# 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 coronavirushit 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 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 assauted up son y



- 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 (22) Pay 2 Supta (25) Vir., Shari (26) nd Aksh y Sugh (31 A 2) 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 threeyear 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 ssue guidelines so that renec 10 the ying tactics in ucl cases a future

# Coronavirus: Lucknow shuts all restaurants after singer tests positive; India cases jump to 223

New Delhi, Agency.

Amid a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases in the country, the Delhi government stepped up to contain the virus by shutting down the malls in the national capital. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation too announced that it will close the metro services on Sunday, the day 'Janata curfew' will be imposed. So far, 223 people have been confirmed positive, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said on Friday, while the death toll



has reached four. In a press conference on Friday, the Health Ministry urged citizens to comply with the 'Janata curfew' as "one day's cooperation will help break the chain of transmission". Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal assured there is no shortage of essential commodities to fight coronavirus and appealed to them to maintain social distancing to fight the virus. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday cautioned against complacency on the pandemic while asking people to observe a self-imposed curfew on Sunday by not stepping out of homes between 7 am and 9 pm. Globally, the virus has infected more than 234,000 people and the death toll exceeded 10,000. In Italy, the death toll overtook China's in a stark illustration of how the outbreak has provided toward Europe and the US. It recorded at least 3,405 deaths, or roughly 150 more than in China. California issued a statewide 'stay at home" order for its 40 million residents and Washington warned Americans to return home or stay abroad indefinitely, with the number of coronavirus deaths in the country hitting 200. The Indian Armed Forces have arranged quarantine facilities on standby in four cities Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Vizag and Gorakhpur to accommodate around 1,000 people if required, said Brigadier Anupam Sharma, the nodal officer for coordinating efforts of the Defence Ministry.

## 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.

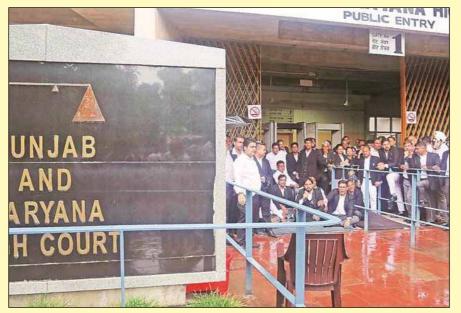
| English Daily Open Search | STATE | New Delhi | Saturday, March 21, 2020

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

Chandigarh, Corresponden

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.

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-yearold youth Gyan was caught by Kadamkuan police station in quick action and a case has been registered under the Poxo Act. The youth is a resident of floods. At present, the youth is under police custody and the police is trying to send him

# 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. "A hile initially we had discussed that wris band my be use i. we decided to instead amp he i as an s can be removed. While w ... ald people, few may be irresponsible," dded Ravi. 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 collect o hone c ar ntine, a ded avi. Of t e t cal 150 s mple 3, 123 w re learly ne ative res lts f 2 are enting some ambel. 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

# '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 infras ructure in schools. Expenditure is being different components such as parks LEDs projectors, building classrooms, greer oard etc. Just by painting a building a colour il 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. Preprimary 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 preprimary 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 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

#### 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 Baijal 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

## 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 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 National Capital Region. Coronavirus at the stations. "The move is aimed at encouraging public to stay indoors and

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 dont's 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 multitasking workers. Meanwhile, the Delhi government

has authorised six state hospitals to collect samples of suspected COVID-10 patients. These are Lok Navak. 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 liam usti sis le f. st priva : lab o got approval for coronaviri 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.

### 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. T e rna ional tudents it J. U in dou it. Ar into national stude it there 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 return in the last week of February," id ISA member Yasmine Omarzada. At I elhi 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.

### 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 fourday 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."

## 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.

# Open Search 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 preretirement 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

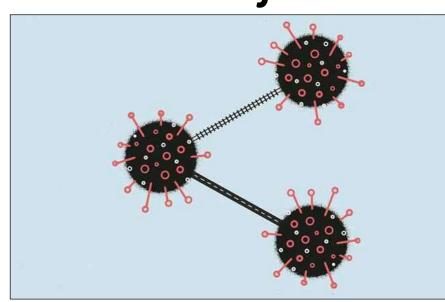
out in 2021.

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

wati Diramal

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 trair i, i ries, was and l nes from leaving the cythen the diseases artec to take now in law january. This wrastic 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 impo tant factors in assessing if public ans ortation constitutes a risk for the disea e's ransmission. Because public trans : na urally requires people to re 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 Mumbai locals

which are known to

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2.6 times more

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train in Mumbai

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What are other

countries doing

with their mass

transit systems?

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 preemptive 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 vou 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 "Swachch 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. Interdependency 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.

#### 5.9-magnitude quake hits Tibet near Nepal border



Beijing, Agency. A 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck China's remote Himalayan region of Tibet close to Nepal on Friday, authorities said. The epicentre of the quake was located 28.63 degrees north latitude and 87.42 degrees east longitude, with a depth of 10 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Centre. Tremors were felt in Tingri county of Xigaze city A 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck China's remote Himalayan region of Tibet close to Nepal on Friday, authorities said. The epicentre of the quake was located 28.63 degrees north latitude and 87.42 degrees east longitude, with a depth of 10 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Centre. Tremors were felt in Tingri county of Xigaze city in Tibet near Mount Everest at 9:33 AM, the local government said, adding that no house collapse or disruption of traffic and communications were reported. The county government has sent officials to villages and towns to collect more information, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Tingri borders Nepal to the south. Most areas of the county belong to the Mount Everest National Nature Reserve, it said. In the meantime, nine firefighters and three fire tenders were dispatched to the epicentre. More than 100 firefighters and dozens of vehicles are on standby. Meanwhile, tremors were also felt in Nepal's capital city Kathmandu and and surrounding districts. The earthquake measuring 6.2 magnitude was recorded at National Seismological Centre in Kathmandu at 7.18 AM. The epicenter of the earthquake was located at Quilling in Tibet, according to the National Seismological Centre of Nepal. No causality or damage to property was reported. Five days ago, western Nepal's tourist hub Pokhara was hit by a 5-magnitude earthquake. PTI KJV/SBP

#### Iran's supreme leader to pardon 10,000 prisoners, including political ones



New York, Agency. On Tuesday, Esmaili said Iran had temporarily freed about 85,000 people from jail, including political prisoners, in response to the coronavirus epidemic. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will pardon in honour of the Iranian new year on Friday, state TV reported. "Those who will be pardoned will not return to jail almost half of those security-related prisoners will be pardoned as well," judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili told state TV on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Esmaili said Iran had temporarily freed about 85,000 people from jail, including political prisoners, in response to the coronavirus epidemic. Esmaili did not sav whether British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe who was temporarily released on Tuesday for two weeks was among those who would be among those who will be pardoned. The United States has urged Iran to free dozens of dual nationals and foreigners held mainly on spying charges, saying Washington would hold the Tehran government directly responsible for any American deaths.

### Virus hits Europe harder than China, is that the price of an open society?

New York, Agency.

The macabre milestones keep coming. By Wednesday, Europe had recorded more coronavirus cases and fatalities than China. On Thursday, Italy by itself passed China in reported deaths. While China claims to have lowered its rate of new cases essentially to zero, Europe's numbers grow faster each about 100,000 confirmed infections and 5,000 deaths in all so far suggesting that the worst is yet to come. So how is it that the new disease, COVID-19, has hit harder in Europe, which had weeks of warning that the epidemic was coming, than in China, where the virus originated and where there are twice as many people? To some extent, experts say, Europeans are paying a price for living in open, affluent democracies, where people are used to free movement.

easy travel and independent decisionmaking, and where governments worry about public opinion. Governments aren't used to giving harsh orders, and citizens aren't used to following them. But China acted with a severity and breadth that stunned the West, making unpopular moves and accepting deep economic damage as the price of containing the disease. It closed off tens of millions of people, prohibiting them from leaving their cities and even their homes, except to get food and medical care, and it imposed lesser restrictions on hundreds of millions, shutting down



whole industries in the process. "China has been willing to go to pretty extraordinary lengths, using the army, using the police, locking people in their homes, using drone technology to monitor behavior, setting up roadblocks," said Dr. Arthur Reingold, head of the epidemiology division at the public health school of the University of California, Berkeley. "Whatever measures have been put in place in Europe really have only been put in place recently, and frankly, and none of them has been as draconian and allencompassing as what was done in Wuhan," Reingold said. The consistency and reliability of the numbers from China and some other countries have been questioned, but the overall situation and its direction are clear.

censor any talk of an outbreak, and medical gear was in critically short supply — it then addressed the crisis seriously. The coercive power of an authoritarian government was only one factor. Speed and aggressive action have been essential, and some East Asian governments have understood that better than their Western counterparts. "They saw what SARS did" in 2003 and 2004, "and they prepared for the next one," said Thomas Frieden, a former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While China lost precious weeks in the beginning, it then moved faster and more decisively than Western countries have. China imposed its first big lockdown, of Wuhan and other cities, While China stumbled in the early going on Jan. 23, less than a month after local — local and regional officials attempted to

facing a new pathogen and barely two weeks after the virus was identified. When Wuhan was closed off, there were fewer than 600 confirmed infections worldwide, though testing had barely begun. "China may have acted late. I have reservations about some measures they implemented, but they controlled the epidemic," Francois Balloux, an epidemiologist at University College London, wrote on Twitter on Thursday. "Doing so, they gave the world a window of opportunity to prepare, which

Europe's first effort to rope off a broad area Italy's much less stringently enforced isolation of the northern region that includes Milan took effect March 8, when the country had reported more than 7,300 cases. Spain and France had similar caseloads the following week, when they chose to ban most public outings nationwide. "You have to do strict social distancing within a week of the start of community transmission, otherwise you get an explosion, and once you get that explosion, it's very hard to contain," Frieden said. "The key is not to get to that point, and much of Europe is beyond that point, and New York is beyond that point." Some parts of East Asia acted quickly but with a very different strategy than China's or Europe's: aggressive testing and contact-tracing to stop the chain of transmission, without shutting down economic activity.

## Italian death toll overtakes China's as coronavirus spreads

Jerusalem, Agency.

The death toll in Italy from the coronavirus overtook China's on Thursday in a stark illustration of how the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States. Italy, with a population of 60 million. recorded at least 3,405 deaths, or roughly 150 more than in China a country with a population over 20 times larger. Italy reached the bleak milestone the same day that Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged three months ago, recorded no new infections, a sign that the communist country's draconian lockdowns were a powerful method to stop the virus' spread. On Thursday, a visiting Chinese Red Cross team criticised Italians' failure to properly quarantine themselves and take the national lockdown seriously. Meanwhile, the damage to the world's largest economy kept piling up, with unemployment claims surging in the United States, while the vi is appeared to be opening 'n al rm 'g new front in Africa, where in 1 ss than three weeks it has spread to 35 countries. The epidemic has also now reached at least one European head of state, 62-year-old Prince Albert II of the tiny principality of Monaco.

The palace announced that he tested positive for the virus but was continuing to work from his office and was being treated by doctors from Princess Grace Hospital, named after his American actress mother. In the US, Congress rushed to pass a \$1 trillion emergency package to help households pull through the crisis, with the first of two possible rounds of relief checks consisting of payments of \$1,000 per adult and \$500 for each child. The worldwide death toll crept toward 10,000 as the  $\,$ total number of infections topped 220,000, including nearly 85,000 people who have recovered. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe pleaded with people to keep their distance from one another to avoid spreading the virus, even as the crisis pushed them to seek comfort. "When you love someone, you should avoid taking them in your arms," he said in Parliament. "It's counterintuitive, and it's painful. The psychological consequences, the way we are living, are very disturbing - but it's what we must do." The American death toll rose to 160, primarily elderly people. Health authorities have cited a variety



of reasons for Italy's high toll, key among them its large population of elderly people, who are particularly susceptible to serious complications from the virus, though severe cases have also been seen in younger patients. Italy has the world's secondoldest population, and the vast raj rity f i , de, 1 - 87% - were ve vo. jon s Sc mia. an sic, a iro. vist at Ger arv's er hard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, said Italy's high death rate could be explained in part by the almost total breakdown of the health system in some areas. "That's what happens when the health system collapses," he said. On a visit to the northern city of Milan, the head of a Chinese Red Cross delegation helping advise Italy said he was shocked to see so many people walking around, using public transportation and eating out. Sun Shuopeng said Wuhan saw infections peak only after a month of a strictly emorcea iockaown. Right now we need to stop all economic activity and we need to stop the mobility of people," he said. "All people should be staying at home in quarantine." Aside from the elderly and the sick, most people have mild or moderate symptoms, like a fever or cough, and most recover in a matter of weeks. Spain has been the hardesthit European country after Italy, and in Madrid a four-star hotel began operating as a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients. The director of the group that runs the Ayre GH Colon hotel tweeted: "365 rooms more to help win the war." The Madrid Hotel Business Association said it has placed 40 hotels with room for 9,000 people at the service of the Madrid region, which has near half of Spain's 17,000 or so cases. In London, home to almost 9 million, the government urged people to stay off

public transportation as authorities considered imposing tougher travel restrictions. The British supermarket chain Sainsbury's reserved the first hour of shopping for vulnerable customers, one of many such efforts around the world.

Iim Gibson. 72, of Lon on said he found not or hi grocel es ti ere in reia ive 'trau na-free' expe ence. be able to get the medicine he needed for his wife and himself, and expressed concerns that Britain's government had been too slow in ramping up testing. "You can't go on ignoring World Health Organisation guidelines - if they're wrong, who the hell is right?" he said. "Let's have no shillyshallying." The British government, which was slow to react to the virus, has shifted gears and is now drawing up legislation giving itself new powers to detain people and restrict gatherings. The bill is expected to be Thursday marked the first time since Jan. 20 that Wuhan showed no new locally transmitted cases, a rare glimmer of hope and perhaps a lesson in the strict measures needed to contain the virus. Wuhan, which has been under a strict lockdown since January, once was the place where thousands lay sick or dying in hurriedly constructed hospitals. But Chinese authorities said all 34 new cases recorded over the previous day had come from abroad. "Today, we have seen the dawn after so many days of hard effort," said Jiao Yahui, a senior inspector at the National Health Commission. Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation warned that the virus is spreading quickly in Africa – an especially alarming development, given the poor state of health care

in many of its countries.

### **US Representative Tulsi** Gabbard ends Democratic presidential bid, endorses Biden

Rome, Agency.

U.S. Representative Tulsi Gabbard, an Iraq War veteran who campaigned to end "forever wars," dropped her long-shot bid for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination on Thursday and endorsed front-runner Joe Biden in a video posted to Twitter. "Although I may not agree with the vice president on every issue, I know that he has a good heart, and he's motivated by his love for our country and the American



people," said Gabbard, 38. She has served as a congresswoman from Hawaii since 2013 and is the first Hindu elected to Congress. The endorsement was something of a surprise given Gabbard's past support for Biden's main rival, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont. But she noted that recent state nominating contests had made it clear that Democratic voters had chosen the former vice president to take on Republican President Donald Trump in November's general election. On Twitter, Biden thanked Gabbard for her service to the country as a veteran and a congresswoman. "I'm grateful to have her support and look forward to working with her to restore honor and decency to the White House," he wrote. Despite remaining mired far behind Biden and Sanders, Gabbard had stayed in the race even as better-known rivals dropped out. In all nine state contests over the last two weeks, she finished behind her contenders who had already abandoned their camp: but still appeared on ballots. Gabbard earned her only two delegates by finishing second in American Samoa, where she was born. Biden has won at least 971 delegates of the 1,991 needed to clinch the nomination in July, while Sanders has collected 737, according to Edison Research an advantage for Biden widely seen as virtually unassailable. A major in the Hawaii National Guard who was deployed in Iraq from 2004 to 2005, Gabbard is a fierce opponent of what she calls "forever wars." Despite her liberal views on most other issues, she has won praise from some Trump supporters and conservative media outlets, where she frequently appears as a commentator. She has consistently opposed U.S. intervention in Syria, going so far as to meet secretly with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in January 2017 during Democratic President Barack Obama's administration, sparking fierce criticism from some in her own party. She became embroiled in an ugly war of words in October after 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton said Gabbard was being "groomed" to disrupt the 2020 election as a third-party candidate. In January, Gabbard sued for defamation, seeking at least \$50 million in damages from Clinton for harming her reputation by allegedly suggesting she was a Russian asset.

### Ebola-hit West African nations on alert amid coronavirus pandemic

New York, Agency.

Although the virus has not yet hit the continent as hard as other parts of the world such as Europe, the World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern over the vulnerability of resource-poor countries with weak health systems. People in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone are ramping up preparations for a potential coronavirus outbreak, with many worried they will see a repeat of the chaos and misinformation associated with the 2014 – 2016 Ebola outbreak. Although the virus has not yet hit the continent as hard as other parts of the world such as Europe, the World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern over the vulnerability of resource-poor countries with weak health systems. The 2014 - 2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa highlighted serious flaws in emergency response systems, with the epidemic ultimately claiming over 11,000 lives by the time the outbreak was officially declared over. In Liberia, authorities have ordered schools to close for at least a week, with at least two confirmed cases of the new coronavirus as of March 18. The second case was identified as a domestic worker in the home of the government official, Nathanial Blama who was the first recorded case in the country after returning from Switzerland. Blama



was allegedly suspended from his position as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency after refusing mandatory quarantine, however Blama disputes this. In communities across the country, memories of the deadly Ebola virus, which killed 4,800, are still strong in people's minds. Prior to the outbreak in 2014, Liberia's health system was still struggling to recover from the civil war which ended in 2003, with only 50 doctors for a population of over 4 million. Teacher Ruby Martine told DW she is already preparing for the worst. You notice I have my gates locked right now," she said, "You don't know who has

the virus, because the people we are depending on to help us during the Ebola crisis can't even help us now because they too have the same problem." Businessman Peter Walker is also concerned about Liberia's ability to cope with another outbreak. "We are very much afraid with what is unfolding now," he told DW. "Ebola came to this country - it started with one case and spread everywhere...We don't have any means to manage this." Misinformation spreads in Guinea As the epicentre of the West Africa Ebola outbreak, Guinea is no stranger to the importance of containment and tracing. But, much like with the Ebola outbreak, misinformation is a key point of concern among residents here, with many left confused as to the symptoms of coronavirus and how exactly it spreads. "I have heard that coronavirus is more dangerous than Ebola," student Fode Soumah told DW. "It is a sickness that can be contracted through bodily heat, so we must therefore take precautions." Scientists say Coronavirus, or COVID-19 - is spread mainly from person-to-person between those who are in close contact with one another and through respiratory droplets produced when a person coughs or sneezes - it was first identified in Wuhan, China in late 2019. It did not reach sub-Saharan Africa until March 9, when the first case was identified in Burkina Faso.

#### Coronavirus outbreak: Some countries are better armoured for epidemics than others

New York, Agency.

No European country is escaping the economic consequences of the coronavirus, but the pain won't be divided equally. Southern Europe, which bore the brunt of the last big economic crisis, will suffer the most. Countries like Greece and Italy depend heavily on tourism and are still suffering the lingering effects of the eurozone debt meltdown over the last decade, including austerity programs that left their health care systems ill prepared for a pandemic. But even countries regarded as paragons of competitiveness, like Germany and the Netherlands, may turn out to have weaknesses that, until a few weeks ago, were regarded as strengths. Germany's automakers, for example, have dominated the luxury car business. But the virus exposed their dependence on sales in China, and now they are closing factories all over the region. Any country with lots of small firms and self-employed people will suffer as well, because these businesses typically have thinner financial reserves to survive a sudden plunge in sales. Greece and Italy are examples, but so is the Netherlands. Other countries may have hidden strengths. An economy with lots of companies that can deliver their services digitally, and where employees can work from home, should be relatively resilient. This could be Estonia's moment; its capital, Tallinn, has a lively digital startup scene. The most important economic policy for any country, economists at Oxford Economics point out, is to get the virus under control. That gives the advantage to countries with effective leaders and well-equipped health care systems. Countries in southern Europe cut back on health care spending during the eurozone debt crisis to meet stringent budget limits that were a condition for receiving bailouts. Now these countries are tragically vulnerable. The virus has spread its woe in unpredictable ways, and there are certain to be more unpleasant surprises. "It's still hard to say which country will be hit the most and which will be the most resilient," said Carsten Brzeski, chief eurozone economist at the Dutch bank ING. "We are still in the middle of the wave." The European economy is.

#### I'll defend French Open title whenever it's played, says Ash Barty



Mumbai, Agency. Ash Barty did not receive a heads up from tournament chief Guy Forget about moving the 2020 edition back by four months but said she would grasp at any chance she gets to defend her title. French Open champion Ash Barty did not receive a heads up from tournament chief Guy Forget about moving the 2020 edition back by four months but said she would grasp at any chance she gets to defend her title. Barty won her maiden Grand Slam title in Paris last June but will have to wait until at least September to return to Roland Garros after the French Tennis Federation (FFT) announced the shift on Tuesday because of the coronavirus pandemic. The FFT have been under fire for making the decision without consulting with other stakeholders but Australian world number one Barty said she was just looking forward to getting the chance to get back out on the famous red clay. "I haven't spoken to Guy Forget but I'm happy to play the tournament whenever it is scheduled," Barty told the Australian Associated Press on Thursday. "I hope I get the chance to defend my title in September - any opportunity to compete is something I'll grab with both hands. "There are more important things going on in the world right now, though, and I will do whatever helps keep us all safe and healthy." Barty last played in a semi-final loss to Petra Kvitova at the Qatar Open in February and faces a long wait before she gets back on court after the WTA suspended the tour until June 7. A freeze in rankings, however, means Barty will stay at the top for another three months

# A footballing Goliath in India, PK Banerjee passes away at 83



New Delhi, Agency. PK Banerjee, India's legendary footballer, passed away Friday at the age of 83 in Kolkata. The former Indian skipper was battling a chest infection since February and was under the supervision of doctors at the Medica Superspecialty Hospital in his hometown. Banerjee had been on life support since March 2 after suffering from respiratory problems due to pneumonia. He also had Parkinson's disease, dementia, and heart problem. Banerjee was first admitted to the hospital on February 6 and his condition had been unstable since then. Baneriee was part of the 1962 Asian Games gold medallist team and also led India in the 1960 Rome Olympics, in which he scored the equaliser against France to help his side secure a 1-1 draw against the European giants. Before the Rome Olympics, Baneriee represented India in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and played a key role in their 4-2 win over Australia in the quarterfinals.

## Cricket boards brace for losses in the time of coronavirus

Mumbai, Agency.

When the mighty Indian cricket board decided this week that only the chief among its national selectors would travel business class, it merely confirmed straitened times for the game amid the coronavirus outbreak. The uncharacteristic austerity by the world's richest cricket board follows its decision earlier this month to halve the winner's purse at this year's Indian Premier League (IPL), a cash cow with a brand value of \$6.8 billion.

The franchise-based Twenty20 league was scheduled to begin on March 29 but has now been postponed until April 15. To many, a condensed tournament, possibly without foreign players, later this year looks like a more realistic prospect. A curtailed or cancelled tournament would mean significant losses for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which gets around 400 million rupees (\$5.38 million) annually from broadcaster STAR India and its central pool of sponsors. "The loss at this stage is notional. The biggest loser in any economic dynamics is always its biggest gainer, which is BCCI in this case,' SportzPower co-founder Thomas Abraham, whose company monitors sports business in India, told Reuters. "For STAR India, it's also a loss of opportunity. It was building the India launch of its Disney+ OTT (streaming service) around the IPL." A truncated tournament would necessitate renegotiation with Disneyowned STAR India, which was not available



to share how it plans to dovetail the launch of its new platform with the IPL. Chinese smartphone maker Vivo, which bagged the 2018-22 title rights for 219 million rupees, is unlikely to suffer a big loss. "They would have been preparing for new launches around IPL. They can still do it," Abraham said. Vivo did not elaborate if the truncation had disrupted their plans to leverage their tournament rights. "In light of the global health risk ... we at Vivo completely support BCCI's decision to postpone the series," Nipun Marya, Director of Vivo India's Brand Strategy, said in a statement to Reuters. "We shall continuously evaluate the situation as it progresses." The BCCI and IPL franchises also pay 20% of a player's annual fee to his home board, which stands to lose that money if it does not allow the cricketer into the IPL due to fears about the coronavirus for example. A shorter tournament will mean

a smaller share from the shrunken central pool of revenues for the eight IPL franchises, not to mention a reduction in gate receipts. Further afield, the Women's Twenty20 World Cup narrowly escaped the health crisis but the outbreak has cast a shadow over the men's event in Australia, which begins on Oct. 18. The International Cricket Council (ICC), which runs the tournament, said it was monitoring the situation.

"We are planning for the event to go ahead as scheduled," it said on the tournament website. Cricket Australia stands to lose some A\$300 million (\$174 million) should the coronavirus outbreak derail their high-profile home test series against India later this year. "We're in uncertain times, and it's difficult to project precisely what will transpire over the next number of months," CA chief executive Kevin Roberts said this week. "But we will be

working through with advice from experts, externally as to what are the various scenarios that are plausible, how likely are they, and how would we plan to deal with each of them." In England, the fate of the inaugural 'The Hundred' championship hangs in the balance after the epicenter of the pandemic moved from Asia to Europe, shutting down most sport on the continent.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have invested heavily in promoting the competition in the 100-ball format, which is scheduled to begin on July 17. "It is clear that every industry, including cricket, will be impacted by this unprecedented situation," Tom Moffat, chief executive of the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA), told Reuters. "It's more important than ever for the cricket industry to work together collaboratively at this time." Individually, top players from outside India risk losing IPL contracts worth millions of dollars if they are unable to travel or their boards deny them permission to play. As far as FICA is concerned, Moffat said, the wellbeing of the players while the world deals with an international health crisis is far more important than cash. "Governing bodies, employers, and leagues owe a duty of care to provide players with a safe workplace," he added. "And enforcing that players travel to, or work in conditions that are unsafe, would not meet that standard."

# Team management backs my approach, don't pay attention to social media: Cheteshwar Pujara

New Delhi, Agency.

Cheteshwar Pujara, who has become one of the most dependable batsmen in the India Test team over the years but has still been

dogged by question marks over his strike rate, says he feels no pressure because the India team management including skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri value his style of play. "I don't think there is too much talk (inside the team on strike rate). In media, it is described differently but the team management has been backing me on this completely. There is no pressure from the captain, coach or anyone else," Pujara,



who is currently getting much-needed family time due to the Covid-19 outbreak, told PTI on Thursday. "I just want to clarify that when it comes to strike rate people start pointing towards the team management's take on it, but there is no pressure on me at all. The team management understands my style of play and its importance," he sai . In 32 ear- 'd from rijke was at t'e receiving end of quest ons or e a ain o so ........dia

# **Athletics Federation of India's Indian GP stopped in its tracks**

New Delhi, Agency.

Despite fears of Coronavirus pandemic, the track and field body was going ahead with the event until the sports ministry banned all events till April 15 Some of India's top javelin throwers, including Neeraj Chopra, and coaches have been put in quarantine rooms for 14 days at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala.

The deputy chief coach of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has isolated himself for a fortnight. At least two national campers were told by NIS officials to leave the premises on Thursday though the AFI had asked them to travel to Patiala from their respective training bases for the first leg of the Indian Grand Prix. At a time when the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has resulted in either the cancellation or postponement of many sports event, including Olympic qualifie s, the AFI over the past week w s a ama t on its ver s cale dar. The vas un T'arsc y hen he spois n. vistry i. a bi to stop to deradio s



like the AFI from conducting national competitions or selection trials issued more stringent restrictions. All national sports federations were told not to conduct 'tournaments and selection trials' till April 15. Olympic-bound athletes are also to be isolated from anyone not a part of their training camp, the advisory ated. The AFI informed coaches and a hletes about the cancellation of the I dian GP. However, there was no

official announcement of the event being called off. The Federation Cup, a qualification event for the Tokyo Olympics, which was scheduled to be held from April 10 to 13 also stands cancelled. When social isolation. selfquarantine and medical screening is being followed across the country and new cases of Coronavirus are being reported daily, the AFI had earlier this week announced that the first and second legs of the Indian Grand Prix series will be held in Patiala on March 20 and 25. This decision was arrived at after taking internal feedback from coaches and officials. Spectators were barred though. The AFI accepted over 175 entries from athletes across the country among them those who would have to take different modes of transport to reach NIS and compete in the same arena as the national campers. The next day, better sense prevailed and the AFI restricted participation in the Indian GP to national campers and some of the events for men and women were culled.

# Express Archives: Second homecoming for Class of 1956

Mumbai Agangy

It took 53 years for the Indian government to acknowledge the country's greatest footballing moment—making the last four at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. At a felicitation function here on Monday, however, the bruises seem to have given way to wrinkled smiles with sips of water between tell-tale stories and posing for the media on request. Despite age catching up with the heroes of yore, the memories from more than half a century back are sharp as ever, and none of the queries regarding November 24-December 5, 1956 went unanswered by the group of 70-year old Olympic veterans.

Two of the surviving members Krishna Pal and Tulsidas Balaram failed to show up for the felicitation. PK Banerjee remembered his injuries "I remained unconscious for nine hours after an injury to my head during our match against Australia. It hit back with a cerebral attack last year" and the lessons of civility "We were littering away on the streets in Melbourne. On looking back, I saw a group of girls picking up the papers. This was quite a lesson," Banerjee added. Teammate Nikhil Nandy talked about the game, speaking of India's 4-2 victory over the hosts, and then the 7-1 thrashing that never made it to the official charts. "There was a lot of chatter from the Australian team after our 4-2 victory in the quarter-finals. They questioned our ability and said we just managed to win on that particular day, inviting us for a re-match against the



same team on our way back. In Sydney, we silenced them with a 7-1 victory," remembered Nandy. The one who wore greatness without vanity Samar Banerjee, the skipper, had some extra, unexpected duties ahead of the very first tie, which, as it turned out, was a smash hit. "Rahim (coach) fell sick and had to be hospitalised soon after our arrival in Australia. I had to coach the team before our first match, which we won," he said.

#### MS Dhoni's India comeback: Virender Sehwag, Wasim Jaffer offer contrasting opinions





Rajkot, Agency.

MS Dhoni's future with the Indian team continues to be a topic of speculation even as international cricket and most domestic cricket has come to a halt. Virender Sehwag and Wasim Jaffer, both former India teammates of Dhoni, offered opposing views on their former captain on Wednesday. "If Dhoni is fit and in form I think we can't look beyond him as he'll be an asset behind the stumps and also lower down the order. It'll take the pressure of keeping off Rahul and India can play Pant as a batsman too if they want a lefty," Jaffer said in a tweet. "Where will he fit in? With the likes of Rishabh Pant and KL Rahul already in form, especially the latter performing exceptionally well of late, I think there is no reason why we should not stick with them," Virender Sehwag, on the other hand, told TOI. Speaking about the T20 World Cup, Sehwag said India will have an edge over other teams with the return of Hardik Pandya. "The whole combination will change with an all-rounder of the calibre of Hardik," he said. The postponement of the IPL has also pushed back Dhoni's return to cricket.

## PK Banerjee: The one who wore greatness without vanity

New York, Agency. .

The Rome Olympics organisers told us we must have a team theme song. We barely had a clue. I took the stage and started singing Dhitang, Dhitang Bole (a Salil Chowdhury composition). Within two minutes the entire Olympic stadium joined the chorus."

PK Banerjee, Pradip da, as we called him was a great recounter. His stories always had a few coats of varnish - how do you justify 80,000 Romans humming to a Bengali song of the IPTA vintage! But that was the legend of the man. He was respected for his football and coaching. Fans and reporters adored him. PK Banerjee, 83, breathed his last at Kolkata hospital on Friday after suffering a massive heart attack. He is survived by his two daughters, and countless pupils and admirers who hero-worshipped him. He was admitted to the hospital on February 7. Gradually, sepsis and multi-organ failure due to pneumonia set in on the background of Parkinson's disease, dementia and heart problems. As a footballer, PK was a trailblazer. someone who brought the modern game to the Kolkata maidan. Till mid-1950s, Kolkata



football was in throes of the Pancha Pandavas – Ahmed Khan, Apparao, P Venkatesh, PB Saleh and Dhanraj. They played for East Bengal and had been very Oriental in their styles. PK brought in power and speed, when he joined Aryan in 1954. "They (defenders) always chased shadow. My Achilles tendon was the worst sufferer," Pradip da's face used to light up every time he recalled his halcyon days. PK liked to boast his on-field exploits but he did that with dignity. There was never a hint of arrogance. It was the mastery of a

master storyteller who revelled in holding court. Born in Jalpaiguri, in north Bengal, PK did his schooling in Jamshedpur and broke into the national reckoning when he played for Bihar in the Santosh Trophy. Soon he was included in the national team for the 1955 Quadrangular Tournament in Dhaka. India won the tournament, defeating Pakistan 2-1 in the final and PK, along with goalkeeper Peter Thangaraj, shone the brightest. The 1956 Melbourne Olympics was where the Indian football found its 'holy trinity' - PK, Chuni Goswami and Tulsidas Balaram. Till date, they remain unmatched. PK played an important role in India's 4-2 win over Australia in the quarterfinals, providing two assists. Although India crashed out of the competition after losing to Yugoslavia in the semifinal and Bulgaria in the third-place tie, the 1956 Olympics performance remains the benchmark for any Indian football team. The 1960 Olympics saw PK's stardom grow, as he scored a goal against France in a 1-1 draw. The 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta followed, which was the highest point in PK's career as a player. India went on to win the football gold under Goswami's leadership.

# 'We are considering different scenarios': IOC president Thomas Bach

Mumbai, Agency.

The opening ceremony is scheduled for July 24, with some 11,000 athletes and even more fans, volunteers, journalists, diplomats and others descending on Tokyo. As coronavirus has swept the globe, placing cities and countries on lockdowns, canceling the spring sports calendar and jeopardizing every major event scheduled for 2020, Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, has not wavered in his determination to hold the Summer Games in Tokyo. The opening ceremony is scheduled for July 24, with some 11,000 athletes and even more fans, volunteers, journalists, diplomats and others descending on Tokyo. Yet complaints about moving ahead have been rising from athletes and other people connected to the Olympics, especially in the countries hardest hit by the disease. In an interview Thursday, Bach acknowledged the increasingly troubling situation but



remained optimistic that infection rates might subside enough to allow the Games to go forward. "We are affected by this crisis like everyone else and we are concerned like everybody else," he said. "We are not living in a bubble or on another planet. We are in the middle of our societies." Here are excerpts from the interview: Q: Is there a date when you have to decide whether the Olympic Games will happen? A: What makes this crisis so unique and so difficult to overcome is the uncertainty.

#### YES Bank fiasco: ED asks Anil Ambani to appear again on March 30



New Delhi, Agency, Reliance Group Chairman Anil Ambani appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday to clarify on the group's exposure to YES Bank, and sought more time from the agency to provide further clarifications on some specific queries. The probe agency has asked him to appear again on March 30. Ambani had been called by the ED in connection with an ongoing money laundering case against YES Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor. Ambani was asked to furnish some important details which are crucial for the case, said an ED official. ADAG is amongst the largest borrower of the bank, with an exposure of around Rs 13,000 crore. Sources said that the ED during questioning asked for his replies on queries related to the group's functioning, utilisation of credit sanctioned and the agreement with the private-sector lender, the official said. An email sent to Reliance group on the specific queries went unanswered. In a media statement, Reliance group said, "Anil Ambani met ED officials (on Thursday) to clarify on the Reliance Group's exposure to YES Bank. He reiterated that the Reliance Group's entire exposure to YES Bank is fully secured and transacted in the ordinary course of business. All transactions between the Reliance Group and YES Bank are in compliance with the law and financial regulations." Ambani also clarified to the agency that Reliance Group had no direct or indirect exposure to Rana Kapoor or his wife or daughters, or any entities controlled by Kapoor or his family. Ambani assured that the Reliance Group will continue to extend its full support and cooperation to all authorities, in its statement. The central agency had issued summons to Ambani to appear last on March 16, but he had sought adjournment and requested an extension.

#### Biocon receives EIR from USFDA for good manufacturing practice inspection



New Delhi, Agency. Biocon on Friday said it has received the establishment inspection report (EIR) from US health regulator for the post-approval and good manufacturing practice (GMP) inspection of its small molecules manufacturing facility in Bengaluru. "The EIR has been closed with a voluntary action indicated (VAI) classification for the observations, the company spokesperson said in a filing to BSE. "Biocon has received the EIR from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the post-approval and GMP inspection of its small molecules active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) manufacturing facility at 20th KM, Biocon Campus, Bengaluru, conducted between Feb 20 and Feb 26, 2020," as per the filing. At the conclusion of the inspection last month, the agency had issued a Form 483, with two observations, which were procedural in nature and are being addressed by the company, the filing said. "We remain committed to global standards of quality and compliance.

# Wi NPA norms may be eased, tax deferment likely in coronavirus healing touch

Mumbai, Agency.

As the Indian economy reels from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the Narendra Modi government is drawing up a relief package for industry. The relaxation of asset-classification norms by banks, thus allowing companies to delay the repayment of loans, and tax holidays for the worst-hit sectors like aviation and hospitality are expected to be part of the package, Business Standard has learnt. These measures could be discussed by the COVID-19 Economic Response Task Force, announced by the Prime Minister.

The task force is also expected to announce sector-specific measures in the coming weeks, government sources said. "There have been discussions at multiple stages, between various ministries and with regulators such as the Reserve Bank of India. Sectoral ministries are giving their suggestions," said a senior government official. The final details were being worked out, the person said. "One plan being strongly considered is loan forbearance. For a specific period, companies will be exempt from the repayment of loans, and banks will relax their asset-classification norms," said the



official. According to the current norms, if a debt is not serviced for 90 days, it is classified as a non-performing asset. After the proposed relaxation, banks will not be classifying outstanding loans as NPAs. The official said discussions were still being held internally and with the RBI on whether such relaxations should be provided to only micro, small and

medium enterprises or larger corporates as well. However, the relaxation on loan repayments won't be sector-specific. "Say you have a hotel, and you have a company which provides security and manpower logistics for the hotel, both are being hit," said a second official. "It will be more difficult to provide relaxations sector-wise," the official added. Another

discussed is whether a temporary tax holiday should be for industry as a whole or sector-specific. Top policymakers are aware of the impact that such a move could have on the already-weak tax revenue collections. Coronavirus fear: Rupee breaches 75 a dollar, hits intra-day low of 75.30 While such a tax deferment will likely be for the April-June 2020-21 quarter, a weak economy is negatively impacting tax collections. For example, the Centre needs to collect Rs 3.06 trillion from direct taxes in 20 days, and Rs 1.11 trillion from indirect taxes in a month to meet the revised estimates (RE) for 2019-20, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur said in the Rajya Sabha in a written reply earlier this week. "These are unprecedented times and we will have to keep aside fiscal considerations," the second official said.

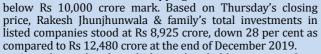
Both officials clarified, however, that so far no fiscal stimulus on the expenditure side was being considered. The revenue foregone due to any tax deferment will be considered a fiscal stimulus.

# Rakesh Jhunjhunwala's portfolio hit 28%; Ashish Dhawan, Dolly Khanna suffer

New Delhi, Agency.

A meltdown in the stock market triggered by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has seen the frontline indices – the S&P BSE Sensex and the Nifty 50 – tank 32 per cent thus far in the calendar year 2020 (CY20). The fall has wiped-off nearly Rs 46 trillion in market capitalisation of the BSE-listed companies.

Amidst the massacre, the networth of high individual investors (HNIs) such as Rakesh Jhunjhunwala & Family, Ashish Dhawan, Anil Kumar Goel & Family, Ashish Ramchandra Kacholia and Dolly Khanna have taken a massive hit. The big bull of Indian equity markets, Rakesh Jhunjhunwala & family, has lost Rs 3,554 crore thus far in CY20, with value their investments slipping



According to data from the latest shareholding pattern where they held an over one percentage point stake reveals that these investors took a painful hit due to sharp correction in shares of mid-and small-cap companies. While the mid-cap index has slipped 27 per cent, the small-coloinal x has los nearly 2 per cent during this period. In that has supped 14 per cent to its 52-week low of Rs 6 JO arest are, for instance, where Rakesh Jhunjhunwala along with his wife Rekha Jhunjhunwala, holds 6.69 per cent stake, the value erosion thus far in CY20 has been Rs 1,710 crore. Jhunjhunwala's investment in Titan based on December 2019 quarter's shareholding pattern now stands at Rs 5,344 crore. NCC, Delta Corp, Karur Vysya Bank, Aptech and Jubilant Life Sciences are among those stocks from Jhunjhunwala's portfolio that took a severe hit, falling more than 50 per cent during the period. However, Lupin, Escorts and Rallis India have outperformed the market by declining less than 20 per cent. In percentage terms, Anil Kumar Goel & Seema Goel who hold stocks of sugar companies such as Dhampur Sugar, Triveni Engineering and Industries, Dwarikesh Sugar and Uttam Sugars in their portfolio, the average value erosion has been 49 per cent to Rs 453 crore. On the other hand, other investors such as Ashish Dhawan, Ashish Ramchandra Kacholia and Dolly Khanna have seen their portfolio value dip between 36 per cent and 44 per cent thus far in CY20. While the jury is still out how long the health scare will continue to impact the markets, analysts at ICICI Securities suggest the real impact to come from the demand side due to the cascading impact of the slowdown. This can eventually lead to suppressed prices and, thereby, financial growth of most companies. "Majority of the negative outcomes from Covid-19 in at least the next two quarters are already discounted across global indices. However, either any delay beyond that or a substantial increase in infection can result in more negative outcomes. Hence, the probability of further downsides in equity indices cannot be ruled out. wrote Chirag Shah and Dhavan Shah of ICICI Securities in a note. Meanwhile, the valuations of the mid-and small-cap segments has dipped below the long-term averages. "Post market correction, current price-earnings (PE) of NSE Midcap Index is -33 per cent/-22 per cent versus its 5/10-yr average. For Nifty50, the same is -21 per cent/-15 per cent. On the other hand, the current PE for our Midcap coverage is -27 per cent/-1 per cent versus its 5/10-yr average," says Sonali Salgaonkar, an analyst with Jefferies tracking these market segments.

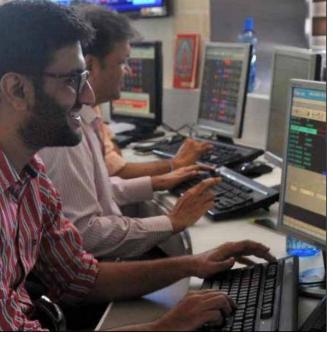
# Sensex takes breather, rallies 1,628 pts; Nifty ends at 8,745

Mumbai, Agency.

After days of brutal sell-off, the domestic equity market witnessed a sharp rebound on Friday and ended with around 6 per cent gains as positive global cues and coordinated efforts by countries across the globe to fight coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic soothed investors' nerves. The S&P BSE Sensex rallied 1,628 points or 5.75 per cent to settle at 29,916. Of 30 constituents, 28 advanced and just 2 declined. Reliance Industries (RIL), HDFC and TCS contributed the most to the index's gains.

ONGC jumped over 18.5 per cent to Rs 72.45 apiece. It ended as the top gainer on the index. Other heavyweights such as RIL, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), and TCS gained in the range of 10-12 per cent. On the downside, HDFC Bank slipped over 1 per cent to Rs 882 after global brokerage house Bernstein downgraded the stock to 'unerperform' and sharply slashed the target price to Rs 750 from Rs 1,400 earlier. On the NSE, headline index Nifty gaine 1482 points or 5.83 per cent to settle 248,7 5 levels. On a weekly ba is, enser slipper xx 1 er cent while N 1,431 st x x per cent. A the ectoral indices on the N E end. d in the gree 1. Nifty

FMCG advanced the most - up around 9 per cent to 26,073 levels while Nifty IT surged over 8.5 per cent to 12,306 points. Metal stocks, too, witnessed solid buying as the Nifty Metal index ended 7.7 per cent higher at 1,695 levels. Asian shares made a partial comeback from a global rout on Friday but still nursed massive losses for the week, while bonds rallied and oil extended its gains. European stocks, too, opened on a positive note. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was 4.41 per cent higher, ending a seven-sessions streak of losses. "A 1,000 million equity shares of Rs 2 each issued at a premium of Rs 8 issued to non-promoters on a preferential basis pursuant to YES Bank Reconstruction Scheme,



2020, approved by Ministry of Finance, are listed and permitted to trade on the Exchange with effect from Thursday, March 19, 2020," BSE said in a notice dated March 18, 2020. COVID-19 causing an economic activity standstill in Mar'20, could see the March and June quarter witness weak credit growth and stretched recoveries causing higher slippages. The next 2-4 weeks might determine the extent of virus proliferation in India and hence the time taken for economic recovery, which we see by H2FY21. Hence for FY21E we lower estimates on loan growth and raise our provisions which could impact FY21/22E PAT by 7.5%/5.3%. With the BFSI space/HDFC Bank correcting by 33% each we revise CUBK's multiple/TP to 2.0x/Rs170 (vs 3.1x/Rs263 earlier).

## Here's why your fuel bill hasn't fallen much despite tumbling crude prices

NEW DELHI, Agency.

You must be wondering why the current freefall in the global oil market is not resulting in commensurate or sharp fall in retail price of petrol and diesel. The answer lies in a plethora of taxes that both Central and state governments levy on the two auto fuels that rob the customers of the real gains that accrue from a subdued oil market. The current base price of petrol stands at just Rs 27.96 a litre while diesel at Rs 31.49 a litre in Delhi (as on March 16, 2020). But customers were paying Rs 69.59 and Rs 62.29 for the two petroleum products, respectively, at the pumps in Delhi on Thursday. Bulk of the retail price consists of taxes that are levied by both the Centre and state governments and



forms an important revenue sources for them. Central taxes (excise duty) on petrol and diesel stands at Rs 22.98 and Rs 18.83 per litre, respectively, while Delhi levies a VAT of Rs 14.79 per litre on petrol and Rs 9.19 per

litre on diesel, effectively taking the total tax component on the two auto fuels to a staggering 54 per cent in the case of petrol and 45 per cent in the case of diesel. The component of taxes is much higher in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and few others states that keep petrol and diesel retail prices much higher for customers in these states.

# Coronavirus impact: Fitch cuts India growth forecast to 5.1% for FY21

New Delhi Agency.

Fitch Ratings on Friday cut India's growth forecast to 5.1 per cent for FY 2020-21, saying the coronavirus outbreak is likely to hit business investment and exports. Fitch had in December 2019 projected India's growth at 5.6 per cent for 2020-21 and 6.5 per cent in the following year. In its Global Economic Outlook 2020, Fitch said the number of people affected by coronavirus will keep rising in the coming weeks but that the outbreak will remain contained. However, there are downside risks to this scenario. Supply-chain disruptions are expected to hit business investment and exports. We see GDP growth to remain broadly steady at 5.1 per cent in the fiscal year 2020-2021 following growth of 5.0 per cent in 2019-2020," Fitch said. For 2021-

22, Fitch projected India's growth to be 6.4 per cent. ALSO READ: Covid-19 to cripple economy: CRISIL cuts FY21 India growth



forecast to 5.2% "The outbreak of the virus is hitting sentiment, while local governments have rolled out measures to contain the

spread of the virus, such as closing schools, cinemas and theatres. While India's linkages with China (e.g. trade and tourism) are modest, manufacturers in India are heavily reliant on key Chinese intermediate inputs especially of electronics and machinery and equipment," Fitch said. The WHO has declared coronavirus pandemic. Over 2 lakh people have been infected globally and the disease caused by it COVID-19 has claimed over 9,000 lives. In India, there are about 195 positive cases and 4 deaths so far from the deadly virus. LSO READ: India's economic policy response to Covid-19 lags global peers: Edelweiss The difficulties facing the Indian economy have been exacerbated by YES Bank failure, it said. "Fragilities in the financial system will further undermine sentiment and domestic spending. The overall financial system remains burdened with weak balance sheets, which will limit any upside to credit and growth despite policymakers' efforts in recent months to ease stresses, Fitch added.

## Bernstein downgrades HDFC Bank on unsecured credit, succession plans

NEW DELHI, Agency.

HDFC Bank stocks fell after brokerage house Bernstein downgraded the bank on exposure to unsecured consumer loans amid a Coronavirus induced slowdown,

and on "non-proactive handling of the management succession so far." The brokerage lowered the bank's rating to 'underperform' from 'market-perform' earlier, and lowered the target price to Rs 750, from Rs 1,400 earlier. "In the current pandemic driven environment. we believe HDFC Bank carries certain idiosyncratic risks and unique management challenges," wrote Gautam Chhugani, analyst with Bernstein, adding, the bank's portfolio is "most exposed to unsecured



consumer credit risk versus peer private banks." The brokerage noted that 24 per cent of earnings and 36 per cent of HDFC Bank's earnings growth were contributed by unsecured consumer finance and that unsecured retail credit is 17 per cent of HDFC Bank's loan book. In comparison, peers ICICI and Axis Banks have 9 per cent of their book in unsecured retail credit. Kotak Mahindra Bank is defensive in its growth in retail unsecured credit and has been highlighting rising risks in unsecured consumer finance for the past two quarters. HDFC Bank's subsidiary HDB Financial services also could pose challenges as it is focused on weaker informal segments. The brokerage also said while HDFC Bank has weathered past crisis well and has been a favourite with foreign investors, success plan is a problem area. "HDFC Bank's impending CEO succession and lack of proactive planning, sets up the bank to lose its sheen with investors who would have preferred less uncertainty. An unsatisfactory outcome of the succession process increases risk of a multiple derating," the analyst wrote. The bank's shares were down 2.90 per cent at Rs 868.85 a piece on the BSE.

#### 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 plainfaced, 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 Ghebrevesus'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- siege' tested the mettle of India's known facts and challenges faced elite counter-terrorism unit, by NSG commandos during the The National Security Guard

(NSG) who braved the 'Black they were on the night of 26/11 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 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

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

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 expects a dear local, state and central gover in it directives. Wishing eve von 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 eer de rre un l frine rouce it minal cele rite like man s, Rita Vilsoi Idris I ba 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 K roor mas l en tested e for coronavirus. She vas in

#### 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 Rajnikanth 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.

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

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.

#### 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 Soorarai 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 selfisolation. 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, vou'll find it hard to stop. The shows are known for their ridiculously goodlooking 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, lighthearted 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,