



FIRST COLUMN

Railway employee suspended for 'hiding' COVID-19 positive son in rest house



New Delhi, Agency. A railway officer in Bengaluru was suspended for allegedly hiding information that her son, who later tested positive for COVID-19 in the city, had a travel history to coronavirus-hit Germany and Spain. Confirming the same, South Western Railway (SWR) Chief Public Relations Officer E Vijaya told indianexpress.com that the lady officer who was working as an Assistant Personnel Officer in Bengaluru Division was officially suspended on Thursday. "She (the officer) had requested a rest house accommodation for her family in Bengaluru and was allotted the same next to KSR Bengaluru railway station from March 13 to 16. It was then understood that the said officer's son who came from Germany via Madrid (Spain) airport to the city was later tested positive (on March 18) for coronavirus," Vijaya added. The action has been taken as the officer neither disclosed information about her son's foreign trip to a coronavirus-hit nation nor informed the state health department as per provisions of Karnataka Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, Vijaya explained. As a preventive measure, SWR has closed down the rest house and has kept the cleaning staff under quarantine. "All officers and their families who stayed in the rest house have been informed to be on the lookout and to be alert for symptoms if any. Details of people who stayed there have been shared with the state government and fumigation is being done," Vijaya added. The Karnataka health department had confirmed the 25-year-old male patient to be the 12th positive case in the state on March 18, stating he was admitted to a designated isolation hospital in Bengaluru. Medical Education Minister Sudhakar K had then confirmed that seven primary contacts were identified and were placed under strict home quarantine. To date, Karnataka has confirmed 15 positive cases of COVID-19 with one casualty reported from Kalaburagi.

Assam to put \$2000 in accounts of residents stuck abroad, stamp those coming in



New Delhi, Agency. In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Friday announced a \$2,000 monetary relief measure for those residents who had travelled abroad from the state in the past 30 days and were now "stuck" with no way to come back home. This was among a slew of measures announced by the health minister. "Many Assamese may have travelled out of the state either as a tourist, or for work (maybe training, workshops, seminars in the past 30 days. However, now due to the outbreak and recent rules announced by the government, they are unable to come back," said Sarma. To help them, we will release an e-mail ID in the next two days. These people can write in to us, with a copy of their stamped passport. We will deposit \$2,000 in their accounts as a gesture from our side. If someone's VISA or passport has expired, they can inform the government, and we will take it up with the Indian embassy," Sarma added. Sarma also said the Assam government has advised the Election Commission (EC) to defer the upcoming Bodoland Territorial Council election scheduled for April 4. In the interim, campaigning too is advised to be put on hold. Shortly after, the Assam Election Commission officially announced that the elections were postponed. Till March 31, government departments will have only 50 per cent employees attending office on a daily/weekly rotational basis. "The balance 50 per cent will work from home. This will be implemented in a rotational basis," said Sarma, adding that the announcement does not apply to employees in essential services like health, fire, electricity and water.

Nirbhaya case: 4 convicts hanged at 5:30 am after nightlong court hearings

New Delhi, Agency.

The four death-row convicts in the Nirbhaya gangrape case were hanged in Delhi's Tihar jail at 5:30 am on Friday. This was after the Supreme Court, in a pre-dawn hearing, brought the curtains down on the gangrape and murder case by dismissing a plea by one of the four against rejection of his second mercy plea by President Ram Nath Kovind. In an indication of public outrage over the case that had shaken the conscience of an entire nation, several posters were seen outside the Tihar premises in the wee hours on Friday ahead of the hanging with placards and posters reading "thanks to judiciary" and "the morning of justice". Earlier, a Supreme Court Bench comprising Justices R Banumathi, Ashok Bhushan and A S Bopanna rejected the fervent plea of Pawan Gupta that his mercy plea had been wrongly rejected by the President without considering the fact that he was a minor at the time of offence in 2012. "The consistent view of this court is that scope for review of President's decision in mercy petitions is very limited," the bench said. "What are the grounds on which you are challenging rejection of mercy plea by President...You had relied on school certificate to claim juvenility and are using it again and again. You are asking us to review judgement, your juvenility claim has been rejected by lower court, Delhi High Court and us as well," it said. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Delhi Police, objected the juvenility plea of Pawan Gupta and said that this had been dealt earlier by all the courts. The court also did not consider the plea of lawyer A L Singh, appearing for the death row convict Pawan Gupta, that his execution be deferred for one or two days so that he can record his statement in an assault case. Singh alleged that the convict was assaulted on person by



■ **Delhi gangrape convicts hanged: Justice finally delivered, says victim's mother Asha Devi**

■ **Asha Devi, the mother of the 23-year-old physiotherapy student who was gangraped and brutally assaulted on December 12, 2016,**

policemen last year. The bench asked the Centre to consider the fervent request of the lawyer for the convicts that the family members of Pawan Gupta and Akshay Singh be allowed to meet them for 5-10 minutes before hanging. Mehta said that though this is painful, the jail manual does not permit convicts to meet family members just before the hanging. On March 5, the trial court issued fresh warrants for hanging on March 20 at 5.30 am of all convicts in the case - Mukesh Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (35), Vinay Sharma (26) and Akshay Singh (31). A 23-year-

old paramedic student, referred to as Nirbhaya, was gang-raped and brutally assaulted on the intervening night of December 16-17, 2012, in a moving bus in south Delhi by six people before she was thrown out on the road. One of the six accused in the case, Ram Singh, allegedly committed suicide in Tihar Jail in 2013. A juvenile, who was among the accused, was convicted by a juvenile justice board and was released from a reformation home after serving a three-year term. Asha Devi, the mother of the 23-year-old physiotherapy student who was gangraped and brutally assaulted on December 12, 2016, hugged a picture of her daughter on Friday morning after four convicted of the crime were hanged to death at Tihar jail in New Delhi. "Finally they have been hanged. It was a long struggle, but today we have got justice. This day is dedicated to the daughters of the country," she told the media. Thanking the President, judiciary and governments, Devi said justice was delayed, but not denied. She urged the Supreme Court to issue guidelines so that no one could adopt delaying tactics in such cases in future.

DPIIT notifies decision to permit NRIs to own up to 100 per cent stake in Air India

New Delhi, Agency.

The FDI policy earlier permitted NRIs to take only 49 per cent stake in the airline. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has notified a decision of the union cabinet to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to control up to 100 per cent stake in disinvestment-bound Air India. The FDI policy earlier permitted NRIs to take only 49 per cent stake in the airline. In its press note, the DPIIT said: "Foreign investments in Air India including that of foreign airlines shall not exceed 49 per cent either directly or indirectly except in case of those NRIs, who are Indian Nationals, where foreign investment is permitted up to 100 per cent under automatic route". On March 4, the cabinet had taken a decision in this regard. The decision came at a time when the government has sought preliminary bids for 100 per cent stake sale in the national carrier. It also said that the condition that substantial ownership and effective control (SOEC) of Air India shall



continue to be vested in Indian nationals. An official statement has earlier stated that in light of the proposed strategic disinvestment of 100 per cent of Air India by the government, it has been decided that foreign investment in Air India be brought on a level-playing field with other scheduled airline operators. The national carrier will have no residual government ownership and will be completely privately owned. Under the SOEC framework, which is followed in the airline industry globally, a carrier that flies overseas from a particular country should be substantially owned by that country's government or its nationals.

Express Archives: PK Banerjee and legends roll back years back to 1956 Olympics

New Delhi, Agency.

PK Banerjee and several other members of the Olympic squad of 1956, where India finished fourth, and 1960, where they held France to a 1-1 draw, were felicitated at a function in Delhi in 2011. His arm trembling, ravaged by the effects of a cerebral hemorrhage a few years back, P K Banerjee moved with obvious discomfort to receive a silver plaque from the sports minister on Wednesday. Age, and injury may have dulled the former Indian forward's reflexes but at the moment he shook hands with Ajay Maken, his grip was firm and his gaze steady, as it must have been more than fifty years ago when he would have received recognition as the captain of the Indian team that reached the semi-finals of the Melbourne Olympics.

Banerjee and several other members of the Olympic squad of 1956 (Melbourne), where India finished fourth, and 1960 (Rome), where they held France to a 1-1 draw, were being felicitated at a function in Delhi. With many of the players from those halcyon days in ill health or having passed away, those gathered used the function as an opportunity to reconnect after many years apart. "You are quite close to each other when you are playing. But once those days are over, everyone has their own thing to do. More important than the fact that we are being honoured after so long is the



fact that we are meeting one another once again," said S Hamid, a member of the Rome Olympics squad. Many were dressed in the faded indigo of the Indian Olympic blazer. They laughed like long lost brothers, honoring those who were not present and swapping stories by the dozen, the anecdotes flying thick and fast. PK Banerjee, hailed as one of the best strikers India has ever produced, recounted a tale of legendary goalkeeper Peter Thangaraj who had assisted in a goal with only his second touch in an international. "We were playing Sri Lanka, and the ball was passed to Peter. He bounced it twice, which was his signal that he was going to kick the ball long. Peter had one of the strongest kick during our playing days, and the ball travelled nearly half the way into the other half. I was anticipating the shot so I only had to tap it in," recalled Banerjee, sitting in the centre of a circle of former comrades.

Madhya Pradesh crisis

Madhya Pradesh govt falls as Chief Minister Kamal Nath resigns

■ **In my 40 years of public life, I have always followed politics of probity and given priority to democratic values.**

New Delhi, Agency.

"In my 40 years of public life, I have always followed politics of probity and given priority to democratic values. Whatever has happened in the last two weeks is a new chapter in the devaluation of democratic values," he said in his resignation letter to Governor Lalji Tandon. Ending days of political uncertainty in Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Friday resigned to bring down curtains on the 15-month-old Congress government in the state.

"In my 40 years of public life, I have always followed politics of probity and given priority to democratic values. Whatever has happened in the last two weeks is a new chapter in the devaluation of democratic values," he said in his resignation letter to Governor Lalji Tandon. Wishing good luck to his successor, he said he would always



extend his cooperation for the development of the state. Nath had taken the oath of office on December 17, 2018. Before handing over his resignation, he told the reporters at the CM house that he tried to give a new identity to the state. He accused the BJP of trying to destabilise his government from day one. He alleged that the BJP did not like the campaign he launched against the

mafia which proliferated during the 15-year rule of the BJP. "I want character certificate from people, not the BJP," he said. The BJP plotted against his government from the beginning, he claimed. "Who took the MLAs to Bengaluru?" he asked insinuating that the BJP arranged flights for the rebel MLAs. Former CM and senior BJP leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan led BJP MLAs to the assembly

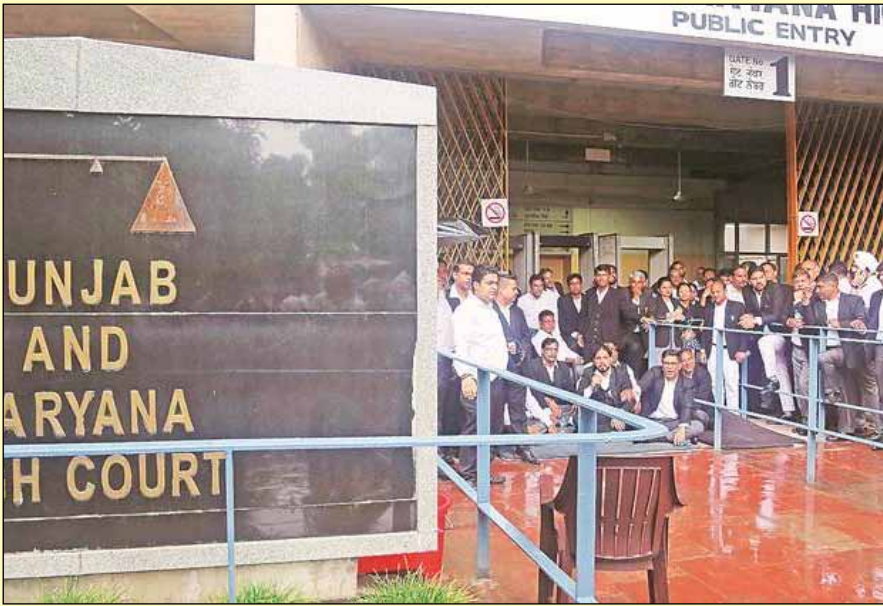
saying he was there to honour the Supreme Court-mandated trust vote. The resignation of 22 MLAs, including six ministers, had plunged the Congress-ruled government into crisis last week. With the resignation of 16 more MLAs on Thursday night, the strength of Congress has come down to 92 from 108. The strength of the House has also been reduced to 206. Madhya Pradesh Crisis Live News Updates: The Assembly was adjourned after till March 26 without the trust vote proceedings. In a brief address to the Assembly, Governor Lalji Tandon advised everyone in the House to uphold law so that the "dignity of Madhya Pradesh remains protected." Soon after the Speaker NP Prajapati adjourned the Assembly till March 26 without holding the floor test, the BJP moved the Supreme Court over the trust vote. The plea filed by former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and nine other MLAs demanding floor test within 12 hours will be taken up tomorrow. The BJP also submitted a letter and paraded 106 MLAs before Governor Lalji Tandon. Stating that while Congress has only 92 members, Shivraj Singh Chouhan accused the chief minister of running away from the battlefield.

HC red flags withholding of tax refunds, issues show-cause to top Haryana officers

Chandigarh, Correspondent.

NOTING THAT the procedure for refund of tax amount and withholding of refund is often being used as a “delaying tactic” for window dressing the collection of revenue, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has issued a show-cause notice to the Principal Commissioner of Tax, Rohtak, Krinwant Sahay and Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax, Circle 4(1) Gurugram Dipin Goel to explain why costs should not be imposed on them for withholding the refund of nearly Rs 300 crore of Huawei Telecommunications.

“It is evident that procedure for refund and withholding of refund is often being used as delaying tactics for various reasons including window dressing of collection of revenue. The method adopted is a short sighted vision. Apart from harassment to the assessee, it results in paying interest on the delayed amount of refund putting further burden on the exchequer,” read an order passed by the division bench of Justices Ajay Tewari and Avneesh Jhingan. Observing that trade and commerce are “life blood” of the system, the division bench further said if the excess amount deposited as tax is not refunded to the entrepreneur or



assessee, it has an effect on the liquidity and business. “There cannot be second opinion that the revenue collection and securing

the interest of the revenue is to be collected like an apiarist extracts honey from beehive without destroying it,” the order read.

The Huawei Telecommunications (India) Company Private Limited had approached the court seeking quashing of an order passed in November 2019 under Section 241A of the Income Tax Act withholding the refund for the assessment years 2017-18 and 2018-19. Section 241A empowers the tax authorities to withhold the refund of an amount subject to certain conditions like Assessing Officer’s opinion that revenue would be adversely affected in case of grant of refund. The company had claimed a refund of Rs 48,11,52,210 and Rs 252,45,13,970 as refund under the provisions of the Act. While holding that the order passed in Huawei’s case is unsustainable as there was no reason recorded for coming to the conclusion that the grant of refund is likely to adversely affect the revenue, the Court said the pendency of proceedings under Section 143(2) (scrutiny assessment proceedings) of the Act in itself is not enough to withhold the refund. It further ruled that selection of a case for scrutiny does not automatically amount to withholding of refund, adding there is no dispute in the company’s case from the authorities regarding the refunds. The court issued notice to Sahay and Goel for April 28.

Minor raped, a youth arrested, sent to jail.

Patna Rajkumar Roy

Gyan, a 22-year-old youth living in Railway Hundar Road of Kadamkuan area, has been arrested in a case of raping a minor in Kadam Kuan police station area of the district. Which by staying in Patna, J.E. While preparing for engineering, Gyan, an accused caught in the case, has told that he met his student 1 year ago after which the meeting turned into love and the girl came in contact with it. While the boy has clearly stated himself to be innocent in this case, he has said that he has met the girl twice in the meantime, despite how she can be pregnant even though the question arises that the victim minor girl And how true are the allegations against the 22-year-old man accused by his family members? This is now a matter of investigation. At the same time, if the accused believes, he has done DNA in the court on this whole matter. When asked to get the test done, while the girl is believed,

■ *At present, the youth is under police custody and the police is trying to send him to jail.*

the minor student called the 22-year-old young man Gyan 4 days before Holi and told that he is pregnant while he gave information about this to his family as well. He was taken to the doctor. Where doctors told the womb of 6 months in the womb, after which the case caught fire and the family hurriedly filed a case at Kadamkuan police station in Patna. After which, 22-year-old youth Gyan was caught by Kadamkuan police station in quick action and a case has been registered under the Poxxo Act. The youth is a resident of floods. At present, the youth is under police custody and the police is trying to send him to jail.

Gujarat sees three new positive cases with foreign travel history, number rises to 5

■ *The three new positive cases include a 49-year old man from Vadodara with a travel history from Spain, and two women in Ahmedabad from Finland and New York.*

Ahmedabad Correspondent.

The three new positive cases include a 49-year old man from Vadodara with a travel history from Spain, and two women in Ahmedabad from Finland and New York. Three new persons in Gujarat tested positive for the COVID-19 on Friday taking the total cases in the state to five. All three people have a travel history to Spain, Finland and New York. Principal secretary of Health Jayanti Ravi told mediapersons that all of them were in stable condition at the moment and all are below 35 years of age. The three new positive cases include a 49-year old man from Vadodara with a travel history from Spain, and two women in Ahmedabad from Finland and New York in US. On Thursday, a man from Rajkot and a woman from Surat with a travel history of Saudi Arabia and London respectively were confirmed positive.

“We are currently rigorously contact tracing. The 49-year-old man landed in Mumbai and then took a train along with his family to Rajkot. They have been institutionally quarantined. Maximum are asymptomatic.



Around two or three are mildly symptomatic and have been isolated,” added Ravi. Rajkot and Surat patients are not on ventilator anymore, she said. Ravi said those who are required to stay in home quarantine owing to their travel history will be stamped. “While initially we had discussed that wrist band may be used, we decided to instead stamp them as plans can be removed. While we would trust people, few may be irresponsible,” added Ravi. “I appeal to citizens that if you find someone violating home quarantine, they call 104 and inform us. We have had cases where a person came from abroad and was not following home quarantine. Collectors have been asked to strictly enforce it. Those found to be violating home quarantine were caught and have

now been institutionally quarantined,” said Ravi. “Yesterday we also took the decision to prohibit weddings and events in party plots as community halls to avoid clustering,” added Ravi. Since two days we are video conferencing with collectors, commissioners on home quarantine, added Ravi. Of the total 150 samples, 123 were clearly negative results for 27 are pending. Some are being re-tested at NIV as test results may give false positives and thus sent to NIV to be ratified. Some results came as inconclusive which are sent to NIV. “Airport screened 559 travellers yesterday, of them 63 were quarantined. At least 492 were home quarantined. Everyday we find 2-3 cases violating home quarantine from multiple districts” said Ravi.

‘Expenditure on schools has increased ten fold’: Vijay Inder Singla

Punjab Correspondent.

We have started pre-primary only in those primary schools where space was available. We have proposed 1,600 new classrooms to be constructed under NABARD funds, says Vijay Inder Singla. Punjab School Edu Minister Vijay Inder Singla tells The Indian Express that the state government is actively working to provide digital infrastructure in schools: Most of the 5,500 government schools have been transformed into Smart Schools using donations. Your take. A proper development plan is made before a school is converted into Smart School. Yes, most of the schools have some contribution from community but they are partially funded by the government. We have released funds for several facilities such as CCTVs, educational parks, projectors, LED screens etc. Our spending on schools has increased ten fold. We have also tied up with ASER to provide digital education infrastructure in schools. Expenditure is being done under different components such as parks, LED projectors, building classrooms, green board etc. Just by painting a building in a colourful way, a school doesn’t become ‘Smart’. There are some Smart Schools which are fully government funded and others are partial. We need to compile exact figure of how much government has spent on Smart Schools. Rs 100 crore has been proposed for these schools in this year’s budget. Pre-primary classes have been started but there is no space in primary schools to accommodate



kids or furniture. They are sitting on the floor. We have started pre-primary only in those primary schools where space was available. We have proposed 1,600 new classrooms to be constructed under NABARD funds. Enrollment in government schools continues to be low, despite intensive drives. We have enrolled 2.70 lakh new kids in pre-primary recently. Enrollment in govt schools had drastically declined during SAD-BJP government and we have filled the backlog they left. Now, it is on the path of recovery. TET and BED unemployed teachers are still protesting. We have already advertised 2,000 posts for recruitment and 2,000 more will be advertised soon, but in no case will we compromise the quality of teachers to be hired. If they want that those who did not even secure 50 per cent marks in their graduation should be hired to teach kids.

Across the country, armed forces readying 11 more quarantine facilities

Pune Correspondent.

MoD officials said the ministry has deployed all possible resources in the aid of civilian authorities to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. The Indian Army, Navy and the Air Force are currently readying 11 more quarantine facilities at various places in the country, in addition to four which are already functional at Manesar, Jaisalmer, Mumbai and Hindon, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has said. MoD officials said the ministry has deployed all possible resources in the aid of civilian authorities to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. A large number of Indian nationals have till now been evacuated by the Indian Air Force from countries like Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, United States of America, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru, as well as from some of the severely COVID-19-affected countries such as China, Japan, Italy and Iran. As a precautionary measure, these evacuated persons are being kept under quarantine for a period of 14 days. Army, Navy and Air Force have set up quarantine facilities which are being called ‘wellness centres’. “It was the Army which had set up the first isolation facility at Manesar, where the first batch of Indian citizens evacuated from Wuhan in China were quarantined. Subsequently, one more facility was set by the Army at Jaisalmer and one each by the Navy at Mumbai, and by the IAF at Hindon. Most of these facilities are near existing military stations, from where resources of Armed forces formations are being deployed for running these facilities. There is close coordination with civil agencies for every aspect of its functioning,” said an officer. He added, “These centres are fully equipped and functional facilities, helping people to undertake the mandatory quarantine period under the supervision of skilled medical authorities. Soldiers have volunteered to provide care and support to our citizens returning from overseas. In addition, more quarantine facilities are being readied and may be made operational within 48 hours, if needed. These facilities are at Jodhpur, Kolkata and Chennai by Army, Visakhapatnam and Kochi by Navy and at Bengaluru, Kanpur, Jaisalmer, Jorhat and Gorakhpur and Dundigal near Hyderabad by the IAF.



Child Advisory Council meeting held under the chairmanship of District Magistrate

Madhubani: Correspondent.

A meeting of the Child Advisory Council was held in the chamber of the Collectorate on Thursday under the chairmanship of the District Magistrate, Dr. Nilesh Ramchandra Devre, IPS. The meeting was attended by the District Transport Officer, District Program Officer (ICDS), ACMO, Director, Child Line, Coordinator Child Line, President, Child Welfare Committee, Superintendent in charge, Girl Child, Labor Superintendent’s Representative and District Education Officer’s representative. . In the meeting, it was decided to send letters to all the schools for cooperation in propagation of child line, to write slogan of child line in the walls of all schools in the district and to inform the child line in the meeting of CRC and BRC etc. Formation of the Block Child Labor Task Force was also discussed with the cooperation of the Superintendent of Labor. Addressing the meeting, the District Magistrate directed that the child line should coordinate with the labor department and campaign for the liberation of child laborers at all major railway stations, bus stands, etc. in the district. He directed the District Transport Officer to coordinate with the Assistant Director, Child Protection Unit and ensure that the child line is installed in all buses and buses of private schools. Through training, information was given to all the units related to child protection as well as the team of child line through training. In coordination with the District Program Officer, ICDS, it was also directed to make wall-line writing on all Anganwadi centers in the district. Also, a child friendly corner was also constructed at each police station.

Water tanker strike hits east Bengaluru amid lockdown over coronavirus scare

Bengaluru Correspondent.

With areas like Panathur and Varthur in Mahadevapura zone being the worst hit, residents are left with no access to water. What has compounded the problem is that most of them are now working from home due to the ongoing lockdown in the city because of coronavirus. As summer kicks in, residents of east Bengaluru especially in residential areas adjacent to the tech corridor in the city – are facing acute water shortage with private water tankers owners going on a strike. With areas like Panathur and Varthur in Mahadevapura zone being the worst hit, residents are left with no access to water. What has compounded the problem is that most of them are now working from home due to the ongoing lockdown in the city because of coronavirus. Echoing the sentiments of thousands of residents in the area, Elan Kulandaivelu, a resident of Mahadevapura, blamed the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) officials for “failing to foresee the situation”. “The civic body and the water board should not have allowed multiple constructions to take place in the area even when they were aware that the area had no source of water to cater to such a booming population,” he said. The situation worsened on March 9 after the Hosakote tahsildar issued an order prohibiting private water tankers from fetching water from borewells in Harohalli, Kotur, and Muthsandra villages. HA Nagaraja Rao, President of Bangalore Apartments’ Federation, called it a ‘knee-jerk action’, especially at a time when the demand for water is higher than usual. “In our meeting with the tanker suppliers association, we were informed that their power supply has been cut off by the order of the Tahsildar.



BSF constable entitled to disability pension, says HC

Chandigarh:, Correspondent.

Directing the authorities to pay disability pension along with arrears to a BSF constable discharged in 2006 for experiencing Affective Psychosis, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has ruled that once it is concluded that the disease for which he was invalidated out was caused only during the service, he is entitled to grant of disability pension as the stress and strain leading to the illness has to be attributed to the service. The constable is from Haryana’s Jhajjar and was enrolled in the BSF in 1995 under sports category. Starting from 2002, he showed abnormal and erratic behaviour with violent outbursts. He would remain alone and also had an aggressive fighting



tendency. The Medical Board in September 2006 declared him unfit from further service. It said the disability was not directly attributable to conditions of service but was aggravated by stress and strain. In November 2006, he was discharged. The authorities in 2014 rejected his claim of disability pension on the ground that the disability was

not attributable to the condition of service. Before court, they defended their action saying the disease was aggravated by stress and strain, which was not attributable to government bonafide duty. Justice Harsimran Singh Sethi, in the order dated March 4, said the authorities nowhere have contended that he was suffering from the illness at

the time of recruitment, adding that once the person, “who was an eminent sportsman”, was recruited in the category of service, it cannot be said that he was suffering from the disease, caused by stress and strain, even at the time of recruitment in 1995. The court further said even the medical board has said the stress and strain of the service has aggravated the disease. “Once, there is nothing on record to show that the petitioner was unfit at the time of recruitment or was suffering from the said disease, it can be safely held that the petitioner suffered the said disease while in service as the causes of the same were stress and strain and the said cause aggravated the disease,” reads the judgment.

Coronavirus: Delhi malls to be shut with immediate effect

New Delhi Correspondent.

Coronavirus in Delhi: Taking to Twitter, Arvind Kejriwal said, “In view of the prevailing situation, we are closing down all malls (except grocery, pharmacy and vegetable shops in them).” All shopping malls in New Delhi will be shut with immediate effect in view of the novel coronavirus cases, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced Friday. As many as 14 cases, including one death, have been registered in the national capital so far. Grocery stores, pharmacies, and vegetable shops in malls, however, will remain open, he added. Taking to Twitter, Kejriwal said, “In view of the prevailing situation, we are closing down all malls (except grocery, pharmacy and vegetable shops in them).” On Wednesday, the Gurgaon administration had announced a similar move. CM Kejriwal also announced that restaurants in the national capital will remain closed at least until March 31 even as he announced a fresh set of restrictions, including barring gatherings of more than 20 people, to contain the spread of coronavirus. For the time being, home delivery and takeaway facilities will continue in restaurants extending such facilities, Kejriwal told a press conference, following a review meeting with Lt Governor Anil Bajjal and other Cabinet ministers and senior officials of the administration. Meanwhile, Delhi Metro rail services will remain suspended on Sunday, a measure aimed at encouraging people to stay indoors in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call for a “janata curfew”. In a statement issued by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, it said: “In the wake of ‘Janta Curfew’ to be observed this Sunday.



Delhi metro services to be closed on Sunday in view of ‘janata curfew’

New Delhi, Correspondent.

Coronavirus in Delhi: In an eight-point advisory released on Thursday, DMRC also emphasised the need for commuters to maintain at least a metre’s distance from each other inside the trains and at the stations. Delhi Metro rail services will remain suspended on Sunday, a measure aimed at encouraging people to stay indoors in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call for a “janata curfew”. In a statement issued by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, it said: “In the wake of ‘Janta Curfew’ to be observed this Sunday, it has decided to keep metro services closed. The move is aimed at encouraging public to stay indoors and maintain social distancing, which is essential in the fight against Covid-19.” To be sure, Modi did not pitch for any institutional backing for, what he described, would be a self-imposed curfew by the people between 7 am and 9 pm. Metro’s decision to suspend all services on March 22 also comes a day after it issued an eight-point advisory, urging people to avail its services “only when it is essential and unavoidable”. It also put in effect a policy urging



commuters to maintain a gap of at least 1 metre among themselves, both inside the train and on the premises of the stations spread across Delhi and the National Capital Region. Coronavirus in Delhi: In an eight-point advisory

released on Thursday, DMRC also emphasised the need for commuters to maintain at least a metre’s distance from each other inside the trains and at the stations. “The move is aimed at encouraging public to stay indoors and

maintain social distancing, which is essential in the fight against Covid-19,” the DMRC press release stated. In an eight-point advisory released on Thursday, DMRC also emphasised the need for commuters to maintain at least a metre’s distance from each other inside the trains and at the stations. “Standing passengers will not be allowed and alternate seats to be left vacant,” the statement said, adding that random thermal scanning of passengers will be carried out at all metro stations. In some cases, trains will skip stations that are crowded and may lead to more passengers on board. “Trains may not stop at such stations which are crowded i.e. less than the expected distance of 1 metre between the passengers,” it said. “In case anyone has fever or is observed to have any symptom of coronavirus, he/she will be referred for medical tests and quarantine to the authorities,” the statement said. Coronavirus in Delhi: In an eight-point advisory released on Thursday, DMRC also emphasised the need for commuters to maintain at least a metre’s distance from each other inside the trains and at the stations.

Delhi Mohalla Clinics get ready to step up to a tough new challenge

New Delhi, Correspondent.

To this end, chief district medical officers (CDMOs) of the 11 districts are reaching out to doctors at the clinics to explain the guidelines that have to be followed while screening a patient. The Delhi government is training doctors working at Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics on handling suspected COVID-19 cases. Aimed at strengthening the healthcare set-up at primary level, doctors at the clinics have been advised to report all suspected cases to designated hospitals. So far, 11 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported from Delhi. To this end, chief district medical officers (CDMOs) of the 11 districts are reaching out to doctors at the clinics to explain the guidelines that have to be followed while screening a patient. “This is an initiative by the CDMOs in the city. They are calling doctors and sending out WhatsApp messages about dos and don’ts to be followed while screening any patient. If any patient shows symptoms, then he/she and their family members are being counselled. We are providing awareness material to mohalla clinic doctors,” said Dr. Nimmi Rastogi, health coordinator, Dialogue & Development Commission (DDC). There are approximately 460 mohalla clinics operational in the city, which cater to 160-200 patients a day on average. Each mohalla clinic has a doctor and three multi-tasking workers. Meanwhile, the Delhi government



has authorised six state hospitals to collect samples of suspected COVID-10 patients. These are Lok Nayak Guru Tegh Bahadur, Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality, Janakpuri Super Specialty, and Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospitals. “We are also getting private labs on board to provide the testing

facility. Roche Diagnostics is the first private lab to get approval for coronavirus’s testing. Three other labs – BioMérieux, Trivitron Healthcare & Mylab Discovery Solutions — are also in touch,” added Dr Rastogi. Until now, samples were being sent to AIIMS and National Centre for Disease Control.

Amid lockdown & social distancing, weddings, engagements deferred

Gurgaon Correspondent.

By early March, the number of positive cases of coronavirus in Italy had crossed 2,500, and as soon as a 29-year-old Delhi-based fashion stylist found out, she cancelled her wedding at Como in Italy. Likewise, a 38-year-old media professional cancelled her four-day wedding festivities in April across Delhi and Goa once the Centre announced the suspension of all visas till April 13. As India takes stringent steps to battle coronavirus, weddings and engagements take a backseat, with many deciding to postpone them indefinitely. “We had booked a hotel in Italy’s Como and booked airline tickets too for our wedding on April 15. Of course, we had to cancel the wedding, and the hotel was kind enough to email that they will refund the sum once banks are properly functional,” said the stylist. The couple did consider getting married on the same day at the bride’s Delhi house on April 15 but are worried about even a gathering of 30-odd people. “There is a lot of uncertainty. We have pushed the wedding to April 25 for now and have told the planners that this will only be confirmed five days before the wedding, depending on the lockdown,” said the stylist. Delhi-based wedding designer Vasundra Banga (30), who runs Tinselle Events, said that even though November-February is peak wedding season, spring and summer weddings too have become common in North India, and the coronavirus outbreak has impacted business. She said, “We were working on four weddings for the month of April, and now three have been pushed to later dates, and one is still on track.” The media professional, who cancelled her wedding festivities due in April, said it was the most practical decision to make. She said, “I have a cousin in Canada, and three friends in Germany and Spain, who would not have made it to the wedding. Also, it is not safe to have a gathering. We are getting a refund from the Goa venue.” A bride-to-be, with an April wedding slated in Delhi, said the families will take a call by Monday and may agree to do a small ceremony at a temple instead. A wedding planner said while she is not discouraging clients, but she is petrified of “exposure as wedding planning requires stepping out of home.”



Coronavirus paranoia: Confusion among foreign students at Delhi campuses

New Delhi Correspondent.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jawaharlal Nehru University Thursday asked all students to vacate hostels within 48 hours citing a Delhi government order. For foreign students, it said “special arrangements” would be made. “The university shall remain closed till March 31. All activities, including services in the hostel, schools and administration, are hereby suspended. Accordingly, all students are required to vacate the hostels,” the Registrar said Thursday. “To facilitate students to leave for home, mess facilities will be available for next 48 hours. No mess facilities and services will be available from March 22-31... IHA (Inter Hall Administration) will make essential arrangements for international students who may not be able to leave for their respective countries,” he added. On what these arrangements would entail, Dean of Students Umesh Kadam said they would review the situation in 48 hours. The last of the international students at JNU in doubt. An international student said, “There is confusion among us... some people who were able to leave earlier have left. Those of us who are staying back don’t know till when we’ll be allowed.” There is also no proper sanitation in hostels, washrooms are not cleaned frequently. They are also



not letting food delivery guys enter,” claimed the student. JNU’s International Students’ Association president, who is from North Korea, has been unable to leave his country. “He was supposed to return in the last week of February,” said ISA member Yasmine Omarzada. At Delhi University, there are two hostels for foreign students, one each for men and women, housing 70 students each. “We can take the decision to vacate the hostel but where will these students go? The second issue is even if we ask students to vacate, aren’t we exposing them while they travel? So what we have

decided is that in university-run hostels, we will keep it optional to leave the hostel,” said Dean of Students’ Welfare Rajeev Gupta, who is also Provost of the International Students’ House. DU has students from around 32 countries. At Jamia, foreign students have been allowed to stay back. “If the rules and government permit, they can leave after informing us. Several of them are still in the hostel,” said Jamia PRO Ahmed Azeem. The university has 259 foreign students from 39 countries, more than half of them from Afghanistan.

Sundar Nagar market body asks traders to shut shop until Mar 31 amid coronavirus outbreak

New Delhi Correspondent.

Sundar Nagar Market Traders’ Association president Komal Jain said he has given a call to close shops to prevent transfer of disease, adding that those who want to keep their shops open can do so. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, most shops in South Delhi’s upscale Sundar Nagar market will be closed till March 31. This is the first time in its 80-year history that the market, known for jewellery, handicrafts and restaurants, has taken such a decision. Sundar Nagar Market Traders’ Association president Komal Jain said he has given a call to close shops to prevent transfer of disease, adding that those who want to keep their shops open can do so. “We felt it would be best to close down the market, keeping in mind the safety of our members, traders, staff and also our clients,” he said. When The Indian Express visited the market on Thursday, it was mostly deserted just seven-eight of the 38 shops were open. Even among the shops that were open, some were preparing to shut due to lack of footfall. Mascot’s



book shop owner Vijay Chopra, who was in the process of closing the shop, said he will keep it closed for at least four days on the advisory of the association. Ojas jewellery and handicrafts shopkeeper D D Pandey also said he will close the shop as there are barely any customers.

Coronavirus outbreak: In Noida, govt spaces turn isolation wards

NoidaCorrespondent.

A 150-bed facility was opened at the Bhimrao Ambedkar Hostel in Gautam Budh Nagar University on Thursday for patients who need to be quarantined As the number of COVID-19 cases rise in Gautam Budh Nagar district, the administration has begun converting government spaces into makeshift isolation wards. As of Thursday, four residents had tested positive while test results of others are awaited. A 150-bed facility was opened at the Bhimrao Ambedkar Hostel in Gautam Budh Nagar University on Thursday for patients who need to be quarantined. The single-occupancy hostel rooms have been turned into temporary isolation rooms. The rooms have a bed, a mattress, a pillow and a table. The facility has a welcome desk where two-three officials will be present to provide further information. The Additional District Magistrate and an SDM will be the nodal officers for the facility, while a senior doctor of the health department will oversee medical aspects. Medical officials will work in three shifts, with at least three doctors present



at any given time. The hostel will eventually have a capacity of 300 beds, when fully functional. Patients will be kept at the facility for 14 days and if they show no symptoms, they will be discharged, officials said. Presently, 10 beds are available at the Government Institute of Medical Sciences and another nine beds in the government pediatric hospital in Sector 30. In addition to this, the Asian Institute of Medical Sciences in Sector 40 and Noida Mitra Hospital in Sector 35, both of which are dysfunctional, will also be utilised for the same. The district hospital

in Sector 30, which was due for inauguration since the last one year, has arranged 350 beds for quarantine. At present, the hospital only has services for quarantine as no other departments have been set up. “We are trying to tell people to not panic. People are being brought in for quarantine only if symptoms appear or they have been in contact with a person who contracted the virus. More than 10 samples were sent after two people had tested positive. We are trying to utilise more government spaces,” said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO, Gautam Budh Nagar.

People make panic purchases, shops run out of stocks amid coronavirus fear

New Delhi Correspondent.

Neighbourhood stores have reported a steep rise in the number of customers placing large orders over the past two-three days. News of bare shelves in supermarkets in several countries that have seen a sizable number of coronavirus cases have started to have an impact in Delhi as well, with people stocking up on grocery items. Neighbourhood stores have reported a steep rise in the number of customers placing large orders over the past two-three days. “We have seen a sudden increase in orders for rice, pulses, sugar — almost double. People are primarily buying basics that can get them through for at least a month,” said Chetan Vashisht, who runs Siddhivinayak store in Jangpura Extension. Online stores such as Big Basket and Prime Now (Amazon) are experiencing a longer turnaround time. “I tried to place an order for dry goods today to be delivered tomorrow, but was informed delivery will be delayed. Earlier I was able to get things delivered within a two-hour window,” said Raashi Sehgal, 42, a resident of Saket. In Gurgaon, where malls were ordered shut, stock that usually lasts weeks is running out in days. At a Safal store in DLF5, for example, employees said their stock, which normally lasts a full day, has been running out in barely three hours since the start of this week. “We get fresh stock every morning and have been getting the same quantity as always, but the surge of demand each morning has been overwhelming. Things like onion and garlic, which can last longer, run out by 10 am. People are buying things in bulk, everyone is worried,” said an employee. “At our store, we have today started the practice of allowing only two people inside the shop at a time.



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EDITORIAL

Justice Gogoi’s Rajya Sabha nomination underlines need for cooling-off period for judges

There is a light-hearted maxim that lawyers are fond of quoting: “There are two types of judges those who know the law and those who know the law minister.” The Narendra Modi government’s tenure has seen the emergence of a third type of judge those who know the prime minister. Former Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi’s rushed nomination to the Rajya Sabha has drawn legitimate criticism and analysis concerning its timing and has led to many unfavourable inferences, whether justified or otherwise. In this context, it becomes important to revisit the jurisprudence and political commentary on this subject. Our founding fathers dedicated a considerable amount of time to debating the importance of an independent judiciary and in ensuring that adequate safeguards are installed to prevent interference by the executive or the legislature. This principle was further elaborated upon by the Supreme Court to state that “the constitutional scheme aims at securing an independent judiciary, which is the bulwark of democracy”. Consequently, judicial independence along with the doctrine of separation of powers – between the legislature, executive and the judiciary – have been repeatedly held to form part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Unfortunately, these safeguards are now being callously disregarded. The defence that the BJP propaganda machine is putting forth is that it has happened before. But that is a deliberately disingenuous half-truth designed to mislead the loyal support base that is unlikely to question them further. It is a fact that no elevation of a former judge to the Rajya Sabha was done in an audacious manner that mocks the wisdom of people. There was a cooling-off period (between retirement as a judge and the subsequent nomination), in one case of almost a decade (Justice M Hidayatullah), of almost six years in another (Justice Ranganath Misra). And Justice Baharul Islam was a Rajya Sabha member for over a decade before he became a judge of the Supreme Court and not vice-versa. None of these examples is comparable to the nomination of Justice Gogoi within four months of retirement. His largely deferential treatment of the government qua constitutional challenges, human rights violations and electoral malpractices left much to be desired. Even if these could have been discounted earlier, his nomination to the Rajya Sabha in this rushed manner puts his supporters in an embarrassing position. No previous government, regardless of the BJP’s false spin, adopted such a cavalier attitude to the line drawn between the three pillars of government. In fact, the late Arun Jaitley in 2012 was quick to point out that sometimes post-retirement jobs can influence pre-retirement judgments. Piyush Goyal, Modi’s Cabinet colleague, expressed similar views. But the best view of all came from Justice Gogoi himself when he was hearing a challenge to the Finance Act. He is reported to have cited a view that post-retirement appointments (for judges) are “a scar on the independence of the judiciary”. It seems that it is easier to profess high ideals than to live up to them.

-Vijay Kumar

Nation must stay with vision of founding fathers to fight threat to secular democracy

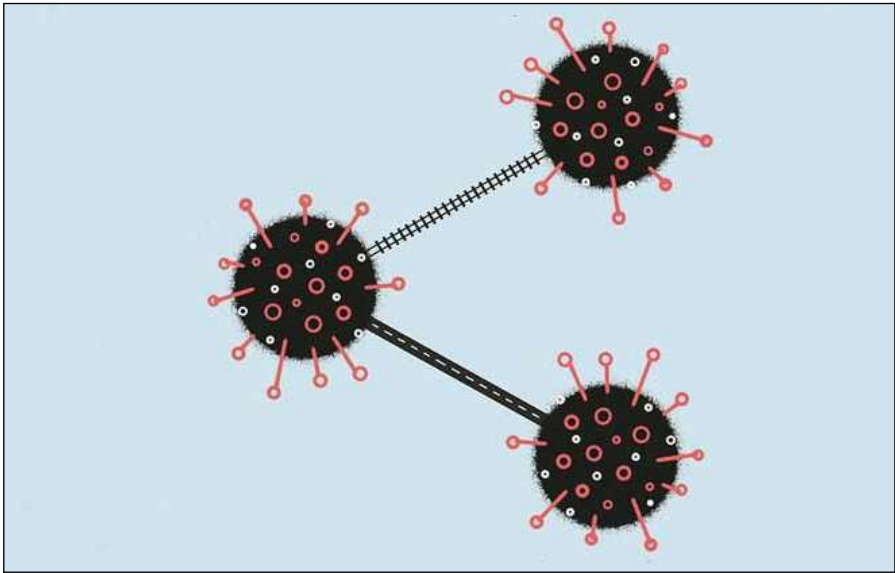
India has the potential to be one of the leading powers of the 21st century. It is the biggest democracy in the world, and is blessed with talented citizens who have made their mark in global business, academia, IT, entertainment and sport. There is so much India can teach the world about its traditions of democracy and ahimsa (non-violence), which is why its friends, including myself, were profoundly disappointed and alarmed by the communal violence that disfigured Delhi in recent weeks. Millions of people around the world remain inspired by the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence. One of his greatest admirers was Nelson Mandela, who recognised a kindred spirit in the fight against oppression and discrimination. When Mandela was awarded the Gandhi Prize in 2008, he called on rising powers like South Africa and India to work together so “democracy and equality becomes a reality” in the international order. His words still ring true today. But speaking as the deputy chair of The Elders, the group of independent global leaders founded by Mandela to work for peace and justice worldwide, I am deeply concerned that Gandhi’s vision is now threatened by sectarian violence and divisive political rhetoric. The attacks on poor, working people, mainly Muslims, in Delhi cannot be separated from the attempts by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to redefine Indian citizenship and who is eligible for it, via the recent Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the proposed National Population Register and National Register of Citizens. These measures would appear to be incompatible with Article 14 of India’s Constitution, which clearly states that all citizens are equal before the law. Together, these developments pose searching questions about India’s democratic future and its place in the global family of nations. Callous imperialism was the handmaiden to India’s violent birth as an independent state. Today, only Indians are responsible for the direction of their country. There is no way that India can overcome its developmental challenges by pitting one religious group against another and turning some Indians into second-class citizens. Yet, I fear this is the precise implication of the CAA and other legislative measures that PM Modi’s government has proposed. When people of one religion are denied access to citizenship that is freely available to others, it prompts memories of some of the darkest periods in recent human history. International observers, including myself, have also been increasingly alarmed at the arbitrary attacks on India’s Muslims based on rumours about sensitive issues such as cow slaughter, beef consumption and inter-communal personal relationships. These actions are tantamount to vigilante punishment, which has a harmful impact on social cohesion as well as the democratic fabric of society. If India were to go further down this path of nationalist and religious discrimination, it would be a political and social catastrophe that could set back the country’s development for generations. The protests in Assam, when this new citizenship law was first introduced on a trial basis last year, were a harbinger of the wider nationwide alarm, and should have prompted the government to pause and listen to its citizens. More than 1.9 million citizens, both Hindus and Muslims, were left off the NRC in Assam when it was introduced in 2019, sparking fears that they could be declared stateless when the next census is carried out in 2021.

We need to restrict the use of crowded public transport to prevent transmission of Covid-19

Swati Piramal

The crowded local train is Mumbai’s lifeline. The city’s supply chain of essential commodities and its residents are heavily dependent on this mode of transport. The local trains, used by more than 7.5 million commuters daily, are being sanitised in a bid to control the spread of coronavirus. Special efforts are being put in to ensure cleanliness and hygiene in all passenger interface areas and components in coaches, including door handles, side handles, grab handles, seats, windows, partitions, etc. In the long-distance trains, disinfection of toilets and washbasins are also being ensured. That said, travelling in the local trains could be the easiest way to contract the virus. The Mumbai locals, which are known to carry commuters 2.6 times more than its capacity, are famous for people breathing down each other’s necks, literally. An infected person travelling on a local train in Mumbai can potentially infect millions. What are other countries doing with their mass transit systems? What can we learn from their experience? Is mere disinfection of the trains enough? In the face of the coronavirus outbreak, health officials are advising citizens to avoid crowds whenever possible, and people are increasingly worried about being in close contact with strangers. For those who use public transit, this concern is top of the mind. Health experts know that Covid-19 causes respiratory problems. This virus is similar to the common cold and other respiratory viruses, which usually spread through exposure to tiny droplets from a sick person’s cough or sneeze.

Scientists have been planning for a pandemic for decades and transport hubs are widely regarded as infection hotspots, with virus transmission rates up to six times higher for those using public transport systems. Airplanes, trains and buses (and the stations and airports you must travel through) provide in many respects the perfect environment for droplet-spread diseases such as coronavirus (Covid-19) to thrive. Most cities with large transit systems, such as in the US, are doubling down on deep cleaning their subway cars, buses, turnstiles, and handrails. The London Underground, which serves roughly 1.2 billion passengers annually, is a particular hotspot. Many mass transit companies have set up pandemic response teams. If the outbreak gets significantly worse, it is up to transit and local officials to use their discretion and shut down the system or reduce service. Authorities in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the outbreak, closed all transportation hubs in an unprecedented quarantine, stopping all travel, ferries, buses and planes from leaving the city when the disease started to take hold in late January. This drastic step, in retrospect, appears to have been most effective in slowing the spread of the virus. What measures can individuals and companies take to reduce risk and effectively slow the spread of the virus? Individuals can consider commuting during non-peak hours, using transport other than mass transit systems, or working from home. Many major companies have asked employees to work from home or instituted a staggered



Scientists have been planning for a pandemic for decades and transport hubs are widely regarded as infection hotspots, with virus transmission rates up to six times higher for those using public transport systems. Airplanes, trains and buses (and the stations and airports you must travel through) provide in many respects the perfect environment for droplet-spread diseases such as coronavirus (Covid-19) to thrive. Most cities with large transit systems, such as in the US, are doubling down on deep cleaning their subway cars, buses, turnstiles, and handrails.

work-from-home plan. If you feel sick or belong to the category classified as “at higher risk” of contracting the coronavirus (older adults, people with chronic medical conditions, etc), staying at home or self-quarantining is the best thing to do. Generally speaking, close contact with people in crowded spaces (whether that be a subway, airplane, or office) makes a person more susceptible to catching the virus. Previous research has shown that using public transport can increase a person’s risk of catching a respiratory infection (the flu or common cold), since “buses and [trains] are crowded with people sitting and standing in close proximity” to one another. Herd immunity (we often say that Indians have great immunity) to other infections may not hold true for the coronavirus since it’s a new virus strain. Preliminary data from China suggests that household contact was an important means of transmission outside of Wuhan — prolonged contact with a sick person increases the risk of transmission. The time spent commuting and the density of people commuting are important factors in assessing if public transportation constitutes a risk for the disease’s transmission. Because public transit naturally requires people to share space with others, it goes against the “social distancing” practices health officials have recommended, such as closing of schools, encouraging remote work, and postponing or cancelling mass gatherings like sporting events, concerts, or religious meetings. According to a 2005 survey conducted in eight regions affected by the 2003 SARS outbreak, six locales — Hong Kong, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Great Britain, and the Netherlands — deemed public transportation the riskiest place to

be in during a pandemic, in comparison to entertainment places, shops, hospitals, workplaces and schools. Countries such as Italy, Iran, Japan, and South Korea have seen a dip in ridership, in part because schools, businesses, and even entire cities have shut down. Cities are still operating some train and bus routes, in addition to thoroughly sanitising them. Some transit systems are using technology to monitor at-risk individuals. Taiwan’s metro agency installed an infra-red tool to measure people’s body temperature before allowing them to enter a train, barring anyone with a temperature above 38 degrees Celsius (or 100 degrees Fahrenheit) from riding. A Chinese tech firm recently developed an algorithm for Beijing subway officials to identify commuters not wearing a mask or wearing it improperly, and Hong Kong’s railway operator rolled out a robot to disinfect trains, in addition to deploying cleaning staff. To contain the risk of spread on public transit, Canadian health authorities recommend that users practise impeccable “hand hygiene”. This means using an alcohol hand sanitiser or washing one’s hands afterwards, and being mindful not to touch one’s face. Commuters are also advised to follow “cough hygiene”, which means not to cough directly into one’s hand and then touch things, or to stifle the cough in one’s elbow. For Mumbai, the pandemic response team on the local trains must use technology and quick response to prevent transmission of the virus. Health workers, police and security, utility and supply chains for food and medicines need to be considered as high priority travellers while travel restrictions could be imposed on others.

Coronavirus challenge underscores the necessity for ‘action in absence of crisis’

Ram Nath Kovind

The outbreak of COVID-19 novel coronavirus has created an unprecedented situation around the world. Humankind is no stranger to calamitous outbreaks of diseases. However, this is the first viral outbreak of this nature and scale in our lifetime. Today my thoughts are with all those battling the virus, with the families of all the victims around the world, and also with the doctors, paramedics and health officials and all others who have put their lives at risk for the rest of us. I commend people for their mature response in the face of the crisis. Their support is helping all institutions to work in a coordinated manner to fight the outbreak. Our healthcare system has shown great alacrity and competence in meeting the extraordinary and evolving challenge. Our leadership and administration have proved their mettle in these testing times.

I believe that together we will weather the storm. I also commend the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, for taking pre-emptive measures in right earnest to contain the pandemic at the very beginning and reaching out to our neighbours in the SAARC to launch joint efforts to check its spread in the neighbourhood. Even the WHO has acknowledged India’s efforts as worthy of emulation for the rest of the world. The outbreak has forced us to keep a respectful distance from others. This isolation, self-imposed or medically mandated, can be taken as an ideal opportunity to ponder on our journey so far and the future path. As we are passing through a tough phase, let us turn this challenge into an opportunity and try to decipher what nature has been telling us through this crisis. The messages are many, but for the purpose of brevity, I would dwell upon a few here. We all know that hygiene is the first and obvious lesson. Precaution is the only cure for this new strain of coronavirus. As precaution, what doctors advise is basic hygiene, apart from social distancing.



Sanitation and cleanliness are among the humblest of civic virtues, and it is easy to underestimate their significance. It needed a Mahatma to attach the utmost priority to them. In South Africa and in India, his historic campaigns always began with, or ran parallel to, the question of sanitation and hygiene. In 1896, Gandhiji was visiting India, and plague broke out in Bombay. He offered his services to the state, and the offer was accepted. As he was in Rajkot, he volunteered there. Do you know what he did as a volunteer? He inspected latrines and exhorted people to pay attention to cleanliness. We need to imbibe his lessons in our daily life, and in this year of his 150th birth anniversary, we may begin by rededicating ourselves to the cause of personal and social hygiene. The nationwide “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” (Mission Clean India) is a precursor to this great social awakening. C Raja Mohan writes: Coronavirus crisis could have

lasting impact on global political economy, trigger new equations among nations. Respect for nature may be the next lesson intended for us. Homo sapiens is the only organism that has overpowered all other animals, taken control of the whole planet, and even set foot on the Moon. Now it stands humbled by a microorganism. We would do well to keep in mind the fact that, at the end of the day, we are merely biological organisms, dependent on other organisms for survival.

Humankind’s craving to control Nature and exploit all its resources for profit can be wiped out in a stroke by an organism we cannot even see with the naked eye. Let us remind ourselves that our ancestors saw Nature as mother, and asked us to respect it. At some point in history, we forgot ancient wisdom. When pandemics and abnormal weather phenomena are becoming the norm, it is time to pause and wonder where we

lost the way, and how we can still make a comeback. Equality may be a factor less apparent, but Nature tells us that we all are equal. This new virus strikes beyond manmade distinctions of religion, race and region. The world has been busy drawing distinctions and waging wars over us-vs-them. But we suddenly realise that in the face of a grave mortal threat like the present one, we have but one identity we are human beings. Inter-dependency is also something we tend to overlook in normal times. In my speeches, I have often referred to the Sanskrit dictum, “vasudhaiva kutumbakam”, which means the whole world is but a family. Today, it turns out to be truer than ever before. We realise how deeply each one of us is connected with everybody else. We are safe in as much as we take care of the safety of others, not only of human beings but also of plants and animals. Faced with an extraordinary crisis, most people tend to be selfish, but this is a crisis that teaches us to think equally of others. Though voluntary services through social mobilisation are not encouraged due to the highly contagious nature of the disease, there are many ways in which people can help contain and mitigate the viral spread. Every citizen can contribute towards raising awareness and equally by refraining from spreading panic, taking prudent precautions advised by the government. Those who can should also share resources, especially with less resourceful neighbours, and senior citizens who are vulnerable to the disease. The coronavirus challenge underscores the necessity for “action in absence of crisis”. Nature is reminding us to acknowledge, with humility, our quintessential equality and inter-dependency. It is a lesson imparted at a heavy price that will come in handy in mitigating global challenges like climate change as well as in building a better, common future. In the meantime, I join you in reaffirming our resolve to come out of the present crisis at the earliest, stronger than ever as a nation.

FIRST COLUMN

Kangana Ranaut starrer Panga is now streaming on this OTT platform



Jaipur, Agency. Panga, starring Kangana Ranaut in the lead role, is now available on OTT platform Hotstar. The film hit screens on January 24. The sports drama, which is helmed by Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, also features Jassie Gill, Neena Gupta and Richa Chadha in pivotal roles. The film focuses on the life of a former Indian Kabaddi player, who defies society's expectations from middle-aged woman, to make a comeback. Panga opened to positive reviews. The Indian Express film critic Shubhra Gupta wrote in her review, "Panga gives us an array of wonderful women walking the talk. Ranaut has the courage to go plain-faced, minus pancake: her sure-footedness right through the film, on and off the mat, is spot-on. Chadha, armed with a bouncy pony-tail and buoyant back-chat, is a lot of fun, as is Neena Gupta's bracing mother." She added, "The two current kabaddi players, whom Jaya spends time with, in the second half, both leave a mark. And it's nice that Jaya is made to work hard for her climactic triumph; the victory is then even sweeter.

Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli: Let's make it safe for everyone by self-isolation



New Delhi, Agency. Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli are doing their bit to spread awareness about coronavirus. The star couple took to their social media handles and shared a video, where they talked about the Covid-19 threat. In the video, Virat said, "We know that we are all going through a very difficult time." Anushka added, "The only way to stop the coronavirus spread is by acting together." The two also shared with their fans that they are social distancing. They said, "We are staying at home for our safety and everyone else's too. You should do it too to prevent the further spread of the virus. Let's make it safe for us and everyone else by self-isolation. Stay home and Stay Healthy." Anushka Sharma was also among the celebrities who took up World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's #SafeHandsChallenge. She posted a video educating her fans about the correct way to wash hands. The actor had on Thursday also shared a long note on Twitter where she discussed several things like social distancing, the importance of hygiene and also the 'Janta Curfew' announced by PM Narendra Modi. India has so far confirmed 195 cases of coronavirus, while the global figure stands at 234,000. Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli shared a video to spread awareness about the need to stay indoors amid the Covid-19 threat.

ZEE5's STATE OF SIEGE: 26/11 – A GRIPPING STORY, WELL TOLD

Mumbai, Agency.

India's leading video streaming platform, ZEE5 has finally premiered the most awaited show State of Siege: 26/11 that centers on the true events of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks from the National Security Guards' (NSG) perspective. On the night of November 26, 2008, terrorists opened indiscriminate firing in a coordinated shooting and bombing attack in Mumbai. The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, one of the most horrific and unfortunate events in the history of India, killed hundreds of people while leaving many badly injured. The sound of gunshots and grenades still reverberates in the financial capital and so does the clamor of sobs and strident outbursts of horror as people plead for life. Over the years, several films, documentaries, and books have drawn inspiration from the grim



reality of 26/11 but seldom do we pay attention to the lesser-known facts and challenges faced by NSG commandos during the

rescue operation. 'Mumbai under siege' tested the mettle of India's elite counter-terrorism unit, The National Security Guard

(NSG) who braved the 'Black Tornado' mission as they named it. A ZEE5 Original 'State of Siege: 26/11' that premiered today will reveal several untold stories about the attack that shook the whole world. India's leading video streaming platform, ZEE5 has finally premiered the most awaited show State of Siege: 26/11 that centers on the true events of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks from the National Security Guards' (NSG) perspective. The narrative reveals the secrets of a war-like zone that shook the foundation of a dream city. Based on Sandeep Unnithan's best-selling novel "Black Tornado: The Three Sieges of Mumbai 26/11," this series is sprawled across eight episodes, each of which brings forth some unsaid accounts of the fateful day. It was an intensely personal experience for me. Everyone remembers where

they were on the night of 26/11. It is one of those memories that's seared into your consciousness." Shares Sandeep. The NSG commandos arrived from New Delhi to Mumbai and used a naval helicopter for an aerial survey. Watch how they freed the hostages at three different places while they successfully took down all attackers, except one – Ajmal Kasab who was later given a death sentence. Yes, it was this long and the NSG conducted this siege without taking a break. The commandos took down 9 out of 10 and rescued over 500 civilians. The unfortunate series of events also witnessed the loss of two Commandos while they fought off the perpetrators resolutely. State of Siege: 26/11 features an impressive cast comprising Arjan Bajwa, Arjun Bijlani, Vivek Dahiya, Mukul Dev, Sid Makkar among other prominent faces.

Kanika Kapoor tests positive for coronavirus

New Delhi Agency.

Singer Kanika Kapoor has been tested positive for coronavirus. The Baby Doll singer was in London just a few days ago. Kanika took to Instagram to share the news. She wrote, "For the past four days, I have had signs of flu. I got myself tested and it came positive for Covid-19. My family and I are in complete quarantine now and following medical advice on how to move forward. Contact mapping of people I have been in touch with is underway as well."

The singer added, "I was scanned at the airport as per normal procedure 10 days ago when I came back home. The symptoms have developed only 4 days ago. At this stage, I would like to urge you all to practice self isolation and get tested if you have the signs. I am feeling ok, like a normal flu and a mild fever. However, we need to be sensible citizens at this time and think of all around us. We can get through this without panic only if we listen to the experts and our local, state and central government directives. Wishing everyone good



health. Jai Hind! Take care. In India, all film, television and web series shoots have been put on hold. Release of movies including 83, Sooryavanshi, Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar have been delayed until further notice. Several national celebrities like Salman Khan, Rita Wilson, Idris Elba, Olga

Kurylenko, Daniel Dae Kim, Kristofer Hivju and Indira Varma have also tested positive for coronavirus. The total number of coronavirus cases in India currently stands at 206. Singer Kanika Kapoor has been tested positive for coronavirus. She was in London just a few days ago.

Amitabh, Alia, Akshay and others shoot special video to spread awareness about coronavirus

New Delhi Agency.

The Bollywood fraternity has come together to be a part of a special video that informs and educates Indians about the ways to check the spread of coronavirus. The special video, which is a Rohit Shetty Picturez Initiative, was posted by megastar Amitabh Bachchan on his Twitter handle. The nearly two-minute-long video features Bollywood A-listers like Akshay Kumar, Madhuri Dixit, Alia Bhatt, Ayushmann Khurrana, Ajay Devgn, Varun Dhawan, Ranveer Singh, Arjun Kapoor and Shilpa Shetty. The stars are seen talking about the pandemic and the dos and don'ts required to contain it, including self-isolation, regularly washing hands, maintaining hygiene and building immunity with healthy food. Film stars in India have been at the forefront of spreading awareness about COVID-19. Apart from sharing social media posts about things to be done to fight the pandemic, actors like Deepika Padukone and Anushka Sharma have also shared videos of themselves participating in the #SafeHandsChallenge. Priyanka Chopra is also among those who are actively trying to educate fans about coronavirus. In India, the number of COVID-19 cases crossed 200 on Friday, including four deaths.



portrayal of North Korea as a place where people actually live, unlike the western image where it is all death and destruction. You can watch

Rajinikanth aces survival challenges in this new Into the Wild clip

New Delhi Agency.

Rajinikanth will be seen on Bear Grylls' show Into the Wild on March 23. The show will be broadcast on Discovery Channel. The Into the Wild episode, featuring Superstar Rajinikanth, will premiere on television on March 23. Discovery Channel on Friday released a sneak peek of



the episode where Bear Grylls and Rajini are taking part in some adventures at the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka. Here, we see Rajinikanth talk about the water crisis that India is facing. He also speaks about his life as a superstar, his bus conductor days, and how he was given an opportunity by K Balachander. Bear Grylls is surprised to know that Rajinikanth is 70 as the actor appears quite fit to the host. Rajinikanth had earlier said in a statement, "Into The Wild is a truly unique show – at one level it offers adrenaline-pumping action, while at another, the show lends itself beautifully to driving a specific purpose for the larger good of society. So, when, officials from Discovery, a brand globally respected for offering inspiring real-life entertainment, approached me, I agreed to finally make my debut on TV after more than four decades of cinema. Kavithalayaa, the iconic Production house founded by my guru K. Balachander, also played a significant role." Bear Grylls had earlier shared a few photos of himself and Rajinikanth on social media.

Suriya's 2D Entertainment suspends ongoing projects amid coronavirus outbreak

New Delhi, Agency. As the coronavirus outbreak spreads across India, actor Suriya's production company 2D Entertainment has announced that they will be suspending all their projects until March 31. The banner took to their official Twitter handle to make the announcement. "In view of the pandemic COVID19 throughout the world, considering the safety of our cast, crew and the public in general, we have stopped filming and post-production of our ongoing projects, commencing today, 19th March 2020, until 31st March 2020. Restraint is the most effective way to combat Corona Virus," their statement read. "We at 2D Entertainment would like all of you to practice social distancing and stay safe during this global crisis. Let's fight this together!," the statement further added. The production and distribution company is currently bankrolling Suriya's upcoming film Soorai Pottru and Jyotika starrer Pon Magal Vandhal. The release of many Tamil films has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In Tamil Nadu, the government recently announced drastic shutdown measures in an attempt to combat the outbreak. According to the announcement, all educational institutions, theaters, malls, gyms, amusement parks and swimming pools will remain shut until March 31.

Top five romantic K-dramas to binge-watch on Netflix

New Delhi Agency.

Here are the top-five romantic K-dramas that you can binge-watch on Netflix to kill time during self-isolation. Yes, the coronavirus outbreak is a bummer. And is the forced self-isolation making you feel even worse about the situation? Not to worry! I have the perfect solution that will not make you feel bad about being crammed inside your house all day. Korean romance dramas. I can guarantee that once you start watching these K-dramas on Netflix, you'll find it hard to stop. The shows are known for their ridiculously good-looking actors, entertaining plots and the best part, they are almost always only one season. So you don't have to worry about a series turning sour. Additionally, they are very easy to

binge-watch and don't require a lot of emotional investment, which is great for mindless TV watching. Today, I will be focusing on the top five romantic dramas that I have watched so far. (Fair warning: I have barely scratched the surface of K-dramas) My current favourite, this series is the story of a rich South Korean girl (Son Ye-jin), who accidentally ends up in the forbidden military lines of North Korea. She is discovered by a North Korean army officer (a terrific Hyun Bin), who decides to protect her and secretly help her return to South Korea. They face several obstacles along the way because of the dispute between their respective countries. But of course, they fall in love. The show is currently among the most popular K-dramas in the world. It received praise for its



portrayal of North Korea as a place where people actually live, unlike the western image where it is all death and destruction. You can watch

if you are curious about the North Korean way of living and of course, whether our beloved lead actors will end up together or not. Starring Son Ye-jin and Jung Hae-in, Something in the Rain is a beautiful, light-hearted rom-com. The show focuses on an unconventional relationship between a 30-something woman and a man who is in his mid-20s. The lead actors' chemistry in the show is so genuine that you cannot help but root for them. The show delves into their struggle with the age difference, breaking the taboo around it and subsequently, finding the courage to go public with it. There is also a fantastic sub-plot that highlights the various problems faced by women in the corporate world of South Korea. A definite must-watch. Descendants of the Sun is considered to be one of

the OG romantic dramas. The show was a major hit upon its release, and it doesn't take long to see why. Primarily a love story between an army captain (Song Joong-ki) and a doctor with a strong moral compass (Song Hye-kyo), the show addresses various conflicts (especially conflicts of the heart) and how it is resolved by the leads. What makes the show even more memorable are the cute moments the lead actors share. Even though circumstances force them to be apart, we are constantly made to feel the separation and angst. Of course, it helps that actors Song Hye-kyo and Song Joong-ki were married in real life (they have since divorced), so most of their affection and romantic moments seem very natural and it will make you swoon. Romantic Doctor;