVID-19, officials said on Wednesday. The hospital has been shut and is being sanitised.

"A senior resident from Delhi State Cancer Institute has tested positive. His brother had come back from the U.K. a few days back and had met

"Community spread of the virus is not taking place in Delhi yet and there is no need to panic as the situation is under control," says CM

him. We are looking into the reason behind his case," Health Minister Satyendar Jain said.

Apart from these, earlier this month, a 49-year-old male doctor, who works at an AAMC, tested positive.

Later the doctor's wife, a 48-year-old woman, who is also a doctor at an AAMC, tested positive for the virus.

The total number of coronavirus cases in Delhi has risen to 384, including 259 who were evacuated from Nizamuddin

Markaz, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday.

In last 24 hours, 91 new cases were reported in the national capital and one more person evacuated from the Markaz died due to coronavirus, taking the total number of deaths in the city to five, he said.

Of the 384 cases, 58 had recent foreign travel history and 38 contracted the virus after coming in contact with them, he added.

Kejriwal said community spread of the virus is not taking place in Delhi yet and there is no need to panic as the situation is under control.

The government has made preparations if the virus starts spreading among people, he said. The chief minister also launched a WhatsApp helpline - 8800007722 for people to enquire about COVID-19, food banks, shelters among others. **AGENCIES**

Delhi govt to promote students till class 8 without exams



NEW DELHI: The Delhi government on Monday announced that students from nursery to class 8 will be promoted to the next class in the national capital.

In a joint digital press conference with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia said the students of government schools will be promoted under the 'no detention policy'.

Sisodia, who is also the education minister, said exams of up to class 8 could not be held due to the recent violence in northeast Delhi which was followed by the coronavirus outbreak.

The government has also decided to start online classes for the students of class 12, he said.

Kejriwal said that the strict patrolling on Delhi's borders has been initiated to prevent movement of migrant workers in Delhi during the lockdown period.

He said an alarming situation had arisen after a large number of people gathered in Kaushambi, bordering Anand Vihar, over rumours that buses were stationed there to take migrant workers to their home states.

The situation has now been brought under control, he said.

The CM said that some people were still trying to enter Delhi but patrolling has been intensified in border areas of the city.

He said that police and civil administration officers have been directed to ensure that people do not come out on the roads. He also said that the government is working to provide ration to the needy who do not have ration cards. He warned of strict punishment to fair price shop owners if they were caught in any malpractices. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

21 FIRs in Dwarka over quarantine rules

NEW DELHI: Twenty-one FIRs have been registered against people in Dwarka for flouting home quarantine rules, police said on Friday. The violators have been booked under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Section 3 of Epidemic Diseases Act, they said. Delhi's Dwarka district has strictly enforced the home quarantine guidelines during the ongoing lockdown for public safety and health, a senior police official said. It is ensured through regular surveillance by way of physical verification and technical monitoring, he added. **AGENCIES**

Deployment of 100 CAPF companies



NEW DELHI: The Centre has extended the deployment of 100 Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) companies in the national capital for strengthening security during the ongoing lockdown in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, a senior official said on Thursday. The Union home ministry, the official told PTI, issued an order on Wednesday extending the deployment of about 10,000 troops in these companies "for maintaining law and order during lockdown in Delhi." A CAPF company has an operational strength of about 100 personnel. These units, the official said, were deployed in the national capital from February, in batches. **AGENCIES**

Jamia student held in connection with NE Delhi violence

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police on Thursday arrested a student of Jamia Milia Islamia for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to incite communal riots in northeast Delhi, officials said.

Meeran Haider (35), a PhD student at Jamia, is the president of RJD youth wing's Delhi unit, sources said.

On Wednesday at 10 a.m., Haider was called for interrogation by the Special Cell at their Lodhi Colony office and was subsequently arrested, the officials said.

Rajya Sabha MP and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Manoj Jha tweeted, "Delhi



Police called him for investigation and then received orders from above and arrested Meeran Haider, who has been

helping people during the time of coronavirus outbreak." Chhatra RJD unit of JNU also demanded the release

"Delhi Police called him for investigation and then received orders from above and arrested Meeran Haider"

of Haider and said the police should become 'people-friendly' and not scare people.

The Jamia Coordination Committee (JCC), a group comprising students and alumni from the varsity, condemned the arrest and demanded his immediate release.

"The country is facing a massive health crisis, however, the state machinery is busy harassing and framing student activists in false cases to suppress voices of dissent," they said.

The JCC said Haider was diligently working to provide ration to the needy during the lockdown. "The JCC demands that he must be immediately released as all charges against him are baseless," they said.

In February, the northeast part of the national capital was rocked with violence which claimed at least 53 lives and several got injured. **AGENCIES**

Adequate security sought at COVID-19 facilities

NEW DELHI: Delhi health department authorities wrote to the city police commissioner on Thursday, seeking deployment of adequate security personnel at the hospitals designated for COVID-19 treatment and the quarantine facilities in the national capital.

In a letter to the police chief, Delhi Health Secretary Padmini Singla said the coronavirus patients brought from the Markaz in the Nizamuddin area and some other patients were triggering a "law-and-order problem" and "commotions" in hospitals. It said those who had congregated inside the mosque were brought out in a "massive exercise" held from March 30 to April 1, 536 of them were sent to various hospitals after they showed symptoms and 1,810 were sent to quarantine facilities.

One person from the Markaz, who was admitted at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, "attempted suicide", but was saved by the hospital staff, the letter said. Two other inmates at a quarantine facility in Narela had escaped and were tracked in Patparganj, Singla said in the letter.

During an interaction over a video link with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday, a senior doctor had also said that the patients brought from the Nizamuddin Markaz were "not cooperating" with the medical staff. The total number

of coronavirus cases in the national capital nearly doubled to 293 on Thursday from the 152 on Wednesday, with 141 fresh cases reported in a day, according to Delhi government authorities. Two more deaths were reported on Thursday, taking the COVID-19 toll in Delhi to four. These cases include 182 people who took part in a religious congregation in the Nizamuddin area last month, the Delhi health department said in a statement. "In view of the above, I am directed to request you to deploy adequate police force at all the quarantine facilities and hospitals as per the list enclosed with the letter," Singla said. The listed hospitals are LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, DDU Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital and the isolation facilities at AIIMS, Jhajjar, besides seven quarantine facilities across Delhi. **AGENCIES**

16 train coaches turned into isolation wards



NEWDELHI: The Northern Railway has already converted 16 coaches into isolation wards for coronavirus patients and four more will be ready by Tuesday, officials said on Monday.

A rake of 10 coaches will be converted into an isolation facility within a week. Further, the Northern Railway is in touch with the state governments concerned for better co-ordination in the fight against coronavirus, they said.

According to a statement, as part of the efforts to use its production units and workshops to manufacture essential medical equipment, the northern railways is also geared to manufacture 700 litres of sanitiser and 700 masks daily. It has already manufactured 1,600 face masks, many of which are being provided to the loading

and unloading workers at the goods sheds. They are being regularly counselled to maintain social distancing, it said.

Prototypes of overall and aprons for medical staff are also being manufactured in both the Northern Railway Coaching workshops.

"Over the next three days, the workshops will manufacture 20 coveralls and aprons per day. This will be further enhanced to 30-35 per day from April 3," the statement said.

Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel of the Delhi Division distributed 2,000 meals, prepared hygienically by the IRCTC, free of cost to the poor and needy at New Delhi, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Delhi Safdarjung, Mandawali and Shakurbasti stations, the statement said. **AGENCIES**

'Track phones of quarantined'

NEW DELHI: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced that the mobile phones of all those who have been asked to home quarantine themselves will be tracked by the Delhi Police to keep a check on their movement.

Several other countries have used this technology to contain the spread of COVID-19, and that tracking mobile phones was one such way to ensure people abide by quarantine norms, he said.

"The government has given 14,345 phone numbers to the Delhi Police on Wednesday to track them, in addition to 11,084 numbers it had shared on Tuesday. Strict action would be taken against those not adhering to the government's order on home quarantine," Mr. Kejriwal said.

Making the announcement during his daily digital briefing, the Chief Minister reiterated that there has not been any community transmission of COVID-19 in Delhi.

He added that for those persons who do not have ration cards, the Delhi government said it was a challenge to distribute ration to them but it had created a system for roughly 10 lakh people who do not have ration cards.



"I want to request all those people to apply for a ration card on the Delhi government e-district website. You can take the help of MLAs and SDMs. You will not get a ration card but will get ration every month till COVID-19 persists," Mr. Kejriwal said.

Appealing to employers to not cut salaries of their employees, Mr. Kejriwal said, "Today is April 1, and to release the salaries of the employees, the employers, and their accountants need to work through the offices. For this, the Delhi government is issuing two passes each to the employers for the next two days, so that they can release

the payments online to their employees."

The Delhi government also announced that it has initiated the process of giving assistance of Rs. 5,000 to daily wage labourers associated with construction work during the lockdown.

"The money is being transferred directly to the account of these labourers. The Delhi government has released Rs. 5,000 assistance amount for 32,358 registered workers on March 31. A total amount of Rs. 16.18 crore has been given to the registered construction workers of Delhi," the government said. It added that it will soon give the assistance amount to nearly 9,000 workers as well whose applications are still pending. **AGENCIES**

Railways limits concessions for bookings

NEW DELHI: Anybody can book train tickets in advance as the Indian Railways had never suspended reservation for journeys after April 14, the national transporter said and clarified that IRCTC concessions can only be availed by patients, students and people with disabilities. Sources said a March 19 order issued by the Indian Railways suspending all concessions except the categories mentioned above till "further advice" was yet to be rescinded. The order was issued to discourage rail travel during the coronavirus outbreak. "We will withdraw the order in time. For now, given the spread of the virus we want to give out a message to

the people not to travel over the next two-three months. They can wait and book their tickets, there is no hurry. If they hurry, they will not get the concessions. We never said that we are permanently withdrawing concessions," a senior railway official told PTI.

The Indian Railways clarified that reservations for journeys after April 14 were never suspended. It also said that the advance reservation period for taking reserved tickets is 120 days.

The railways had suspended all passenger services till April 14 after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 21-day lockdown across the country to contain the spread of coronavirus. **PTI**

Davinder Singh sent to further custody till April 10

THE SUSPENDED JAMMU & KASHMIR POLICE OFFICER WAS ARRESTED WHILE FERRYING TWO HIZB-UL-MUJAHIDEEN TERRORISTS IN A VEHICLE ON THE SRINAGAR-JAMMU HIGHWAY EARLIER THIS YEAR

NEWDELHI: Suspended Jammu and Kashmir police officer Davinder Singh, who was arrested while ferrying two Hizb-ul-Mujahideen terrorists in a vehicle on the Srinagar-Jammu highway earlier this year, was on Friday sent to further custodial interrogation by a Delhi court till April 10.

Special Judge Munish Markan extended Singh's custody after the Delhi Police said that he was required to be further confronted with three other accused persons — Javed Iqbal, Syed Naveed Mushtaq and Imran Shafi Mir — arrested in the case to unearth their respective roles.

The court also extended the custody of Iqbal, Mushtaq and Mir till April 10 on a plea by the police. The Delhi Police said that the accused were required to be interrogated



further to identify the other persons involved. The custody was required to ascertain the identity of other handlers, the police told the court.

The police said that further interrogation was required to unearth the larger conspiracy and role of the accused, to trace the details of financial transac-

tions, verify and trace other offenders.

Defence advocate Prashant Prakash opposed remand on the ground that there were no fresh and adequate reasons for the remand demanded. He further said that the grounds of remand were the same as the previous ones, hence po-

lice could not be allowed to interrogate the accused further. The court directed the police to conduct Singh's medical examination after every 48 hours.

Singh was suspended from the Jammu and Kashmir Police in January this year. The Delhi Police's Special Cell had brought Singh to the national capital from Hira Nagar Jail in Jammu and Kashmir. Earlier, the court had sent Syed Naveed Mushtaq and others to police custody till April 3

after police said that he and other co-accused were planning to execute terror attacks in Delhi and other parts of the country and targeted killings of protected persons, police told the court.

The Delhi Police filed an FIR under Section 120B of IPC, and sections of the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

The FIR said that the youths of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab were being trained for carrying out terrorist activities. The FIR also mentioned D Company and Chhota Shakeel. According to the FIR, the Special Cell had received an input that the D Company was funding pro-Khalistan terrorist organisations in Punjab. **AGENCIES**

ALSO READ | ALLAHABAD BANK-INDIAN BANK MERGER FACES DELAY * P5 | ₹50 LAKH COVER FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS * P5

Nitish must quit, says Prashant



PATNA: Poll strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor has said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, his former mentor, should "quit" for his alleged failure to provide adequate assistance to migrants returning to the state from far-off places, amid the 21-day lockdown.

Kishor, who was expelled from the JD(U) headed by Kumar, two months ago, shared a disturbing video footage on his Twitter handle, where scores of people can be seen cooped up inside a structure, beating their fists against the gates and pleading that they be allowed to go home.

With the hashtag #NitishMustQuit, Kishor wrote in Hindi, "It is a terrifying picture of government's measures to save people from coronavirus infection. Such are the arrangements in place by @NitishKumar to ensure social distancing for those who are reaching Bihar from various parts of the country after enduring untold hardships."

Though the place where the video was shot was not mentioned in the tweet, it has been traced to Sareya in Guthani block of Siwan district where nearly 100 people had arrived on a bus the previous day.

"The video is misleading as no one is held up at the RBT Vidyalaya in Sareya anymore. All migrants were sent off to their respective places late Sunday night," Block Development Officer Neeraj Kumar Dubey told PTI over phone. He also said that migrants who hailed from "far-off districts such as Madhubani and Sitamarhi" were put up at a school building where the government had proposed to set up a camp for stranded people.

"They had an arduous journey from Delhi. Even after being served food and water they seemed desperate to rush to their homes and were ready to make a dash on foot." **AGENCIES**

Congress calls for relief plan

UNPLANNED IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCKDOWN CAUSING CHAOS AND PAIN, SAYS SONIA

NEW DELHI: Top Congress leaders on Thursday discussed the situation arising out of the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown, with party chief Sonia Gandhi calling for acting in solidarity and helping the disadvantaged during the crisis.

She said while the 21-day nationwide lockdown may have been necessary, the "unplanned manner" of its implementation had caused chaos and pain to millions of migrant workers all over India.

Besides Sonia Gandhi, former prime minister Manmohan Singh and former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders discussed the issue at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) through video conferencing.

Addressing the meeting, Sonia Gandhi said the country is in the midst of an unprecedented health and humanitarian crisis.

"The magnitude of the challenge before us is daunting but our resolve to overcome



MAINPOINTS

- ❑ The magnitude of the challenge before us is daunting but our resolve to overcome it must be greater,"
- ❑ The COVID-19 pandemic has already caused untold suffering across the world, but it has also "reaffirmed the bonds of brotherhood"
- ❑ In our country, those who are most vulnerable to the consequences of this pandemic are the poor and disadvantaged

it must be greater," she said. She said the COVID-19 pandemic has already caused

untold suffering across the world, but it has also "reaffirmed the bonds of brother-

hood" that unite humanity.

"In our country, those who are most vulnerable to the consequences of this pandemic are the poor and disadvantaged. We must come together for their sake and do all we can to support them through the difficult days that lie ahead," she said.

She further said that "the 21-day national lockdown may have been necessary but the unplanned manner in which it has been implemented has caused chaos and pain in the lives of millions of migrant workers all over India".

While former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh talked about the nation rallying as one to fight COVID-19, former party chief leader Rahul Gandhi, who had so far kept away from CWC meetings, talked about an Indian model to deal with the crisis.

"At the Congress CWC meeting today I emphasised the urgent need to devise an India specific strategy to combat the #COVID19 Pandemic & for Congress workers & leaders to help soften the

blow by assisting the poor & the most vulnerable sections of our society," Mr. Gandhi tweeted.

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram talked about the inadequacy of the government's financial action plan. "The government must shed its inhibitions and announce that it will fund the battle with Rs. 5-6 lakh crore," he said.

BJP president J. P. Nadda, meanwhile, slammed Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's criticism of the lockdown as "insensitive and indecent", saying this is not the time for politics when the entire country is fighting the coronavirus unitedly under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Nadda said PM Modi is taking along all State governments to lead the fight of "team India" against the pandemic and asked the Congress to play the role of a responsible political party in this difficult time. The Indian government's efforts are being praised across the world, he tweeted. **AGENCIES**

J&K parties slam domicile order



SRINAGAR: The J&K domicile order has evoked criticism from almost all mainstream political parties with even those who promised people relief and reconciliation through this order coming out in the open vocally expressing their opposition to it.

Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said the new law was an insult to the people as there were none of the promised protections.

He also lashed out at the timing of the notification. "At a time when all our efforts and attention should be focused on COVID outbreak, the government slips in a new domicile law for J&K. Insult is heaped on injury when we see the law offers none of the protections that had been promised," he said in a series of tweets.

Alluding to the JK Apni Party leader, Omar Abdullah said the law was so hollow that even politicians with Delhi's blessings were forced to criticise it.

Altaf Bukhari, chief of JK Apni Party, has said that the timing of the notification is ill-timed and has been issued when the country is battling Coronavirus. "It should be put on hold," he said.

Bukhari, who had said in public that the Prime Minister had promised protection of domicile, jobs and land rights for the residents of J&K, now said: "It is most unfortunate that such an important order has been issued at a time when the whole country is battling for its survival and is under strict lockdown to stem the spread of deadly Coronavirus disease."

"While J&KAP had been vehemently demanding Domicile Rights on land and jobs for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the order issued by the Union government reflects a casual exercise carried out at bureaucratic level without taking aspirations and expectations of people into consideration." **AGENCIES**

"This Order in its entirety is a casual attempt, cosmetic in nature, to hoodwink the people of Jammu and Kashmir who genuinely believed that post October 31, 2019 their rights and privileges in the matter of employment and other rights would remain as it had been," the JKAP President added.

Congress leaders in J&K said the BJP leadership in Delhi has demolished even those it was apparently projecting. "What do those say now who claimed that they were a local party with a national agenda?" said a top Congress leader.

The notification has disappointed most mainstream parties and their main apprehension is that with the implementation of the notification on ground, they would have little to sell to the people during the next elections in J&K.

While a rider of 15, 10 and 7 years has been fixed for obtaining a domicile right in the UT, the most disturbing part of the notification, according to mainstream politicians, is the decision with regard to jobs. According to the law, those having the domicile status will have exclusive rights to apply for jobs up to level four.

Above level four are categorised the posts of teachers, Patwaris and all gazetted services including administrators, doctors, engineers, college teachers etc for which all citizens of the country can apply.

"It is going to be competition between 130 million for our youth who have suffered immensely during the last 30 years and whose education has been the worst hit because of official and separatist shutdowns, curbs on Internet and non-availability of libraries in Kashmir," said a senior National Conference leader. Senior leaders of the People's Democratic Party are also disappointed. **AGENCIES**

Ashok Gehlot urges Modi to release ₹1 lakh crore to states

NEW DELHI: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot suggested to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday that the Centre release Rs. 1 lakh crore to States to enable them to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and the ramifications of the nationwide lockdown.

The grant could be based on the number of patients in each State, its population or the GST Council's guidelines, Mr. Gehlot said during Mr. Modi's videoconference with Chief Ministers.

Mr. Gehlot proposed that the borrowing limit of States should be increased by 2% so that the people felt comfortable. "The States also expect a moratorium on the payment of their dues to the financial institutions under RBI. These should be deferred," he said.

The Rajasthan CM also raised the issue of MGNREGA workers with the Prime Minister, saying that the government must consider giving these workers an advance payment during the lockdown period. **AGENCIES**



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said the State had asked for 10 lakh N95 masks but received only 50,000. After seeking five lakh PPE kits, Bihar has received 4,000; and against a demand for 100 ventilators, the State is yet to get a single one, he said. "Whatever decision the Prime Minister has taken to fight coronavirus, we're following it," Mr. Kumar was quoted as saying in a release. "Though some problem had cropped up earlier as people were sent from Delhi during lockdown, all

those who came here were taken to their homes and are being provided medicine, food and being quarantined," the statement said. A total of 1,70,470 people had come to Bihar from outside the State, of whom 12,051 had travelled from overseas. All are being kept under home quarantine, the statement said.

On his part, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that his government had decided to roll out telemedicine services in the State immediately since people are unable to visit hospitals. **AGENCIES**

Ajay Maken seeks all-party meeting on coronavirus

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Ajay Maken on Saturday demanded that the government convene an all party meeting and spell out steps being taken to tackle the coronavirus outbreak.

He said all parties should come together to unitedly fight the pandemic.

Whenever any natural calamity happens, it is the duty of the ruling party to convene such a meeting and spell out the steps being taken to tackle it, but it has not happened yet.

"This is not a political fight. We have to fight it while rising above politics. The government should come forward and take the initiative and convene an all party meeting and there is no reason why it has not happened yet," he said in a video message.

Maken said there are many experienced leaders in the Congress party like former prime minister Manmohan Singh, whose advice can be taken in such a situation.

"We feel an all party meeting should be called and the government should



seek views of all and spell out its steps taken to tackle the pandemic. This will ensure confidence among the people," he said. Congress leader Kapil Sibal too called for a united approach to fight coronavirus. "To combat the COVID-19 crisis, we need to respond with a unity of purpose," he tweeted. Maken also called for implementing the NYAY scheme, which the party proposed in the 2019 general election.

He said an amount of Rs 7,500 should be immediately credited to bank accounts of the poor and marginalised. He also asked the government to provide transport to the migrant labourers who are forced to walk to their native villages due to the nationwide lockdown. **AGENCIES**

AAP's Raghav Chadha booked for 'defaming' Yogi

NOIDA: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Raghav Chadha was booked here on Sunday for allegedly posting a tweet defaming Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in connection with the coronavirus pandemic, police said.

Chadha, however, claimed that the FIR got registered at the behest of some "known political operatives" and it appeared to be based on absolutely "frivolous and erroneous" grounds and "warrants to be rejected".

He also said that it is surprising that in such a situation (coronavirus outbreak) the UP Police has used its energies to register a "baseless" FIR.

The FIR was registered on the basis of a complaint lodged by UP-based lawyer Prashant Patel Umrao at the Sector 20 police station in Noida, a police official said.

The case has been lodged under Indian Penal Code sections 500 (defamation), 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) and under Section 66 (offensive messages through a computer or any other communication device like a mobile phone) of the Information Technology Act, according to the FIR.

"His (Chadha's) malicious and deliberate act is not only dangerous to the maintenance of law and order but also it will create panic among the people who are going to their native places at this time due



to coronavirus epidemic," Patel claimed in his complaint, citing a tweet allegedly posted by Chadha.

The case comes amid thousands of migrant daily wage earners from Delhi and nearby areas gathering en masse at Anand Vihar on UP border leaving for their home towns and villages due to the 21-day countrywide lockdown called by the Centre with an objective to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Chadha, also national spokesperson of the AAP, said that at this vulnerable time when mankind and the country are facing an unprecedented public health and economic crisis in the COVID-19 pandemic, people can overcome this challenge through a united effort.

"It is surprising that in such a situation, the UP Police has used its energies to register a baseless FIR against me in NOIDA, at the behest of some known political operatives," he said in a statement to PTI. **PTI**

'PM Modi trying to turn pandemic into political event'

KOLKATA: Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Friday alleged that instead of working on a plan to revive the economy and fix the lacunes in the healthcare sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was trying to turn the coronavirus pandemic into a "political event".

Hitting out at Modi who urged people to light lamps, candles or mobile phone torches at 9 pm on April 5 to

display the country's "collective resolve" to defeat the coronavirus, the leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha said the prime minister should stop doing politics over the issue.

"Instead of working on a plan to revive the economy and fix the lacunes in health sector, the prime minister is trying to divert the attention of the people from these gaps. What purpose will lighting a lamp serve when people are



losing jobs and starving. Such diversionary tactics won't work," Chowdhury said in a

video message shared with journalists. He said Modi and his party BJP are trying to turn the pandemic into a "political event".

"I will neither switch off my lights nor will switch on my mobile phone flash. I don't believe in such absurd things. Will clanging utensils and switching on cell phone torches solve all the problems?" the Congress leader questioned. West Bengal Chief Minister

Mamata Banerjee declined to comment on the prime minister's appeal and said it is for the people to decide.

"I don't want to comment on it. If someone is willing to do it let him do and if somebody don't want to do it, so be it. It's individual choice," the Trinamool Congress supremo said.

However, her party MP Mohua Moitra slammed Modi and said the Centre should

rather announce assistance for workers in the unorganised sector.

"Turn out lights & come on balconies? GET REAL MR. MODI! Give India fiscal pkg worth 8-10pc of GDP. Ensure immediate wages to construction & other labour during lockdown- laws exist permitting this Stop gagging real press in name of curbing fake news," Moitra said in a tweet. **AGENCIES**

Sena seeks action against BJP leader over Covid-19 remarks

"When people venture out violating the lockdown, it is not Modi or the Maharashtra chief minister's fault. Those who have hidden their travel history and violated quarantine rules have brought this crisis on the state"

MUMBAI: The Shiv Sena has demanded action against Maharashtra BJP spokesman Avdhut Wagh who tried to link state minister Jayant Patil's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over lockdown announcement to 25 people contracting COVID-19 in his Assembly constituency in Sangli.

Such remarks not just malign Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but also hurt the legacy of progressive leaders and social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr B R Ambedkar, an editorial in Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana' said.

"What Avdhut Wagh has said is a fit case for taking action under the anti-superstition laws," it said.

"When people venture out violating the lockdown, it is not Modi or the Maharashtra chief minister's fault. Those who have hidden their travel history and violated quaran-



tine rules have brought this crisis on the state," the editorial said.

In a bizarre statement, Wagh on Sunday said NCP leader and state water resources minister Jayant Patil has been "punished" for his criticism of Modi.

Patil hails from western Maharashtra's Sangli district, where 25 members of a family from Islampur tehsil have

been found to be infected with COVID-19. Islampur is Patil's Assembly constituency.

In a series of tweets, Patil had said instead of announcing the lockdown at 8 pm on March 24, the prime minister should have given enough time to migrant labourers to make necessary arrangements to face the shutdown impact.

Wagh's comment came as part of his rebuttal to Patil.

Taking a dim view of the BJP leader's remarks, the Sena said, "President Donald Trump is a big fan of Modi and still coronavirus has created havoc in the US. A city like New York has been silenced. Can someone clarify who punished Islampur and New York?"

It said when the virus is spreading its tentacles, BJP spokespersons are saying anything they want.

Jayant Patil is not just a state minister but also president of the Maharashtra NCP. He put forth his view. Why should BJP leaders get so agitated?" the Marathi daily said.

"Do they want to say homes, talukas, villages and cities of those who criticise Modi should be affected with coronavirus? What if someone says those who call Modi the avatar of Lord Vishnu wish destruction of Maharashtra," the Uddhav Thackeray-led

party said. It said Delhi got more 29 more coronavirus patients on Tuesday, but nobody criticised Modi there.

In Nagpur, the hometown of former chief minister Devendra Fadnis and Union minister Nitin Gadkari, the figure (of COVID-19 cases) is more than 20, it pointed out. "If the figure in states that have not criticised Modi is rising, then it is defeat of his godliness," it stated.

The entire country is with Modi in this fight against coronavirus and even Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has supported the decisions taken by the Modi government, it said. "Why is it that those who call themselves 'bhakts' behave in such a manner?" the Marathi publication asked.

The Sena said it was confident that if Modi comes to know about such comments, he would take action against his own party men. **AGENCIES**

Pandemic blamed for slow pace of manufacturing activity

NEW DELHI: The country's manufacturing sector activity grew at the slowest rate in four months during March, hampered by softer rises in new business as international demand faltered owing to the coronavirus pandemic, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

The headline seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing PMI fell to 51.8 in March, from 54.5 in February, signalling the slowest improvement in business conditions since November 2019.

This is the 32nd consecutive month that the manufacturing PMI has remained above the

50-point mark.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction.

"The Indian manufacturing sector remained relatively sheltered from the negative impact of the global coronavirus outbreak in March, however, there were pockets of disruption and a clear onset of fear amongst firms," Eliot Kerr, economist at IHS Markit, said.

Moreover, the confidence towards the business outlook plummeted to a record low, with positivity tapered by COVID-19 concerns, the survey said.

"Should the trajectory of



injections continue in the same vein, the Indian manufacturing sector can expect a much

sharper negative impact in the coming months, similar to the scale seen in other countries,"

Kerr said.

According to the survey, the sentiment towards the 12-month business outlook weakened in March. Some panelists said there are fears of prolonged shutdowns due to COVID-19 and the associated negative impact on demand.

Commenting on the latest India survey results, Kerr said new orders and output both grew at softer rates, but those readings were relatively tame compared to those seen at goods producers in Europe and other parts of Asia. "The most prominent signs of trouble came from

the new export orders and future activity indices, which respectively indicated tumbling global demand and softening domestic confidence," Kerr noted. New orders placed with Indian manufacturers rose at a slower pace in March, while, new export business fell sharply.

"In fact, the decline in international sales was the fastest since September 2013 amid widespread lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic," the survey noted.

A sub-index that tracks overall demand in the sector hit a four-month low as foreign

demand contracted for the first time in nearly two and a half years, falling at its fastest rate since September 2013.

That was despite input and output prices increasing at their weakest in five and six months, respectively, a sign of a decline in overall inflation, which has continued to remain above the RBI's medium-term target for five months.

Lower price pressures could provide additional room for the central bank to ease policy further. It cut its key interest rates by 75 basis points and introduced a stream of unconventional measures last week.

Optimism about output over the coming 12 months fell to

a low not seen since October 2015, echoing the findings of a Reuters poll which forecast Asia's third-largest economy to grow at its weakest pace in the fiscal year 2020/21 since the global financial crisis.

"Should the trajectory of injections continue in the same vein, the Indian manufacturing sector can expect a much sharper negative impact in the coming months, similar to the scale seen in other countries," added Kerr.

The number of deaths around the world linked to the new coronavirus has crossed 47,000. In India, nearly 2,000 coronavirus cases have been reported so far. **AGENCIES**

MANUFACTURING WEAKENS

Grofers to hire 10,000 for warehouses, delivery

NEW DELHI: Online grocery platform Grofers is looking at hiring 10,000 people for its warehouses and last-mile delivery to clear pending orders quickly and meet the spike in orders on account of the nationwide lockdown.

"We are looking to hire 10,000 people for our warehouses and last-mile delivery. This hiring will happen across all 26 cities that we are present in," bigbasket Vice President-Human Resources Tanuja Tewari said.

She added that the pressure is being felt across all cities with the challenges being



higher in tier I cities.

E-commerce companies have been struggling to deliver orders after the 21-day lockdown, imposed to contain the spread of the deadly coronavirus, came into effect from March 25.

Even though the government has allowed delivery

of essential goods including food, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment through e-commerce platforms, players have complained of their delivery staff being hassled by police. With local authorities shutting down warehouses and stopping trucks from crossing state borders, e-commerce players have seen their operations getting disrupted.

The companies have resumed operations and working to complete pending orders. Some companies are giving people the option to cancel their orders, and are also delaying taking fresh or-

ders to ensure the pending orders get delivered. Another challenge facing the industry is the availability of limited staff for warehouses and logistics. Tewari said currently, there is a shortfall of 50 per cent staff in the company's warehouses and delivery team.

The company has started taking orders in all the cities but due to capacity constraints the slots are getting filled very quickly, she added.

In a tweet, bigbasket said it is operating at about 40 per cent of its planned capacity. **AGENCIES**

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India's power demand falls over 25% to 125.81 GW on April 2

NEW DELHI: India's peak power demand slipped over 25% to 125.81 GW on Thursday compared 168.32 GW on April 2 amid the lockdown to contain COVID-19 outbreak, showed power ministry data.

In actual terms, the demand fell around 43 GW on Thursday compared to the same day a year ago. However, the data showed that peak power demand met has stabilised around 120 GW after March 22.

The government has imposed 3-week lockdown to fight the pandemic from March 24.

The demand was down mainly due to lower requirements from industry and state power distribution companies (discoms) across the country due to the lockdown.

The peak power demand met is the actual highest energy supply during the day across the country.

According to the data, the peak demand met was 163.72 GW on March 20, which came down to 161.74 GW on March 21.

This dropped sharply to 135.20 GW on March 22 due to a call for 'Janata Curfew' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The data also showed that the peak demand met im-



The demand fell sharply to 120.31 GW on March 26 and to 115.23 GW on March 27, indicating continuous slump in demand

proved slightly to 145.49 GW on March 23 but fell again to 135.93 GW on March 24 and subsequently to 127.96 GW on March 25.

The demand fell sharply to 120.31 GW on March 26 and to 115.23 GW on March 27, indicating continuous slump in demand.

However, there was little improvement on March 28 as the peak demand met rose slightly

to 117.76 GW and to 120.18 GW the following day. The demand stood at 120.79 GW on March 30; 123.08 GW on March 31; 123.30 GW on April 1 and 125.81 GW on April 2.

The peak power demand met was 168.7 GW in March and 176.81 GW in April last year.

India's peak power demand (met) was recorded at 170.17 GW on March 3, 2020. During the remaining ten days of the last month, the peak power demand was 145.49 GW on March 23. The spot power price touched a three-year low of 60 paise per unit for supplies on last Wednesday (March 25) on the Indian Energy Exchange due to low demand. The average spot power price is hovering around 2.50 per unit at electricity exchanges. **AGENCIES**

Retail trade sees \$30b loss in a fortnight

NEW DELHI: Traders' body CAIT on Tuesday said India's retail trade has incurred a whopping loss of USD 30 billion in the last fortnight alone due to the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), the country's retail sector comprising 70 million small medium and big traders employing 450 million people, does a monthly business of approximately USD 70 billion, and is one of the hardest hit due to the pandemic.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said even if global economies and other sectors of the Indian economy bounce back sooner than expected, Indian traders are likely to pay a higher price and the strenuous ramifications will reverberate for a much longer time than expected.

"Most important reason for this devastating situation is the fact that a majority of the Indian traders have had to down shutters or curtail operations for health reasons, while still paying employees salaries and that's apart from meeting costs for rentals, taxes and other levies," he said.

Khandelwal said that another significant reason is that the import cycle has been hit drastically due to which Indian traders may not have enough goods to sell even after the lockdown is lifted.

"Finished goods imports from China, the US, Europe which are under severe effects of Covid-19 will take more time to normalise and therefore the import cycle and supply chain might take much longer to get back on track," he said.

Khandelwal further said retail markets in urban centres will face an acute shortage of labour which have migrated to their towns and villages amid the coronavirus outbreak and nationwide lockdown. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Discoms' dues to power gencos rise 32%

NEW DELHI: Power producers' total outstanding dues owed by distribution firms rose nearly 32 per cent to Rs 88,311 crore in January 2020 over the same month previous year, reflecting stress in the sector. Distribution companies (discoms) owed a total of Rs 67,012 crore to power generation companies in January 2019, according to portal PRAAPTI (Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators).

The portal was launched in May 2018 to bring in transparency in power purchase transactions between the generators and discoms.

In January 2020, the total overdue amount, which was not cleared even after 60 days of grace period offered by generators, stood at Rs 76,192 crore as against Rs 51,453 crore in the same month of the preceding year.

According to the latest data on the portal, outstanding dues in January has decreased over the preceding month. In December 2019, the total dues of discoms stood at Rs 86,948 crore. **AGENCIES**

Apparel sector faces 15% loss

MUMBAI: In the wake of the rapid spread of COVID-19 that has brought demand to a standstill, revenues of Indian apparel players are likely to fall by at least 10-15 per cent in 2020-21, according to a report. Although companies are likely to undertake some cost rationalisation measures such as employee base optimisation, pay cuts, promotional budget cuts and rental renegotiations, Iera in a report said that it expects high operating leverage, discounted sales to clear inventory backlog and bad debts to result in a shrinkage of their profit margins. "With the 21-day domestic lockdown announced by the government from March 25 onwards to combat the spread of the virus, domestic apparel sales have come to a complete halt. "Further, seven of India's top apparel export destinations, which account for nearly half of India's total apparel exports, are among the worst affected regions globally.

With most of these regions resorting to lockdowns and social distancing, export demand for apparels has also fallen significantly," Iera Senior Vice-President Jayanta Roy said. **AGENCIES**

Equalisation levy on e-tailers flayed

NEW DELHI: The "sudden" imposition of equalisation levy on e-commerce companies without permanent establishment in India is shocking, especially in the current challenging times, and a wider stakeholder consultation is needed, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) said on Tuesday.

The industry body, which represents the digital services sector in India, said it has reached out to the government on this matter on behalf of the sector at large. IAMAI pointed out that the Budget Speech of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman did not have any such sugges-



tions. "Since mid of March, the entire sector was caught up in the impending challenge of COVID-19 and the restrictive counter-measures much like the rest of the economy.

"The Finance Bill which was finally adopted by Parliament on March 23 amidst this chaos suddenly imposes this levy

effective from April 1, 2020, thereby barely giving 7 days' notice to the sector for implementing this levy," it added.

The levy, which is already paid by digital advertising companies like Google, would tax e-commerce companies without permanent establishment in India at 2 per cent. **AGENCIES**

Over 30000 poultry birds buried alive by farmers

SATISH HANDA

Poultry industry in Haryana having more than 4.5 crore birds is on the verge of collapse due to extremely poor demand of eggs, cocks and hens as a result of epidemic outbreak in the country and lock down declared by the government adversely affecting trade and industry in the state. Famous poultry industry in Haryana state supplying eggs and broilers in adjoining states and wholesale Delhi market has become completely sick due to poor demand and closure of all hotels and restaurants the biggest consumers. According to poultry farmers, the news in social media that eggs and chicken meat are harmful and promote corona virus made situation further worst and prices of eggs and chicken meat witnessed more than 70% drop

since past sometime. A couple of days ago poultry farmers in Bhiwani district in Haryana state unable to meet the expenses of their poultry farms buried alive more than 30000 poultry birds at village Dhigawa in Bhiwani district causing them huge loss.

According to Gurpreet Singh Honey General Secretary of Poultry Farmers Association at Ambala, poultry farmers are unable to bear the cost of their farms because of total slump in the market and meet demand of poultry feed as well as day to day labour and electricity expenses for birds when there is no sale of egg dumped in their godowns as a result they are left with no alternative except to kill their births. According to Shivam Mittala president of Poultry farmers Association, poultry birds are dying of hunger posing a threat of bird flu.

ADB to invest \$100m in Indian infrastructure

MUMBAI: Multilateral institution Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Monday announced a USD 100 million funding for the Indian infrastructure sector through the government-promoted NIIF.

The Manila-based body will be investing in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund's (NIIF) "fund of funds" which will ensure that the actual money invested will be a few times more than the USD 100 million. The investment announcement comes at a critical time for India, as the already sagging economic growth is feared to be taking a heavy hit due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"ADB's commitment to NIIF fund of funds during these extraordinary and challenging times is highly meaningful," NIIF's managing director and chief executive Sujoy Bose said. He



added that the commitment should be seen as reflective of ADB's confidence in the continued growth and potential of the Indian economy, its skilled private equity fund managers and the large pool of determined entrepreneurs who seek capital to grow and strengthen their companies.

"ADB's investment in NIIF will help catalyse institutional

capital into domestic private equity funds in India, thereby contributing to greater availability of long-term growth financing for private sector companies and leading to the creation of quality jobs, social infrastructure development, and economic growth," its Vice President Diwakar Gupta said. Bose said ADB has been funding Indian pri-

private equity funds for over two decades now, and added the latest move will help NIIF commit money to private equity fund managers who may be struggling to raise money from overseas sources.

The total size of NIIF's fund of funds has now grown to USD 700 million, with ADB's commitment, an official statement said, adding that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has also committed money to the corpus.

So far, it has made commitments to three funds aggregating to over Rs 2,600 crore or USD 350 million, the statement said. These three funds are engaged in investments in diverse areas including green energy and climate; middle-income and affordable housing, and entrepreneur-driven mid-market growth companies operating across diversified sectors, it said. **AGENCIES**

Logistics hit by shortage of drivers, labourers: Truckers

NEW DELHI: Only 5 per cent of around 90 lakh trucks across India are plying on the roads at the moment due to shortage of drivers and labourers at loading and unloading points following the nationwide lockdown, thereby severely hampering transportation of goods, according to truckers body AIMTC. The All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) said even after the notification by Union Home Ministry on Sunday allowing movement of non-essential goods during the lockdown, things have not changed at the ground level as many drivers have either abandoned trucks and went to native places, or have moved to stay put at places where basic amenities like food and shelter are available.

"There are around 90 lakh commercial vehicles that we represent all across the country

with 3,500 state, district and taluka level bodies affiliated with us... What we feel is that only around 5 per cent of them are operating now. These are mainly LPG and other petroleum products carriers and short distance milk tankers," AIMTC Chairman Core Committee and former president Bal Malkit Singh told PTI.

He further said vegetable and fruits that are available in the market now transported by farmers through their own means. Singh said before the nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24, there was already partial lockdown as some states have already sealed borders and lakhs of trucks were stranded.

"When lockdown was announced, there was a panic situation among drivers fraternity across the country. As a result many drivers abandoned



vehicles and went to their native places. Some headed to safer places where basic amenities like food and shelter are available and they don't want to come on the highways at the moment as there are no "dhabas" or eateries available now," he said.

Apart from driver issues, Singh said labour availability is also a big challenge that is also hampering logistics operations in the country.

"Truck owners are at home, offices are closed, staff are at home, garages are closed and labourers are not available at

loading and unloading points," he said. Singh further said, "in the logistics supply chain, huge manpower is involved. At loading point you need supervisor who would do documentation but with no public transportation available he can't go to loading points at the moment."

"Truck owners are at home, offices are closed, staff are at home, garages are closed and labourers are not available at loading and unloading points"

Besides, he said, "There is also a huge fear factor as staff are unwilling to come out due to coronavirus, and the same is also with drivers."

"We have suggested that people who are involved in supply chain must also be given the Rs 50 lakh insurance cover that government has announced for frontline health workers during these trying circumstances. If that

happens it can be an incentive for them to come out," Singh said. Moreover, trucks should also be sanitised at every 200 kilometre and drivers health checked before entering from one state border to another, he added. When asked if things could improve with government interventions, like the home ministry order allowing movement of non-essential goods, he said, "we will have to wait and watch, but the fact is drivers are also human and they are fearful of coronavirus outbreak."

Many FMCG companies like ITC, Dabur India, Parle Products, Godrej Consumer Products and Jyothi Labs had said that due to trucks shortage transportation of their goods has been affected during the lockdown which has been imposed to curb spread of coronavirus pandemic. **AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

Banks sensitise branches how to help customers

NEW DELHI: Banks have started sensitising their branches about three months' moratorium on all term loans, including home, auto and crop loans, to help customers in overcoming financial difficulties due to the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent nation-wide lockdown. Several banks on Tuesday said they have informed and provided their branches with the detailed guidelines on various schemes announced by the RBI recently and customers are being sent messages individually on their registered mobile number about the EMI payment. Union Bank of India Managing Director Rajkiran Rai G told PTI that branches have been informed about with respect to moratorium on all term loans. "In case of those who have opted for ECS route for EMI deduction, customers are given the option of availing the facility by informing the branch concerned through mail or other digital medium," he said. Banks cannot unilaterally stop ECS payment due to legal issue but the customer has the option of requesting bank to stop it, Rai said. He further said the customers whose income has not been impacted are encouraged to continue payment as per the scheduled. **AGENCIES**

Ease in motor third party insurance premium

NEW DELHI: Vehicle owners have been given time till April 21 to pay third party motor insurance premiums falling due during the countrywide lockdown in wake of coronavirus outbreak, according to an Irda circular. The risk cover will continue from the due date of renewal of such policies. Motor Third Party Insurance is mandatory, the Irda said on Thursday. "The Central Government has directed that policyholders whose motor vehicle third party insurance policies fall due for renewal during the period on and from March 25, 2020, up to April 14, 2020, and who are unable to make payment of their renewal premium on time ... are allowed to make premium payment for renewal of policies to their insurers on or before April 21, 2020," the circular said. Irda further said when the policy is issued after receipt of premium, it should be ensured that the period of cover commences from the date the renewal was due without there being any break in the policy period provided such renewal fell due within the lockdown period. **AGENCIES**

Indian banks' outlook changed to negative

NEW DELHI: Moody's Investors Service on Thursday changed the outlook for Indian banking system to negative from stable, as it expects deterioration in banks' asset quality due to disruption in economic activity from the Coronavirus outbreak. It said Banks' asset quality will deteriorate across the corporate, small and medium enterprises and retail segments, leading to pressure on profitability and capital. "We have changed the outlook for the Indian banking system to negative from stable. Disruptions to economic activity from the coronavirus outbreak will exacerbate a slowdown in India's economic growth," Moody's said. Stating that asset quality will deteriorate, Moody's said a sharp decline in economic activity and a rise in unemployment will lead to a deterioration of household and corporate finances, which in turn will result in increases in delinquencies. "Growing solvency stress among non-bank financial institutions will increase risks to banks' asset quality because banks have large exposures to the sector," it added. It expects deteriorating profitability and loan growth to hurt capitalisation. "Increases in loan loss charges and declines in revenue will hurt banks' profitability, which will lead to a deterioration of capitalisation." **AGENCIES**

Allahabad Bank, Indian Bank merger face delay

BASIC BANKING TRANSACTIONS, HOWEVER, COMMENCES FROM APRIL 1

KOLKATA: The merger process of Indian Bank and Allahabad Bank could face a slight delay in the wake of the 21-day nationwide lockdown, an official of the Kolkata-based lender said on Saturday.

Basic banking transactions, however, will commence from April 1, the effective date of merger, he said.

"Due to the prolonged lockdown, there could be some slight delay in completing the merger process... but transactions like cash deposits, withdrawals and money transfer will begin from April 1," the official told PTI. As per the swap ratio of the merger, 115 shares of Indian Bank will be exchanged with every 1,000 shares of Allahabad Bank.

The official also said post the amalgamation, Allahabad Bank will vacate its iconic head office building on NSC Bose Road here and move to a nearby premise.

He said the name 'Allahabad' will be retained in the new logo just below the slot



"It is important to ensure that all market segments remain liquid and stable, and function normally"

for Indian Bank.

"We will vacate the head office building, hopefully after three to six months once the merger takes place. This is a

rented building and we will move to our annex building across the street on India Exchange Place," he said.

The official said though the branches are not operating at full strength due to the lockdown, all internal guidelines have been disseminated to the staff regarding standardisation of products, process and procedures.

Post the merger, the total business volume will be to the tune of Rs 8.40 lakh crore, he said, adding, all the staff will

be retained.

The current MD and CEO of Indian Bank will become the new chief of the merged entity.

Indian Bank has allotted 520.56 million equity shares of face value of Rs 10 each at approved Share Exchange Ratio to the equity shareholders of Allahabad Bank following the amalgamation of Allahabad Bank into Indian Bank.

The bank is in the process of filing listing applications with the stock exchanges and the aforesaid equity shares will either be credited to the Demat Accounts or Share Certificates will be despatched to the eligible shareholders of Allahabad Bank.

According to the Amalgamation Scheme, Bank accounts of eligible shareholders of Allahabad Bank as registered with the Depositories or Bank will either be credited or fractional warrants will be issued for the amount arising out of fractional entitlements. **PTI**

Axis Bank offers EMI deferment for three months

NEW DELHI: Private sector lender Axis Bank has offered its customers to opt for the loan moratorium if they face problem in keeping their EMIs running, in line with actions of its peers.

"In the wake of the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines on the COVID-19 Regulatory Package, we are now offering you the flexibility to opt for a moratorium/deferment," Axis Bank said in a tweet.

Customers can opt for moratorium on payment of installments and interest for various term loans/credit card dues, and/or defer the interest for working capital facilities due between March 1, 2020 and May 31, 2020, it said.

The offer of flexibility is in line with most of its peers in the private sector such as HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank.

"The option of deferment can be availed if your immediate cash flows are adversely impacted or you are facing financial constraints arising from Covid-19 pandemic," Axis Bank said detailing about the terms and conditions on its website.

Further, the bank clarified to its customers that it is only



"The option of deferment can be availed if your immediate cash flows are adversely impacted or you are facing financial constraints arising from Covid-19 pandemic"

a deferment option and not a concession or waiver, since interest would continue to accrue for this period.

The repayment would resume from June 2020, once the deferment period is over.

Borrowers whose cash flows are not impacted and

do not wish to avail the moratorium, may choose to opt out from the moratorium by sending an email or by reaching out to any of bank branches, Axis Bank said adding, it is deemed that borrowers have opted for the moratorium if there is no written communication stating otherwise.

Meanwhile, a host of state-run banks, which control over two-thirds of the system, have gone for an option where the repayments automatically get deferred unless a customer informs of her willingness to pay. Experts have already made it clear that this is not an interest waiver, but a deferment of payments, meaning the additional interest costs will have to borne by the customers. **PTI**

Union Bank becomes fifth largest PSB post-merger

NEW DELHI: Union Bank has become the country's fifth-largest public sector lender after amalgamating Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank into itself.

The merger, effective from Wednesday, will harness rich individual legacies and forge a dynamic shared future, it said in a release. "As of today, all employees, customers and branches of Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank will become part of the Union Bank of India family," it added. The amalgamation will also strengthen the bank's footprint in southern India with a considerable market share in this region, the Mumbai-headquartered lender said.

Union Bank becomes 5th largest PSB post-merger with Andhra Bank, Corporation Bank and National Bank of India. The amalgamation is also expected to generate cost and revenue synergies to the tune of Rs 2,500 crore over the next three years. "We now offer



our customers a much wider access to branches, ATM, digital services and credit facilities and are now in a much stronger position as a bank," Union Bank Of India MD and CEO Rajkiran Rai G said. The bank offers a wide array of products and services to more than 120 million customers across its over 9,500 branches and more than 13,500 ATMs.

Combined, they are India's fourth-largest banking network and fifth largest public sector bank. It further said in order to minimize disruption,

the account numbers, IFSC codes, debit/credit cards and internet/mobile banking portals and login credentials will remain the same.

Union Bank also said with effect from Wednesday, basic services such as cash withdrawal and deposit, balance enquiry and funds transfer will become interoperable across the combined network. "No additional charges will be levied on Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank customers using Union Bank ATM's and vice versa," it added. **AGENCIES**

After 39 years, Vishwanathan leaves RBI

VISHWANATHAN WENT ON TO SERVE THE BANK UNDER GOVERNORS URJIT PATEL AND SHAKTIKANTA DAS AND WAS GIVEN A ONE-YEAR EXTENSION LAST YEAR TILL JULY 3, 2020

MUMBAI: N S Vishwanathan, the senior-most deputy governor of the Reserve Bank, demitted office three months ahead of his extended tenure on Tuesday on health grounds after serving the nation's monetary authority for 39 years.

His departure comes at critical time for the central bank and also for the country given the crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Citing deteriorating health, the 62-year-old Vishwanathan had on March 6 requested the central bank to relieve him from duties by the end of the month.

With this, he becomes the second deputy governor to leave under Shaktikanta Das who took over as the governor in December

2018. Deputy governor Viral Acharya left in June 2019, six months ahead of his tenure.

In his farewell note sent to colleagues and the rest of the RBI family, Vishwanathan said, "For someone who has been with the Bank for nearly 39 years, the thought that I would, in a couple of hours from now, become an 'ex-RBI official' leaves a very eerie feeling. I am at the same time elated because there is still 'RBI' in that term."

Vishwanathan, born in June 1958 in a middle-class Kerala family, did his Masters in economics from the Bangalore University. He joined RBI as a Grade B officer in November 1981 and went to become the deputy governor on June 28, 2016 under Governor Raghuram Rajan. He was heading the all-important department of banking supervision, and replaced H R Khan.

Vishwanathan went onto serve the bank under governors Urjit Patel and Shaktikanta Das and was given a



one-year extension last year till July 3, 2020.

He was a director on the board of Punjab National Bank from September 2012 to May 2013, a nominee director at Dena Bank from May 2011 to September 2012 and chief general manager of vigilance at IFCI. In April, he became an executive director of the Bank. He was also a director of supervision at the Bank of Mauritius, the central bank of the island nation.

Admitting that there have been moments of disappointments, misses and frustration, Vishwanathan however said "high points have, outnumbered, outlasted and outlasted the low points, by far", as per

the farewell note seen by PTI. Describing RBI is an outstanding institution, he said he has seen the bank scaling new heights and thus growing in stature over the years.

PTI had on March 7 reported that the Reserve Bank had accepted Vishwanathan's request to be relieved by March 31, even though, despite ill health, he was planning to serve the bank till end-April, but his deteriorating health did not allow him to.

Vishwanathan has been in-charge of the key supervisory and regulatory functions at the Mint Road and it was this powerful position that led the government to offer him an extension given the problems in the banking system. The RBI's supervisory and regulatory powers came under criticism after IL&FS, one of the largest NBFCs, went belly up in September 2018. And then came the scam at the city-based PMC Bank in September 2019. Both incidents dented the image of RBI's regulatory prowess. **AGENCIES**

'Roll back cut in interest rates on small savings'

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Wednesday termed the cut in interest rates on small savings as a heartless and shameful act, and demanded its immediate rollback.

Congress spokesperson Jaiveer Shergill said the reduction in interest rates on small savings is irrational, illogical and ill-timed as it has come at a time when the people are already facing hardship due to the lockdown and the economic recession.

The 21-day lockdown was

imposed in the country from March 25 to check the spread of the novel coronavirus.

He also demanded that the government waive interest on EMIs for the three-month period from March to June, saying the moratorium in EMIs is merely hogwash and a postponing exercise.

The Congress leader also demanded that the government comes out with a second tranche of economic relief packages to help small and medium enterprises, and the



poor and common people from the economic downturn the country is facing.

"The BJP government's decision to cut interest rates on small saving schemes is a

heartless and shameful act that will hit the common people, especially the farmers, middle class and the poor who are already suffering due to the downturn in the economy," Mr. Shergill told reporters at a press conference held through video conferencing.

"The decision to reduce interest rates on small savings is ill-timed, illogical and irrational," he said, adding that it will snatch the incomes of 90 crore people in the country. **AGENCIES**

₹50 lakh cover for healthcare workers

NEW DELHI: The Union Health Ministry on Saturday said 22.12 lakh public health-care providers, including community health workers, will get Rs 50 lakh insurance cover under a national scheme for them.

They will be covered under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19, which was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26.

In an order, the ministry

said that "as per the announcement made under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package, the central government has approved the launch of insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19 outbreak."

Besides, healthcare workers in government institutions, the insurance scheme will also cover private hospital staff, retired staff, volunteers, contract workers, daily wagers and even outsourced staff hired by the central government, state governments and autonomous

healthcare institutions, it said.

The insurance will provide a "comprehensive personal accident cover of Rs 50 lakh for 90 days to a total of around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of patients suffering from coronavirus infection and who may be at risk of being impacted by this," the ministry said. These cases will also be covered subject to numbers indicated by the Ministry of Health. **PTI**

SBI employees may face action over social media posts

"WE HAVE SEEN A SPURT IN SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS PERTAINING TO FUNCTIONING OF THE BANK'S BRANCHES AND OFFICES... THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SUCH POSTS CRITICAL OF THE BANK NOT CLOSING DOWN OPERATIONS IN CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK, LITTLE APPRECIATING THE ROLE OF THE BANK AT SUCH A CRITICAL TIME"

KOLKATA: The State Bank of India has warned its employees against posting content on social media that is critical of the country's largest lender over its functioning in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

In a recent letter to chief general managers of all circles, SBI also said action will be taken against employees who take to social media platforms to write messages disparaging the bank, its management and policies, sources said on Friday.

"We have seen a spurt in social media posts pertaining to functioning of the bank's branches and offices... There have been many such posts critical of the bank not closing down operations in context of the COVID-19 outbreak, little appreciating the role of the



bank at such a critical time," the sources said, quoting a circular. The lender has already initiated action against two of its employees based in West Bengal for "offensive" posts against the bank and a senior management official, they said.

The move has met with criticism by a large section of SBI employees, who called it an attempt to muzzle free speech and expression. "Being a citizen of a demo-

cratic country, we have a broader right to express our views on social media about the situations that affect our day lives, without divulging details of our organisation or using derogatory language...this circular is an attempt to curb our rights enshrined in Article 19 of the Constitution," said an SBI employee, who preferred not to be named.

A senior United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) offi-

"Indecent language in social media against banks is not encouraged, but employees are well within rights to flag concerns through their posts"

cial told PTI that SBI is the only bank to have come out with such a circular amid the coronavirus crisis.

An official of the All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC) said the state-run lender's circular on social media posts of its employees is "definitely" a breach of their democratic rights.

"Indecent language in social media against banks is not encouraged, but employees are well within rights to flag concerns through their posts," he said. When contacted, SBI Chief General

Manager, Kolkata Circle, Ranjan Kumar Mishra, said the bank has a social media policy in place which every employee is expected to adhere to, failing which action could be initiated. "Everybody is free to express themselves on social media regarding COVID-19 or any other subject, but if such posts tarnish the image of the bank and is violative of the set code of conduct, then disciplinary action might be taken after investigation," Mishra told PTI.

On reports that some of its employees are placed under suspension over recent social media posts, he said such steps are "regular internal matters of the bank". Mishra also said SBI has been largely successful in managing customer flow at its branches across the country amid the ongoing lockdown, and help of local authorities is being sought wherever required. **AGENCIES**



Govt must help the weakest during Covid-19

The ₹1,70,000-crore relief package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 — Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) — is a good first step towards alleviating the distress caused to vulnerable sections of the population by the 21-day lockdown imposed to combat the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). What is noteworthy about the package is not the amount but the innovative ways in which the government is seeking to offer relief. It covers various sections of the vulnerable, ranging from farmers and women Jan Dhan account holders, to organised sector workers, to the most important of all — healthcare workers, who will now get a sizeable insurance cover of ₹50 lakh. The doubling of foodgrain allocation offered free is a good idea that privileges the hungry poor over rodents and pests devouring the stocks in Food Corporation of India godowns. So is the move to provide free cooking gas refills to the underprivileged who are part of the PM Ujjwala scheme. The offer to pay both employer and employee contributions to the Provident Fund for very small business enterprises is welcome and will offer relief to those businesses that have been forced to shut down operations, and also to employees earning small salaries for whom the PF deduction may hurt at this point in time. Ideally the government ought to have announced a relief package for the corporate sector and the middle class along with the PMGKY. It should now turn its focus towards businesses that are running out of cash and may soon default on even salaries and statutory commitments if relief is not given. There are enough ideas to borrow from others such as the U.S. which is in the process of finalising a \$2 trillion package. Delays in the economic relief package always hurt the weakest most if not announced on time.



JEAN DRÈZE WONDERS WHY THE POOR COUNT FOR VERY LITTLE IN THE CENTRAL GOVT'S CURFEW PLAN

Lopsided lockdown serves nothing

"I am willing to go hungry if there is no other way to stop this virus, but how will I explain that to my children?" We heard these poignant words two days ago from Nemi Devi of Dumbi village in Latehar district, Jharkhand. Her son and husband, both migrant workers, are stranded far away. In village after village, many other women expressed similar worries. And that was even before the Prime Minister announced a drastic 21-day lockdown, from Wednesday. The enormity of the coronavirus crisis is gradually dawning on India. For you and me, it is still in the future. But for many informal-sector workers and their families, the crisis is already in full swing: there is no work, and resources are running out. Things are all set to get worse as the privileged hoard with abandon and food prices go north. Hopefully, the Central government's decision to impose a 21-day lockdown will prove right in due course. But the lockdown (a virtual curfew) is crying out for relief measures, including income support for poor families. As it happens, most of them already receive a limited form of income support: food rations under the Public Distribution System (PDS). Under the National Food Security Act, two-thirds of Indian families (75% and 50% in rural and urban areas, respectively) are covered. In most States, including the poorest, the PDS works — not perfectly, but well enough to protect the bulk of the population from hunger. The PDS is the country's most important asset in this situation. It is essential to keep it going, even to expand it, in terms of both coverage and entitlements. Fortunately, India has gigantic excess food stocks. In fact, it has carried excess food stocks (more than twice the buffer-stock norms) for almost 20 years, and this is the time to use them. Nothing prevents the Central government from, say, doubling PDS rations for three or even six months as an emergency measure. That will not make up for most people's loss of income, but it will ensure that there is food in the house at least. Some bold steps are required to make food distribution effective. For instance, biometric authentication (fingerprint scanning) is best removed at this time — it is a source of exclusion as well as a health hazard. Distribution needs to be staggered and tightly supervised, to avoid crowds and cheating at the ration shop. Dealers who are caught cheating must be swiftly punished. All



this is well within the realm of possibility; the main thing is to release the stocks without delay. Having said this, the PDS is not enough. For one thing, many poor people are still excluded from it. Large-scale cash transfers are also required, starting with advance payment of social security pensions and a big increase in pension amounts (the Central government's contribution has stagnated at a measly ₹200 per month since 2006). Here, one possible hurdle is the payment system. Many pensioners collect their pension from "business correspondents" (BCs) — a kind of human automated teller machine (ATM), who dispenses money on behalf of the bank. The problem is, unlike ATMs, most BCs use biometric authentication rather than smart cards. And mass biometric authentication could accelerate the transmission of the novel coronavirus. Ideally, biometric authentication should be abandoned for now. Even if it is not, many BCs may vanish for fear of infection (most of them are poorly-paid employees of poorly-regulated private entities). Under both scenarios, something has to be done to ensure safe crowd management at the bank. New payment arrangements are also possible. For instance, social security pensions could be paid in cash at the panchayat bhavan on a given day of

the month, obviating the need for everyone to go to the bank: this has been done in Odisha for years, with good results. Cash could also be disbursed, with due safeguards, through anganwadis or self-help groups. Cash transfers need not be limited to social security pensions. Revamping the PDS and social security pensions would go a long way, but a significant proportion of vulnerable families are likely to fall through the cracks. Further, food rations may prevent hunger but people have many other basic needs; they will need money to cope with this spell of unemployment. There are several possible ways of extending the reach of cash transfers beyond pensions. For instance, money could be sent to the accounts of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act job-card holders, or Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) beneficiaries, or PDS cardholders. How these lists are best used and combined is a context-specific question, perhaps best handled at the State level (my sense is that in many States, the MGNREGA job-cards list is the best starting point). These are just some examples of possible emergency measures. Many other valuable suggestions have been made, relating for instance to midday meals, community kitchens and relief camps for stranded migrant workers. The first step is to make relief measures an integral part of the lockdown plan. Failing that, it may do more harm than good. For one thing, a hungry and enfeebled population is unlikely to fight the virus effectively. A constructive lockdown should empower people to fight back together, not treat them like sheep. Finally, Centre-State cooperation is essential. Many State governments have already initiated valuable social-security measures, but they are far from adequate. The Central government, for its part, has been struck with inexplicable paralysis on this. Adequate relief measures require big money (lakhs of crores of rupees) from the Central government. Implementation, however, should be led by the States. They all have their own circumstances and methods. The Central government is unlikely to do better on their behalf. If it foots the bill, that will be a good start.

Jean Drèze is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University. Views expressed are his own

FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON HOW THE CORONAVIRUS IS LIKELY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

- 1 GEOPOLITICAL RACE WILL INTENSIFY**
The first fallout is the deepening of tensions between the US and China. The geopolitical competition, which has always been there, will now assume a raw, direct and more aggressive form.
- 2 POWER EQUATIONS WILL CHANGE**
Whoever emerges less bruised from the virus will be an important variable in determining future power equations. By the way, China is limping towards normalcy while the US is struggling with it.
- 3 PROTECTIONISM IS SET TO INCREASE**
There had been rising protectionism, especially in the West, in the last few years. But there will now be more widespread scepticism about international economic linkages, and an inward turn.
- 4 DEMOCRATIC NORMS WILL GET HURT**
Political regimes use such moment to expand their powers. This is needed in times of a public health emergency, but measures, once instituted, are often not easily rolled back. Democracy is in danger.
- 5 SELF-RELIANCE IS THE ONLY WAY OUT**
India will have to emerge from the economic crisis by relying largely on its own tools. And it will have to ensure that it retains its democratic character even as the State becomes more powerful.



SHYEL TREHAN ADVISES INDIA TO GO FOR COMPULSORY LICENCE UNDER PATENTS ACT FOR GILEAD'S DRUG

Set a clear policy for coronavirus cure

The World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared COVID-19 an orphan disease, or a rare disease. Which of these statements is true? As of March 23, it seemed both. In the U.S., under the Orphan Drug Act, 1983, companies are provided incentives to develop therapies, or orphan drugs, for rare diseases. The idea is that without these incentives, companies would find it difficult to recoup their R&D costs given the small number of people suffering from the rare disease. The Act allows seven years of market exclusivity and financial incentives to innovators of these drugs. As a result, orphan drugs are often exorbitantly priced. Privileges under the Act may be conferred to companies for drugs to treat a disease that affect less than 200,000 people in the U.S., or for a disease that affects more than 200,000 people but for which there is no hope of recouping R&D costs. Interestingly, according to the regulations for revocation, if the number of people suffering from the disease exceeds 200,000 after designation but before approval, this would not be a ground for revocation. In an egregious misuse of the Act, the FDA granted Gilead Sciences orphan drug status for its antiviral drug, Remdesivir, on March 23. Originally developed to treat Ebola but found ineffective, the drug is now being tested for treating COVID-19. Clinical trials are already in Phase III. But in an interesting turn of events, on March



25 Gilead announced that it had submitted a request to the FDA to rescind its designation for Remdesivir. It alluded to the fact that abbreviated trials were behind the initial designation, though it is well known that there are other avenues for abbreviated trials in such circumstances. The question that remains is, how did the Act apply to a potential drug for COVID-19, which is anything but a rare disease, with 800,049 confirmed cases across the world? How does the U.S. FDA justify conferring the status of an orphan drug on a therapy designed to treat COVID-19? Sure, as of March 25, the U.S. had 54,941 people suffering from the disease. But this is simply a technicality. Congressional findings for the Act state that the purpose of the legislation is to provide financial incentives for drugs that may reasonably expect to generate

relatively small sales. Is it legal to apply the benefits of a statute to something entirely outside its stated objective and purpose? The simple answer is no. Gilead had said that it intends to make the drug accessible and affordable around the globe. However, Gilead's exorbitant pricing of its drug to treat hepatitis C and its drug to treat HIV attracted attention in the past. Yet in 2017, Gilead placed its HIV therapy in the Medicines Patent Pool, a move that would make the medicine more accessible. For Remdesivir, Gilead's suspension of its "compassionate use" programme raised alarm bells. The programme was reinstated for only children and pregnant women; Gilead said it cannot process "the overwhelming number of applications". So, what would have been the impact of this orphan drug status for the U.S., given the status of its patents? Patents are open to challenge. Had Gilead not sought that orphan drug status be rescinded, generic manufacturers would not have been able to market a drug to treat COVID-19 with the same active ingredient till the seven-year period of market exclusivity had ended. This would have given Gilead free rein on pricing and licensing which would have had disastrous consequences on the healthcare system. What does this mean for India? While the orphan drug status of Remdesivir would have no impact on India, Gilead Sciences does hold a patent in India, which it is likely to claim for this use. As far as its patent rights are concerned, Indian law permits the government to issue a compulsory licence in certain circumstances of a public health crisis under Section 92 of the Patents Act. This would allow third parties to manufacture a patented drug without permission of the patent holder. Indian companies have already expressed their capability to manufacture the drug. The firepower under this provision has never been deployed before. If the government does not exercise its powers to issue a compulsory license if required, Indian manufacturers would not be able to manufacture generics (without challenging the patent). This would leave the people vulnerable to Gilead's pricing policies and licensing conditions, should its drug be successful.

Shyel Trehan practises in the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India. Views expressed are his own

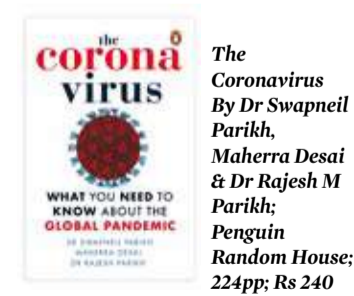
BOOKS: REVIEW

New book set to demystify coronavirus, debunk myths

Three medical experts have come together for a book on coronavirus, seeking to demystify the global epidemic and debunk myths besides talking about its economic, political and social fallout. "The Coronavirus: What You Need to Know about the Global Pandemic" is written by internal medicine specialist Dr Swapneil Parikh, clinical psychologist Maherra Desai, and neuropsychiatrist Dr Rajesh M Parikh and will be published by Ebury Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House. According to the authors, writing the book in less than three weeks was a "transformative experience". Parikh says the book ad-

resses the history, evolution, facts and myths around the COVID-19 threat. "The elusive symptoms of the virus are making it harder to identify and assess the potential threat. Amid this, correct and expertly led information will be the key to mitigate the problem, and perhaps even clear the air," he says.

Stressing on the need for immediate action, co-author Desai says, "The situation we are in was inevitable. We have had multiple unheeded warnings. Are we willing to learn this time around? We are invincible only to the extent of our preparedness." Parikh says "getting to know the phenomenal courage and dedication of



healthcare workers across the world has made us look with renewed respect at our nursing and paramedical staff." According to Milee Ashwarya, Publisher at Ebury Publishing & Vintage Publishing, the world is currently in the grip of this epidemic caused by COVID-19, and there is a lot of scattered information floating around leading to fear and panic. "What we need most right now is credible information from professionals that can help us understand what coronavirus is, and how we

can prepare and protect ourselves against it," she says. The book explains the dos and don'ts, busts the myths, explain the history and evolution of the virus and share insights into what lies ahead for us, she adds. The book is out for pre-order and is expected to hit the market by the end of March. Dr Swapneil Parikh is a practicing physician in Mumbai and the co-founder of a healthcare start up. Maherra Desai is a clinical psychologist and medical researcher. She has excelled in academics and psychometrics, and is the site manager of clinical research at the Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre, Mumbai. She is passionate about fitness, travel and voluntary social work. Dr. Rajesh M. Parikh is the Director of Medical Research and Honorary Neuropsychiatrist at the Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre, Mumbai.

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NEWSBRIEF

Global growth may contract by 1.9%

MUMBAI: Fitch Ratings on Friday projected that the global economy will fall into a deep recession in 2020 due to the massive disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, with growth print contracting by 1.9 per cent, pulled down by larger contraction in the US and the Euro zone. The ratings agency's Chief Economist Brian Coulton pegged India's growth at 2 per cent and China's at under 2 per cent -- making them the two large economies which will not slip into recession. "A deep global recession is our baseline forecast... The speed with which the coronavirus pandemic is evolving has necessitated another round of huge cuts to our growth forecasts. "We now expect world economic activity to decline by 1.9 percent in 2020 with the US, the Eurozone and Britain contracting by 3.3 percent, 4.2 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively. "China's recovery in 1Q will be sharply curtailed by the global recession and its annual growth will be below 2 percent," Fitch said, adding the immediate hit to activity and jobs in the first half of this year will be worse. AGENCIES

No change in fiscal year: Minister

NEW DELHI: The government has not extended the current 2019-20 fiscal year, and it will end as scheduled on March 31, the finance ministry has said. "There is no extension of the financial year," the finance minister said while refuting reports that the new financial year would start from July 1. Earlier, industry bodies had appealed to the government seeking extension of the current financial year, ending March 31, by at least three months till June-end, citing the present economic situation amid the coronavirus pandemic. Representatives from industry chambers including CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM had met officials of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs here last week and apprised the government of the issues being faced by them, and gave various suggestions. AGENCIES

Govt to borrow ₹4.88 lakh cr

NEW DELHI: The government will borrow Rs 4.88 lakh crore in the first half of fiscal 2020-21 starting April 1 to shore up resources amid a war it is waging to contain economic fallout of coronavirus pandemic, DEA Secretary Atanu Chakraborty said on Tuesday. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had in her budget for 2020-21 pegged gross borrowing in the new financial year at Rs 7.8 lakh crore, higher than Rs 7.1 lakh crore estimated in the current fiscal. Gross borrowing includes repayments of past loans. Presenting Budget for 2020-21, Sitharaman had said net market borrowing for the year 2019-20 would be Rs 4.99 lakh crore and for the year 2020-21, it would be Rs 5.36 lakh crore. "A good part of the borrowings for the financial year 2020-21 would go towards the capital expenditure of the government that has been scaled up by more than 21 per cent. AGENCIES

India's growth to slow down to 4 per cent

MEASURES TO CONTAIN COVID-19 AND WEAKER GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT WILL ADD TO WOES: ADB

NEW DELHI: India's economic growth is likely to slow down to 4 per cent this fiscal on the back of the current global health emergency, Asian Development Bank said in its outlook for financial year 2020-21 on Friday.

Growth in India will remain subdued after the country suffered a sharp slowdown last year, from 6.1 per cent in fiscal 2019 to 5 per cent, as a credit crunch that originated in the non-banking financial sector severely hampered bank lending, the Manila-based lender said.

"We face extraordinarily challenging times. The out-



"We face extraordinarily challenging times. The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) is disrupting people's lives and interrupting business and other economic activities around the world"

break of coronavirus (COVID-19) is disrupting people's lives and interrupting business and other economic activities around the world," said Matsugu Asakawa, President of Asian Development Bank.

Noting that COVID-19 has not yet spread extensively in India, ADB said measures to contain the virus and a weaker global environment will whip up headwinds, offsetting support from corporate and per-

sonal income tax cuts as well as financial sector reforms which are meant to revive credit flows.

In its Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020 the lender said: Gross domestic product (GDP) growth in India is forecast to slow further to 4 per cent in FY21 before strengthening to 6.2 per cent in the next fiscal. South Asia will face a milder slowdown, it stated. "Growth in South Asia will decelerate to 4.1 per cent in 2020 and then recover to 6 per cent in 2021, largely tracking the trend in the dominant Indian economy," according to ADO 2020.

After a disappointing 2019, growth in the region (Asia and Pacific) is expected to slow sharply to 2.2 per cent in 2020 under the effects of the current health emergency and then rebound to 6.2 per cent in 2021, region wise, as per the outlook.

Developing Asia will weaken tremendously due to the pandemic, considering the

region's deep integration with the global economy through tourism, trade, and remittances, it said, adding that plummeting commodity prices are also placing a severe burden on some countries. Globally, the pandemic could cost the economy \$4.1 trillion, the ADB said. "The estimated impact could be an underestimate, as additional channels such as...possible social and financial crises, and long-term effects on health care and education are excluded from the analysis," the ADB said. A shorter containment period could reduce the losses to \$2 trillion, it added.

The global economic meltdown triggered by the pandemic comes at a time when confidence in the Indian economy is giving way to uncertainty because of the continued slump in manufacturing. India's economic growth slipped to a nearly seven-year low of 4.7% in the October-December, according to government data. AGENCIES

'Strong fiscal measures may not help economy'



NEW DELHI: Indian economy, which was already in slowdown phase for last six quarters, could register the lowest growth in the post-reform period in 2020-21 despite strong monetary and fiscal stimulus measures, an eminent economist said on Friday.

N R Bhanumurthy, a Professor at National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, said that with the current lockdown, the state of the Indian economy has aggravated further.

"With the current lockdown, the current situation in the Indian economy, which was already in slowdown phase for over six quarters, has actually aggravated further.

"Assuming that the situation could improve in a quarter, in 2020-21, the Indian economy could register the lowest growth that was experienced in the post-reform period (since 1991). This is despite strong monetary and fiscal stimulus measures introduced since February 2020," he told PTI in an interview.

Multilateral agency ADB expects India's economic growth to slow down to 4 pc in FY2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Moody's Investor Service last month also slashed its estimate for India's GDP growth during 2020 calendar year to 2.5 per cent and said that coronavirus outbreak will cause unprecedented shock to the global economy. Asked whether under the current circumstances, India can achieve the target of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy by 2024-25, Bhanumurthy said that some of his studies have shown that achieving this target even in good times was difficult given the slowing economy. "Now that the world is expected to get into a recessionary stage and not sure when there could be some rebound, achieving a USD 5 trillion economy is going to be a distant dream.

"Added to that the exchange rate also depreciated sharply," he noted. Bhanumurthy, however, added that based on NIPFP study to 15th Finance Commission, "we strongly believe that with some prudent fiscal policies, we can still achieve such big targets. But that also means government (both centre and states) needs to sacrifice a lot, though not sure if politically feasible".

On the need for large fiscal stimulus to boost growth, he said given the current conditions, there are fewer options on the policy front other than large fiscal stimulus as well as reprioritizing the government expenditures.

"This has to happen even by printing more money. "While the government has come out with a stimulus of Rs 1.7 lakh crore, with other measures that are brought by monetary authorities, the actual (both direct and indirect) stimulus could be much more," Bhanumurthy emphasised. AGENCIES

Ind-Ra sees India's growth at 3.6%

MUMBAI: Domestic credit rating agency India Ratings (Ind-Ra) on Monday cut its FY21 growth forecast to 3.6 per cent amid coronavirus-related worries.

It has assumed that a full or partial lockdown will continue till end of April and economic activities will be gradually restored only after May. The report comes amid a crippling impact on economic activity due to the three-week lockdown till April 14 which is expected to only aggravate the difficulties around growth that were existing before the pandemic. Some watchers are also estimating for a contraction of the economy in the June quarter.

Ind-Ra said it expects India to clock a 2.3 per cent growth for the June quarter, down from its expectation of a 4.7 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) expansion in March quarter.

The agency said the initial and visible impact of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy has been the disruption in the production of select manufacturing sectors due to the breakdown of supply chain,



near-collapse of the tourism, hospitality and aviation sectors and a rise in the work load of the healthcare sector.

Small businesses have begun to witness cash flow disruptions. However, some of the services sectors such as financial services, information technology and IT-enabled services have greater flexibility in operations and they have quickly readjusted and/or are readjusting their operations by allowing employees to work from home, it said.

A changed outlook of investors has led to a huge outflow of capital and the rupee has come under intense pressure, it said, pointing that wealth erosion would impact the consumption levels.

Additionally, disruption in harvesting the maturing Rabi

or winter crop and inability of agricultural markets to timely procure them could be a blow to the farmers' income and rural demand, it warned.

Stopping of construction activities will accelerate the problems of the real estate sector which is still struggling to access funding in the middle of a meltdown in the non-banking financial company (NBFC) and banking sectors, it said, pointing out that this sector is the highest employment generator after agriculture.

Apart from this, the closure of non-essential commercial establishment and multiplexes will have a ripple effect on many sectors, and impact demand for consumer durables, entertainment, sports, wholesale trade, transport, tourism and hospitality. AGENCIES

Assocham seeks stimulus package to revive economy

NEW DELHI: Industry body Assocham has urged the government to roll out a USD 100-120 billion stimulus package to help revive all sectors of the economy, which has been battered by the coronavirus outbreak and the subsequent nationwide lockdown.

Stressing that the Reserve Bank's decision on key policy rate cut and measures to infuse liquidity could just be seen as a "quick short term fix", Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood said the government would need to do much more in the immediate future.

"This could include the central government making use of the current scenario, wherein the gloom of deflation as well as recession, and no threat of inflation hovers around the economy, to take advantage of the prevailing fiscal deficit present in the financial system, and put together a stimulus package of about USD 100 to 120 billion that is sure to help revive all sec-



tors in the country," Sood said.

India also stands to gain around USD 50 billion in fuel import bill due to the fall in global crude prices, he said in a statement.

According to the chamber, the government may go in for temporary suspension of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Rules (FRBM) Act.

The legislation, enacted way back in August 2003, was passed with the aim to make the central government responsible for ensuring "inter-generational equity in fiscal management and long-term macro-economic stability". AGENCIES

Oil, gas bid deadline extended; bid rounds merged

"IN VIEW OF THE LOCKDOWN DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE OALP BID ROUND-V LAST DATE FOR BID SUBMISSION WILL BE EXTENDED."

NEW DELHI: The government has extended the last date of bidding for the 11 oil and gas blocks on offer in the fifth bid round, and decided to merge the next two rounds into one in view of the COVID-19 lockdown in the country.

The fifth bid round under Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) opened in January and was to initially close on March 18. However, the bid date was earlier this month extended to April 16. Now it has been further extended.

"In view of the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the OALP bid Round-V last date for bid submission will be extended. The revised date shall be notified soon," the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) said in a tweet.

So far, the government has awarded 94 blocks in four rounds in the last two-and-a-half years. These 94 blocks cover an exploratory area of about 1,36,800 square kilometers over 16 Indian sedimentary basins.

In the latest bid round, about 19,800 sq km of area is on offer for bidding, according to the DGH.

Under OALP, companies are allowed to carve out areas they want to explore oil and gas in. Companies can put in an expression of interest (EOI)

for any area throughout the year but such interests are accumulated thrice in a year. The fifth cycle of submitting

EOIs closed on November 30, 2019, and was followed by the sixth cycle that began on December 1, 2019 and was to last till March 31, 2020. It was to be followed by the seventh cycle from April 1, 2020 until July 31, 2020.

"In view of the lockdown due to Covid-19, the EO cycle for Round VI (ending March 31, 2020) and Round VII (ending July 31, 2020) shall stand merged," DGH said, adding the EOIs received between December 1 and July 31 will be clubbed and put on offer as a combined bid round.

"Bidding round would be launched based on EOIs received till July 31, 2020,"

it said. The last bid round, OALP-IV, saw just eight bids coming in for seven blocks on offer. State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) walked away with all the seven oil and gas blocks on offer.

OALP-IV was the first round on revamped terms approved in February 2019. Unlike previous rounds where blocks were awarded to companies offering a maximum share of oil and gas to the government, blocks in little or unexplored Category-II and III basins are now awarded to companies offering to do maximum exploration programme. AGENCIES

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Over 7.27 lakh unemployed educated youths in Haryana await jobs

SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

More than 7.27 lakh unemployed educated youths registered with districts employment department in Haryana state are awaiting jobs.

Of them, only 950 youths were able to get jobs in government departments in past one year, according to an official. Information also reveals that number of such unemployed youths is fast increasing day by day as a result of present world wide economic crisis and corona virus spread all over the world.

Micro, small and medium

manufacturing enterprises in private sectors have been forced to close down their shutters due to present epidemic outbreak in the country as such majority of units in private sectors are unable to meet expenses has already said good-bye to their employees left for their home towns after became jobless and situation turning bad to worst in future due to recession.

The present district wise scenario reveals that there are 35290 educated unemployed youths registered with employment office Ambala, of them only 42 youths were able to get government job in past one year. Similarly, there are

11391 unemployed educated youths registered with employment office at Panchkula, 54184 youths at Yamunanagar, 40752 youths at Kurukshetra, 48523 at Kaithal, 60698 youths at Karnal, 35950 youths at Panipat, 43846 youths at Rohtak, 34923 youths at Jhajjar, 47146 youths at Sonapat, 64465 youths at Jind, 70893 youths at Bhiwani, 11442 youths at Gurugram, 10862 youths at Faridabad, 12500 youths at Mewat, 33720 youths at Mohindergarh, 22557 youths at Rewari, 64358 youths at Hisar, 31711 youths at Fatehabad, 38305 youths at Sirsa and 22026 youths at Palwal of them only 950 youths



were offered jobs in banks and government departments in the state.

According to state government guidelines, those educated unemployed youths

registered with employment department in the state studied up to post graduation are eligible to get employment in state government departments at Rs 60 per

hour or Rs 6000 quarterly till they get a permanent job in a government or private organization under 'Suksham Yuva Yozna'. Besides, employment department in the state organises job fairs

Micro, small and medium manufacturing enterprises in private sectors have been forced to close down their shutters due to the present epidemic outbreak

for unemployed educated youths time to time inviting private employers looking for employees and issue appointment letters to suitable applicants on the spot. Rajinder Pal Saini District Employment Officer Ambala told that in the year 1986 Supreme Court of India had directed state government to offer government jobs to educated unemployed youths registered with employment department through Haryana Staff Selection Board on DC rate.

According to information, JJP having alliance with BJP to form government in Haryana state in their poll mani-

fest had assured that youths hailing from the state would be given 75% share in jobs after coming to power as a result present state government facing a challenge. While talking to media persons in this regard sometime ago in reply to a question Manohar Lal Khatter Chief Minister said that government cannot force but request a private industry to implement government policies. According to entrepreneurs, any sort of pressure by the government on industry in the state already facing severe recession since past many years may force them to shift their units to other states.

ALSO READ | NO IPL, NO SALARY WORRY FRANCHISES * P10 | TEAMS TAKE OLYMPICS DELAY IN STRIDE * P10

NEWSBRIEF

IAG sells stake in SBI General Insurance

NEW DELHI: SBI has said Australia's IAG has sold its entire 26 per cent stake in the lender's general insurance joint venture SBI General Insurance Co Ltd for \$310 million (about Rs 2,325 crore). The stake has been sold to Premji Invest and Warburg Pincus group. "IAG (Insurance Australia General) is pleased to advise it has completed the sale of its 26 per cent interest in SBI General in India. The associated transactions were first announced on October 17, 2019," SBI said in a regulatory filing, referring to IAG's disclosure on Australian Securities Exchange about the sale. As a result, IAG will book a net profit on sale of its interest in SBI General of approximately USD 310 million in the second half of FY20, as per IAG's filing to the Australian exchange. **AGENCIES**

Stake-buy approved in Religare Health Insurance Company

NEW DELHI: Fair trade regulator Competition Commission has approved acquisition of 18.95 per cent stake in Religare Health Insurance Company by Trishikhar Ventures under the green channel route. Trishikhar is a part of Kedaara Group, which invests in a variety of companies through acquisitions and corporate restructurings, while Religare provides general insurance products relating to health segment, the Competition Commission of India said in a press release. The green channel concept -- recommended by the high-level panel that reviewed competition law -- allows automatic system for speedy approval for certain categories of merger and acquisitions. **AGENCIES**

Guidance note revised for combination applications

NEW DELHI: Competition Commission has revised its guidance note for filing applications seeking approvals for combinations, a move that will help in having a more standardised review process. The guidance note for Form I has been revised with a view to incorporate the changes made with respect to green channel, an official release said on Saturday. Generally, Form I is used for applications seeking nod for combinations. In competition law parlance, mergers and acquisitions are termed as combinations. **AGENCIES**

Markets retreat amid virus woes

HEAVY SELLING, RISING COVID-19 CASES BLAMED; BANKS WORST PERFORMER

MUMBAI: Equity indices spiralled lower for yet another session on Friday, pressured by heavy selling in bank stocks, as the steady rise in Covid-19 cases fuelled uncertainty over the economic impact of the pandemic. Unabated foreign fund outflows and a depreciating rupee, which skidded below the 76-mark against the dollar, further kept investors on the sidelines, traders said.



After hitting a low of 27,500.79 during the day, the 30-share BSE barometer ended 674.36 points or 2.39 per cent lower at 27,590.95. The NSE Nifty shed 170 points, or 2.06 per cent, to finish at 8,083.80. During the holiday-truncated week, the Sensex lost 2,224.64 points or 7.46 per cent, while the Nifty sank 576.45 points or 6.65 per cent. Bank stocks came under heavy selling pressure on Friday after Moody's Investors Service changed the outlook for Indian banking sector to negative from stable due to the coronavirus crisis.

Axis Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, cracking 9.16 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, Titan, SBI, Maruti, HDFC and Asian Paints. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, ITC, ONGC, M&M and Tech Mahindra were among the gainers. With fresh cases of novel coronavirus mounting by the day, concerns over a looming economic recession kept investors on the edge, traders said. The Asian Development Bank warned on Friday that the Covid-19 pandemic could

cost the global economy USD 4.1 trillion as it ravages United States, Europe and other major economies. It also said that India's economic growth rate will slip to 4 per cent in the current fiscal. "The Indian markets opened and stayed negative, with reduced volatility. A ratings downgrade for the Banking sector, due to the impact of Covid-19 and ensuing stressed asset concerns, impacted the financial stocks. The slide in the markets, after a brief interlude of short recovery, continued during the course of this week

HIGHLIGHT

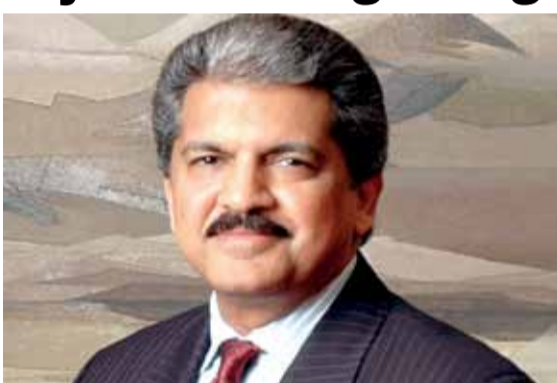
- ❑ The Indian markets opened and stayed negative, with reduced volatility
- ❑ A ratings downgrade for the banking sector due to the impact of Covid-19 hurt its stocks
- ❑ Ensuing stressed asset concerns also impacted the financial stocks
- ❑ The slide in the markets, after a brief interlude of short recovery, continued during the course of the week

, but it is comforting to see that the pace of the fall is relatively feeble now. "...Businesses which have good cash flow and who have good cash levels and cash equivalents with them, and also entities who have leadership positions especially in the market share may see good interest from investors. Higher intrinsic value compared to the prices at which assets are available may act as a spur for discerning investors," said Joseph Thomas, Head of Research - Emkay

Wealth Management. BSE bankex, finance, auto, IT, teck and metal indices ended up to 5.39 per cent lower, while healthcare, oil and gas, utilities, FMCG and telecom closed with gains. Broader BSE midcap and smallcap indices fell up to 1.17 per cent. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases around the world has soared past one million and fatalities have topped 50,000 as the US reported the highest daily death toll of any country so far. **AGENCIES**

Mahindra refuses to inject fresh equity in SsangYong

NEW DELHI: Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) on Friday said its board has rejected a proposal to inject any fresh equity into its loss-making Korean arm SsangYong Motor Company (SYMC).



The management and labour union of SYMC had sought a funding of 500 billion KRW (USD 406 million) from the Mumbai-based auto major over the next three years. "After lengthy deliberation given the current and projected cash flows, the M&M board took a decision that M&M will not be able to inject any fresh equity into SYMC and has urged SYMC to find alternate sources of funding," the auto major said in a statement. However, with a view to enable SYMC to have continuity of business operations, whilst they are exploring alternative sources of funding, the board has authorised the M&M management to consider a special one-time infusion of up to 40 billion KRW (USD 32 million) over the next three months, it added. The board hoped that the employees and management at SYMC understand the

The management and labour union of SYMC seek \$406 million from the Mumbai-based auto major over next three years

magnitude of the unfortunate and unforeseen crisis created by the coronavirus, which has compelled it to take the difficult decision, the statement said. M&M would, however, make every effort to continue to support to all other non-fund initiatives that are

currently in place to help SYMC reduce capital expenditure (capex), save costs and secure funds, it said. The decision was taken by the board in a special meeting to review investment SYMC and at the same time to discuss the approach to capital allocation in light of the COVID-19 impact. The board noted that large parts of the global economy are under shutdown and India particularly is under an unprecedented 21-day complete lockdown. The board also initiated several measures to tighten capital allocation norms and ensure that M&M remains strong through the current crisis and beyond. **AGENCIES**

RBI unveils 3rd targeted LTRO for ₹25,000 crore

MUMBAI: To ensure adequate liquidity in the system, especially in the corporate bond market, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday announced the third targeted long-term repo operation (TLTRO) on April 7 for Rs 25,000 crore.



The central bank announced the LTROs on February 6 and has pumped in liquidity worth Rs 1 lakh crore since then, and the TLTRO was announced on March 27 and has so far done two tranches worth Rs 50,000 crore and the initial target is Rs 1 lakh crore. The second tranche was conducted for Rs 25,000 crore on Friday. The new issue coming up on April 7 is of three-year tenor, the central bank said. "The Reserve Bank will conduct TLTROs of up to three-year tenor of appropriate sizes for a total amount of up to Rs 1,00,000 crore. So far, Rs 50,000 crore have been

conducted in two tranches and it has now been decided to conduct another TLTRO operation for Rs 25,000 crore," the RBI said in a statement. The funds availed under this tranche of TLTRO would have to be deployed within 30 working days from the date of the operation, it added. While announcing the TLTRO, the monetary authority had said banks would have to deploy at least 50 per cent of the proceeds in corporate bonds, commercial papers and debentures, so that the secondary market for debt remains fully liquid. **AGENCIES**

Brokers' forum hail smooth functioning of capital markets



NEWDELHI: BSE Brokers' Forum on Monday lauded the efforts of market participants as they brave the risk of their health and the inconvenience of travel in curfew conditions to ensure that the capital market is able to serve all the national and international investors associated with it. "We are proud of this community and express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for each and every one of them," Bombay Stock Exchange Brokers' Forum Chairman Uttam Bagri said. Last week, International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) announced that its board is committed to ensuring that capital markets continue to function throughout this difficult period in an open and orderly manner to enable all participants to price and transfer risk across all traded asset classes. **AGENCIES**

tory participants and mutual funds among others have risen to the occasion, the brokers' forum said in a statement. The markets are such that 100 per cent work from home may not be possible. The essential executives on daily basis brave the risk of their health and the inconvenience of travel in curfew conditions to ensure that the capital market is able to serve all the national and international investors associated with it. "We are proud of this community and express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for each and every one of them," Bombay Stock Exchange Brokers' Forum Chairman Uttam Bagri said. Last week, International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) announced that its board is committed to ensuring that capital markets continue to function throughout this difficult period in an open and orderly manner to enable all participants to price and transfer risk across all traded asset classes. **AGENCIES**

HUL buys Horlicks for ₹3,045cr as it completes merger with GSK

NEWDELHI: Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) has announced the completion of merger of GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare Ltd (GSKCH) with itself, almost 15 months after the announcement of the mega deal.

The board of HUL also gave its approval to the acquisition of the Horlicks brand from GSK for Rs 3,045 crore as part of an option available in the original agreement made between HUL and GSK. Besides, other Health Food Drinks (HFD) brands of GSKCHA -- Boost, Maltova and Viva -- would come to HUL's portfolio by virtue of the merger, making it a leading player in the segment. Horlicks, which commands around 50 per cent maker share in India in the segment, would be expanded further as HUL see a market development potentials in HFD segment due to its low penetration. According to the company, the merger is in line with HUL's strategy to build a sustainable and profitable foods and refreshment (F&R) business in India by leveraging the mega trend of health and wellness. **AGENCIES**

Raise trading hours: Commodity brokers

MUMBAI: The Commodity Participants Association of India has moved the market regulator Sebi to restore the commodity derivatives trading up to 11.30 pm due to intense volatility in trading.

Brokers were earlier of the view that they could shut down their office servers only past mid-night after commodity markets closed

SEBI had reduced the trade timing of commodity market to 5.30 pm from last Monday due to complete lockdown announced by the Government on the back of Covid-19 crisis. Following this, CPAI had conducted a survey amongst its members on Wednesday for rolling back timings. About 70 per cent of its members were in favour of rolling back. Their staff are now able to travel to offices as curfew passes have been issued and broking is classified as essential services. In addition to this,

many of them are now able to work from home. Hence, at operation level, things have comparatively improved in last 5-6 days. The association has shared the survey figure with exchanges and regulators. Based on survey results we have mentioned if exchanges want then timings may be rolled back, said a CPAI spokesperson. According to sources, SEBI is likely to ask commodity exchanges to revert to the normal practice of trading till 11.50 pm, mid-night. This

is after several members of CPAI raised a concern that trading volumes were falling sharply due to truncated market timing. Many brokers, especially those having online operations, have told CPAI that they will manage to keep their services running, the sources said. Those mainly doing algorithmic trades take their cues from US markets when they open for trading at around 7.30 pm India time. Algo volumes quickly form more than 50 per cent of the intra-day

trades. Brokers experienced that they were losing out on these volumes if Indian markets close at 5 pm, the sources said. While equity markets close by 3.30 pm, commodity markets in India have always traded between 10 am to 11.50 pm. Brokers were earlier of the view that they could shut down their office servers only past mid-night after commodity markets closed. Such a situation led to tremendous pressure on brokers and commodity exchanges for operating in the current situation as employees too are unwilling to wait till mid-night, the sources said. Following these complaints, CPAI had written to SEBI and sought shorter trading hours. **AGENCIES**

DBS hails new foreign investment category

SINGAPORE: The unrestricted access of foreign investors to select Indian bonds is a first step towards facilitating inclusion of INR bonds in global bond benchmarks, says a DBS report. The Reserve Bank on Monday opened certain specified categories of government securities (G-Secs) for non-resident investors as part of an initiative to deepen the bond market. RBI in a notification on Monday said that a separate

route namely, Fully Accessible Route (FAR) for investment by non-residents in securities issued by the Government of India has been notified. "Assuming 15 per cent of Rs 7.8 trillion gross borrowings for FY21 is considered under the FAR, eligible securities will amount to Rs 1.2 trillion (around USD 15 billion). "This together with around Rs 4.3 trillion of existing securities cumulatively make USD



70 billion worth securities eligible," DBS Bank economist Radhika Rao said in a note. Rao further noted that "if inclusion into global indices is

considered, this might translate into a potential weight of 4-6 per cent on the JPM GBI-EM Index and less than 1 per cent on the Bloomberg Global aggregate bond index." According to Rao, the plan to free up part of the GSec issuance to full FPI participation was announced in February's Budget, marking a first step towards facilitating inclusion of INR bonds in global bond benchmarks. **AGENCIES**

Deadline extended for comments on QIP, delisting norms

NEW DELHI: In the wake of coronavirus pandemic, Sebi has extended the deadline for public comments on proposed relaxation in norms with regard to six-month-gap between two QIPs, and delisting of a firm in case of its merger with listed holding firm till April 30. Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) had sought comments on these two proposals till April 15. In addition, the deadline has been extended for submission of comments till this month-end on proposed e-voting facility provided by listed firms as well as on a proposal that will require listed entity to obtain prior approval from the shareholder

ers before extending any loan and guarantee to promoter entities. The comments on these two proposals were sought till March 31. "In view of the representations received by Sebi seeking extension of timelines due to impact of COVID-19 pandemic, it has been decided to extend the timelines for seeking public comments on... (the) consultation papers to April 30, 2020," the regulator said in a report dated March 31. With respect to QIP, it has been proposed to relax the mandatory requirement of a six-month-gap between two successive issuances of shares to qualified institutional in-

vestors by listed companies requiring urgent funds, if they meet certain conditions. As per the Sebi regulations, a listed company cannot make



any subsequent qualified institutions placement until the expiry of six months from the date of the prior qualified institutions placement made pursuant to one or more special resolutions. In respect of delisting, the capital markets regulator proposed to exempt a listed company from following regulations in case of its merger with a listed holding firm, if the shareholder of the subsidiary entity gets shares of the parent. This would apply to cases where a listed holding company is merging its listed subsidiary and the subsidiary is desirous of getting delisted without following the provisions of delisting regulation.

Further, Sebi, last month, proposed two mechanisms to make the e-voting process more secure, convenient and simple for shareholders. Under the proposal, shareholders would be able to access the e-voting links of ESPs (e-voting service providers) without further authentication by it for participating in the process. Further, to enable demat account holders to cast vote on different ESP portals without having to register again with the ESPs. At present, multiple players provide e-voting facility to listed entities in the country and shareholders require to register and maintain multiple user IDs and passwords with them. **AGENCIES**

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Covid-19 cases hit million

GOVTS EXPAND LOCKDOWNS AS US RECORDS YOUNGEST DEATH; WORLD FACES FOOD SHORTAGES

NEW YORK: The world was quickly approaching one million confirmed coronavirus cases on Wednesday as a six-week-old baby died in the United States in what was believed to be the pandemic's youngest victim.

As governments expanded lockdowns that have affected half the planet, global agencies warned that parts of the world could face food shortages if authorities fail to navigate the crisis properly.

More than 900,000 people have been infected by the novel coronavirus and nearly 46,000 have died since it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, according to an AFP tally based on official numbers. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), said the number would hit one million "in the next few days."

"I am deeply concerned about the rapid escalation and global spread of infection," he told a virtual news conference.

The United States accounts for the most cases, with a database at Johns Hopkins University saying that infections have topped 200,000 with at least 4,600 dead. Among the dead was a six-week-old in Connecticut who was brought unresponsive to a hospital late last week. "Testing confirmed last night that the newborn was COVID-19 positive," Governor Ned Lamont wrote on Twitter.

"This is absolutely heartbreaking. We believe this is one of the youngest lives lost anywhere due to complica-



tions relating to COVID-19," he said.

The victims of the new coronavirus have been disproportionately elderly, with horror stories emerging from hard-hit Italy and Spain of isolated seniors found dead and alone. But a number of recent cases have highlighted that the disease can befall even youngsters with seemingly strong immune systems. The dead have included a 13-year-old in France, a

12-year-old in Belgium and a 13-year-old in Britain — identified as Ismail Mohamed Abdullah, whose family said the "gentle and kind" boy had no underlying health issues. Illinois reported the death of a nine-month-old, although investigators were still determining whether it was directly linked to the coronavirus.

New York, by far the most densely populated part of the United States, has become the country's epicentre of the

The package — coupled with a European Central Bank plan to buy 750 billion euros in bonds — saw stock markets rebound on Friday with exchanges up throughout Asia and Europe

coronavirus, with refrigerated trucks grimly parked outside of hospitals to deal with the surge in bodies. The administration announced it was closing all playgrounds and basketball courts to enforce orders of "social distancing" to halt transmission through people in close proximity.

"You still see too many situations with too much density by young people. Compliance is still not where it should be," Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters. "Use the open space in a park, walk around, get some sun. Great. No density, no basketball games," he said. **AGENCIES**

Trump to help end Saudi-Russian rift



WASHINGTON: U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday he was ready to help resolve an escalating oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia that has helped push crude benchmarks to 17-year lows.

The threat of a global recession triggered by the coronavirus pandemic had already hammered prices when Riyadh said last month it would raise exports after a production-cut agreement among top producers flopped in early March.

On Monday, Saudi Arabia said it would increase exports further to a record 10.6 million barrels per day from May, deepening a global supply glut as crude recorded its biggest monthly and quarterly price plunges in history.

Trump said he had spoken with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman by phone with the aim of halting the slide.

"The two countries are discussing it. And I am joining at the appropriate time, if need be," Trump said.

Saudi Arabia had been exporting around 7.0 million barrels per day under an output reduction agree-

ment among a 24-member producer alliance known as OPEC+, which included Russia.

OPEC+ failed to reach an agreement on further production cuts to shore up sagging prices as the coronavirus battered the global economy last month.

Analysts say Riyadh is engaged in a deliberate long-term strategy to capture greater market share by pressuring its high-cost rivals.

"Saudi policy will not just drive more expensive forms of oil production out of the market; it will also make it harder for renewable energy to compete with fossil fuels," said Bernard Haykel, a Saudi expert at Princeton University.

The price war has also hit shale oil producers in the U.S., with Trump telling Tuesday's press conference that the production dispute threatened "thousands and thousands" of jobs.

In a letter last week to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a group of U.S. senators accused Saudi Arabia and Russia of waging "economic warfare against the United States." **AGENCIES**

Iran warns US after it deploys Patriot to Iraq

TEHRAN: Iran warned the U.S. on Wednesday that it was leading the Middle East to disaster in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic after it deployed Patriot air defence missiles to Iraq.

Washington had been in talks with Baghdad about the proposed deployment since January but it was not immediately clear whether it had secured its approval or not.

Iran, which wields huge influence in its western neighbour, said that it had not.

The U.S. deployment runs "counter to the official position of the Iraqi government, parliament and people," a foreign ministry statement said.

It called for a halt to "warmongering during the coronavirus outbreak" and warned that U.S. military activities in the region could lead it to



"instability and disaster". Iran is in the throes of one of the world's deadliest coronavirus outbreaks with more than 3,000 fatalities. The U.S. death toll has meanwhile surpassed Iran's, topping 4,000.

U.S. forces should "respect the wishes of the Iraqi people and government and leave the

country," the Iranian Foreign Ministry added.

The Patriot is Washington's principal anti-missile defence system.

Its deployment to Iraq comes after a spate of rocket and other attacks on bases and other facilities used by U.S. personnel that Wash-

ington has blamed on Tehran-backed Shiite militias or Tehran itself.

One of the Patriot batteries was delivered to the Ain al-Asad in western Iraq last week and is now being assembled, a U.S. defence official and an Iraqi military source said.

Ain al-Asad was hit by a retaliatory Iranian missile strike in January after Washington killed Tehran's foreign operations chief Major General

Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike just outside Baghdad airport.

A second battery was deployed to a base in Arbil, capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

Two more are still in Kuwait, where Washington has rear bases for its operations in Iraq, the U.S. official said.

Iraqi leaders have resisted U.S. deployment of the advanced weapons system for fear that it would anger Iran and further ratchet up tensions between its main allies.

On Monday, Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi warned against any "offensive military action without the approval of the Iraqi government." He did not specifically mention the Patriot deployment. **AGENCIES**

Myanmar journalist faces terror charges



RAKHINE: A Myanmar journalist faces up to life in prison for publishing an interview with a rebel group operating in the country's restive Rakhine state a week after the insurgents were classified as a terrorist organisation.

The western region has long been a tinderbox of conflict between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA), a group demanding greater autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine people. Clashes have left scores of civilians killed, hundreds injured and 150,000 displaced since January last year, and both sides have traded allegations of abuse.

A March 27 interview with a top representative of Arakan Army, a group seeking greater autonomy for Rakhine people, published by Voice of Myanmar led to the detention of editor-in-chief Nay Myo Lin, who was brought to court on terrorism charges

His wife Zarni Mann, a reporter with independent local news outlet The Irrawaddy, said her husband's laptop was seized. She decried the use of counter-terrorism laws against journalists. Amnesty International's Nicholas Bequelin called for the charges to be dropped and for Nay Myo Lin's immediate release.

"Myanmar must stop arresting journalists simply for doing their jobs," Bequelin said. Myanmar has come under fire in the past for the high-profile jailing of two Reuters journalists who were convicted in 2018 of breaching a law on state secrets after revealing a massacre of Rohingya Muslims.

The pair were eventually freed by presidential pardon after spending more than a year in jail. Myanmar is ranked 138 out of 180 countries for press freedom by the campaign group Reporters Without Borders. **AGENCIES**

Taliban team in Kabul to monitor prisoner release

KABUL: A three-member Taliban technical team arrived on Tuesday in the Afghan capital to monitor the release of their prisoners as part of a peace deal signed by the Taliban and the U.S., a spokesman for the insurgent group said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the team's arrival in a tweet. It marked the first time a Taliban delegation has been in Kabul since the group was driven out by the U.S.-led coalition in November 2001.

There was no immediate comment from the Afghan government on the team's arrival. On Monday, Jawed Faisal, spokesman for the Afghan National Security Adviser's office, said Afghan officials and the Taliban



agreed during a video conference that the insurgent group should send a technical team to Kabul for discussions on the release of Taliban prisoners. The International Committee of the Red Cross agreed to assist the team in getting to Kabul.

The prisoner release is part of a peace deal signed last month by the Taliban and

U.S. that calls for the government's release of 5,000 Taliban and the Taliban's release of 1,000 government personnel and Afghan troops.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and political opponent Abdullah Abdullah both declared themselves president in a parallel inauguration ceremony earlier this month. **AGENCIES**

Italy urgently seeks safe exit from punishing lockdown

ROME: Italy's coronavirus epidemic may be slowing, but critics warn the government is falling seriously behind on strategies to lift the punishing nationwide lockdown and reboot the economy.

Nearly 12,500 people have died of the virus so far according to official data.

Despite a slowdown in new death and infection rates the government has extended an economically crippling lockdown until "at least" mid-April over fears of a second wind.

But poverty and unemployment numbers are already skyrocketing. Analysts have warned the eurozone's third-largest economy will suffer its worst recession in decades, contracting six percent in

lions of euros a week.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte told opposition leaders Wednesday: "We must plan a return to normality, and it must be done gradually and must allow everyone, eventually, to return to work safely." But he has yet to publish a blueprint.

Finance Minister Roberto Gualtieri said the recession forecasts were "realistic," but warned against jumping the gun on easing the lockdown, saying "the more rigorous and efficient we are in combatting the epidemic, the sooner we can restart".

His department was planning economic support measures worth some 500 billion euros, he said in an interview.



According to official figures, just over 100,000 people have been infected in Italy since the epidemic began, but experts say there could be anywhere between 700,000 and six million cases — up to 10 per cent

of the population.

That could mean large numbers of people have already had the virus without suffering symptoms and could return to work.

As morgues overflowed and

"We must plan a return to normality, and it must be done gradually and must allow everyone, eventually, to return to work safely"

fear reigned, opposition parties largely curbed criticism of the government. But with good news on the infection rate, ex-prime minister Matteo Renzi has broken ranks to insist mass testing be done to end the lockdown.

"We'll have to live with COVID-19 for months, maybe years. Those who tell you otherwise are lying. We cannot stay locked indoors for years, we must find a way to get out safely and work within the rules," he said.

Mr. Romer called for "a policy of intelligent isolation, which means people are tested repeatedly, once every two weeks". Those who test negative can work; those who don't, remain in isolation.

"You need to test on a large scale... for at least two years. And be ready to find through tests those who have (since) become contagious, because the virus will come in (to Italy) from other parts of the world," he said. "In past wars, countries mobilised production

to produce new equipment. They have to do that again. Each country in Europe is rich enough and developed enough to do it."

Italy has blood tests capable of quickly identifying who has the virus and who has the antibodies, but they are still in a trial phase, according to Guido Marini, head of the doctors' union in hard-hit Bergamo in the country's north. Such tests would provide important data on "the population's temporary immunity to the virus," he said.

But according to Italian virologist Roberto Burioni, the tests only reveal antibodies some 14 days after infection. "We don't know yet what extent of defence those antibodies provide," he said. **AGENCIES**

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No IPL, no salary worry franchises

DOMESTIC PLAYERS WILL ALSO BE AFFECTED, SAYS ICA CHIEF ASHOK MALHOTRA

NEW DELHI: No play, no pay. This could well be the fate of players, who have signed up for this year's IPL, which has been postponed and seems unlikely to go ahead unless BCCI figures an alternate window later in the year, compromising a few bilateral commitments.

"The system of IPL payments is that 15% is paid a week before the tournament starts. 65% more is paid during the tournament. The remaining 20% is paid within a stipulated time after the tournament ends," a senior official of an IPL franchise told PTI. "The BCCI has specific guidelines. Obviously, no player will be paid as of now," he added.

In fact, the economic implications of a season without IPL could be huge, admitted BCCI Players' body — the Indian Cricketers' Association — president Ashok Malhotra. He feels that even domestic players may have to accept pay cuts if losses run into thousands of crores amid the ongoing lockdown to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Right now, BCCI is look-



ing at an alternate window as chances of a curtailed IPL in May look dim but nothing concrete has come out.

The country is currently under a 21-day lockdown till April 14 while IPL has been postponed till April 15. The pandemic has caused mayhem worldwide, killing over 37,000 people so far.

The economic upheaval caused by it has led to play-

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"We will not get any money from insurance company as pandemic is not covered in the clause. Each franchise has salary overheads ranging between ₹75 to 85 crore

pay if there's no action," he asked.

"From English Premier League, La Liga to Bundesliga, players are taking pay cuts. Also there is no certainty anywhere as to when things will get normal," the official, who has been part of at least IPL 10 editions, added.

Both of them said in unison that BCCI needs to see what can be done even though they understand that the parent body stands to lose close to ₹3000 crore.

"It's not just the Dhonis and the Kohlis who will be affected. Surely they would feel the pinch but for many first-timers, the ₹20, 40 or 60 lakh is serious life-changing money

after all the hard work. Hope the BCCI has a plan in place," he said. BCCI treasurer Arun Dharmal, however, said that at present, there hasn't been any discussion about pay cuts.

"There has been no discussion at all on pay cuts. IPL obviously is BCCI's biggest tournament. But at this point, it is very difficult to do calculations and estimate losses. The calculations are complex and till office-bearers get together, we can't say anything," Dharmal told PTI.

However, former India Test player Malhotra feels that one needs to be practical in understanding the situation. In case of domestic players, it might not be a pay cut but probably the much-awaited pay hike could be put on hold for some time. "The BCCI earns its money from cricket. If cricket is not happening, where will the money come from? We have to be sensible here."

"So, it's not just international cricketers but domestic players will also be affected. It's not the board's fault. This is an unavoidable situation," Malhotra said. AGENCIES

ECB may lose over £300m if no cricket takes place

LONDON: The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) stands to lose over 300 million pounds if no cricket is played in the upcoming season in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, its chief executive Tom Harrison has said.

In another development, England's centrally contracted players appear to have said no to the ECB's offer of taking a 20 percent pay cut as part of board's plans to combat the financial challenges arising out of the pandemic, reported ESPNcricinfo. The ECB on Tuesday announced a 61 million support package to tackle the ongoing crisis. In a letter of Professional Cricketers' Association chief Tony Irish, Harrison expressed his concerns on the long-term impact of the pandemic.

"The pandemic is biggest challenge the sport has faced in the modern era although the full extent and impact of the pandemic on cricket is as yet unknown, it is already clear that it will be extremely significant," wrote Harrison.

With its reserves going down to 11 million pounds in 2018-19 from 73 million



pounds in 2015-16, a cricket-less season could make a severe impact on ECB's balance sheet.

"We can only estimate the total financial impact on the game, which will not be clear for some time, but by way of offering an indication of the potential scale of the loss to the game, losing an entire cricket season - which is not an outlandish scenario - will cost cricket in England and Wales well in excess of £300m," Harrison wrote.

"Our absolute priority in the face of this challenge is firstly, to ensure the public safety of our people - our

staff, players and colleagues around the game, but secondly, that the cricket network remains intact, and emerges from this crisis in a state to resume our trajectory towards a bright future."

In the letter to Irish, Harrison claimed he himself will be taking a 25 percent pay cut for at least the next three months. Harrison is expecting the centrally contract players to take a pay cut in "these circumstances". "Whilst the health of the nation is under threat, the future of our sport depends on every single one of us sharing the load right now. AGENCIES

BWF freezes rankings

NEW DELHI: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Tuesday decided to freeze the world rankings, saying standings as on March 17 will be the basis for entry and seedings when it restarts the international calendar that has been thrown haywire owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a clamour for freezing the world rankings with Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B. Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H.S. Prannoy leading the way in expressing their concerns.

"The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can announce it will freeze World Rankings and World Junior Rankings until further notice. The freezing of rankings will be backdated to Week 12, which is the week following the last international tournament that was played — the YONEX All England Open 2020," BWF said in a release.

"The ranking lists issued on 17 March, 2020 will serve as a basis for entry and seeding into the next international tournaments — although it is difficult to say at this stage when this may be."

Also read | Disappointing to see our sincerity questioned: Badminton World Federation Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is also top-16.



The BWF had suspended all tournaments post the All England Championships until April 12 due to the pandemic.

These tournaments include big-ticket events like India Open (Super 500), Malaysia Open (Super 750) and Singapore Open (Super 500), apart from the three Continental Confederation championships.

BWF said due to the current scenario the next set of tournaments will also be suspended.

"Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the badminton community has experienced an unprecedented suspension to international tournaments from mid-March 2020 to the end of April 2020."

"At present, it is difficult to predict when the next international tournament will take place with further tournaments also expected to be suspended in May and June." The world body said it will take time to decide on the process of unfreezing the world rankings as it will depend on how the international calendar looks once things improve. AGENCIES

Juventus players, coach Sarri ready for pay cut

ROME: Juventus players and coach Maurizio Sarri have reached an agreement over a wage reduction that will save the Italian champions 90 million euros (\$100.26 million), the Serie A club announced on Saturday.

Sarri and the first-team players have agreed what amounts to a four-month pay reduction to help Italy's most successful club during the coronavirus crisis.

The effective one-third cut to the players' annual salaries will mean a huge drop in wages for a squad headed by marquee Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, the best-paid footballer in Italy who is reported to earn 31 million euros a year.

The agreement comes at a time when many clubs around Europe have had to cut wage bills because of the dramatic impact of matches having had to be postponed or played behind closed doors due to the spread of the virus.

"The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros for the 2019/2020 financial year," Juventus said in a statement.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly pay-



“**The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros for the 2019/2020 financial year**”

ments of March, April, May and June 2020", it added, saying personal agreements with Sarri and the players will be finalised in the coming weeks.

The Turin-based club, in one of the regions hit hardest by the crisis, have suffered in recent weeks with three of their players having tested positive for the virus — forward Paulo Dybala, defender Daniele Rugani and midfielder Blaise Matuidi. Soccer around the world

has been brought to a standstill by the pandemic with Italy having suffered more than 10,000 deaths from the virus, the highest number in any country.

Italy's top-flight Serie A league has been suspended since March 9 with Juventus, seeking a ninth successive title, leading the league by one point from Lazio with 12 games each remaining.

"Juventus Football Club S.p.A. announces that, due to the current global health

emergency (which) is preventing the performance of the sporting activity, it has reached an understanding with the players and the coach of the First Team regarding their compensation for the residual portion of the current sport season," the club statement said.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly wages of March, April, May and June 2020. In the coming weeks, personal agreements with the players and the coach will be finalised, as required by the current regulations. Should the current season's matches be rescheduled, the Club will negotiate in good faith with the players and the coach conditional increases of compensation according to the actual resumption and finalisation of official competitions. Juventus would like to thank the players and the coach for their commitment at a difficult time for everyone," it read.

Long-standing defender Giorgio Chiellini led the players' negotiations amid reports in the Italian media that Ronaldo had agreed to sacrifice 3.8 million euros of his yearly wage to ease the financial burden on the club while Italy is in lockdown. AGENCIES

Teams take Olympics delay in stride



BENGALURU: The news of Tokyo Olympics' postponement is yet to sink in but India's hockey captains Manpreet Singh and Rani Rampal are confident that they will take the disappointment in stride while working hard for the next one year.

"We had just finished the day's evening session when chief coach Graham Reid informed us about the postponement of the Olympic Games," Manpreet said.

"I think the news is yet to sink in for us. We were mentally gearing up for our first match on 25th July, so the disappointment is surely there but it is important for us to now look at the positives," he added.

The Indian men's and women's teams have shaped up well over the course of the last year, winning big competitions such as the FIH Series Finals and the Olympic Qualifiers in front of the home crowd in November last year.

The men's team made a fine start to the season this year with a fantastic outing in the Pro League while the women's team was stoked after its tour to New Zealand earlier this year. "Though, somewhere at the back of our minds we anticipated this could happen considering the impact COVID-19 has made across the globe, we had never let it affect our training or the intensity needed in every session," Manpreet said. AGENCIES

Wimbledon cancelled for first time since WWII

LONDON: Wimbledon has been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, the first time since World War II that the oldest Grand Slam tennis tournament won't be played.

The All England Club announced after an emergency meeting that the event it refers to simply as The Championships is being scrapped for 2020. Wimbledon was scheduled to be played on the club's grass courts on the outskirts

of London from June 29 to July 12.

Instead, the next edition of the tournament will be June 28 to July 11, 2021.

The tournament was first held in 1877 and has been contested every year since, with the exception of two stretches from 1915-18 because of World War I, and from 1940-45 because of World War II.

It now joins the growing list of sports events scrapped

completely in 2020 because of the COVID-19 outbreak. That includes the Tokyo Olympics — which have been pushed back 12 months — and the NCAA men's and women's college basketball tournaments.

Wimbledon is the first major tennis championship completely wiped out this year because of the coronavirus. The start of the French Open was postponed from late May to late September.

As of now, the U.S. Open is still scheduled to be played in New York from Aug. 31 to Sept. 13. AGENCIES

Indian tennis players work on future ventures

NEW DELHI: Swinging the racquet will not earn them money all their life, so a few Indian tennis players, forced out of Pro Tour due to the health crisis triggered by COVID-19, are utilising their time to work on career beyond tennis.

Almost all of them are restricted to doing fitness drills at home with courts and gyms out of bound.

Jeevan Nedunchelzyan is spending time hitting at private courts and handling the marketing of their family resort in Puducherry.

"It obviously is unusual situation. We can hit at a few

places where people have private space and obviously the gathering is small. A few players doing that. I am in Puducherry to help with my resort (K resort)," Jeevan told PTI.

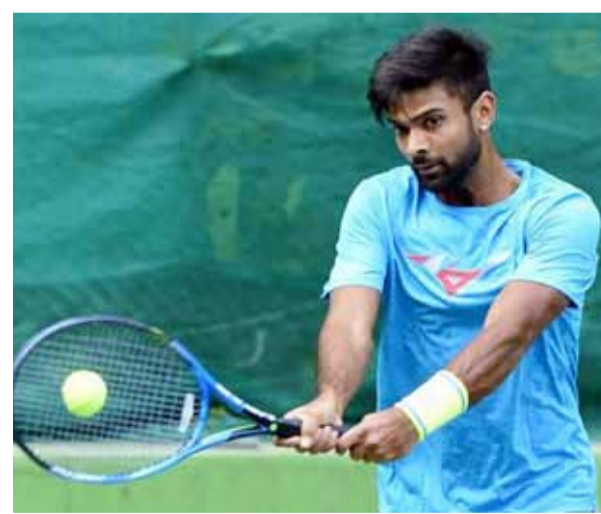
The left-hander said he is working on developing a tennis facility at their family resort to host tournaments in future at a scenic location.

Mumbai-based Purav Raja has also busied himself in shaping up his business. "I am starting 'Restring India', a racquet customising business. It's about building your own racquet. I am spending some

time on this now which was difficult being on road. This is fun, giving Indian players a chance to use best equipment," he said.

"My wife is also helping me in this. But I still have to train and do my daily stuff. I am working on fitness and and getting stronger."

Meanwhile, Prajnesh Gunneswaran said, "We are all having to sit around and wait. It's not ideal. I hope this passes quickly. Everybody in the world is struggling. We as tennis players should not say that our livelihood is at stake, it's worse for many others," said Prajnesh. AGENCIES



Virat Kohli is 'boss' of Indian cricket, declares Ravi Shastri

NEW DELHI: Head coach Ravi Shastri has called Virat Kohli the "boss" of Indian cricket and said the support staff is there to "take the burden off" the skipper.

Batting maestro Kohli has been at the heart of India's world-record 12 Test victories in a row on home soil.

"The captain is the boss, I always believe that. The job of the coaching staff, as far as I'm concerned, is to prepare the guys in the best possible way to be able to go out there and

play brave, positive, fearless cricket," Shastri said.

Shastri was speaking to former England captains Nasser Hussain and Michael Atherton and Rob Key during a Sky Cricket Podcast.

"The captain leads from the front. Yes, we are there to take off the burden but you leave him to do his job in the middle. The captain sets the tone and is encouraged to set the tone. In the middle, he controls the show."

Shastri, who took over as



SHASTRI ALSO SAID

The captain is the boss, I always believe that.

The captain sets the tone and is encouraged to set the tone. In the middle, he controls the show

When you talk about fitness, the leadership came from the top and that is Virat. He is not a guy to mess around.

the head coach in 2017, largely attributed India's march to top of the ICC Test rankings

to Kohli.

He also spoke about how Kohli's relentless focus on fit-

ness rubbed on to his teammates.

"When you talk about fitness, the leadership came from the top and that is Virat. He is not a guy to mess around.

"He woke up one morning and said if 'I want to play this game I want to be the fittest player in the world and compete against the best in all conditions' and he let his body go through one hell of a lot."

In recent years, Kohli is one

of the very few regulars of the team to have played almost non-stop, across formats.

"It was not just the training but the sacrifices he made with his diet. I could see that change happening all the time. He got up one day and said 'Ravi, I'm vegetarian!' "When he sets those standards, it rubs off on others. Test cricket for us is the biggest form. It's the benchmark. We want to set standards," Shastri said. AGENCIES

Star India launches Disney+

THE NEW SERVICE DISNEY+HOTSTAR IS AVAILABLE TO SUBSCRIBERS IN HINDI, TAMIL AND TELUGU

MUMBAI: Star India launched Disney+ in India by upgrading its streaming app Hotstar on April 3.

The new streaming service will now be called Disney+Hotstar and will be available to subscribers in languages such as Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.

Disney+ launch gives consumers an access to over 250 superhero and animated films, over 100 series including Disney+ Originals like "The Mandalorian" besides the Hotstar specials and Bollywood releases, the company said in a release.

"With the success of Hotstar, we ushered in a new era for premium video streaming in India. Today, as we unveil Disney+ Hotstar, we take yet another momentous step in staying committed

to our promise of delivering high-quality impactful stories for India that have not only entertained but also made a difference in people's lives, a promise that is even more meaningful in challenging times such as this.

"We hope the power of Disney's storytelling, delivered through Hotstar's technology, will help our viewers find moments of comfort, happiness and inspiration during these difficult times," Uday Shankar, President, The Walt Disney Company APAC and Chairman, Star & Disney India, said. Viewers will get three distinct offerings - Disney+ Hotstar VIP, Disney+ Hotstar Premium and an ad-supported basic tier.

The launch of the streaming service gives subscribers access to the entire Marvel



Cinematic Universe and the best of superheroes movies like "The Avengers", "Iron Man", "Thor Ragnarok", "The Lion King", "Frozen II", "Aladdin" and "Toy Story 4".

Subscribers of Disney+ Hotstar Premium will receive all the benefits of Disney+ Hotstar VIP, with the addition

of access to English language content and 29 critically acclaimed Disney+ Originals, including "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series", the live-action "Lady and the Tramp" as well as the latest American shows from studios like HBO, Fox, Showtime at the price of Rs 1499 for a year.

"We hope the power of Disney's storytelling, delivered through Hotstar's technology, will help our viewers find moments of comfort"

All existing subscribers will be automatically upgraded to their respective new subscription plan and will be charged the new rates upon renewal.

A separate Disney+ branded section will help users navigate the wonderful Disney, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, and National Geographic content available on the service. Subscribers will enjoy the benefits of unlimited downloads of all

Disney+ movies and shows, as well as personalised recommendations. Parents can navigate through the kids-safe mode to access age-appropriate content.

Users will continue to get free content such as daily catch-up TV shows in 8 Indian languages, a vast library of blockbuster movies and LIVE and on-demand news in 8 languages from the leading news channels in the country.

Disney+ Hotstar will also have a comprehensive sports clips offering for its free users, covering major sporting events such as IPL, BCCI cricket series, Premier League, ISL and PKL, with all the exciting action from the day available as match highlights, key individual performances and match analysis, the release added. **AGENCIES**

Huawei plans grand Next Image Awards



NEW DELHI: Huawei has announced the launch of the fourth edition of its legendary Next Image Awards. Huawei's Next Image Awards is one of the world's best online photography awards that is committed to broaden the horizon of visual culture and encourage mobile photography worldwide.

The "NEXT" in NEXT-IMAGE refers to the next generation of photographers using the next generation of tools to create and spread the next generation of visual content - all with new forms of interaction and feedback.

The "IMAGE" part of the name refers to both static imagery and new forms of dynamic visual expression. Huawei has proposed the "NEXT-IMAGE" concept not only to highlight the many years of innovative spirit it has brought to the field of visual expression, but also to create a new word that conveys its insight into what it believes is growing into a new school of photography.

In 2019, more than 150+ countries participated and over 520,000 entries were received. The competition requires the participants to send their best photograph, which will be meticulously judged by the jury members. Under the umbrella of the competition lies six categories, one of which a participant must stick to while submitting his/her entry.

The participants have to send their entries and brownie points will be awarded to shots taken through a Huawei phone. Apart from the 3 grand prizes of USD \$10,000 each, each of the 6 categories will have its own winners.

"Huawei's Next Image Awards is one of the world's most well-known online photography competitions. Since 2017, more than 150 countries have participated and we have received more than 1 million submissions. We extend the invitation to all photography enthusiasts worldwide to participate in the contest and win exciting prizes of upto \$10,000. **AGENCIES**

BYD unveils new blade battery

NEW DELHI: Shenzhen-based electric carmaker BYD has officially launched a new blade-shaped battery to mitigate concerns about battery safety in electric vehicles.

The company unveiled its new battery at an online event themed "The Blade Battery - Unsheathed to Safeguard the World".

According to the company statement, Wang Chuanfu, BYD Chairman and President, said that the Blade Battery reflects BYD's determination to resolve issues in battery safety while also redefining safety standards for the entire industry.

"In terms of battery safety and energy density, BYD's Blade Battery has obvious advantages," said Professor Ouyang Minggao, Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Professor at Tsinghua University.

Due to its optimized battery pack structure, the space utilization of the battery pack is increased by over 50 percent compared to conventional lithium iron phosphate block batteries, claims BYD.

BYD further highlighted that while undergoing nail penetration tests, the Blade Battery emitted neither smoke nor fire after being penetrated, and its surface



temperature only reached 30 to 60°C.

"Under the same conditions, a ternary lithium battery exceeded 500°C and violently burned, and while a conventional lithium iron phosphate block battery did not openly emit flames or smoke, its surface temperature reached dangerous temperatures of 200 to 400°C," BYD said adding this implies that EVs equipped with the Blade Battery would be far less susceptible to catching fire - even when they are severely damaged.

Besides, BYD also stated that the Blade Battery also passed other extreme test conditions, such as being crushed, bent, being heated in a furnace to 300°C and overcharged by 260 percent. "None of these resulted in

a fire or explosion," BYD pointed out.

According to He Long, Vice President of BYD and Chairman of FinDreams Battery, many vehicle brands are in discussion with the company about partnerships based on the technology of the Blade Battery. He added that BYD will gladly share and work with global partners to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for all industry players.

The Han EV, BYD's flagship sedan model slated for launch this June, will come equipped with the Blade Battery. The new model will lead the brand's Dynasty Family, boasting a cruising range of 605 kilometers and an acceleration of 0 to 100km/h in just 3.9 seconds, said the company. **AGENCIES**

Cyberbit starts remote cybersecurity training

NEW DELHI: Cyberbit will provide \$100,000 worth of free, remote cybersecurity training on their Cyber Range to help organizations challenged with maintaining training continuity for their information security teams as a result of recent travel restrictions, quarantines and social distancing.

According to the SANS SOC Survey of 2019, lack of skilled staff is the most frequently cited SOC barrier to



excellence. Frequent hands-on training is key for SOC

teams to maintain their skill level, enabling them to successfully respond to security incidents which depend on their detection, investigation and response skills.

Unfortunately, since the outbreak of COVID-19, training for SOC staff worldwide has been put on hold. Travel to training courses is no longer an option and remote team members' skill levels have been gradually deteriorating. The remote training exercises consist of live cyberattack simulations in a virtual SOC hosted in Cyberbit's cloud-based Cyber Range. **AGENCIES**

Isuzu defers launch of BS-VI vehicles to Q2 of 2020-21

NEW DELHI: Japanese utility vehicle manufacturer Isuzu has pushed the launch of BS-VI compliant vehicles in India to the later part of second quarter of 2020-21 due to coronavirus pandemic.

Isuzu Motors India said that owing to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic and resultant inconvenience it has been causing people, the company has realigned its plans to introduce its BS VI models.

"A firmer date will be announced closer to the time of launch," the com-



pany said. India will adopt the stricter BS-VI emission norm from April 1, transi-

tioning from BS-IV. The Supreme Court had last week allowed sales

Meanwhile, Isuzu Motors India said it has extended warranty on its existing vehicles.

"All vehicles whose warranty expires/expired during the period March 15, 2020 - April 15, 2020 will now have their warranty extended until end-May 2020," it said.

Similarly, all vehicles that were due for periodic maintenance service during March 15 - April 15, 2020 can now avail their services until May-end 2020, the company said. **AGENCIES**

Freightwala app to remotely book shipments

MUMBAI: Digital freight forwarding startup Freightwala recently launched their Android application on the Google Play store.

The app offers all the services that their web platform offers, making it possible for logistics managers and business owners to plan, manage and track their shipments right on their mobile screens.

The app launch is part of a larger "work from anywhere, anytime" initiative as Freightwala strives to make logistics & supply chain accessible 24x7, from anywhere, on any device.

With the launch of a mobile app, Freightwala's digital portal is now available not only as a Web Application that can be installed and run standalone on any Windows and Mac devices, but also on

mobile phones. The user can now get all his shipment-related information 24x7, whether he is in his office or on the field.

Freightwala's newly launched app offers Instant quotations, Online chat support, Intelligent Cargo Tracking, Real time status reports and Documentation Management.

Freightwala's digital platform provides advanced tools such as instant rate-discovery and online booking, along with added post-booking benefits such as real-time tracking of shipments and transshipments to empower its clients with an improved visibility in supply chain.

Real-time notifications on the phone help in risk mitigation and allow businesses to take corrective actions on time if and when required.



The app also offers the users all necessary tools to manage their workflows smoothly, and keep a tab of all their shipments at a single place.

Punit Java - Chief Technology Officer, Freightwala said, "Our new app is an extension of the Freightwala digital web

platform. We are aiming to create an ecosystem of freight services that can all be managed on a single platform. With the app our customers can now access Freightwala's features on any device on the go. In the context of the present Corona virus situation, we

"In the context of the present Corona virus situation, we hope our app will help businesses to have improved visibility on their supply chains, while working from the safety of their homes"

hope our app will help businesses to have improved visibility on their supply chains, while working from the safety of their homes."

In business, sometimes the 'time to quote' makes all the difference in winning the business. In such situations,

the app comes really handy as rates and vessel schedules can be fetched instantly on any mobile screen, as compared to the traditional freight forwarders that take anywhere between a few hours to even a day before they can revert back with the rates.

Not to mention, the hassles involved with multiple phone calls, emails, and follow-ups to get shipment information have been reduced to zero with the help of the digital platform.

Freightwala has ensured that the app complies with the highest level of security for user data and information that is exchanged on the app. The app uses the same technology as its website, which is backed by a secure SSL encryption. Freightwala recently raised \$4 million (approximately INR 28.70 crores) in a Series. **AGENCIES**

NBT plans book series on coronavirus

NEW DELHI: The National Book Trust (NBT) is working on a series titled 'Corona Studies Series' which will include books focused on art, literature, folklore, economic and sociological aspects as well as science and health awareness emerging out of the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown imposed by the government.

NBT, an autonomous body under the HRD ministry, has set up a study group comprising some experienced and young psychologists and counselors to prepare books on the sub-series on 'Psychosocial Impact of Corona Pandemic and the Ways to Cope'.

"The Corona Studies Series seeks to be our long-term contribution to prepare and engage readers with the various aspects of 'corona times' by bringing out affordable books in various Indian languages in the identified subject areas. It will also provide suitable platform to authors and researchers willing to contribute in this genre," NBT India chairman Govind Prasad Sharma said.

The National Book Trust had last week announced launch of 'stay at home with books' initiative in which bestselling books were being made available for free download.

NBT director Yuvraj Malik said both e-editions and printed editions of these books will be published soon as support materials **AGENCIES**

"Books focused on art, literature, folklore, economic and sociological aspects, science and health awareness emerging out of the coronavirus pandemic, and the lockdown, are also in the pipeline"

for the readers. "We have identified various areas for preparing suitable reading materials under the series. Besides, the sub-series on the psycho-social impact (of the virus) on various segments of population, we are preparing children's books to let them know about our 'Corona Warriors', and other story and picture books related to various aspects of the disease to create awareness.

"Also, books focused on art, literature, folklore, economic and sociological aspects, science and health awareness emerging out of the coronavirus pandemic, and the lockdown, are also in the pipeline," said Kumar Vikram, senior editor of National Book Trust, India, who is leading the project.

With fresh deaths in six states, the death toll from COVID-19 climbed to 25 and the total number of cases to 979 in the country on Sunday, according to the Union Health Ministry. **AGENCIES**

Innovators working on COVID-19 solutions get ₹100cr

NEW DELHI: Founders of Indian startups, members of investment advisory firms and independent advisors have joined hands to launch a Rs 100 crore grant for supporting innovators working on solutions to control COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed thousands of lives globally.

The mission of ACT (Action COVID-19 Team) is to provide guidance and resources to startup founders and employees, and empower teams through financial grants and mentoring to create a large-scale impact in the fight against COVID-19.

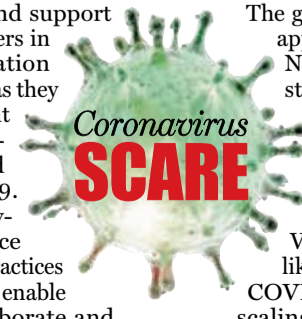
The group will be supported by partner NGOs and industry veterans and will collaborate with government agencies to

scale up solutions that show promising results.

"Investors, industry veterans and founders will collaborate and support startup founders in their preparation and planning as they face significant economic impact caused by COVID-19. It will be a dynamic resource to share best practices with them and enable them to collaborate and co-operate efficiently with business partners and various other external and internal stakeholders," a statement said. A Rs 100 crore ACT Grant

will springboard innovators who are working on solutions to overcome COVID-19, it added.

The grant is seeking applications from NGOs, SMEs and startups that are working on innovative solutions to combat the effect of COVID-19 in areas like prevention of COVID-19 spread, scaling testing, disease management at home, enhanced support for health-care workers and hospitals, management of critically-ill patients, and support for mental health.



"A 25-member team combining the resources of the startup community has been formed to enable rapid evaluation and recommendations on potential projects. A leadership team comprising members of the investment advisory community, founders and independent advisors has been formed to make grant decisions," the statement said.

Further, a mentoring team has been constituted who can monitor and support post-investment for the projects, it added.

Corporates have been rushing in to help the government and citizens fight the Covid-19 pandemic in India.

IT major Cognizant has also announced an initial USD 10

"A leadership team comprising members of the investment advisory community, founders and independent advisors has been formed to make grant decisions"

million philanthropic commitment to support communities around the world in addressing the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19.

Cognizant and its US and India-based foundations will provide critical resources to

strengthen public health systems, education and workforce institutions, and the economic outlook of communities worldwide, the company said in a statement. As part of the USD 10 million commitment, the Cognizant US Foundation will match all Cognizant associate contributions to Global-Giving's "Coronavirus Relief Fund" throughout April. In a separate statement, short-video platform TikTok said it is donating Rs 100 crore worth of medical equipment in India.

TikTok is donating 4 lakh hazmat medical protective suits and 2 lakh masks to protect doctors and front line medical staff in India, it said in a statement. **AGENCIES**



There is constant learning and unlearning for actors: Manisha Koirala

“I AM A HUNGRY ACTOR AND I AM CONSTANTLY TRYING TO BECOME BETTER. AT SOME POINT, I AM HAPPY I AM GETTING OPPORTUNITIES TO DO SOMETHING THAT IS HELPING ME GROW”

Manisha said in an interview. Due to changing styles of storytelling, the 49-year-old actor believes artists should always be open to any kind of challenge that is thrown at them. “There is a constant learning and unlearning that happens if you want to grow as an actor,” she said. Having changed her process and style of acting, Manisha said, she feels happy when people appreciate the efforts an actor puts in building a character.

“If people appreciate your work, it is a pat on your back. If I get appreciated, I feel happy and grateful. As artistes, be it a writer or director or painter or actor, our work depends on whether it has moved the audience or not, when it happens, you feel thrilled.”

The actor’s role in 2018 Netflix anthology “Lust Stories” was critically lauded and now she stars in another film from the streamer, “Maska”. She is reuniting with director Dibakar Banerjee for another Netflix project, “Freedom”.

“I am a hungry actor and I am constantly trying to become better. At some point, I am happy I am getting opportunities to do something

that is helping me grow,” she added. She said the jump from films to streaming wasn’t a planned move.

“I have never been a planning kind of person. From the 80 to 90 films that I have acted in, there are about 10 to 15, where I have worked with good directors where I have been given good roles but that is not always possible. Whatever came to me, I tried my best,” she said. Asked about equal opportunities for women, the actor said the film industry has always been a male-dominated space as the heroes tend to bring in the money.

“If you have a big hero, people are willing to put in money, this is a fact. When we talk about equality, I feel we have a long way to go, we haven’t arrived yet. But the momentum has started.”

There are more women working in different departments of filmmaking, which was not the case in the past, she said. “So times are changing slowly. Women are taking centre stage. But to think we have arrived is also delusional. We have a long way to go. We have to strive to get equal standing and respect,” she said. **AGENCIES**

TAAPSEE
can’t have a
tattoo on
her neck



“ I AM MYSELF A TATTOO LOVING PERSON PROVIDED IT’S SOMETHING THAT IS ATTACHED TO THE PERSON’S PERSONALITY AND NOT JUST A RANDOM DESIGN”

Actress Taapsee Pannu is a tattoo lover. She already has two tattoos. She also wanted to get a neck tattoo, but cannot get herself inked on that spot because of professional constraints as an actress.

On Wednesday, Taapsee shared a throwback image in which she is seen flaunting her temporary birds tattoo from the shoot of the film “Pink”.

“The first tattoo trial of Pink. The idea was to find a design which resonates with the situation of Minal. A bird who wants to open her wings and fly. A bird who comes in her own elements by the end of it all. It was a pleasant surprise for me to know that post

the film’s release there were many girls who reached out to tattoo artists to get the similar tattoo done on them.

“I am myself a tattoo loving person provided it’s something that is attached to the person’s personality and not just a random design. I have 2 tattoos on me and had it not been this acting profession I would’ve probably gotten a third one on the nape of my neck by now,” she wrote

On the film front, Taapsee has plenty of projects in her kitty. After giving a stellar performance in “Thappad”, she will be seen in “Haseen Dillruba”, “Rashmi Rocket” and “Sha-baash Mithu”. **AGENCIES**

With time and the kind of roles that she is being offered now, actor Manisha Koirala believes she has changed from being spontaneous to methodical in her approach towards acting.

The actor, one of the most popular faces in the 1990s and 2000s films such as “Bombay”, “Khamoshi”, “Dil Se”, says she is enjoying doing something new with the characters is playing today.

“The roles that I used to do earlier

didn’t require me to have specific skills or way of doing the role. Today, the roles that I am doing require me to do that so I want to put in that extra hour, extra effort.

“I feel when you are challenged, you push your boundaries and you try to excel in that direction. I love this whole thing of becoming a method actor from spontaneous actor. And if I can bring in the spontaneity and method together that will be great. I love harnessing my skills, I love pushing boundaries,”



NORA FATEHI: Memes don’t affect me

Actress Nora Fatehi feels she is the “meme-queen”, and says that memes don’t affect her.

Nora is popular in the virtual world, courtesy memes around her. The actress doesn’t get offended by them.

“I think I’m the meme-queen. I even post them on my stories. So, memes don’t affect me because by nature they’re supposed to be funny and I take them in my stride because I have a comedy streak to me. Someone said that if you become a meme then you’ve made it,” she said.

Nora moved from Canada to India to become an actress in Bollywood. She managed to bag a few acting projects initially, including “Roar: Tigers of the Sundarbans” and “Crazy Cukkad Family” — they all were low-profile and went unnoticed.

Then, her appearance on “Bigg Boss” and the dance numbers “Manohari” in “Baahubali: The Beginning” changed the tide. People started noticing Nora, and soon she was belting out the hit dance numbers, “Dilbar” (“Satyamev Jayate”) and “O saki saki” (“Batla House”).

Looking back at her decision to shift to India from Canada, she shared: “People asked me why I would choose to leave a country like Canada to go to India when I don’t even know anyone there. However, I have lived in many countries. My family is from Morocco and I have also lived in Saudi for three years. So, I’m a multicultural chick. So coming to India wasn’t scary. Also, being someone who is well-versed with Hindi cinema, I knew I wasn’t going to have any cultural shock. But, something that I didn’t anticipate was the struggle in the journey.”

She was last seen in dance movie “Street Dancer 3D”, which also features Varun Dhawan and Shradha Kapoor. The actress opened up about her life in an episode of “Starry Nights GEN Y”, which is aired in India on Zee Cafe.

Talking about her struggle, she said: “My first-ever job was as a retail sales associate. I was sixteen and I had to work for many reasons. There were a lot of financial issues in my family and I was supposed to be the one that would step up and become the breadwinner. After that, I did numerous things such as waitressing in restaurants and even working at telemarketing offices where I had to cold-call people.”

Asked to name an actress she envies, Nora said: “I envy Deepika (Padukone)”, going on to reveal her fascination with Sanjay Leela Bhansali movies as being the reason for the same. **AGENCIES**



LINDSAY LOHAN working on music comeback

LOHAN FIRST VENTURED INTO MUSIC IN 2002. HER STARRING ROLE IN FREAKY FRIDAY RESULTED IN HER FIRST SINGLE ULTIMATE

Actress Lindsay Lohan is making a return to music after a 12-year hiatus.

The former child star-turned-singer and businesswoman posted a 30-second clip to her social media accounts, captioning it “I’m back!” and a pre-save link, reports variety.com.

The teaser shows a television, flashing between moments from Lohan’s career as her name is echoed by news anchors. In the clip, Lohan is also seen on the news, at red carpets, partying in Greece, being harassed by paparazzi and dancing in the music video for her 2004 hit “Rumors”.

The voices and videos speed up, the television explodes and a smiley face logo flashes across the screen as Lohan says, “I’m back”.

Back in August 2019, Lohan similarly teased a new single titled “Xanax”. She previewed the track on Virgin Radio Dubai’s “The Kris Fade Show” and even posted part of the music video to Instagram. Soon, it disappeared and the song was never officially released.

Lohan first ventured into music in 2002. Her starring role in “Freaky Friday” resulted in her first single “Ultimate”, but it was the four songs she recorded for the 2003 film “Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen” that brought her pop stardom.

Her debut album “Speak” was released in 2004. It was followed by “A Little More Personal (RAW)” in 2005. Her last official release was the 2008 single “Bossy”. **AGENCIES**

Other ‘Ramayan’ also back on TV screens



With Ramanand Sagar’s popular eighties mythological serial “Ramayan” returning on Doordarshan to entertain viewers amid the nationwide lockdown, another “Ramayan”, which had originally released in 2012 on Zee Tv, is also being retelecast from Ram Navami on April 2.

The show, which ran from August 12, 2012 to September 1, 2013, casts Gagan Malik as Ram, Neha Sargam as Sita, Malhar Pandya as Hanuman

and Sachin Tyagi as Ravan. It also features familiar faces such as

“As the entire country unitedly fights the threat amidst us, there’s nothing better to bring the entire family together than this epic battle between good and evil”

Shikha Swaroop, Rucha Gujarathi and Divyanka Tripathi in various roles.

The 56-episode “Ramayan” is directed by Mukesh Singh, Pawan Parkhi and Rajesh Shikhre.

“Ramayan” undoubtedly is one of the greatest and timeless Indian epic tales, read and loved by all. What better day to celebrate this eter-

nal saga of Lord Ram than Ram Navami itself? Knowing the devotional fervour with which families across India celebrate this day, this year amidst the countrywide lockdown, we chose to bring Lord Ram closer to our viewer’s hearts and homes through this show,” said Vishnu Shankar, Business Head, &TV. **AGENCIES**

Badshah defends against ‘Genda Phool’ plagiarism charge

After being deluged with plagiarism charges by netizens over his latest track “Genda Phool”, rapper Badshah has defended himself saying he has been trying to reach out to the creator of the original track but to no avail.

Badshah’s new song mixes rap with lyrics from an old Bengali folk hit, “Boroloker biti lo”, created by Ratan Kahar and originally sung by Swapna Chakraborty. Clarifying his situation on social media, the

rapper claimed that he has been trying to contact Kahar but has not managed to do so owing to the ongoing nationwide lockdown.

“After receiving so much information from the Bengali community, I have been constantly trying my best to reach out to him and connect with him and be able to do justice to the situation to all my might. However, the lockdown situation has not been very helpful, it has been difficult to get through to the village that Shri Kahar is in and I am still trying,”



Badshah tweeted.

The rapper has also requested anyone who might have any knowledge of how to contact Kahar to help him get connected. “I urge and request any of the representatives who have been speaking on his behalf, to help me connect

with him so I can do whatever possible on my part on humanitarian grounds to put this right.”

He further stated: “A couple of days after the song release, I started getting feedback on my social media that the Bengali lyrics are originally from a song “Boroloker

Beti Lo” that were penned by the veteran artist Shri Ratan Kahar.”

Claiming the original creator of the 1972 song has not been given due credit in any of the previous versions, Badshah further wrote: “We had however done our due diligence before releasing the song, and nowhere on any copyright societies or on any of the previous reprises/versions of the song was Mr Ratan Kahar credited as a lyricist. Information all across say that “Boroloker Beti Lo” is a traditional/folk song from the Bauls of Bengal. Just for general information, traditional songs are open for recreations/reprises/sampling globally.”

Meanwhile, veteran folk artist Ratan Kahar lives amid poverty in the town of town Siuri in West Bengal’s Birbhum district.

“All I want is love from the people. I am a selfless person. I don’t have any greed for money, food or anything else. But I live with a pain that even though many people sing my songs, they don’t know the proper style of singing it, neither do they know the story behind why I created the songs. I want the artist Badshah to at least give me recognition for my song. I share my best wishes for him,” Kahar told news18.com. **AGENCIES**