

Sensitise children living at child care institutions: NCPCR

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

Apex child rights body NCPCR has asked states to sensitise children housed at child care institutions about the importance of social distancing and staying indoors to protect themselves from coronavirus.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has directed district child protection units to ensure that donors are not allowed to go inside the premises and a separate counter may be placed near the entrance of the home, where the donations can be accepted.

"The donors may be requested to provide dry ration/uncooked food material instead of cooked meal," the NCPCR said.

According to official data, over 60,000 children are living in different child care institutions across the country.

Apart from sensitising children living at child care institutions about the importance of social distancing, commission has also asked states to ensure that the CCIs are equipped with sufficient academic and recreation material for the kids. "Further, if required, therapeutic counselling services may be provided to the children and staff to ensure social well-being. Medicines and medical facility for children with HIV/AIDS should be made available in all CCIs and other places where these children are residing," it said.

The NCPCR has urged states to release pending funds to the child care institutions at the earliest. India is currently under the biggest lockdown with around 1.3 billion people asked to stay home in view of the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed 29 lives and infected over 1,00,000 people in the country.

The Government and medical professionals have urged people to avoid mass gatherings and practice social distancing which has emerged as the most effective way to prevent the spread of coronavirus. (PTI)

Army teams decontaminate Command Hospital

KOLKATA, Mar 30:

Army personnel have decontaminated the premises of Command Hospital in the city and identified those that came in contact with a doctor there who have tested positive for COVID-19, an official statement said here on Monday.

People found to have come in direct contact with the doctor were relocated to a separate quarantine facility with full medical and administration support, it said.

The army doctor, who had travelled to Delhi between March 12 and 17 and participated in professional discussions in the national capital, had tested positive for COVID-19 at the Eastern Command Hospital on March 29.

"In a swift response, Indian Army teams quickly isolated the facility and identified the direct contacts of the doctor in Kolkata," the statement said.

The workplace and the premises of the Command Hospital have been decontaminated with three teams working overnight, it said.

The statement also said that further actions were in progress to establish contact with those who might have come in close proximity of the doctor, while he was at the national capital and during transit.

"All actions will be taken to proactively contain the issue," it added. (PTI)

Govt seeks feedback from IAS officers on COVID-19 preparedness

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

The Central Government has asked over 600 IAS officers to give feedback on a questionnaire related to its preparedness against coronavirus pandemic, officials said on Monday.

The officers of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) of five batches (2014-2018), who served as assistant secretaries at central government departments soon after completion of their training, have been asked to give response to the questionnaire, they said.

"They have been asked to reply to 23 questions in the questionnaire and share their response," a senior official said, requesting anonymity.

A comprehensive report based on the participants' responses will be shared with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), he said.

Over 400 IAS officers have already shared their response to the questionnaire, the officer said.

The exercise to seek the response from the officers began on March 25.

The country is under 21-days lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Wednesday as part of its measures to check the spread of deadly coronavirus.

As part of the government's unique initiatives, IAS officers are now posted as assistant secretaries in different central government departments for about three months time before they move out to their respective state cadres.

All IAS officers are allotted cadres which could either be a state or group of states. The officers are supposed to start their career in their respective cadre states.

As per rules, IAS officers are eligible to come on central deputation only after completing nine years of service at their respective cadres. (PTI)

Nehru, Nizam and Indian classical music!

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

During the Hyderabad integration crisis, Jawaharlal Nehru threw a reception for the Nizam but found it difficult to keep him engaged in a conversation before a Nepalese bureaucrat came to his rescue.

Nehru failed in his attempts to take, what he felt, good care of the dour Nizam and finally turned up to Bijay Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, the then Nepalese ambassador to India, for help.

"After racking his brains, my father came up with Indian classical music as the subject for a tete-a-tete and managed to engage the Nizam in a lively conversation for almost an hour," says Bijay Rana's politician son Pashupati Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana.

Pashupati Rana mentions this anecdote as recounted by Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pandey, the then Nepalese Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi, in the latest issue of The Equator Line magazine.

"Pandit Nehru, it goes without saying, was duly grateful. This was a measure of their mutual trust and understanding," writes Rana, a descendant of Nepal's Rana dynasty, and chairman of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (United). The erstwhile Hyderabad state was annexed to the Indian Union on September 17, 1948.

India's first home minister Sardar Patel requested Mir Osman Ali Khan Asaf Jah VII, the last Nizam of the princely state of Hyderabad, to join India, but he refused and instead declared Hyderabad as an independent nation on August 15, 1947. A military operation was launched in 1948 and the Indian armed forces invaded the Nizam-ruled princely state, annexing it into the Indian Union. Rana hails Nehru's statesmanship saying his "view that there should be continuity with change played a pivotal role in the peaceful transition to democracy in Nepal".

Such political safe landings are rare in history and difficult to make, he adds. Nehru and his vision is the topic of this issue of the magazine, which has articles by the likes of economist Bibek Debroy, journalist Harish Khare, writer-TV producer Jad Adams and Sri Lankan writer Daya Disnayake, among others. "With his exposure to international politics, insights into the future, radical ideas in the context of the time and his phenomenal mass appeal, Nehru was the foremost leader of the freedom struggle and well-suited to interpret his country's gloom and aspirations," says magazine's editor-in-chief Bhaskar Roy. "India's success as a democracy could be entirely ascribed to Nehru's visionary leadership of this inchoate land for 17 long years after independence," he adds. (PTI)

Fear and panic becoming bigger problem : SC

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

As thousands of migrant workers walking back to their native places after being rendered jobless due to the coronavirus lockdown, the Supreme Court on Monday observed that the panic and fear is becoming a "bigger problem than coronavirus", and sought a status report from the Centre by Tuesday on the measures taken to prevent the exodus.

The court said it would not create more confusion by issuing directions on measures which the government is already taking.

Hearing two separate petitions through video-conferencing, Chief Justice Bobde and Justice L Nageswara Rao said before passing any direction, it would like to wait for the status report from the Centre.

The PILs, filed by advocates Alakh Alok Srivastava and Rashmi Bansal, sought relief, including food, water, medicines and proper medical facilities, for thousands of migrant workers who are leaving for their native places after being rendered homeless and jobless due to the 21-day coronavirus lockdown.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre said the migration needs to be stopped to prevent the spread of virus and the Centre as well as concerned states have taken requisite steps to deal with it.

Referring to various news stories, Srivastava, petitioner in-person, said there is lack of cohesion and cooperation between states on the issue of migration of labourers. The Uttar Pradesh government initially provided buses for movement of migrant labourers for two days and now they have stopped the service, he added.

Reacting to Mehta's submission that Centre would like to file the status report on affidavit on the steps taken, the bench said, "we would not deal with



the things, which the government is already doing. We would like to wait for the report of Centre".

Bansal, another petitioner in-person, said medical and safety measures are required for these migrant labourers. She also suggested that sanitisers can be sprinkled on the groups of migrant labourers to disinfect them, and mid-day meal providers should be roped in to provide food.

To Bansal's remarks, the bench said, "you are assuming that government is not doing anything. It is advising us on what steps to be taken. Let us see what they are doing. Let them file a common reply on both these petitions".

Bansal said counsellors could be deployed for these migrant workers, who are trying to leave cities due to fear and panic. "This fear and panic is a bigger problem than this virus", the bench observed, adding, "we are not going to add to the confusion by issuing directions which are already being taken care of by the government".

The bench posted the matters for further hearing on Tuesday.

Srivastava in his plea had sought direction to the Centre to redress the plight of thousands of migrant workers who along with their families are "walking

on foot" to reach their native places amid the coronavirus pandemic and nationwide lockdown.

The plea has also sought a direction to the authorities to identify such stranded migrant workers and provide them with food, water, medicines and proper medical facilities.

"With Railways and buses suspended, several of such migrant workers are walking for kilometres to reach their villages. Many are unable to make it across state borders and thus are left stranded on roads, without food, water or shelter. There is a large-scale human distress," his plea said.

The separate plea, filed by advocates Bansal and Anuj Gupta, contended that "mass exodus" of migrant workers from cities to their villages could further spread the virus.

The plea also said states should be directed to stop migrants wherever they were and allow their movement after they are sanitised.

It said that direction should be given to the authorities to create awareness regarding the measures taken by the government, including provision of free food grains and other essential items through PDS, and streamline the procedures to stop fear and chaos among these people. (PTI)

Cong demands law against any retrenchment in private sector

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

The Congress on Monday demanded that the Central Government bring in a law or rule to ensure there is no retrenchment of workers in the private sector for six months till August in the wake of lockdown due to coronavirus.

Congress spokesperson Gaurav Vallabh also said the central government should bear 70 per cent of salary and wage bill of MSME sector for three months from March to May 2020.

He said there are around 4.25 crore MSMEs in India as of 2019 and the contribution of the sector to GDP is 29 per cent, which is about Rs 61 lakh crore.

Assuming the wage bill of MSMEs to be 10 per cent of turnover one can consider Rs 6.1 lakh crore as the wage bill and it comes to around Rs 50,000 crore for one month.

He said 70 per cent of this is around Rs 1 lakh crore and assuming that approximately

45 crore are employed this works out to only Rs 2,200 per person employed.

Vallabh also demanded that truck drivers, which are the backbone of the economy, should be extended support at this crucial time.

"The government has to support these people by providing immediate driver advance to transporters by Direct Benefit transfer (DBT) to the extent of 3 months of their wages," he said.

The Congress leader said there are around 30 lakh truck drivers in our country and the total burden will be around Rs 25,000 crore.

This will also ensure a smooth supply chain, he said.

"The central government should come out with a law to ensure that there is no retrenchment in any sector or company whatsoever for next 6 months (March - August, 2020)," he said.

He said 15 per cent of the workers are on the lower end of the corporate salary structure

and the government should pay half their salaries.

"If the government pays half the salaries of such employees for the next six months, it requires only Rs 3.78 lakh crore, which is only about 1.5 per cent of the country's GDP.

"This is possible fiscally and this will ensure that no employee will suffer due to the lockdown or its effect on the economy," he said, adding that the Congress is making the suggestions as a constructive opposition.

He also said that the prime minister should apologise for the "insensitive" remarks of some of his ministers.

"If you have to apologise, do so to the migrant labour and daily wagers who are made to suffer.

"If you have to apologise do so for the actions of some of your ministers, who are cooking, playing 'Antakshari' or watching TV at home and making insensitive remarks," he said. (PTI)

CAPFs seek live WhatsApp location from troops on leave

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

The paramilitary forces have directed that "live location" of all officers and jawans allowed to work from home or on leave should be obtained daily to prevent the spread of COVID-19 after two positive cases were reported among them, official said on Monday.

Border guarding force Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) has taken a lead and directed all team heads a few days back to undertake this exercise daily and submit a compliance report twice to the headquarters in Delhi at 10 am and 4 pm.

In a directive accessed by PTI, the force has ordered that a senior officer designated for the task should every morning give a call to all personnel allowed to 'work from home' or on leave and subsequently ask them to send their 'live location' over the latest WhatsApp app especially created for this purpose.

"This is aimed to check that none of the personnel misuse their leaves and stay at homes. This is important as it will not only help in strict enforcement of the ongoing lockdown declared by the government but also save the vital manpower of these fighting forces from contracting coronavirus," a top Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) commander told PTI.

All supervisory officers have been asked to check the WhatsApp live location provided by their subordinates with the house addresses furnished

by them in official records, he said.

He said while no such case of violation has been detected till now but the intelligence and vigilance arms of these about 10 lakh personnel strong forces have reported that misuse of official ID card, uniform or government-issued vehicle by force personnel to visit their homes or family members during the leave period can take place, and hence checks need to be deployed.

"The snoop wings indicated that the police forces manning check posts in the city and at borders may not strictly check official force vehicles or allow those in uniform or carrying ID cards. Some erring personnel can misuse this authority," the commander said.

All CAPFs have been asked this WhatsApp-based data on a daily basis, he added.

The paramilitary forces comprising the ITBP, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) are also known as CAPFs.

They work under the command of the Union Home Ministry for rendering a variety of internal security tasks and border guarding.

Counter-terror force National Security Guard (NSG) has also been brought under the same order and directed for compliance, officials said.

A BSF officer posted in

Tekanpur in Gwalior and a CISF head constable deployed at the Mumbai international airport have recently tested positive for coronavirus that has claimed thousands of lives and infected lakhs across the world.

In the case of the BSF, at least 50 personnel have been sent to home quarantine as the infected officer attended at least two meetings and carried out official work for some days. His wife had returned from the UK sometime back but was tested negative.

The officer was himself in-charge of managing affairs of a special quarantine centre created at its academy in Tekanpur to treat COVID-19 patients.

These forces have also circulated a declaration form amongst the personnel to report if any of their family members have returned from abroad in the recent past or they have come in touch with someone who is infected.

This measure is also aimed to ensure that any such individual can be immediately be isolated or quarantined and his medical tests are conducted, officials said.

"Strict disciplinary action will be taken against any officer or jawan found violating these two latest directives on grounds of jeopardising the health of his healthy colleagues who are part of an armed security force under the Union of India," the commander said. (PTI)

Peak US death rate likely in 2 weeks: Trump

WASHINGTON, Mar 30:

Some one lakh people in the US may die from the coronavirus pandemic and the peak death rate was likely to hit the country in two weeks, President Donald Trump has warned, citing his health experts as he extended the "social distancing" guidelines until April 30.

His statement came as the death toll in New York state, America's epicentre of COVID-19, crossed the 1,000 mark, with Governor Andrew Cuomo warning that thousands of people may die before the crisis ends.

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the US stood at 143,025 and 2,509 people have died in the country, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Assuring his countrymen that he expects the US to be on its way to recovery by June 1, Trump told reporters at a televised White House news conference that he had to extend the social distancing measures till April 30, based on the advice from his two top public health advisors and members of the White House Task Force on Coronavirus: Dr Deborah Bix and Dr Anthony Fauci.

"They demonstrate that the mitigation measures we are putting in place may significantly reduce the number of new infections and ultimately the number of fatalities.

"I want the American people to know that your selfless inspiring and valiant efforts are saving countless lives. You are making a difference. The modeling estimates that the peak and death rate is likely to hit in two weeks," Trump said during his second Rose Garden press conference on the coronavirus outbreak.

Trump predicted his decision would save hundreds of thousands of lives, in an apparent moving of the political goalposts to account for the fast worsening US pandemic.

"2.2 million people would have died if we didn't do what we are doing," the President said.

"If we can hold that number down ... To 100,000, it's a horri-



President Donald Trump speaks during a coronavirus task force briefing in the Rose Garden of the White House.

ble number, maybe even less ... We all, all together have done a very good job," Trump said.

The new April 30 date marks yet another reversal of position on the pandemic by the President, who last week made it clear he did not pick the Easter date, April 12, based on data but because it was a "beautiful timeline."

Shrugging off his row back, Trump claimed Sunday that Easter (on April 12) had only been an "aspirational date."

"We can expect that by June 1 we will be well on our way to recovery," he said.

The coronavirus pandemic is expanding fast in New York's neighbouring New Jersey, where so far more than 13,000 cases have been reported, with 161 deaths.

More than 20 of the 50 American states have recorded over 1,000 coronavirus cases -- the number from where the deadly disease starts skyrocketing.

Major disaster declaration has been notified in nearly two dozen states, in addition to Trump declaring a national emergency a week ago.

The state governments and local city officials have started taking tough measures against those found in the public or not abiding by social distancing measures. For example, in Silicon Valley and New York, the local police have started imposing hefty fine ranging from USD 200 to USD 400 for those not adhering to social distancing measures in public places.

Court grants bail to 3 Shaheen Bagh protestors

NEW DELHI, Mar 30:

A Delhi court has granted bail to three persons, arrested for allegedly not moving away from the Shaheen Bagh anti-CAA protest site and obstructing police officials, so as to decongest jails in view of coronavirus.

Metropolitan Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh granted relief to Shan Mohammed, Syed Masood Ahmed, Syed Taseer Ahmed taking into account the directions of the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court to decongest already overpopulated prisons in the wake of coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic.

The court however imposed certain restrictions on them, including that they cannot mobilise a crowd at the protest site.

The court further directed them not to post any opinion regarding the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Population Register, National Register Citizen on any social media, instant messengers or give any interview in this regard to print and electronic media.

It granted bail to the three persons on furnishing a bail bond of Rs 25,000 each and two sureties of like amount.

"It is well known that in the

current scenario in the wake of COVID-19 epidemic, the Supreme Court of India and the Delhi High Court have both passed the directions regarding the de-congestion of already overpopulated prisons. The bail has been opposed by the state (police) primarily on the ground that the applicants might mobilise a crowd at the protest site which could prejudice the maintenance of law and order and affect adversely the efforts of the state to contain the spread of coronavirus.

"In view of this court, this reasonable apprehension can be addressed by imposing suitable restrictions on the applicants. Accordingly, this court allows the bail on furnishing a personal bond of Rs 25,000 with two sureties of like amount," the court said.

It further directed the accused to mark attendance at Shaheen Bagh Police Station every Monday at 10 AM during investigation of the case and not to visit the site at Shaheen Bagh for the purpose of any protest.

They shall not participate in any meeting/gathering where more than five people in total including the applicant are assembled during the existence of the directions of the Centre and the State Government due to COVID-19, the court said.

The counsel for the accused told the court that they were innocent and has nothing to do with the alleged offence and they are likely to be infected with the coronavirus if detained for long. (PTI)

It directed them to comply with the directions of the Centre, state government and local self-governing bodies, made to contain the spread of the Coronavirus.

They should not tamper with evidence, regularly appear before the court on each and every date of hearing and not leave the country without permission of the court, it said.

During the hearing, the police opposed the bail applications saying they have disobeyed the directions of the Centre and the state government regarding the lockdown and prohibition of protests gathering which were made to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The police alleged that the accused did not pay any heed to the directions of the police officials to remove themselves from the protest site and obstructed the police from discharging their duties.

If released on bail, they may mobilise large crowd at the protest site and it might pose problems of law and order, the police claimed.

The counsel for the accused told the court that they were innocent and has nothing to do with the alleged offence and they are likely to be infected with the coronavirus if detained for long. (PTI)

UK PM's top aide in self-isolation

LONDON, Mar 30:

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's top aide, Dominic Cummings, has gone into self-isolation after developing mild symptoms of coronavirus over the weekend, according to UK media reports.

Cummings, the UK PM's senior-most adviser, is the latest among the top rung in government to be hit by COVID-19 after Johnson himself was tested and went into self-isolation last week, followed soon after by UK health secretary Matt Hancock.

It remains unconfirmed whether Cummings has been tested for the deadly virus yet but, according to reports, he is working from home and remains in contact with the Downing Street team.

He was last caught on television news cameras leaving 10 Downing Street soon after Johnson had announced his COVID-19 diagnosis to the British public. Cummings, 48, is the man behind the victorious Vote Leave campaign for the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) and has also been

credited with aspects of Johnson's landslide election win in the December 2019 General Election.

He is believed to have developed symptoms of COVID-19, including a cough, in line with the mild symptoms experienced by Johnson.

"I am now self-isolating, but I will continue to lead the government's response via video-conference as we fight this virus. Together we will beat this," Johnson, 55, had said in his video message on Twitter last Friday.

Since then, Hancock posted a similar video message to say he would be working from home as he fights his mild symptoms.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack is another Cabinet minister who went into self-isolation with symptoms, as did England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty -- who had been leading the government's charge against the pandemic alongside Johnson.

The latest addition to the list of the government's top team developing symptoms of the deadly virus will once again

raise concerns around social distancing rules imposed UK-wide earlier last week not being followed stringently enough within political quarters.

Senior Indian-origin UK Cabinet members, Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary Priti Patel, are among those who have been working in close proximity to the UK PM and his top team.

Johnson's pregnant fiancée, Carrie Symonds, had moved out of Downing Street and is said to be self-isolating in her flat in south London.

Among other senior UK figures afflicted by the virus include Prince Charles, who continues to work from his home in Balmoral, Scotland.

The 71-year-old heir to the British throne had tested positive for COVID-19 last week but was said to be in "good spirits". His 93-year-old mother, Queen Elizabeth II, has been based at Windsor Castle for some time with husband Prince Philip, 98. The monarch has conducted her weekly meetings with the UK PM via telephone from there. (PTI)