First 100-bed Covid hospital in suburbs takes shape

SevenHills rises from the dust

Reliance, L&T work with BMC to get the defunct hospital fully equipped, and in ship shape

On Saturday morning, four men, including India’s wealthiest man and Mumbai’s municipal commissioner, took a moment to congratulate one another during a 20-minute-long conference call before getting on with the pressing job at hand. With nine new positive cases reported on Saturday—the city is now averaging eight positive cases a day since March 11—these men have been in a race against time to ready Mumbai’s first Covid hospital in the suburbs before a possible crush overwhelms the healthcare system, as is evident in New York.

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Health workers are using gowns given to those treating AIDS patients

Lack of bodysuits for docs, nurses cripples hospitals

Amid global shortage, manufacturers have increased prices ten-fold; experts say govt must intervene

Health workers are using gowns given to those treating AIDS patients.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) bodysuits that health workers dealing with corona cases must wear. Only a handful of top doctors have access to these suits in Mumbai

MERC allows power distribution utilities to issue average bill for lockdown period

Exception granted as meter reading is not feasible

The state power regulator, Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC), has allowed the power distribution utilities in the state to send average bill to their consumers as it is not feasible to take metre reading during the lockdown period.

The state has four power distribution companies, including the government-owned Mahavitaran Ltd, which distributes power in eastern suburbs of Mumbai such as Bhandup and Mulund and rest of the state. It has nearly three crore consumers.

In Mumbai, three utilities distribute power. The municipal undertaking, BEST, which distributes power in the island city. It has around 10 lakh consumers. The Adani Electricity Mumbai Ltd (AEMI) supplies power between Bandra and Bhayander, Kurla and Mankhurd and Kurla and Kanjurmarg. It has around 30 lakh consumers.

Tata Power, which has licence to supply power across Mumbai, has around seven lakh consumers.

Meanwhile, electricity consumers and industrial organisations’ state level coordination committee has written a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, demanding that the industry should be given waiver in fixed charges as it is suffering huge losses due to the lockdown.

There are around 4.12 lakh industrial consumers in the state. If the government waives fixed charges for one month, the state will have to pay huge losses due to the lockdown.

The electricity bill consists of two components – fixed charges and variable cost. The fixed charge is charged toward distribution infrastructure, staff’s salary, interest on loans etc, and variable cost consists of power purchase cost of the utility.

Quarantined man runs out naked, bites woman, 90, to death

A 34-year-old man in Tamil Nadu’s southern district of Theni, who was on mandatory home quarantine – a precautionary measure taken to prevent the spread of the virus - ran out of his house on Friday night and killed a 90-year-old woman by biting her throat.

Police said the man, a native of Bodinayakanur town in Theni district, had returned from Sri Lanka a week ago. He was “mentally disturbed” after being home quarantined to rule out Covid-19. He is a textile trader, according to sources. Late on Friday, the man ran out of his home naked and bit the throat of Natchiammal, who was sleeping on the verandah outside her home on Baktha Seva Street. Hearing her cries, neighbours came to the spot, beat him up, tied up his hands and handed him over to the police.

The woman was admitted to Theni Government Medical College Hospital where she succumbed on Saturday morning. — Gladwin Emmanuel

Mumbai

Total cases rise to over 900, death toll 19

The number of total COVID-19 cases climbed to 918 on Saturday, while the death toll remained at 19, according to the Union Health Ministry. While Maharashtra has reported five deaths, three died in Gujarat, two in Karnataka, two in Madhya Pradesh and one each from Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.

In its updated data, released at 5.45 PM yesterday, the ministry stated the number of active Covid-19 cases in the country is 819, while 79 people were either cured or discharged and one had migrated. The total number of cases includes 47 foreigners, the data stated.

Meanwhile, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Saturday inaugurated a 24x7 national tele-consultation centre at the AIIMS through which doctors in other hospitals and medical colleges will be provided clinical guidance on managing the patients.

Online Covid-19 portal, which was launched on March 25, is available on the government’s dedicated helpline 1800-1802-480 and can be accessed through the website https://covid19.mohfw.gov.in. People can also use the CEAT website: https://covid19.ceat.com.

Covid-19 spread of the virus – ran out of his house on Friday night and killed a 90-year-old woman by biting her throat.

As cases rise in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the rest of the state, more and more hospitals are being enlisted to start isolation facilities. But this entire effort will come to a naught if health workers are not provided PPEs because exposing health workers to a grave danger to their own health is not going to help anyone.

In just last 48 hours, 22 new positive cases were reported in MMR, while the daily tally has now risen to 108.

So far, city private hospitals that have created isolation facilities are – Jaslok (13 beds), Sir H N Reliance Hospital (2 beds), Kokilaben Hospital (10 beds), Hinduja Hospital (10 beds), Lilavati Hospital (6 beds) 5 L Raheja Hospital (10 beds), and Bombay Hospital (10 beds).

While hospital management are trying to arrange PPEs for their staff, the manufacturers have increased the prices ten-fold. “It is extremely difficult to buy at such high prices. The government must intervene and control prices,” a senior Jaslok doctor said.

Dr Asit Khanna, senior consultant, general and interventional cardiology, said expenditure on healthcare in India is one of the lowest in the world. “If corona does not wake up our lawmakers and if they don’t start revamping healthcare setup in India, then we are doomed. This pandemic is the right time to get the right equipment and people in the right place,” he said.
15,000 gather at APMC as 1,000 trucks arrive

The market, which received fewer trucks than usual in the initial days of the lockdown, received five times its capacity on Saturday after govt eased lockdown norms for essentials

Spain forbids firms from firing people

The Spanish government has banned layoffs in the country, saying it had put enough measures in place for temporary leaves to be granted to employees instead. Employment Minister Yolanda Diaz said on Friday that nobody was allowed to use Covid-19 as an excuse to fire people”, reports El País.

“It is not necessary to fire anyone in this country, this crisis is a parenthesis, we believe there are sufficient mechanisms in this country for people to use public resources responsibly,” she added, adding that the government had simplified the process of placing employees on temporary leave by simply filling out a basic form.

Trump to get auto giant GM to make ventilators

US President Donald Trump on Friday invoked a wartime law to force “time-wasting” auto giant General Motors to make ventilators to save lives, amid a mounting coronavirus cases in America, now the global epicentre.

Trump invoked the Korean War-era Defence Production Act, which allows a president to force companies to make products for national defence. He said on Friday that “GM was wasting time” on price negotiations and action was needed to save American lives.

The US now has over 104,000 cases of the virus, the most in the world. With over 1,700 deaths and 21,520 infections appears to be slowing. The country has the world’s second-highest coronavirus death toll after Italy with 5,680 fatalities. The number of confirmed fatalities has jumped to 72,244 as the country moves to significantly increased testing.

Although Spain’s latest figures showed a daily increase of more than 8,000 cases, the rate of new infections appears to be slowing. Madrid remains the worst-hit region, with 2,757 deaths and 21,520 infections, leaving hospitals and morguaries overwhelmed, and the regional authorities working to open a second temporary morgue in an unused public building near the airport.

Spain counts 852 deaths in 24 hours

The death toll in Spain surged over 5,600 on Saturday after a record 852 people died in 24 hours, and the number of infections soared over 72,000, the government said. The country has the world’s second-highest coronavirus death toll after Italy with 5,680 fatalities. The number of confirmed fatalities has jumped to 72,244 as the country moves to significantly increased testing.

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Tempo driver runs over 4 labourers

They were part of a group of 7 trying to return to their hometown in Rajasthan, but were asked to go back at the Gujarat border

Civic body ties up with medical and grocery stores

Residents of Kalyan-Dombivali will be able to get essentials delivered to their doorsteps

KDMC asked citizens not to crowd vegetable markets and grocery stores.
Australia death toll reaches 14

Australia on Saturday stepped up the enforcement of social distancing rules to limit the spread of coronavirus, as the death toll in the country from the pandemic rose to 14 with over 1,245 confirmed cases. An 80-year-old woman on Friday became the 14th person in Australia to die after contracting the infection. The woman died in an aged-care facility in New South Wales (NSW) state where several residents and employees have tested positive for the virus. “Words fail hope from Monday, we will be able to distribute free food from CSMT base kitchen as well. This distribution work will continue till the lockdown is lifted,” said an IRCTC official.

Parcel specials

The Western and Central Railway have decided to run special trains called parcel specials for transportation of essential commodities in the country. The trains will run between Kalyan and New Delhi, Nashik and New Delhi, Kalyan and Santragachi in West Bengal and Kalyan and Guwahati. The Western Railway had decided to run parcel special train from Ahmedabad to Sambhur (SGTY), Bandra terminus to Ludhiana, Bandra Terminus to Nagercoil, Ahmedabad to Cuttuck, and Ahmedabad to Delhi-Chandigarh-Ludhiana.

IRCTC to provide free meals from today

Food packets will be distributed to thousands of needy people in the city through RPF and NGOs

The IRCTC’s base kitchen at Mumbai Central

In Mumbai, 15,000 food packets can be prepared in the base kitchen of IRCTC at Chhatrapati Shivaji Mahadajadra Terminal. The base kitchen at Mumbai Central also has the capacity to prepare 15,000 meal packets.

Around 2,000 meals consisting of dal khichdi and pickle will be distributed by the IRCTC from its base kitchen at Mumbai Central on Sunday. These simple meals are being made available for onward distribution through the channels of NGOs and railways’ commercial department.

The major NGOs involved are Salvation Army Mumbai, Future India Foundation, and Ahmaddabad Olympic Club.

Three people arrested and booked under the Essential Commodities Act

Three people arrested and booked under the Essential Commodities Act

Three people were arrested by the Crime Branch and booked under the Essential Commodities Act.

The accused (with faces covered) in the Crime Branch custody

The accused have been booked under the Essential Commodities Act.

Rail coaches being turned into isolation wards

The railways has manufactured a prototype of an isolation ward for treating coronavirus patients by converting non-air-conditioned train coaches, it said on Saturday.

Once the best practices are finalized in the next few days, each railway zone would manufacture rake with 10 coaches every week, the national transporter added.

“The government is assessing the needs of the states and whichever region needs the coaches,” Northern Railway spokesperson Deepak Kumar said.

The prototype was manufactured at the Jagadri workshop of the Northern Railways in Haryana’s Yamunanagar. A senior official of the workshop said that a Link Hofmann Busch (LHB) coach was used for the purpose.

To make the modified isolation ward, the middle berth was removed, the lower portion of the compartment plugged by plywood and a provision of partition provided from the aisle to ensure isolation of the compartment, the railways said. Each coach would have a self-contained unit added.

For medical equipment to be plugged in, the railways has provided 220-volt electrical points in each compartment, which have air curtains segregating one patient from the other.

MMB
BMC to disband Dadar vegetable market, set up smaller ones

Smaller markets will be set up at Somaiya ground, MMRDA ground and two check nakas at Mulund and Dahisar

Indira Canteens to provide free food to poor

Small Canteens will provide free food to poor

Chembur woman fights for her life in Fortis ICU

Despite having symptoms, 43-year-old was turned down twice by Kasturba as she hadn't travelled recently or met anyone who had; relatives now being tested

Fortis hospital at Mulund, where she is being treated. She had telephoned Kasturba Hospital's help line on March 19 and again on March 21.
SevenHills rises from the dust
Rs 500 crore donation by the Tata Trusts announced on Saturday. But SevenHills is the first concrete result of the cooperation between the municipal corporation and private players in battling an escalating crisis.
With the number of cases rapidly on the rise in the city, there is a mad dash to get the SevenHills facility up and running soon. The hospital, which came up on BMC land in 2010, and briefly became famous as the hospital where Aishwarya Rai delivered, was to have 20% of its 150 beds reserved for the poor. But financial mismanagement led to a spectacular collapse in 2017, after several specialist doctors quit. Few would have imagined then that just three years on, the defunct hospital would be on the front lines of combating the worst pandemic in two generations. On March 18, as Indians travelling abroad started coming back in large numbers, the BMC opened a 147-bed quarantine facility there. All passengers who arrive at the city’s international airport are taken there for quarantine after being screened. The facility currently has 100 doctors and 150 nurses and other paramedics from various BMC-run hospitals.
Saturday’s conference call ended on the note that by next week, the 100-bed facility will be ready, with 30 beds dedicated to the ICU. The Reliance Group’s other hospital, the HN Reliance Foundation in Giranag, has been turned into a dedicated Covid-19 treatment centre at SevenHills. A team is working round-the-clock on the new facility which will be spread over the building’s sixth and seventh floors, with the ICU located on the third floor. “The team includes engineers, doctors and other experts and we are hoping that by next week, another 65 beds will be installed,” says Dr Mohan Joshi, who has been in charge of SevenHills Hospital, and has been stationed there since March 17. “The plan is to also develop a thousand-bed isolation centre,” adds Dr Joshi. Jupiter Hospital, a multi-care tertiary hospital, has also agreed to build another hundred-bed isolation unit on its fourth and fifth floor,” says another a MCGM officer not wanting to be quoted. All treatment at the facility will be free.
Dr Tarang Gianchandani, CEO of HN Reliance adds, “Our staff is working on a rotational basis and we are adhering to international guidelines for the safety of our healthcare professionals.” Each of the beds will be kitted up with equipment such as ventilators, pacemakers, dialysis machines and patient-monitoring devices. The facility will also have a negative-pressure room that will help prevent cross-contamination and control the spread of infection, he says.
Besides Reliance Industries, Larsen & Toubro has also joined in the initiative. “LT&T will help us revamp the hospital and it is expected to be up in six months. The building needs maintenance, since the lifts are not working, the electrical system and the roof needs work,” says the BMC official. “LT&T are sending over their engineers to help with all this including repair-piping.”

STEPS TAKEN TO DECONGEST KALYAN WHOLESALE MARKET
Civic body identifies four public grounds where trucks can unload produce

As cases rise, health workers face protective gear shortages

Continued from Page 1

A junior doctor from Patna, on the condition of anonymity, told Mirror that their hospital had nowhere near enough equipment for the entire staff. “The person in charge of storage here has told me that they have 500 PPE kits right now,” said the health worker, “and our staff is in the thousands.” The situation is the same across hospitals in Bihar, said the doctor, who has been coordinat-
ing with his colleagues on the issue. Health workers have already begun contacting the virus, as evi-
denced by a letter from the Junior Doctors Association of Nalanda Medical College and Hospital, to their Medical Superintendent on March 23. The letter asked if 83 doc-
tors who had fallen ill could stay in quarantine. Many had started show-
ing symptoms of fever and dry cough after treating suspected Covid-19 patients around Holi, earlier in March, without the correct protective equipment. They are yet to receive an answer from their admin-
istration. NMCH is now Bihar’s nodal centre for Covid-19, and expects to see a sharp spike in patient numbers. According to news reports, on March 28, India needs 38 million masks and 6.2 million pieces of PPE, but currently has 9.1 million masks and 8,000 body coverals. HILL Lifecare, the centre-appointed nodal agency to procure PPE, refused to comment on this to Mirror. Dr Sanjay Aora, founder of Suburban Diagnostics, which is one of the approved Covid-19 private testing laboratories in Mumbai. They have eight collection points in Mumbai and six in Pune, and have staff collect-
ing samples from homes of patients in Mumbai, Thane and Pune.
Daily, they collect more than 150 samples. “We only have the 200 kits we need for tomorrow,” said Dr Aora. His regular vendor, he said, could supply them with a fully assembled kit, but is overwhelmed with orders from other hospitals and path labs, and the supply has been hit by a lockdown, in which state borders have been sealed and manufacturing units shut down. Instead, Aora’s staff has been pick-
ing up parts from different vendors, assembling them in the office, and sending them to their 30 team mem-
bers who are engaged with home col-
cections and mapping collection centres.
“If you’re in a centre,” he said, “you can wear one kit for one shift. But you have to change the kit for each home visit.” His team works 14 hours a day to procure and assemble enough kits for the next one. The government was not pre-
pared, say doctors on the condition of anonymity. Nobody was prepared for the pandemic hitting India the way it did. Now they fear that panic buying, and deliberate hoarding, will make getting PPE even harder for doctors.
Health activist Malini Aisola, with the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), said the government didn’t prepare in time, and now its deci-
sions seem to be made in panic. Despite the World Health Organisation warning India to stockpile PPE on February 27, the govern-
ment did not take enough action. She also called making HILL the nodal agency for central and state health bodies a mistake, as the agen-
cy neither stocked enough PPE for all, nor did it make their documents public. It also alienated manufactur-
ers by setting unreasonable standards in some cases, she said.
“States should try and procure their own PPE now,” said Aisola. Some parties are more optimistic than others however. Joy Chakraborty, the CEO of Mumbai’s Hinduja Hospital, one of the centres treating Covid-19 patients, said they had enough PPE for three days and were working very closely with the Maharashtra government to procure more.
Even as existing companies struggle to manufacture and supply PPE in the national lockdown, compa-
nies from other sectors have offered creative solutions. Mumbai-based 3D printer manufacturing company Boson Machines has started printing out face shields that have been approved by doctors from Jaslok Hospital. Two weeks ago, said co-founder Arjun Panchal, an intern brought the worldwide PPE shortage to their attention. Since then, they have received orders for 25,000 shields from across India, The Brinhanmumbai Municipal Corporation, said Panchal, has allowed them to open their factory and are trying to up their daily capac-
ity from 400 shields to a few thou-
sand.
7 labourers stuck in Dadar

Seven men working at an under-construction building in Dadar near Sena Bhavan had to spend several days without food or money due to the lockdown. After repeated appeals on social media, they were able to get some groceries on Friday night.

Their supervisor was sending them food until last week. After the lockdown, they lost touch with him. By Wednesday, they had used up all the money they had on themselves. They just want to return home now. “I am ready to go through any length of quarantine if I am allowed to go home. Here, we will just starve,” said Mungase.

“My only family is my grandmother. If I told her about my condition here, she will die of a heart attack. If I stay here, I may die before her,” he said. SATISH MALAVADE & PAYAL GWALANI

Community kitchen set up in Kandivali

BJP corporator from Kandivali Kamlesh Yadav has started a community kitchen to help feed the needy as the city faces a strict lockdown. With the help of civic authorities, he has also ensured that a welfare centre is set up in the locality for the destitute.

He says the idea behind this step is to ensure that nobody in his locality goes to sleep hungry.

“We are also ensuring everybody observes social distance,” said Yadav. “At first, we thought of distributing food twice a day. However, it would have required distributing food twice a day. However, it would have required more interaction, more crowding and too many resources,” he said.

On Saturday, more than 1,400 people were fed. “We had prepared food sufficient for at least 5,000 people,” said Yadav. PAYAL GWALANI

Phishing in the times of corona

A 46-year-old man lost over a lakh of his hard-earned money and became a victim of phishing. The victim, Abhijit Gavali, a resident of Goregaon East, had downloaded an app that claimed it would make his phone vibrate if it detected a coronavirus positive nearby.

“I had downloaded the application on Thursday. It sent me an OTP which I entered,” said Gavali.

On Friday, however, after he got his salary, he lost Rs 1.06 lakh in three transactions within a few hours. Gavali has informed his bank and lodged a complaint with the Vasant police.

AMIT KOTKAR & VINAY DALVI

Locked down and out

Chaos, confusion and a stampede-like situation prevailed at the Delhi-Ghaziabad border as hundreds of migrant workers fought to get seats on the limited number of buses the UP administration operated on Saturday to ferry them to their homes.

Hundreds of migrant workers from Delhi, Haryana and even Punjab reached Anand Vilhar, Ghaziur and Ghaziabad’s Lal Kuan area after an arduous trek on foot to take buses to their respective native places.

The imposition of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown has left migrant workers with no means to earn a living, forcing them to undertake long journeys on foot to their far-flung homes in the absence of any means of transport.

STAY INSIDE, THE WORLD IS HEALING

Empty roads and beaches are being taken over by wild animals

With humans under lockdown, nature has taken over the earth as skies have begun to clear, wild animals are reclaiming their turf and the world in general seems to be healing.

Many wild animals, including several from endangered species, have been spotted on the deserted streets at several places.

In India, videos shared by Indian Forest Service (IFS) officials show wild animals, including the critically endangered Malabar large-spotted civet which was last seen in 1990, taking over the streets of Kozhikode in Kerala.

Another video shows a Nilgai (blue bull or Asian antelope) walking freely outside a mall in Noida. Though Nilgais inhabit the area and a number of accidents on highways have been reported on roads in this part of the state, it is not usual to see it walking inside the city.

Susanta De, an IFS officer from Odisha, posted a video of a group of Sambar walking on the road near Hardwar. Forest Officials say the ‘barasinghas’ are from the Jhilmil Jheel Conservation Reserve, a marshy grassland near Hardwar.

Endangered olive ridley turtles have returned for mass nesting at the Rushikulya River mouth in Odisha. Forest officials also found an extremely rare albino turtle there.

Spotted deer were seen running in the lanes of Dehradun, while sambar deer took over the streets of Chandigarh.

On the world front, seagulls, cormorants, pelicans and other birds are flocking to the beaches in Peru’s capital city of Lima; a flock of ducks out and about in Patna.

Air quality picks up

Air quality is improving in countries under coronavirus quarantines, experts say, but it is far too early to speak of long-term change.

Images by the US space agency NASA are clear, in February the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) fell dramatically in Wuhan, China, which has been locked down to fight a resurgence in NO2 emissions.

As China moves past the peak of its crisis, however, recent images by the European Space Agency (ESA) show a resurgence in NO2 emissions.

A striking reduction has also been observed by the ESA in northern Italy, which has been locked down to fight a spread of the novel coronavirus, which causes COVID-19.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) reports a similar change in Barcelona and Madrid, where Spanish authorities issued confinement orders in mid March.
When they’re not participating in virtual conferences and concerts, they’re cooking, cleaning and connecting with family, friends and fans. These celeb self-isolation diaries will make you wonder if you’re packing enough into your days.

**COOKING ADVENTURES AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

*Aditi Mittal, stand-up comic, 34*

The first day of my isolation, I had just got home from a tour, and so I sat in bed and ate chips. On day two, I put on a bra, which is the unofficial indicator of being “ready”, and worked out. And then sat at my laptop and ate chips. The next day, I read the news in detail and chatted with some doctor friends, and then lay catatonic on my sofa, worrying, and in awe of the health workers who are taking on the pandemic. In the days since, I’ve been moisturising my arms and legs nine times a day. I also realised I’m addicted to a chat-at-6 pm routine. There’s no chaat ka saaman at home so I’ve been throwing random masalas into chawli and rajma to see if the same effect can be achieved.

I’ve developed a semi-romantic relationship with my phone, and now have the time to respond to trolls in their own language. But I’ve also been getting numerous warm and encouraging messages from people who see my work. I, too, have emailed authors Andrea Long Chu and Shilpa Phadke, whose books *Females and Why-Loiter?* I just read and loved. I also re-read *Chup* by Deepa Narayan-Parker — who I’d interviewed for my podcast, *Women in Labour* — for the fourth time.

The way I see it, when all this ends, there will be three problems — divorces, a baby boom and anxiety about how to talk to people in person again. But on a more serious note, yes there’s anxiety about the pandemic and supplies, but I’m also keeping busy cleaning the house and moving around a lot.

**BIG TAKEAWAY:** I’ve been grappling with my own privilege and trying to reconcile it with the world and its many horrors. When you’re at home. I have been utilising the time to work — I don’t think work should ever stop — as a lot can be done over phone calls. I’m also using the break to plan ahead, introspect, and spend time with my family. I have been posting messages from time to time, to remind people how important this period of self-isolation is.

The whole day belongs to me, I adjust my routine as it suits me, but I fit in work, exercise, important phone calls, and time for my family into each day. Also, I’ve been keeping in touch with friends, which I think is so necessary.

**WORK WHERE AND WHEN YOU CAN**

*Sachin Tendulkar, Bharat Ratna recipient, cricket legend, 46*

When you’re not participating in virtual conferences and concerts, they’re cooking, cleaning and connecting with family, friends and fans. These celeb self-isolation diaries will make you wonder if you’re packing enough into your days.

The way I see it, it’s not just me alone, we are all in this together and have to self-isolate for each other’s sake. It’s not that nothing can be done when you’re at home. I have been utilising the time to work — I don’t think work should ever stop — as a lot can be done over phone calls. I’m also using the break to plan ahead, introspect, and spend time with my family. I have been posting messages from time to time, to remind people how important this period of self-isolation is.

Because the whole day belongs to me, I adjust my routine as it suits me, but I fit in work, exercise, important phone calls, and time for my family into each day. Also, I’ve been keeping in touch with friends, which I think is so necessary.

**BIG TAKEAWAY:** We need to go back to the basics, and teach our children to be more independent, too. I am finding great joy in doing simple things.

**THE LOSS OF ROUTINE HELPS GAIN CLARITY**

*Annie Zaidi, author, 41*

Initially, I only stepped out to get groceries occasionally; in the last few days, I haven’t been out at all. Being a freelance writer, even during normal times, a large part of my day is spent in isolation, revolve as it does around reading and writing. So, self-isolating isn’t such a great strain on me except that I can’t step out even for walks and am not used to home workout routines. I’m waking up a little later than usual and eating and doing chores at odd hours. I’m regretting not having enough comfortable ‘home’ clothes and having too many uncomfortable ‘outside’ clothes. A major change has been an increased dependence on e-commerce. Possible data breaches and digital surveillance bother me and I normally avoid shopping online. I like to feel objects physically before buying them, too. But right now, that’s not an option. The shortage of supplies — the groceries and medicine shops in my neighbourhood are running out — is making me anxious. I was supposed to travel to the UK in May for the release of my book, *Bread, Cement, Cactus: A Memoir of Belonging and Dislocation* — this has been indefinitely postponed.

**BIG TAKEAWAY:** Small personal disappointments like cancelled travel plans really don’t matter in the larger context. In times like these, we realise how much we can do without, and the proportion of our own privilege.

**R&R MEANS READING AND RECONNECTING**

*Amish, author and diplomat, 45*

I am not much of a social person, so I am not really missing the socialising that was required of me as director of The Nehru Centre in London. Currently, I am reading *The Greatest Ode to Lord Rama* by Pavan Verma, *Sixteen Stormy Days* by Tripurdaman Singh and *The Cases That India Forgot* by Chintan Chandrachud. In a way, this isolation is good because it forces you to slow down. Instead of the hurried phone calls I used to have with my mother or son, I chat with them for 20-25 minutes now. Turns out, the quantity of time you spend with your family also matters.

**BIG TAKEAWAY:** It’s made me ponder the wisdom of elders. Our grand-parents would say that the moment you get back home, you must wash your hands and feet, for instance. They also emphasised the need to eat on time, practise pranayama and yoga regularly, and to follow a simple diet. These simple things keep one fit — and that is the best protection against a virus. One thing is for sure, the crisis will change our lifestyles and the way we work.
BACK TO PARENTING 101
Mandira Bedi,
TV host and actor, 47

I COULD have been stuck and under lock-down in Australia, I was there on March 8 for the women’s cricket World Cup, but decided to fly back. I am so thankful that I am with my family right now. I think I am more in touch with my friends now than I was earlier. I am a social drinker, and last weekend, my husband and I opened a bottle of wine, video-called my parents in Delhi and a few friends of ours, and shared a drink with them virtually. I’ve started guiding my son in mathematics, which my husband or a tutor helped him with before. My parenting skills are being sharpened for sure. If my son doesn’t want to eat anything, I make him understand that there may be food shortages, and talk to him about how many have go without eating. At the same time, it’s important to not make things seem too scary. You have to strike the right balance.

BIG TAKEAWAY: It’s important to take life one day at a time.

A NECESSARY WAKE-UP CALL
Zia Mody, managing partner, AZB & Partners, 63

THINGS have been a little slower now that I’ve been working from home. But I still respond to emails and have discussions with the other business partners frequently. This is also the time to push out advisories and think through a lot of issues about the firm. But working from home is not as efficient as being in the office.

Now that we’re in isolation, my husband, daughter and I have been spending more time together just chatting and having meals. Unfortunately, we’ve also been watching a lot of TV together and following all the terrible things that are happening. We’re numbed by what we’re hearing and seeing. We have no idea when the disease will spike and how, and I worry about our healthcare infrastructure. It’s depressing.

BIG TAKEAWAY: This is an opportunity for mankind, as a whole, to deliberate and reflect on what has befallen us and why. And to see whether we are going to try and change ourselves for the better.

FAMILY TIES
Anant Goenka, managing director, CEAT, 38

WHEN I’m working, I get to see my children only in the evening after I return from office. But with the lockdown, we are all at home now and the kids’ school has given them lots of tasks to finish. So my wife and I take turns to teach them. She helps my son while my daughter sits with me as I do my work. The good thing is that education has evolved so much that it’s no longer about just studying from books. In fact, just this morning I worked on an interesting project with the kids...

I used to start my day with a morning run at 7.15 am, but now I have replaced my regular workout regimen with a high-intensity interval training schedule that I follow on YouTube, and my yoga teacher instructs me over WhatsApp. I thought I would have more free time, but I find myself really busy with emails, online meetings and trying to figure out how we can help the government with Covid-19 crisis.

BIG TAKEAWAY: It makes you realise that there is so much more you can do, even when working remotely.

IT’S A VUCA WORLD
Sam Balsara, chairman, Madison World, 69

WITH the lockdown, I find I have more time on my hands. I’m learning to appreciate my garden, where I read every evening. I do yoga every day, and also spend more time with my grandchildren, who live next door. In the bustle of daily life, the urgent gets done but not the important.

But I do try to maintain some discipline. I’ve worked out a schedule where I attend to my emails and con-calls, and connect with the leadership team every alternate day. We do this across all the units in the country. It’s frustrating not to be able to go to work and meet people. I’ve been doing that for 45 years and I love it. But I’m getting more family time. Besides my wife and I, our daughter Rashi, my older brother and my 98-year-old aunt also live with us, while my daughter Lara, her husband and two children are just a lawn away. Now I get to have lunch with all of them, which I couldn’t do earlier because of my work schedule.

BIG TAKEAWAY: We live in a VUCA world and must learn to adapt. Once the virus recedes, the world will reset and we will all have to get used to a new normal.

PREPARE FOR A NEW NORMAL
Rooshad Shroff, architect and designer, 38

AS designers, we are quite fortunate to be able to work remotely. I’ve tried to be disciplined with my routine. I have taken to starting work a bit earlier than usual. The quiet time allows me to be more focused. I have tried to keep active and workout indoors in the evening. I have also made a list of things I’ve always wanted to work on and not had the time to — to gather thoughts and material to get my website started, begin research on different crafts of India for a new collection, and visit a virtual museum every day to view new works. I hope I will tick some of those off over the next couple of weeks.

BIG TAKEAWAY: I hope this will be an eye-opener and make our government prioritise public healthcare and education. Less status, more hospitals, please.
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Derek O’Brien, TMC MP and quiz show host, 59

AT a parliamentary committee meeting on March 18, I happened to be seated next to BJP MP Dushyant Singh, who had come into contact with a Covid-19 patient. Self-isolated since the next day, I have been hooked to my iPad and phone. Thankfully, I remain asymptomatic. I have been working longer hours than usual. From home, I have been coordinating with the Bengal chief minister and my other colleagues. Since the nationwide lockdown, one major area of focus for me has been the plight of migrant workers from my state who are stuck in other states. I have also been reading Joshua Foer’s Moonwalking With Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything and re-reading Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha).

BIG TAKEAWAY:
What a blessing it is to be in our homes at a time like this. Think of all those people who have to walk hundreds of kilometres to reach theirs.

SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 19

HOUSEWORK IS HARD WORK

Ankur Tewari, singer-songwriter, 43

WHILE writing songs at home is something I still continue to do as a musician, all the meetings now take place digitally. And, as my house help is unable to come to work, a lot of my time is spent doing house work. I am reading two books at the moment — they had been collecting dust on my bookshelves for a while now. One is Flames by Leonard Cohen and the second is William Dalrymple’s The Anarchist.

Even though I studied hotel management when I was younger, I stick to making the basics — dal, chawal, khichdi. Once in a while, I experiment, like a few days ago, when I made ramen.

Instead of performing at venues, musicians are now performing live on social media platforms. I have done this, too. One of the most recent being the first one to kick off the #SOCIALindoors gigs on March 26.

BIG TAKEAWAY:
I realised I definitely need to increase my house help’s salary. It’s so much work taking care of a house. It is not easy at all.

SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 17

A TIME TO HEAL

Monica Dogra, singer, 37

BIG TAKEAWAY:
I feel what this pandemic is teaching us all is how fragile humanity truly is. We need to reinvent, realign and reimagine the way we live — we must learn to live in harmony with nature, as well as with each other.

SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 17

TIME FOR CHANGE

Sourav Kothari, former world billiards champion and Arjuna awardee, 35

BIG TAKEAWAY:
I WORK from home and on my own schedule anyway, but now I am motivated to not procrastinate, and to complete chores quickly, and in an organised manner. I have started setting targets for each day. I have been going through a pile of unread and half-read books, and have been thinking about getting back to things that I have neglected — like drawing, which I have completely lost touch with. Since I collect Gandhi figurines, and I was supposed to give a talk on my Gandhi collection, I started taking photos of them. I’ve also been looking through my archives — negatives and photos which I had forgotten about, like the one of the ceiling of a Dadar optician’s showroom, which has white head sculptures with quirky sunglasses.

BIG TAKEAWAY:
Though I live a frugal life, now I wonder whether one really needs all the things one spends on. You also realise how important it is to personally connect with people.

SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 15

NO SUCH THING AS ‘TOO FRUGAL’

Chirodeep Chaudhuri, photographer, 48

BIG TAKEAWAY:
I am accustomed to being homebound for extended periods when I write. But now, my biggest challenge has been to survive without the didis, the women who cook, clean and water our plants. I have a small garden at home where I grow palak, coriander, chillies, tomatoes, beans and ginger. My appreciation for the house help has risen. My children have started helping me out with household tasks. We have deleted all the games from our iPad, so now they have to find productive ways to engage themselves. I am also learning to paint on my iPad and my reading list includes Pranay Lal’s Indica and Amitav Ghosh’s The Great Derangement.

SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 13

PLANTING NEW IDEAS

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, writer and filmmaker, 40

BIG TAKEAWAY:
When this is behind us, we won’t be taking things for granted; we will be more responsible about how we treat ourselves and our health. People will cut back on impulsive online shopping, too, and realise they don’t need as much.


SELF-ISOLATED SINCE
March 14
Five years in a hotel room

How two Pakistani nationals, stuck in India for a prolonged court case, paid the price for the fractured relationship between the two countries

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did not matter what the judge said before or after uttering that one word. The one-and-a-half page order comprised nine points, all of which were drownd out when he said "acquited". The judge bended the gavel, and they were free men. Free to go back to Pakistan.

Syed Rafat and Mirza Shafiq Baig had been longing for this particular day for a while. So much so, that when the verdict finally came on September 30, 2019, it took over a moment to sink in, as they sat stunned on a wooden bench on the fifth floor of the bustling city civil and sessions court in south Mumbai. As the initial disbelief wore off, a wave of emotions swept over them. Tear-eyed, they congratulated each other, profusely thanked their lawyer, and headed to the hotel on Dockyard Road, where they had been staying since November 2014.

In the early hours of October 28, 2014, eight Indian fishermen, far out into the Arabian Sea, met with an accident. A cargo boat, the MS Batis, on its way from Abbas port in Iran to Hazira in Gujarat, crashed into the stationery fishermen’s boat at 1 am, according to an FIR. It allegedly

continued on its way without attempting to rescue the fishermen, resulting in five deaths. The captain of the Batis was Rafat, 62, and Baig was the second officer — both residents of Karachi. The complaint was filed 10 days later, on November 8, 2014, at Mumbai’s Yellow Gate police station. They were charged under Section 280, 304-A, 336 and 337 of the IPC — rash navigation of vessel, death by negligence, and endangering personal safety of others, respectively. Nine days after the complaint, they were arrested. On November 20, 2014, they got bail and were shifted to the Royal Park Hotel on Dockyard Road.

At the time of their arrest, Nawaz Shariq was only in the second year of his third term as Prime Minister of Pakistan. And Misbah-ul-Haq was still the captain of the cricket team. When they got back home in early 2020, Imran Khan was the Prime Minister, and Misbah had been retired for three years. Baig and Rafat were hundreds of kilometres away from all this, in a South Mumbai hotel. “It is suffocating to sit around in a room all day,” Baig had said when Mirror met him during the hearings in late 2018 and early 2019. “We wonder when we will be able to go home. How long can you sit and watch TV?” They were not allowed to leave South Mumbai as per court orders. But every six months, accompanied by two policemen, they would go to Delhi to get an extension on their visa. WhatsApp was the only source to stay in touch with family. Baig’s son was five when he was arrested, and he had missed out on spending time with him. Rafat, on the other hand, had a daughter who refused to get married until her father returned. Stuck in a rival country, his chances of making it back seemed grim, but she was adamant.

To make things worse, in April 2018, the Metropolitan Magistrate at Mumbai’s Ballard Pier Court held them guilty. “The lower court convicted them because there was no other ship around at the time of the accident,” says advocate Vinit Jain, who represented them. “It is likely that the fishermen’s boat capsized because of overload, since its capacity was five, and eight were on board. Nonetheless, we proved in the sessions court that the Batis was actually nine km away from where the fishermen had rowed their boat.” The three fishermen who survived were eyewitnesses in the case. But those had been asleep when the accident took place, and did not know what caused the capsize. A fisherman had earlier claimed in his deposition that the name of the boat that collided with them was Batis. But during cross-examination, he admitted that he had only studied up to the second standard and could not read English.

The prosecution also examined the officer who, after midnight, handed over charge of the Batis to Baig, who was on duty until 4 am. The officer, in his cross-examination, said he did not feel any jerk [of the collision] after his hours on duty. By the time the Ballard

Pier Court ruled against them, four years had passed, and they stared at more years in the hotel room. In January 2019, Rafat persuaded his daughter to go ahead with the wedding. Soft-spoken, fair-skinned and walking with a hunch, Rafat remained cagey and reserved throughout his meetings with Mirror. Baig, on occasion, would engage in some small talk. “It hardly rains in Karachi,” he would say. “This year, it rained quite a bit, I’m told. The monsoons in Mumbai are something else though.”

The two, however, discussed the merits of their case with Jatin Desai, general secretary for the Pakistan India Peopl’s Forum for Peace and Democracy, an independent group that advocates better bilateral ties. “I keep an eye on Pakistani prisoners in India, and vice versa,” says Desai, who has rescued hundreds of fishermen arrested by both countries. “That is how I found out about Rafat and Baig.”

Desai believes had the two of them been residents of any other country, they would not have had to waste five years of their lives. “When the Italian marines had shot two Indian fishermen, they were sent back to Italy relatively soon,” Desai says. “Rafat and Baig basically paid the price for the fractured relationship between India and Pakistan. At their age, wasting five years in a hotel room is a biting loss. Technically, they were not in prison. But mentally, it was nothing short of that.”

Six months before they were arrested, Narendra Modi had been sworn in as Prime Minister. Since then, India and Pakistan’s relationship has soured further with several instances of cross-border provocations. Desai says Rafat was always mindful of that. “He’s a humble man,” he says. “But he was aware of the demonisation of Pakistanis in India. That scared him.”

After one of the hearings, over coffee and idli sambar at the canteen of the Sessions Court, Desai asked Rafat and Baig if they should seek some press coverage. The case did not seem to be going anywhere. But Rafat vigorously shook his head in disapproval. “That is out of the question,” he replied. Both insisted on maintaining a low profile, wanting to not appear in the news until they were safely home. It came to their aid after the sessions court acquitted them on September 30, 2019. The Maharashtra government did not challenge it in the high court.

Three months later, their passports were in their hands and by January-end, they had landed in Karachi. “Had the state government appealed, they would have been stuck in that hotel room for 10 more years,” says Jain. “It must have taken extreme mental toughness to not lose it for five years. They were polite, and not once did they lose their temper with me when the case kept getting delayed.” Desai, who believes that such cases should always be tried in a fast track court, says the extended court hearings did not surprise him. “When Pakistani nationals are involved in a court case in India, everyone concerned is naturally under pressure,” he says. “The police, lawyers, as well as the judge.”

In an uncommon practice, the judge had called the investigating officer four times to court to be able to understand the intricacies of the case. He also deliberated on the matter for two months before passing the verdict. Eventually, what counted was that one, all-important word that he uttered.
G
rim times call for ghoulish humour. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who took oath as the Madhya Pradesh chief minister for the fourth time on March 23, unwittingly became the subject of a dark joke in Bhopal. “Had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Delhi leadership’s preoccupation with curbing its spread”, a BJP wit quips, “he might not have made it”. The “leadership” (read Narendra Modi and Amit Shah) clearly wanted someone else to helm affairs in Madiya Pradesh. This time around the candidates vying for the top job were not in short supply. The trio, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Narottam Mishra and Rakesh Singh, had conspicuously upped their game. And each of them felt they had a shot because they believed they had Shah’s ear, having worked in key organisational positions when he headed the BJP. Narendra Singh Tomar, the Morena MP, was the fourth prong of the joust and, for a while, appeared as the “strongest” contender. “When the resort politics were on, BJP legislators were shepherded to a hotel on the Indore-Bhopal highway. To pass time, they would play cricket. Mishra was so charged up that he hit the most fours and sixes,” says a Bhopal-based political observer. The sass quickly dissipated the day Chouhan took the Trust Vote in the Assembly. Crestfallen, Mishra only claimed credit for the SP and BSP MLAs that crossed over to the BJP. “What helped settle our choice was caste,” says a BJP functionary, who was privy to the events leading to Chouhan’s return. “Tomar would have made it, but he’s a Rajput and we already have Rajput CMs in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The caste bias might have become obvious.” Chouhan is from the backward sub-caste of Kirari.

Moreover, the 24 legislators of the Congress who resigned before joining the BJP — and were expected to become ministers — have to fight by-polls in six months. “With a Rajput or a Brahmin [Mishra is one] as the CM, they might not have won again,” concedes the functionary. In 2005, a little over a year after the BJP won the state elections, Chouhan stepped into the shoes of Uma Bharti, who was BJP’s best known OBC leader. In 2011, the 2018 Assembly elections. Chouhan was low-key, understated and soft-spoken, but his prowess at appeasing the leadership in Delhi guaranteed that he not only got the CM’s job, but also secured it for over 13 years. “It was famously said of the late Arjun Singh that his right hand didn’t know what his left hand was doing. In Chouhan’s case, it was even more inscrutable. His right hand didn’t know what it was up to,” a BJP source says. Chouhan’s chief mentor was LK Advani, and Sushma Swaraj was his guardian angel of sorts, though she needed him more than he depended on her. (Swaraj used to win her Lok Sabha seat from Vidisha, his fief.)

So how did he have his way with the present BJP dispensation, which has always been openly hostile to him? “After he lost the elections two years ago, he steadily worked at his own pace. He didn’t wait for any orders from Delhi. Like Raman Singh and Vasundhara Raje [former Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan CMs], he was also made BJP national vice-president, a token post. But he didn’t move out of MP. Even though he was stopped from launching ‘Abaar (thanksgiving) yatra’ after losing, he remained undeterred,” explains Girija Shanker, a Bhopal-based political analyst. “Initially, he would attend every social function he was invited to, where he made the most by spending time with party workers. Whenever he would find an issue that people were protesting about against the Kamal Nath government, he would take it up. The central command, in the end, couldn’t find a better alternative to him.”

While this may suggest that Modi-Shah had no other clear option, it’s far from the truth. Like a quintessential politician who wears one too many masks, Chouhan has always been flexible with his allegiances. Since 2014, he has not lost an opportunity to sing paeans to Modi and rarely, if ever, called on Advani when he fell from limelight. Though it hasn’t helped his cause; his national ambitions became evident before 2014. At a BJP national conclave in Delhi in 2013, Advani likened Modi (then Gujarat CM) with Chouhan and lauded them equally in his speech. Their “economic models” were hailed in corresponding measure: Modi for his “top down” template, where the state financially empowered those at the bottom through government spending. Chouhan also began fielding his “secular” credentials to offset Modi’s hard anti-minorities stance. In 2011, Modi turned down a Muslim cleric’s offer to wear a skullcap during a function for communal “amity”. In 2013, Chouhan wore a “topi” presented by actor Raza Murad at an Eid get-together. But a year on when Modi became PM, Chouhan made news by refusing to don a skullcap on Eid in Murad’s presence. By then, his “secular” veneer, too, had fallen by the wayside. Fourth time around, Chouhan has a whole new set of challenges to deal with. Among the defectors who he has to manage, there is Congress’ star Jyotiraditya Scindia, who propped up his government. It’ll be hard to forget how his cheerleaders used “Maaf karo Maharaj, hamara neta Shivraj” slogan in the 2018 Assembly elections. Chouhan also superciliously referred to the former Congressman as ‘Vibhishana’ after he joined the BJP, like Ravana’s brother who deserted him and became part of Lord Ram’s army. There’s irony aplenty in the post-Kamal Nath-Scindia denouement. Chouhan got what he wanted. Scindia has still to get elected to the Rajya Sabha — the Cabinet reshuffle in Delhi seems to have been put off indefinitely. What else can one do right now, blame coronavirus?
**Scripting her own story**

The *Thappad* screenwriter, and daughter of the late actor Reema Lagoo, tried her hand at acting before choosing to write...

The idea of dharma manifests in the Puranas too. In Brahma Purana, we have the story of Brahma’s son, Deva, and Asuras who are constantly fighting. Swarga is the realm of Devas, full of wealth and pleasure, ruled by Indra. But there is no peace as it is constantly under siege by Asuras, who live in Patala (under the ground), and are convinced they have been tricked of their share of wealth. The battle of Devas and Asuras is unending. Indra is constantly replenished by more capable Indras, and Asuras are constantly reborn with more smart boons that Devas have to outsmart.

This is contrasted with Mount Kailas, abode of Shiva, in the Shiva Purana, where there is always peace, as no one is hungry for anything: Shakti’s tiger does not chase Shiva’s bull who does not complain about the absence of grass on the icy mountain top. Kartikeya’s peacock does not chase Shiva’s snake which does not chase Ganesha’s rat who does not eat Ganeshi’s sweets. So if in Swarga, the hunger of Devas is indulged and the hunger of Asuras remains unsatisfied, in Kailasa there is no hunger.

In Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu in Vishnu Purana, Vishnu is not hungry, but he seeks to satisfy the hunger of humanity by descending on earth in various forms (avatars) to teach humans dharma, first as a fish, and finally as an invader/revolutionary.

This brings us to Ramayana, which is essentially a part of Vishnu Purana, as it retells the story of Vishnu’s avatar Ram who lived in the Treta yuga, so within the limits of time (kala). Here, we are told marriage is a way to establish dharma, ensure the rights of husband and wife. But neither Surpanakha nor Ravana respect marriage laws and wish to satisfy their hunger (desire being a more refined word) at any cost. They think of themselves and not others. The royal siblings misuse their power to abuse the powerless exiled prince and his wife.

Mahabharata, the other great epic, is also a part of Vishnu Purana, as it retells the story of Vishnu’s avatar Krishna who lived in the Dwapara yuga, so within the limits of time (kala). Here the complexity of legal system is revealed. Who is the heir? Must the eldest be chosen over the youngest (Dhritarashtra over Pandu), the ailed over the disabled (Shantanu over Dvapi), the bloodline (Kauravas) or the adopted (Pandavas)? It comes down to does the mighty (hundred brothers with eleven armies) willing to co-exist with the meek (five brothers with seven armies)? Or will they not share ‘a needlepoint of land’.

The idea that a king overturns matysa nyaya to establish dharma and prevent anarchy is also in the royal inscription that established the Pala kings of Bengal in 750 CE. Incidentally, Pala kings patronised Buddhism indicating the concept of ‘king overthrowing jungle law’ was an Indian idea, not just a Hindu one.

The consistency in meaning from Vedas through Puranas to the epics to Buddhist lore is remarkable.
With the Covid-19 pandemic, people from the Northeast are facing a rise in racial attacks across the country.

The seven states share only a four per cent border with rest of India and are only connected by the 27 km landmass at Siliguri. If that region were to be cut off, the Northeast would be severed from ‘mainland’ India. There’s no denying that the Northeast was a late entrant into the Indian mainstream—a term the people there detest because they have always felt a part of the mainstream. Most of the seven states signed the Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union only in 1948, when Sardar Vallabhai Patel visited the area and coerced many of the tribal chieftains to accede to India. But groups like the Nagas are still unresolved about their ‘Indian’ identity, having picked up arms time and again against the Indian states since the 1950s. They are also currently in talks with the government about their special status. In fact, the region has had a troubled past with insurgent movements—in Mizoram in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, followed by Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya. Today, many of these movements are on the wane and the insurgent leaders are either in peace talks with the government or on in cessation of operations mode. But often, the disenchantment persists.

The racial profiling Northeasterners are facing in the wake of Covid-19 is heart-rending. Many living in the metros are starving or worried sick about not being able to pay rent since their employment — mainly in the informal sector — has been hit by the lockdown. To make things worse, they are being socially ostracised and shunned.

On a social media group called the ‘Northeast Solidarity Group’, young people living in Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi, are reporting how poorly they are being treated and forced to go back home. Take for instance, Prerna Pradhan from Sikkim, who is working in a private company in Bangalore, where her sisters are also studying. “We are stuck inside our homes because if we step out, people here abuse us. They think we are Chinese. Will our government help us? Many don’t even dare step out of their homes for groceries. Others have been asked to evict their apartments by March 31 and not return,” she writes. From being abused and spat on, to being evicted from their hostels and rented rooms and trolled online, Covid-19 has shown hateful hues that arouse disgust and anger. This hatred could manifest itself in reverse racism in the Northeast, where the ‘mainland Indian’ is seen as an ‘outsider’ by many tribal societies, and is given a particular label to distinguish him/her from the indigenous tribes.

In the past, there have been instances of clashes between these so-called outsiders and locals. Meghalaya has a history of ethnic clashes where Bengali speaking people were targeted and many had to leave their hearths and homes in 1979. This cycle was repeated in 1982, 87 and ‘92. The state slowly returned to normal but the underlying tension is palpable even today. A similar anti-Bengali drive also rocked Assam in the 1980s. Many of those who had to leave Meghalaya under duress carry a deep hurt, which surfaces in their writings and on social media every now and again. This vicious cycle needs to be broken. Now more than ever, when there is the larger fear of Covid-19 looming over all of us — without exception.
Brain fever hits Bihar once again

Two kids admitted to SKM hospital; AES had killed 120 last year

#MUZAFFARPUR Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), also known as brain fever, that had killed about 200 children in the state last year, has struck this north Bihar town again in what could be a double whammy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, an official said on Saturday.

The Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital, which bore the brunt of last year’s brain fever outbreak and accounted for more than 120 deaths, has admitted its first AES patient this year at the paediatric ICU, superintendent SK Shahi said.

He said a three-year-old boy, who belongs to Bajaj Bujurg village under Sakda block of the district, was brought to the hospital by his family members, when condition of the child, who caught a cold a few days back, worsened.

In addition, a girl from Chiraiya in East Champaran district has been referred to SKMCH by the Sadar hospital at Motihari, where she was first admitted with symptoms of AES, Shahi said.

Children afflicted with AES often tend to develop hypoglycemia, which implies a sudden drop in glucose level and has been linked disproportionately to consumption of unripe litchis which are grown in abundance in north Bihar.

Medical experts had, last year, blamed the high number of fatalities on the inordinate delay in administering glucose to the afflicted children who often end up getting the much-required intravenous transfusion at hospitals far away from their homes.

Meanwhile, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also stressed on the need for preparedness for AES at a high-level meeting in Patna to take stock of the coronavirus situation.

He also instructed officials that expansion of the capacity of the SKMCH paediatric ICU to 100 beds, which he had ordered in the wake of AES outbreak last year, be completed at the earliest.

In this 2019 pic, an infant with symptoms of AES is treated at paediatric emergency ward of Patna Medical College and Hospital.

PM Modi creates fund to fight Covid-19, urges citizens to donate

The money will be appended to govt’s combative measures

#NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the creation of an assistance and emergency situation relief fund where people can contribute and help in the government’s fight against coronavirus.

The Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund will go long way in creating a healthier India, he said on Twitter.

“People from all walks of life expressed their desire to donate to India’s war against COVID-19,” he said, adding the fund has been constituted respecting that spirit.

“It is my appeal to my fellow Indians, kindly contribute to the PM-CARES Fund. This Fund will also cater to similar distressing situations, if they occur in the times ahead,” he said.

A statement posted on his official website said while the prime minister is chairman of the new public charitable trust, its members include the defence minister (Rajnath Singh), home minister (Amit Shah) and the finance minister (Nirmala Sitharaman).

In India, like the rest of the world, the spread of coronavirus has been alarming and is posing severe health and economic ramifications for our country, it said.

The Prime Minister’s Office has been receiving spontaneous and innumerable requests for donations to support the government in the wake of this emergency.

“Distress situations, whether natural or otherwise, demand expeditious and collective action for alleviating the suffering of those affected, mitigation/control of damage to infrastructure and capacities/sets,” the statement said.

Delhi records lowest PM10 levels in 6 months, temp falls due to rains

City’s overall air quality index at 11 am stood at 40, which falls in the ‘good’ category

#NEW DELHI

The sun shone bright in a cloudless blue-sky in the national capital which recorded a significant drop in the mercury on Saturday due to intermittent rains over the last two days.

The city and its surrounding areas also recorded lowest concentrations of PM10, particulate matter 10 micrometers or less in diameter, since August 18 last year.

At 10 am, PM10 levels in Delhi-NCR stood at 32.5 microgram per cubic meter, the lowest since 15.9 µg/m3 recorded on August 18 last year.

The city’s overall air quality index at 11 am stood at 40, which falls in the “good” category.

Environment and weather experts attributed the improvement in the air quality to the 21-day lockdown enforced to contain the spread of the coronavirus and rains and gusty winds due to successive western disturbances.

They said the air quality is expected to oscillate in the good or satisfactory categories due to the reduction in local sources of pollution — vehicular pollution, construction dust, stack emissions etc — due to the lockdown.

Delhi recorded a minimum of 15.7 degrees Celsius, four notches less than that recorded on Friday.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative figures for the national capital, recorded 5.3 mm rainfall till 8.30 am on Saturday.

The weather station at Palam recorded 3.2 mm rainfall.

The national capital has recorded 109.6 mm rainfall so far, the highest ever in March.

Telecom firms to opt for EMI moratorium

Also pitch for raising call, internet rates; no hike during lockdown

#NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden telecom operators are likely to opt for three-month moratorium to avoid cash crunch during the lockdown, industry body COAI said on Saturday.

The telecom operators have spoken in favour of raising mobile call and internet rates at the earliest, however, they will keep the prices stable during the lockdown period, COAI DG Rajan Mathews told PTI.

“There is debt of around Rs 1.6-2 lakh crore that telecom operators owe to Indian banks. They will opt three-month moratorium in loan repayment to help them maintain cash flow. It is a relief for them,” Mathews said.

The RBI on Friday allowed banks to put on hold EMI payments on all term loans for three months, slashed the cost of fresh borrowing by cutting policy interest rate by steepest in more than 11 years and infused a massive Rs 3.74 lakh crore liquidity as it joined the efforts of the government to counter the economic fallout of coronavirus pandemic.

Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) also allayed fear of hike in tariff by the telecom operators.

“Telecom companies understand market situation. They will give tariff stable for now,” Mathews said.

Telecom operators have been asking for fixing minimum tariff for call and data rates. Vodafone Idea has suggested that the minimum rates should be fixed starting April 1, 2020.

Mobile subscribers get access to 4G data at a price as low as Rs 3.5 per GB but if the floor price is fixed as demanded by telecom operators, mobile internet prices will increase 5-10 times from the current level.

Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea has proposed that the minimum price of data should be fixed at Rs 35 per GB, Bharti Airtel has proposed minimum price of Rs 30 per GB for low data users and Reliance Jio wants it to be hiked gradually to Rs 20 per GB.
World

Taliban not to negotiate with Afghan govt team

Militant group’s spokesperson says the negotiating team was not selected in a way that included ‘all Afghan factions’

#KABUL/PESHAWAR

The Taliban refused to negotiate with the team announced by the Afghan government, the militant group’s spokesman said on Saturday, in a potential setback to the next steps of the US-brokered peace process.

Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the group would not negotiate with the team as it was not selected in a way that included “all Afghan factions”. The Afghan government announced a team late on Thursday, which was later praised as “inclusive” by US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

The United States signed a troop withdrawal deal with the Taliban in February, but progress on moving to negotiations between the militant group and the Afghan government has been delayed by a feud between Afghan politicians and disagreement between the Taliban and the government over the release of prisoners and a possible ceasefire as preconditions for talks.

Mujahid said the fact the team was announced by the Afghan government “violated” its agreement with the United States and that not all sides had agreed to the team. “In order to reach true and lasting peace, the aforementioned team must be agreed upon by all effective Afghan sides to identify that it can represent all sides,” he said.

Naja Anwari, spokeswoman for the Afghan ministry of peace affairs, said in response: “This team was made after wide consultation with different layers of the Afghan society.”

President Ashraf Ghani’s political rival, Abdullah Abdullah, has not yet confirmed whether he will support the delegation, a move diplomats say would be important given his camp’s strong influence in the country’s north and west. His spokesman on Friday declined to confirm or deny whether he would support the team.

Abdullah’s spokesman and the U.S. Embassy did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Saturday.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo failed to mediate between the two men to create an “inclusive” government during a day-long visit to Kabul on Monday, and announced a $1 billion cut in U.S. aid to Afghanistan, which he said could be reversed.

Afgan politicians and disagreements between the Afghan ministry of peace affairs, the Afghan ministry of foreign affairs, and the Afghan government have delayed the Afghan government’s acceptance of the team announced by the Afghan government.

Afgan politicians have been unable to agree on a team for negotiations with the Taliban, which is causing delays to the peace process and increasing the risk of violence.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (right), leader of Taliban delegation, and Zalmay Khalilzad, US envoy, after signing a peace pact on February 29

Aussie local poll: $80 fine for not voting

#SYDNEY

People in the Australian state of Queensland were urged to vote in local elections on Saturday or face a fine of $80, as polls went ahead despite most citizens being encouraged to stay home to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

The state’s top health official said it was safe to vote in person as long as people followed social distancing guidelines. “There’s no risk here, we’ve got to remember the risk of people going to the shops is far, far higher,” Jeannette Young told reporters. Many of the three million eligible voters had cast their ballot early, or remotely by post or telephone. However long queues were reported outside some booths on Saturday due to safety measures limiting the number of people allowed inside at once. Queueing voters were told to stand 1.5 metres (5 feet) apart and asked to bring their own pens. Compulsory voting remained in place, but those who were self-isolating due to illness could apply to have fines waived, state health minister Steven Miles said.

A US recessed? Probably. Depression? Only if the virus is untreated

#WASHINGTON

A US recession may already be underway. Could it be worse?

The Great Depression that began with a stock market crash in 1929 and lasted until 1933 scared a generation with massive unemployment and plummeting economic output.

The unpredictable and unprecedented path of the coronavirus has drawn parallels with the Depression, in particular with predictions that the rise in unemployment and the percentage drop in economic output could rival those seen in the 1930s.

But for that to happen, the jobless numbers likely to be record...
Kashyap speaks out on behalf of wife Saina who questioned world body's motives, says players' lives were at risk

P arupalli Kashyap (inset) has hit back at the Badminton World Federation after its secretary general Thomas Lund said it was “disappointing” that some players, including Saina Nehwal, had questioned its “sincerity and motives” for continuing with the All England Championships despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It has been very disappointing to see some members of the badminton community speculate on the sincerity and motives of the BWF in this time of crisis,” Lund had written in an open letter. “Our number one concern has always been the health and safety of all of our participants.”

Several leading shuttlers and coaches had slammed the BWF for not cancelling the All England. Among them were Nehwal and husband Kashyap, who said that the BWF’s reaction was ‘unfair’ as the world was waking up to the reality of COVID-19.

“I just saw that whole lashed-out part by the BWF but they didn’t even tag us,” Kashyap, the world No 24, told Mirror. “It’s unfair for the BWF also to react like that because our lives are at risk.

“We are risking a lot of people if we are getting affected and coming back like that. You don’t know who could have underlying health issues. I am an asthmatic, I have a question mark there.”

Kashyap and Nehwal have been critical of badminton being played in the times of COVID-19. Nehwal had retweeted Danish player Mads Conrad-Petersen’s tweet. “With the world closing down due to the corona virus I get worried and ashamed that All England was played under completely normal standards. It can take up to 14 days before you feel that you are sick. Can’t help to be a little nervous (Terrible decision #Coronavirus)” he had tweeted on March 18.

Nehwal retweeted this and added a comment. “Only thing I can think of is that rather than the players’ welfare n feelings, financial reasons were given more importance. Otherwise there was no other reason for the #AllEnglandOpen2020 to go on last week.”

Kashyap said, “Even I retweeted Saina’s thing. Actually we both sat together and tweeted it so.. I think it’s unfair of BWF to react like that and I saw that article that BWF slams Saina and all top players. I don’t think it’s right of them, Mr Thomas Lund or whoever has done it. It was a tough time.”

Kashyap said that the BWF should have cancelled the tournament on its own rather than leave it to individual players to take a call on their participation.

“I think they should understand the emotions of the players. Many players are wanting to play and perform well because it’s the Olympic qualification.

“But until you cancel the tournament, people will come. So we are always there to compete, so you are leaving the call to us. You are the bigger body, so leaving the call to us is a tough spot we’re in.”

Kashyap said that the UK also did not take the situation very seriously at that time. “The UK was actually in a much better place than us. The whole scenario and we had to make a quick decision. We are lucky that there are not many cases which have come up. But if they were, then we would have been in real trouble. It’s not a very nice situation to be in, so our reaction is also valid and them reacting in that way - I don’t think it’s valid.”

Having said his bit, Kashyap felt that there were bigger concerns facing the world currently. “Now the state that the UK is in... it’s not the nicest place they’re in. The whole world actually. I just think that their reaction could have been better, but it’s all over now.

“It’s all done and dusted now. We said something, they reacted, and now I am saying something else. I think there are bigger concerns right now. People are getting infected and we’re in a lockdown, and so many lives are getting affected. So we just have to stay calm. I saw this article a couple of days back but I didn’t feel it’s the right time to react now.”

We are risking a lot of people if we are getting affected and coming back like that. You don’t know who could have underlying health issues

Parupalli Kashyap

The Board of Control for Cricket for India (BCCI) has finally woken up to the reality of COVID-19 and announced a grant of Rs 51 crore to the relief fund. The decision was taken by the BCCI along with its state units.

Calls were made to all state units about this and each state unit has been asked contribute Rs 50 lakh each from their coffers and the BCCI has agreed to contribute from its central funds.

The move was initiated by president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah. A few state units like Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) have already contributed Rs 50 lakh to the Chief Minister’s relief fund. But Mirror understands the MCA has agreed to the BCCI contribute to the BCCI fund too. There are about 32 units who receive BCCI grants and they all understood to have agreed to pay Rs 50 lakh each. It will add up to Rs 16 crore and remaining Rs 35 crore will be contributed by the BCCI.

BCCI said in a release yesterday, “Mr Sourav Ganguly, President, Mr Jay Shah, Honorary Secretary and Office Bearers of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) along with the affiliated state associations on Saturday announced to donate INR 51 crores to the Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) to contribute towards strengthening the nation’s disaster management capacities and encourage research to combat COVID-19 and protect Indian citizens.”

MCA also confirmed the decision. “Mumbai Cricket Association today decided to donate Rs 50 lakh through BCCI to the Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) to contribute towards strengthening the nation’s disaster management capacities and encourage research to combat COVID-19 and protect Indian citizens.”

Meanwhile, there have been individual contributions from cricketers. Yesterday, Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane contributed Rs 10 lakh to the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah initiated the move to contribute to COVID-19 relief.
Virat is the boss... not a guy to mess around, says Shastri

Coach feels Kohli controls the show in the middle and support staff’s role is to reduce captain’s burden

It was not just training but the sacrifices he made with his diet. I could see that change happening all the time. He got up one day and said ‘Ravi, I’m vegetarian!’ When he sets those standards, it rubs off on others.

"Test cricket for us is the biggest form. It’s the benchmark. We want to set standards," Shastri said.

Forced rest ‘welcome’

Sport coming to a standstill owing to the COVID-19 pandemic is a “welcome” rest for India cricketers, feels Shastri, who has spent barely 10-11 days at home since leaving for the World Cup last May.

As with other sports across the world, cricket has also been affected with all international and domestic fixtures being called off due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

“(This rest) cannot be a bad thing because towards the end of the New Zealand tour, you could see some cracks coming up when it came to mental fatigue, physical fitness and injuries,” Shastri said.

According to Shastri, the players may use the time to re-energise themselves, especially after a gruelling New Zealand tour where India played five T20Is, three ODIs and two Tests.

“The amount of cricket we have played over the last ten months, that was beginning to take its toll.

“Guys like me, and some other guys from the support staff, we left India on May 23 for the World Cup in England. Since then we have been at home for 8 or 11 days.

“Think the players knew it was coming, they sensed it in New Zealand. There were apprehensions towards the end of that tour... I thought we got out just at the right time,” Ravi Shastri on COVID-19 pandemic and. There were apprehensions towards the end of that tour, when flights were coming through Singapore, out of Singapore.

“By the time we landed (in India), I thought we got out just at the right time. There were only two cases in New Zealand at that time, that has rocketed now to 300.

“The day we landed, that was the first day they were screening and testing people at the airport. So (we came back) just in the nick of time.”

Shastri said that in such a situation, players could play a role by spreading awareness about this pandemic.

“Players, as you have a lot of responsibility. That’s why the message is very clear that cricket should be last on everyone’s mind now,” he said.

“The most important thing is safety and not ensuring just your safety but ensuring safety of others as well, by creating a kind of awareness that tells people there is something serious around. Virat has done it, a lot of other players have done it by posting certain messages on social media.”

AGENCIES

Short Pitch

Space constraints to hit Indians: Gloster

NEW DELHI

Indian players could be at a “physical disadvantage” due to lack of enough training space during the COVID-19 lockdown, feels the team’s ex-physio John Gloster. “The physical constraints Indian players are now having seem to be a lot greater than that of guys in say, South Africa, Australia or UK,” he told ESPNcricinfo. “…because space is an incredible constraint here. I’ve seen some fantastic footage of players in UK where they’re in their own gyms and got lots of space, and Indian boys are going to be perhaps at a physical disadvantage there.”

Half day goes in taking care of daughter: Puji

RAJKOT

Cheteshwar Pujara has said that most of his time at home during the lockdown goes in taking care of his daughter. “It’s a welcome change for me,” Pujara told Sportstar. “I like spending time with myself, reading a book or watching TV is something I would do when I’m alone. That said, I’ve a young daughter who is so energetic and wants to play all the time, so half day my goes into taking care of her. I’m also helping my wife Puja with the daily chores. He urged citizens to not venture out during the lockdown for the sake of their families.

MPL owners to donate 8 lakh for groundsmen

MUMBAI

The eight team owners of the Mumbai Premier League will be donating Rs 8 lakh each to help the groundsmen, working on Mumbai maidans, who’re facing hardships due to the lockdown. “With the Covid-19 lockdowns, the daily wager community that our maidans’ groundsmen find that their only source of income (has) come to a significant halt,” the owners wrote in a letter to MCA chief Vijay Patil.

“To help them overcome this crisis, the team owners would like to contribute Rs one lakh per team as gesture to support many groundsmen.”

SA offie Pleded eycket career in USA

JOHANNESBURG

Off-spinner Dane Piedt is giving up on South African cricket and will move to the USA, with dreams of guiding the Associate team into a World Cup one day.

Piedt will leave for the USA in the next few months to be part of the Minor League 120 tournament, due to launch next month. “USA were given ODI status last year so it’s not completely out of the question,” Piedt told ESPNcricinfo. “I just signed the deal but no one really knows when I will be able to travel. It was an opportunity I just couldn’t pass up, financially and for lifestyle reasons, but it was still a tough decision to make.”
Olympic qualifiers will happen, asks NSFs to share plans

Batra says postponed Olympic qualifiers will happen, asks NSFs to share plans

Nearly 80 Indian athletes have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in seven sports -- athletics, archery, boxing, equestrian, hockey, shooting and wrestling. The IOA was expecting to raise the number to more than 120.

"WE’LL BE STRONGER THAN EVER’

Osaka, tennis star and poster girl of Tokyo 2020, comes out to support decision to postpone Games

Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka, the poster girl of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, took to social media on Saturday to show her support for the decision to postpone the Games until next year.

Osaka, who won the US Open in 2018 and the Australian Open in 2019, was the central character in the video to launch Tokyo 2020’s official motto for the Games, launched last month.

"Everyone knows how much the Olympics means to me and how proud I will be to participate in my home country," Osaka, the world number 10, wrote on Twitter.

"Of course, I am disappointed that it won’t happen this year but we’ll all be ready to stronger ever in 2021! I support Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s brave decision and the IOC 100%.

"Sport will eventually unite us again and be there for us always, but that time not now," the 22-year-old added.

"This is the time for people from all countries, backgrounds and race to rally together to save as many lives as we can. To me, that is the Olympic spirit.

"To the people of Japan: stay strong, hang in there, and let’s show the world our beautiful country when time is right in 2021.

"Stay safe everyone, take care of each other, be kind and we will make it through. Love, Naomi."

Osaka, who was born in Japan to a Haitian father and Japanese mother before being raised in the United States, was chosen to lead Tokyo 2020’s "United by Emotion" motto as the face of a changing country.

Japan, which has traditionally seen itself as a racially homogeneous country, is becoming more ethnically diverse and Osaka has been at the forefront of a new wave of sporting heroes set to represent the host nation at the Olympics.

Coronavirus infections in Japan have climbed to more than 1,400, with 47 deaths.

New date won’t satisfy everybody: Coe

World Athletics president Sebastian Coe admitted that settling on a new date for the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 will not satisfy everybody. "All sports have made it pretty clear they have particular challenges at particular times of the year," said Coe.

"We are probably not going to reach a solution that meets with the approval of every sport.

"But there does have to be an element of flexibility and there is going to be flexibility for the next two years." The 2021 World Athletics Championships, for example, are scheduled to be staged in August next year in Eugene, Oregon.

There is no definite date yet for the rescheduled Games with IOC chief Thomas Bach saying the Olympics "must be rescheduled to a date beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021."

European season has to resume by June end: UEFA chief

UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin said that the European league season has to restart by late June or it would be lost.

“We could start again in mid-May, in June or even late June,” Aleksander Ceferin told Italy’s La Repubblica daily. Ceferin said that any time after that would mean that the season would be lost.

The club football season in Europe, which was supposed to enter its decisive final stretch in March, April and May before the start of the 2020 Euros, has grinded to a halt due to the crisis caused by the spread of coronavirus.

Domestic football leagues across Europe have all been suspended because of the pandemic.

“We don’t know when this pandemic will end, but we have a plan A, B and even C. We are in contact with the leagues, with the clubs, there’s a working group. We have to wait, like any other sector,” said Ceferin.

“We could start again in mid-May, in mid-June or at the end of June. Then, if we don’t succeed, the season is probably lost,” he added.

“This also is the proposal to end this season at the start of the next, which would then be postponed, starting a little later.

“We will see what the best solutions for the different Leagues and clubs are. It’s difficult to imagine all the games behind closed doors, but now we don’t even know if we will resume, with or without spectators.”

Barcelona to donate masks to help fight COVID-19

Barcelona has decided to join hands with the Catalonia government in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak and will provide masks so that people can wear them and stay safe from the deadly virus. The masks are set to be supplied to nursing homes so that doctors and nurses can make use of them to treat the patients.

In a statement issued by the club, it said: “The club has put itself at the service of the health authorities to help with the and enforce all its instructions, recommendations and orders to combat contagion of the virus and alleviate its effects as much as possible.”

Earlier, Barcelona became the first Spanish football club to officially announce a pay cut for players and club staff as the country grapples with the coronavirus pandemic. Sports in Spain has come to a standstill and Barcelona had to make the move so as to pay their support staff.

Bach on Thursday had a conference call with its members in the aftermath of postponement of the Olympics. Batra is an IOC member as well as the president of International Hockey Federation.

Batra also said the IOA and NSFs need to plan on the extension of contracts of the coaches whose tenures were to end this year.

As you are already aware that 2020 Olympics is postponed to 2021. We now need to plan for:

Extension of Contracts for High Performance Director, coaches, support staff etc till end of 2021 as many such contracts are ending in 2020, the process needs to start as soon as possible,” the IOA chief said.

Nearly 80 Indian athletes have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in seven sports -- athletics, archery, boxing, equestrian, hockey, shooting and wrestling. The IOA was expecting to raise the number to more than 120.“

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Batra also asked the top brass of the IOA, TOPM, Sports Ministry, PMO and Cabinet Secretariat, as well as the presidents and secretaries of all the NSFs to prepare a list of such tournaments, postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic, which would then be postponed, starting a little later.

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“We could start again in mid-May, in mid-June or at the end of June. Then, if we don’t succeed, the season is probably lost,” he added.

“This also is the proposal to end this season at the start of the next, which would then be postponed, starting a little later.

“We will see what the best solutions for the different Leagues and clubs are. It’s difficult to imagine all the games behind closed doors, but now we don’t even know if we will resume, with or without spectators.”

Barcelona has decided to join hands with the Catalonia government in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak and will provide masks so that people can wear them and stay safe from the deadly virus. The masks are set to be supplied to nursing homes so that doctors and nurses can make use of them to treat the patients.

In a statement issued by the club, it said: “The club has put itself at the service of the health authorities to help with the and enforce all its instructions, recommendations and orders to combat contagion of the virus and alleviate its effects as much as possible.”

Earlier, Barcelona became the first Spanish football club to officially announce a pay cut for players and club staff as the country grapples with the coronavirus pandemic. Sports in Spain has come to a standstill and Barcelona had to make the move so as to pay their support staff.
Web games by chess officials

Two factions of All-India Chess Federation create different websites and ids

Juventus’s Dybala reveals how he coped after contracting Coronavirus

Juventus star Paulo Dybala revealed how he “struggled to breathe” after contracting coronavirus which has killed over 9,000 people in Italy. The Argentine international announced last Saturday he was one of three Juventus players to catch the virus along with Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi, who both had no symptoms.

“I feel better now after some strong symptoms,” the 26-year-old Dybala told JTV channel.

“A couple of days ago I was not well, I felt heavy and after five minutes of movement I had to stop because I was struggling to breathe.

“Now I can move and walk to start trying to train, because when I tried in the past few days I started to shake too much. I gasped for air and as a result I couldn’t do anything, after five minutes I was already very tired, I felt the body heavy and my muscles hurt. Now I’m fine. My fiancée Oriana (Sabatini) has also overcome the symptoms,” the 26-year-old Dybala told JTV channel.

Dybala has scored 13 goals in all competitions this season, including in league leader’s Juventus’s last game against Inter Milan before Serie A and all sport in Italy was suspended. The goal against Inter was the greatest emotion, (Aaron) Ramsey provided the perfect assist - it’s a pity that it was one of three Juventus players to catch the virus along with Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi, who both had no symptoms.

I gasped for air and as a result I couldn’t do anything, after five minutes I was already very tired, I felt the body heavy and my muscles hurt.

— Paulo Dybala

Web games by chess officials

The International Chess Federation (Fide) was widely criticised for being stubborn and going ahead with the Candidates event in Russia. Even though it made a climbdown and postponed the tournament midway the other day, the All-India Chess Federation (AICF) officials are showing no signs of slowing down in their fight for control.

The Chennai and Delhi factions are engaged in a fierce battle for control and the power struggle has reached such a level that now two websites are claiming to be that of the national chess. There are, of course, different ids for communicating to the national chess.

A new website was developed in a span of over a week by the Delhi faction, led by secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan, while the Chennai faction, led by PR Venketrama Raja, backed by Mumbai body, has changed the official id for communication. Both groups, obviously, claim theirs to be the legitimate body.

“Secretary comes after the president, and the Chennai faction also does not have enough support of the state units. We have the backing of 20 associations,” claimed BN Dongre, of Mumbai Chess Association, who is a supporter of the Chennai faction. On the other hand, Chauhan said till the elections are complete, the interim president has to be Ajay Patel, who was declared president by the court-appointed returning officer. The decision has been successfully challenged by the Chennai faction. There are 32 affiliates to the AICF.

“As per the constitution, Ajay Patel has to be the interim president. We have to wait till the elections are over. I had to develop a website because I have been denied access to it by the president. I have sent a legal notice to the service provider,” said Chauhan. His website has a URL of www.aicf.org.in. The other website could be visited at www.aicf.in. Meanwhile, the Chennai faction has notified a new id for official communication. A post in its website said, “This is to inform you all that the AICF official e-mail id has been changed to office@aicf.in. The old emails ID’s indianchessfed@gmail.com and aicfsecy@gmail.com are no longer valid. Players, arbiters, tournament organisers and others are requested to kindly send your queries only to office@aicf.in.”

The power struggle has ended up in the courts which wanted the elections to be held. But things could not progress because of the prevailing nation-wide lockdown. The world body did not respond to a query from this paper till the time of going to press.
**Status of women, women of status**

Pavali Gulati and Taapsee Pannu play husband and wife in Anubhav Sinha’s thought-provoking film Thappad

maye Lagoo display a keen awareness that this country in even more that others, heterosexual domestic partners are part of an intricate web of familial, social and professional relationships. And that weis is suspended in a matrix that’s inevitably patriarchal.

With that in mind, let me re-describe the premise of Thappad. Confronted with a professional crisis while hosting a private party at his home, Vikram (Pavali Gulati) loses his temper at his wife Amrita and slaps her, in front of the assembled guests: his bosses as well as the couple’s family, friends and neighbours. Amrita, an educated upper middle class woman who has chosen not to be a全景in a career in pursuit of a behaviour that is sooner than others, Amrita is that even more than others, Amrita would not be ‘together’. But like a thing: a climactic monologue. There are actions of the woman doesn’t notice when her husband doesn’t notice when her heart is.

Demanding empathy, support and sanctuary from her female partners while giving none back is simply the norm for men, and women have previously had no choice but to live with it. Thoda baardhaat karna seekhna chahiye auraton ko,” says Amrita’s mother-in-law, not unkindly. “Aap khush hain bhagwan thadani...?”

The wife is a full-time companion, with a professional crisis while hosting a party at his home. The film act, with adeptly-written scenes that prevent characters from seeming like ideological messengers, even when delivering that usually bludgeoning thing: a climactic monologue. There are little clever touches, like Vikram complaining unendingly about feeling hard done by at work. “Vahan rehna hi nahi jahan value nahi hai [Who wants to stay on where you have no value]?” - while remaining tone-deaf to Amrita’s silences. What emerges, with empathy and without drama, is the patriarchal context that normalises the ‘working’ husband’s dependence on the ‘non-working’ wife - while invisibilising her labour, both physical and emotional. The wife is a full-time companion, hostess and cheerleader; manager of the upper-middle class household, primary caregiver to him and his ageing mother and any potential children. But her husband doesn’t notice when her heart is.

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our relationship with food is increasingly an unhappy one. We eat too much - or too little. As urban middle class India gets more prosperous and as globalisation invades your kitchens and dining tables, as India gets fatter and more unhealthy, everyone is running around in stressed-out, feverish, confused circles, trying to figure out what and how much to eat. In Ayurveda, curry leaves have long been confused circles, trying to figure out what and how much to eat. In Ayurveda, curry leaves have long been used to treat diabetes. Several thousands of years later we now know that this is because they slow down the breakdown of carbohydrates to glucose. This, in turn, regulates the release of glucose into the bloodstream. Similarly, ginger's therapeutic powers were used in almost every ancient system of medicine to cure disorders ranging from dyspepsia to rheumatism. Today, we know that ginger is a powerful anti-inflammatory and a potent antioxidant.

So here are four nutritional recipes that can be easily prepared using basic Indian ingredients that pack several health benefits:

Alibaba Laddoos
Combining the nutritious and delicious, toasted flavours of sesame and peanut and poppy seeds in one divine laddoo, this is a great warming snack in wet and cool weather.

INGREDIENTS
- 1 small cup sesame seeds (the black variety is more flavourful)
- 1 small cup raw peanuts
- 2 tbsp poppy seeds (optional)
- ½ cup (about 180 ml) powdered jaggery (adjust according to how sweet you like your laddoos)

METHOD
1. Roast the sesame seeds, peanuts and poppy seeds (if you are using them) separately in a heavy-bottomed pan over low heat, till they release a roasted aroma.
2. In the case of the peanuts, roast them till the skins begin to split and turn brown. (A quick way to check is to let a peanut cool and peel it. If it has turned golden brown, it’s done.) Allow the peanuts to cool and rub off and discard the peels.
3. Now grind the sesame seeds and peanuts separately, to make a coarse powder. While grinding the peanuts, do so only a few seconds at a time because they quickly turn into an oily paste if ground too much.
4. Mix together. Add the powdered jaggery (and the poppy seeds, if you are using them) and grind the mixture briefly so that all the ingredients are well blended and form a homogenous powder.
5. Form the powder into laddoos by first pressing small amounts of it hard between your palms. The pressure will cause the jaggery to melt ever so slightly and thus help to bind them.

Sweet and Sour Bitter Gourd Curry
A delicious accompaniment to main meals, this can double up as a dip for snacks such as samosas and pakoras, or even as a sandwich spread.

INGREDIENTS
- 1½ kg bitter gourd, seeded, washed, cleaned and chopped into small pieces
- 1½ tbsp oil
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- ½ a dried red chilli, broken into pieces
- 7 to 8 curry leaves
- A few pinches of asafoetida
- Salt to taste
- Juice extracted from a ball of tamarind the size of a small lemon, soaked in ¼ cup hot water for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 1½ cups grated jaggery (adjust to taste)
- 1 tbsp sambar or curry powder (you can increase the quantity if you want a spicier version)

METHOD
1. In a heavy-bottomed pan or kadai, dry-roast the bitter gourd pieces over low heat, till they are brown at the edges.
2. Heat the oil in a separate pan. Add the mustard and chilli pieces. When the seeds stop sputtering, add curry leaves and asafoetida.
3. Add the roasted bitter gourd pieces and stir-fry for a few minutes. Add about half a glass of water and cook on low heat, till the bitter gourd pieces are half-cooked. Add salt, tamarind juice and jaggery and simmer till the bitter gourd is completely cooked and tender. Now add the sambar or curry powder and simmer on low heat, till the curry turns ‘glossy’. (You can add a little water if necessary.)
Amla Jaggery Murabba

My mother tells me that when her friend’s young daughter became myopic, she was asked to eat amla murabba. But even otherwise, a teaspoon of this, eaten regularly, is said to do wonders for one’s overall health and well-being, because amla is a great immunity booster and source of Vitamin C, and jaggery fortifies the blood and improves digestion, among other things.

**INGREDIENTS**
- ¾ kg (about 7 to 9, depending on the size) amla
- 300 to 500 gm jaggery. The jaggery can be grated, powdered or even in pieces (adjust to taste)
- 1 tsp powdered cardamom seeds
- ½ tsp saffron strands (or ¼ tsp crushed saffron), soaked in about 1 tbsp of warm milk for about ½ to 1 tsp of lime juice and a tad more ‘spicy’, by adding two three cloves, a large bay leaf and a one-inch length of cinnamon in several hours of strong sunlight for about 15 to 20 days, till the juice thickens and becomes a syrup.

**METHOD**

1. Wash and dry the amla. Heat about two cups of water in a pan. When the water is boiling, put a colander over it, place the amla in it and close with a lid. (You can also do this in an idli steamer or an electric rice cooker.) The steaming retains the Vitamin C content in the fruit.

2. Steam for about 10 to 12 minutes. When done, the amla will be soft to the touch and will have started to split open slightly at the natural separations of the segments in the fruit.

3. Next, detach each segment from the seed with a knife. Place all the segments in a glass jar, add the jaggery on top and shut the lid tightly. Allow it to stand for about two days. The amla will cause the jaggery to melt completely and form a dark brown juice covering the amla pieces completely.

4. Now, if you have the time and patience, put the jar of murabba in several hours of strong sunlight for about 15 to 20 days, till the juice thickens and becomes a syrup. If you don’t, add the amla-jaggery juice and the pieces into a heavy-bottomed pan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly, so that the juice thickens and becomes a syrup. The first method is quicker and easier, especially if you have continuous days of strong sunlight. But the second method allows the jaggery to really soak into the amla pieces, making them more delicious and keeping them softer and easier to bite.

5. Finally, choose which flavouring you want your murabba to have — the kala namak/pepper combination (which is favoured in North India) or the cardamom powder. Add to the murabba and mix well. Store in a dry, airtight jar in a cool place.

**TIP**
The syrup makes a lovely, cooling drink. Add about a tsp to a glass of water, about ½ a tsp of lime juice and more jaggery if necessary. Check and adjust to taste. Sip and boost your immunity even more! This tip and the basic inspiration for this recipe comes from Jaya Subramanian’s recipe in her “Happy Homemaker” channel on YouTube.

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**Savoury Saffron Rice**

Used to flavour as well as tint dishes, both sweet and savoury, with its delicately golden, yet unmistakably aromatic presence, saffron has always been known for its nutritional benefits. This mildly-flavoured rice recipe can be made a tad more ‘spicy’, by adding two three cloves, a large bay leaf and a one-inch length of cinnamon to the onion while frying it.

**INGREDIENTS**
- 1 tbsp ghee
- 1 large onion, finely sliced
- 1 cup basmati rice, cleaned and washed
- 2 cups water
- 10 saffron strands (or ¼ tsp crushed saffron), soaked in about 1 tbsp of warm milk for around 30 minutes
- ½ tsp salt (adjust to taste)
- 3 to 4 peppercorns, coarsely crushed
- 1 to 2 bay leaves
- ½ cup slivered roasted almonds

**METHOD**

1. Heat the ghee in a heavy-bottomed pan, over moderate heat, and fry the onion till golden brown.

2. Add the rice, stirring gently so that the grains don’t break. Fry for about 30 seconds, till they turn opaque.

3. Now, add the water, saffron-flavoured milk, salt, crushed peppercorns and bay leaves and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and cook till the rice is done but firm and all the liquid is absorbed.

4. Garnish with slivered almonds and serve with any curry of choice.

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**EXTRACTED FROM RATNA RAJAIH’S SECRETS OF HEALTH FROM THE INDIAN KITCHEN PUBLISHED BY WESTLAND**
Despite its ubiquity, the word ‘meditation’ is notoriously imprecise. Meaning different things to different people, the term is used to cover almost anything in addition to a formal sitting practice: walking the dog, pottering in the garden or enjoying a quiet day’s fishing can all qualify. Benign and restorative such activities may well be, but that is just the point, they are still activities, whereas ‘real’ meditation, deep mind-yoga is the gradual lessening of all activity and a commensurate entry into silence.

Even within the orthodox repertoire of sitting practices, we find numerous schools, approaches and philosophies. As well as the venerable contemplative traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islamic Sufism; India alone has produced many different types of meditative practice. Some of these are detailed in early texts such as the Shvetashvatara Upanishad; the best known is the use of the mantra Om that Patanjali recommends. Then come Jainism and early, or Theravadin, Buddhism, that champions the calming and centering practices of samatha (‘settledness’; meditation which steadies the mind and brings about a state of ‘calm abiding’) and vipassana (‘insight’; a contemplative exercise enabling one to discern the conditioned nature of phenomena), and the cultivation of compassion, or loving-kindness, through the technique of metta bhavana (an affective focus that generates compassion for all living beings).

From around the end of the first millennium, Hindu Tantric and Mahayana Buddhist schools (especially the Tibetan Vajrayana), advocate the use of mantras and visualisation. A more emotive approach emerges in medieval times, with the culture of surrender to divine love through the means of theistic worship (puja), devotional chanting and singing (bhajan, kirtan) or dedicated service (seva) to a deity, such as Krishna, Rama or the Divine Mother in one of her many forms. Within all these systems there are further distinguishing factors, such as the different uses of sound, whether the eyes are open or closed (and the way this changes the meditative experience), and the distinction between a method employing awareness of the breath, or other physiological functions, as opposed to a purely mental focus that is detached from bodily grounding.

Nevertheless, whatever the practice, meditators themselves have always known that it has definite subjective effects, which is presumably why they bother to continue. Scientists, on the other hand, the high priests of our secular age, are slower in the uptake, generally beginning to take interest in a phenomenon only when it becomes noticeable as an economic and cultural factor in society. This tipping point has now been reached with yoga and meditation, whose success over many decades indicates that they are no mere passing fad, but reflect deep-seated, long-term needs, ways of thinking and changes in society at large. Realising that an examination of yoga can tell us something about how people live under the taxing conditions of modernity, researchers have been exploring the territory over the past forty years or more, and continue to do so with enthusiasm.

Featuring prominently among the data accumulated so far are the physical changes accompanying meditation, or what we can call the bodily imprint of mind-yoga. The general state of the meditating body can be measured by its breathing rate and volume, and its level of rest as shown by the metabolic rate and galvanic skin response, as well as various chemical and hormonal changes in the system. More excitingly, concomitant changes in brain-activity are monitored by examining the electroencephalogram (EEG) readings of the brainwaves, which show the electrical activity of millions of neurons as they rise and fall at different frequencies, depending on our state of consciousness and what we are doing. Two American researchers, Fred J Travis and Jonathan Shear, have recently proposed a useful model which identifies three basic types of meditation, each with its own characteristic physical and mental parameters.

**Focused Attention**
This first type of meditation involves focusing the attention on some object or perception, by concentrating on a single point and disallowing the mind from wandering off it. The object of such a focus could be virtually anything: a candle flame, a geometric yantra diagram, or a regular bodily rhythm is all methods typically employed in such a system. The aim is to train the attention to hold steady in one place and thereby to frustrate its natural habit of jumping from one thing to another. The shorthand term ‘monkey-mind’ is used in many teachings, likening our chronic mental restlessness to the movements of a monkey that leaps from branch to branch, chattering incessantly. Such instability, so the argument goes, can only be overcome by forcibly centering the attention so that it remains undistracted on the present point of focus. EEG imaging techniques have identified the various areas of the brain associated with mental meandering, as well as those associated with registering distraction, re-orienting awareness and holding a sustained focus.

These show that in this focused attention meditation, the EEG movement is rapid, rising and falling twenty to thirty times a second to produce what is called ‘beta wave EEG’. It can be even faster, in the range of thirty to fifty times per second which is known as ‘gamma wave EEG’. Studies cited in Scientific American suggested that, one might predict, practising this type of meditation improves the mind’s ability to focus. However, the human strain
Kakuro

The numbers in the grey squares refer to the sums of the digits that you must fill into the empty spaces directly below or to the right of the grey square containing the number. For instance, in the given example, the 3 boxes horizontally next to 16 must contain 3 digits that add up to 16, whereas for 9, it is the 2 boxes placed vertically under it that must add up to 9. No zeros are used here, only the digits 1 through 9.

Note: A digit cannot appear more than once in any particular digit combination. For instance, in the example, we cannot have the combination of 4+7+4 for 15.

How to begin:
Example (Fig A) - Begin with the zero next to 3. Since no lines can be drawn around zero, mark crosses around it, as shown. Now, there is a cross in one space around it. So we know the three lines of 3 can only be drawn in the remaining three spaces. Next, these lines can only be extended in one direction each. Continue, using the same logic. Hints: Keep eliminating possibilities by marking crosses in spaces between dots where a line isn’t possible. If you have already completed required lines or where a line extension may create a branch or cause a dead-end (Fig B).

How to solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from one to nine must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Gofigure

Place the four numbers in the first, third, fifth and seventh boxes and whatever operators you care to use in the second, fourth, and sixth boxes in the correct order to get the answer. Use the numbers only once.

Quick

Place the four numbers in the correct order to get the answer. Use the operators

Place the four numbers in the correct order to get the answer. Use the operators

Strikeout

This crossword has no clues and answer is there waiting for you. All you have to do is find it in each square. You have a choice of two letters, one of which you must strike out. If you choose correctly, you will be left with a grid that contains real words.

Quote

This puzzle is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that Q equals C, it will equal C throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

TODAY'S CLUE: G EQUALS H.

U FQXL CUV QWQGX
KB FQV, ZHK GLQX
KFOAL UDBBP FGB
QUX VB MPUV OBI
MBXXZQPL TLOLUK.

Mensa puzzle

Which letter replaces the question mark and completes the puzzle?

Bull's eye

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown? Every word must contain the central letter. There should be one seven-letter word. British English Dictionary is used as a reference.

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U FQXL CUV QWQGX
KB FQV, ZHK GLQX
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MBXXZQPL TLOLUK.

Alphabet triangle

Beginning at the top move towards the bottom seven-letter word by adding a letter at each step and rearranging. A correct and different word must be made at each step answering to the clue given.


MINDCLOW

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

Joke of the day

Q: What did the left eye say to the right eye? A: Between you and me, something smells.

Riddler

In this teaser, I have given you 4 words. Beside each word are a series of letter groupings. Your task is to find the answer to the word on the left by choosing one letter from each of the letter groups to the right of that clue. Glasses are in digs glean to part of 9 o'clock (Janice Ojey) (Fig A) the title is poisonous Drinks u go out tall f its Mainroad love old gh link try
**If it’s your birthday today**

Singles enter the marriage dasha and are introduced to some people via family and friends. Those who are married in a relationship may find the going tough as there may be unnecessary misunderstandings. Just sort them out immediately instead of waiting. Career/business runs a smooth and normal course, but with lesser downs. Travel decreases for six months. Health is good.

**Capricorn**
Be aware that some changes in the organization are bound to impact your role, but in a positive manner. Some receive a job offer.

**Lucky days:** 30th, April 1st.
**Colours:** blue/ grey.

**Aquarius**
Keeping communication open at all times makes sure the relationship moves ahead on an even keel. Some work for tomorrow has to be completed.

**Lucky days:** 30th, April 3rd.
**Colours:** salmon/ grey.

**Pisces**
Steer clear of unnecessary arguments since you’ve already made up your mind. Students find their focus and mental retention is excellent.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 31st, April 1st, 3rd, 4th.
**Colours:** khaki/ plume.

**Cancer**
Just quietly flow with the karmic tide and sequence of events with faith. All will be well in a couple of hours.

**Lucky days:** March 30th to April 4th.
**Colours:** beige/ pink.

**Aries**
You mentally move with the times of today. Ones relationship shows signs of reviving. This is like receiving karmic justice.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 30th, 31st, April 1st, 2nd, 4th.
**Colours:** peach/ bronze.

**Leo**
Focus on health, following a nutritious diet. You want to revel in this rush of love and just forget about everything else.

**Lucky days:** 29th, April 2nd, 3rd, 4th.
**Colours:** brown/ purple.

**Virgo**
Social life may be on the back burner for a while. Some may take a few days off and go on a mini vacation.

**Lucky days:** 30th, April 3rd.
**Colours:** aquamarine/ beige.

**Scorpio**
The worst is over now. An overly cautious approach to managing money is a good mindset to have. Friends give good advice.

**Lucky days:** 30th, April 1st, 2nd, 3rd.
**Colours:** grey/ orange.

**Sagittarius**
Genuine caring brings reciprocation; is there just a one sided approach to an issue in your mind? Find out the truth.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 30th, April 2nd, 3rd, 4th.
**Colours:** pink/ cream.

**Taurus**
A relationship decision made is fine. Your ability to get to the root of the issue is why people ask for advice.

**Lucky days:** The entire week is auspicious.
**Colours:** plum/ sandalwood.

**Gemini**
Being a little quiet and incommunicative is surprising. The atmosphere at home may be partly to blame for this. Pay attention to conversation.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 31st, April 1st.
**Colours:** orange/ white.

**Libra**
Those seeking employment or a change of job receive good news soon. This karmic cycle encourages learning the value of patience.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 30th, April 1st, 2nd, 4th.
**Colours:** grey/ beige.

**Capricorn**
Be aware that some changes in the organization are bound to impact your role, but in a positive manner. Some receive a job offer.

**Lucky days:** 30th, April 3rd.
**Colours:** salmon/ grey.

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**Libra**
Those seeking employment or a change of job receive good news soon. This karmic cycle encourages learning the value of patience.

**Lucky days:** 29th, 30th, April 1st, 2nd, 4th.
**Colours:** grey/ orange.
Another general category of meditation is Open Monitoring. This employs a volitional control of the mind, in order to change how it reacts to stressful information. The practitioner of this type of technique observes their thoughts, experiences and emotional reactions as they appear and disappear, and tries to maintain a non-judgmental attitude towards them. Continuously cultivating a neutral response to whatever sensations arise and pass away in the mind, and remaining free of reactivity to them, develops the strategic habit of separating the experient, the ‘I’, from his mental impressions. This separation works to correct, redirect or even inhibit his spontaneous reactions. With sufficient practice, this habit persists outside of meditation as well. So, for example, if patients suffering from depression school themselves to monitor the memories, and observe the feelings, they find problematic, they will become better able to manage sadness and anxiety and so on, in everyday life. When and if such feelings do arise, they will carry less force and be less dominant.

Neuro-imaging studies confirm that Open Monitoring reduces activity in those areas of the brain involved in anxiety and the technique has been shown to help people deal with symptoms of depression and anxiety. One dramatic example is that of war veterans suffering post-traumatic stress disorder. Open Monitoring also decreases disturbed sleep patterns. This type of meditation is characterised by a slower EEG wave pattern, called theta, which oscillates only five to eight times a second. Theta EEG occurs naturally when someone is preoccupied — for example, while reading a book — and is no longer aware of outside stimuli, such as surrounding noise or other sensory input from the environment. This lack of attention to ambient information is due to changes in the functioning of the thalamus, that part of the brain responsible for processing incoming sensory data. While Open Monitoring can be seen to correspond to what Patanjali calls pratyahara — the withdrawal of the sensory focus in an inward direction as the attention settles down — it still requires continuous focus and thus some degree of mental effort is involved. This effort is less than that required in the Focused Attention method, and may not be experienced as onerous, but it still works to engage the awareness in a focus which is limiting and exclusive. Because of this, the mind is still confined to a relatively surface level of thinking and perceiving.

The third type of meditation corresponds to the process that Patanjali advocates in his classic text, which is to say, a progressive interiority that culminates in the settled state of the mind known as samadhi (‘coming together’ or ‘coherence’). What is crucial about this process, and what distinguishes it from its two predecessors, is that the mind is not volitional and proceeds automatically. In other words, the awareness easily and effortlessly settles inwards of its own accord. The subjective experience is that of a change becoming increasingly quieter and less defined; rather as if the volume of the radio were gradually being turned down until it becomes silent. This progressive renaming of experience is felt as a growing peacefulness and quiet enjoyment. The surrender of experience culminates in a state free of sensory perceptions, thoughts or emotions, whatever their content or character. Mind-yoga teachings call this ‘pure consciousness’ — the word ‘pure’ meaning free of all admixture — describing it as a state of undisrupted being, free of all mental input. With the cessation of its activity, the limited sense of self as volitional agent is gradually transcended. During ‘self-transcending’, a middle frequency EEG wave pattern typically occurs, at seven to nine cycles per second. This is called alpha-1 and is characterised of reduced mental activity and increased relaxation. We can imagine these coherent alpha waves as functioning something like the conductor of an orchestra, working to bring all the different instruments into a harmonious whole. This orderly activity in frontal alpha waves was first discovered in practitioners’ self-transcending meditation over forty years ago. More recently, a meta-analysis published in the American Psychological Association’s Psychological Bulletin in 2006 cited seven studies showing that in self-transcending meditation alpha EEG coherence increases between the left and right sides of the frontal brain and continues spreading until the whole brain becomes synchronised and coherent. Such synchrony appears to enliven a coherent state of consciousness that has beneficial effects for both mind and body. When the mind settles, the level of biochemical and physiological stress decreases significantly. This reverses our ancient biological inheritance, the ‘fight-or-flight’ response, that is marked by an increase in heart beat, respiration rate and the production of powerful stress hormones, such as adrenalin and cortisol, as well as stress-related compounds such as lactic acid. This stress-reflex is still hard-wired in the human animal because our early ancestors were stationed squarely in the middle of the food chain, eating smaller creatures but in constant danger of being eaten themselves. Our high-alert setting continued until relatively recently in evolutionary terms, and such ancient and intrinsic biological mechanisms cannot just be wished away by conscious intention. However, when mental activity settles down naturally, without any coercion and of its own free will, the direct opposite to the ‘fight-or-flight’ response seems to occur in the body. ‘Self-transcending’ techniques bring about a ‘stay-and-play’ physiological response, marked by a reduction in stress chemicals and a generally benign blood chemistry.

It seems the repeated restfulness of this state allows for not only the spontaneous dissolution of accumulated physical fatigue and tension but, over time, the neutralising of those deep-rooted psychological and emotional impressions that Hans Selye identified as the persisting effects of ‘distress’. One clue as to how this self-healing — or to use a yogic phrase ‘purification’ — happens may lie in its analogy with dreamless sleep. Self-transcending techniques mimic sleep, but practitioners do not lose consciousness and they also register different types of physiological changes from those brought on by sleeping. Studies published between 2012 and 2015 show that in sleep, the brain switches on an internal detox-system that uses the cerebrospinal fluid moving between the brain and spinal cord to wash out cellular waste from the central nervous system. This so-called glymphatic system uses the cell’s batteries — the mitochondria — to flush out up to three pounds of waste proteins a year, in much the same way as the lymph system in other organs removes waste to the kidney and liver. If this cleansing and revitalising process is, in fact, activated by the restful nature of dreamless sleep, it may well be replicated and augmented by the deep rest of regular meditation.

Subjectively, the relief of being free from the burden of any sort of thinking, whether directed or not, is immense. From a yogic point of view, this process is a gentle withdrawal of awareness from the habitual outward pull of the senses (pratyahara), followed by the gradual settling of the waves of thought and feeling (chitta-vritti) as their content is purified and released. Eventually there comes a falling back into what Patanjali calls our ‘true nature’ (sva-nupa). In this way, self-transcending meditation allows the practitioner eventually to become consciously familiar with the core of their being, an area that lies beyond all mental activity, which yoga teachers identify as purusha, ‘the Person’, that is to say, our irreducible essence.

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