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See Full
Page Advt
on Page 23



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\$1

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Coronavirus Pandemic World On Edge



Page 18

Cases In India Rise To 81, States
Swing Into Action

Trump declares national emergency
in latest bid to combat coronavirus

Page 19

Scientists believe they've made a
huge breakthrough in coronavirus
vaccine effort



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(See Full Page Advt. on Page 16)



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'We are being treated as smugglers': Indians stranded in coronavirus-hit Italy

In a bid to avoid the spread from coronavirus in the country, the central government has issued a circular barring the return of Indians from virus hotspots unless they produce a certificate that proves they have tested negative.



(News Agencies) The plight of Indians stuck in airport without knowing that coronavirus-hit Italy has come to light after Hima, a woman from Kerala, stranded at an airport in the European nation released a video showing their hardships. "We are being treated as smugglers. People have commented on the video put up on Facebook asking us why we want to come back

to Kerala. Many came to the airport without knowing that a certificate would be required for them to travel. The airport authorities say that India was not ready to receive us," she said in a voice message to media. The woman said at least 200 Indians were stranded at Milan and Rome airports. "We are sitting at a corner of the airport in freezing temperatures. It is just like

an isolation ward. The central government should give us the certificate to enable us to return," she said as reported by news agency PTI. In a bid to avoid the spread of coronavirus in the country, the central government has issued a circular barring the return of Indians from virus hotspots unless they produce a certificate that proves they have tested negative for the

virus. The circular stipulated that people "travelling from or having visited Italy or South Korea" and desirous of entering India "need to obtain certificates of having tested negative for COVID-19" from the designated laboratories authorised by the health authorities of those countries. India had previously stated that it will now screen passengers from all countries coming to India. Previously, passengers only from 12 'high-alert' countries like China, South Korea, Japan and others were being screened for novel coronavirus. On Tuesday, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to withdraw a similar circular issued by the Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Vijayan said the state Assembly would consider moving a resolution in this regard in the ongoing

session seeking the intervention of the Centre to bring back the stranded Indians including many Keralites, from abroad. "How can we say that an Indian citizen cannot come back to India just because he is infected? Barring our citizens from coming to the country is an uncivilised attitude," Vijayan told the Assembly. India has reported over 50 positive cases of novel coronavirus. Over 100,000

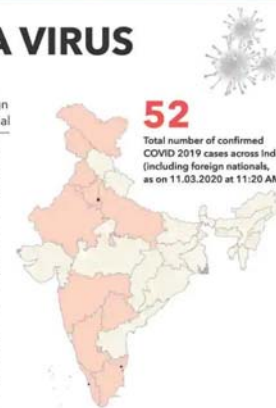
people have been infected by the virus globally that has claimed more than 3,000 lives across the globe. Italy has emerged as the super spreader of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in India. Italy has recorded the highest number of deaths outside China. The country has locked down 16 million people in Lombardy and other parts of the north. The Vatican has suspended mass until April 3 because of the emergency.

NOVEL CORONA VIRUS

TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES

S. No.	Name of State / UT	Indian National	Foreign National
1	DELHI	5	0
2	HARYANA	0	14
3	KERALA	9	0
4	RAJASTHAN	1	2
5	TELENGANA	1	0
6	UTTAR PRADESH	9	0
7	LADAKH*	2	0
8	TAMIL NADU	1	0
9	JAMMU & KASHMIR*	1	0
10	PUNJAB	1	0
11	KARNATAKA	4	0
12	MAHARASHTRA	2	0

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare



US court strikes down key Trump admin decisions behind H-1B denials

The United States issues 85,000 H-1B visas annually to highly skilled foreign workers on petitions from US companies to make up for a shortage of locally available hands.

(News Agencies) A US court has struck down key Trump administration memos and decisions behind soaring denial of H-1B visas, sending a wave of relief through IT services companies that use foreign workers, a large number of whom are from India. They have faced intense pushback and pressure in recent years. These memos had sent up the rate of denial of H-1Bs from 2% in 2015 to 30% for some companies, according to an analysis of government data by an independent body. The court of a district judge in Washington DC on Tuesday struck down memos used by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to prevent companies from hiring foreign workers on H-1B visas for third-party work — outsourced operations in other words, and required employers to produce contract details for which the H-1B had been petitioned. The court also directed the agency to provide reasons while rejecting an H-1B petition. "A decision like this has been long overdue, we finally have the judicial system agreeing with the employers that USCIS has been out of bounds for a long time," said Amar Varada,

president of ITServe, an association of more than 1,200 IT solutions and services organization, whose challenge led to the Tuesday ruling. The United States issues 85,000 H-1B visas annually to highly skilled foreign workers on petitions from US companies to make up for a shortage of locally available hands. Critics of the programme have argued it has been used to displace American workers by contracting out their work to foreigners. Denial of initial applications for H-1B visas and renewal applications has gone up under the Trump administration's "Buy American, Hire American" policy. The National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an independent body that closely tracks immigration issues, denial rates have generally risen from 6% in 2015 to 21% in 2019 for new petitions; and from 3% to 12% for continuing employment, renewals in other words. The agency also found that the denial rate for new employment had gone up to 30% in 2019 for IT services and consulting companies in comparison to between 2% and 7% for technology product companies such as Apple.

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"Breaking Bread, Building Bonds"



(By a staff reporter) Long Island: Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams recently hosted the 15th of a series of 100 dinners throughout the city as part of his "Breaking Bread,

Building Bonds" initiative at Divya Jyoti Jagdati Kendra, New York. This initiative aims to combat anti-Semitism and all forms of hate in New York City, one meal at a time.

Eric Adams, Brooklyn Borough President; Swami Radeshwaranand Ji, Director of Divya Jyoti Jagrati Kendra; Dilip Chauhan, Director Southeast / Asian Affairs, Sunil Hali, Radio Zindagi 540AM, Raj Dhingra, India Republic News and Zafar Iqbal, CEO at Subrang Television USA were in attendance.

Attendees were encouraged to share their backgrounds and life experiences with each other. Concerns of the increase in hate crimes were discussed.

Swami Radeshwaranand Ji explained that the root of hate crimes is the hate brewing in the hearts

of people due to constant differentiation based on race, color, religion, etc. To eradicate hate crimes we need to rid the darkness within the hearts and minds of the people of New York. This is possible by enlightening individuals to their true self. As this connection builds we will see a shift from identifying as part of a race or religion to identifying as a child of god regardless of race or religion. He suggested ideas of more accessible yoga and meditation classes in the community. Zafar Iqbal, Suheri Rosado, Sunil Hali, Raj Dhingra, Carole Dunn, Ajuba Frazier

Avoid non-essential travel': Embassy's message Indian students in US

Soon after President Donald Trump on Friday declared a national emergency to combat the novel coronavirus, the Indian Embassy in the US asked the large Indian students' community to avoid all non-essential domestic and international travel. There are over 200,000 Indian students studying in various educational institutions and universities in the US. "Please avoid all non-

essential domestic or international travel," the embassy here said in an advisory to Indian students. For official advisories on domestic and international travel, the students have been asked to check the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 100 colleges and universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Harvard University, have also

suspended in-person teaching and announced to shift to online classes in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed 41 lives in the US.

The institutions have also asked students not to return after the spring break and to move out of their houses and first-year dorms. This has created a major challenge for students from India as a large number of them do not have any friends and relatives in the US. For international travel, the Indian Embassy asked students to contact their Designated School Official (DSO) for information on any possible impact in the future on their F-1 or J-1 status. F-1 or J-1 are two different categories of visas for international students. These have certain restrictions on stay of an international student after their academic institute closes down or they conclude their courses.

Indian students also face the problem of visa validity in the development of universities moving to online courses. The

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) does not consider online courses as a reason for foreign students to stay in the US. The embassy advised Indian students to read official campus advisories or contact their DSO for information on how short-term or long-term

shifts to online courses will impact their F-1 or J-1 status. "If you are graduating in Spring 2020 and travelling internationally, please contact your DSO for advice on how this may impact your graduation and application for OPT," the embassy said. On

this matter, the US government has indicated that this is an evolving situation, it said. The embassy said that "at this stage, they expect the closure to be of limited duration (two to four weeks), which fits within the current regulatory context".

Lyft driver accused of forcibly touching passenger

(By our staff reporter) Long Island: Jaspal Shergill, a Lyft driver from Hicksville has been arrested and is accused of forcibly touching a passenger, according to a release from the Nassau County Police Department. Jaspal Shergill, 35, of Seymour Lane in Hicksville, was driving a Lyft on Feb. 2, police say, when he was driving a 30-year-old woman as a passenger. Police say he forcibly touched the woman while at the Taco Bell at 3946 Hempstead Tpk. in Levittown around 1 a.m. Shergill was arrested on charges of forcible touching and third-degree sexual abuse. He's scheduled in court at 9 a.m. on March 16. Anybody who feels they've been the victim of a similar incident is asked to call Nassau County Crime Stoppers at 1-800-244-TIPS or call 911. All callers will remain anonymous.



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The Queen is making her most serious misstep here

In her close to seven decades on the throne, the Queen of England has rarely faltered in her sense of duty or made a serious misstep. She is doing both now, however — not in her treatment of her grandson, Harry, and his wife Meghan, who made their last public appearance as senior royals this week, but, more insidiously, her handling of another problematic relative, her son Prince Andrew, the Duke of York.

Not for the first time, Andrew finds himself garnering lurid headlines stemming from the Jeffrey Epstein scandal.

On Monday Geoffrey Berman, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, called the prince out in stinging terms, accusing him of misleading the public by offering to assist authorities investigating Epstein's alleged crimes while in fact failing to make himself available for interview.

Andrew has said in a public statement: "Of course, I am willing to help any appropriate law enforcement agency with their investigations, if required." As Berman put it: "Contrary to Prince Andrew's very public offer to cooperate with our

investigation into Epstein's co-conspirators ... Prince Andrew has now completely shut the door on voluntary cooperation and our office is considering its options." But the Epstein scandal is not going away. More and more devastating details could seep out unless the boil is lanced by Andrew cooperating, in full, with the New York authorities.

Until he does, the Queen should display the sacrifice and sense of duty which have been the hallmarks of her reign by removing from the duke all remaining vestiges of the privilege of serving as a member of the royal family — yes, even if as an ordinary British citizen he is exposed to an extradition request by the US.

Otherwise, it won't only be Harry and Meghan questioning why they are treated more harshly for the transgression of wishing to live in another country than the duke is for, at best, consorting with a convicted pedophile.

Buckingham Palace has not responded to Berman's claims, but earlier this year the duke was described to journalists by an unnamed source as "angry and

bewildered" at suggestions he was uncooperative in the inquiry.

It is unclear what Berman's "options" might be; the prospect of extraditing a member of the British royal family seems diplomatically improbable. And yet the swirling scandal around Andrew seems unlikely to go away, with the drip-drip of allegations continuing to mount. He continues to face questions about Virginia Giuffre, who told the BBC she was trafficked to the UK and Caribbean as a 17-year-old and presented as a plaything for the duke by Epstein and his alleged girlfriend-turned-procurer, Ghislaine Maxwell. Maxwell has denied all allegations levied against her. Her attorneys have previously denied she engaged in sexual abuse or sex trafficking. Andrew has denied having any sexual contact with Giuffre, and Buckingham Palace has also denied her allegations.

Even before Berman's comments and long before Epstein hanged himself in jail, Andrew's friendship with him has posed an existential threat to the royal family.

The crisis has flared up repeatedly over the years: when

Andrew was photographed with Epstein in Central Park after the latter was convicted of soliciting a minor; when he was accused by Giuffre; after Epstein's suicide; when the prince gave a disastrous interview to the BBC in which he failed to express sympathy for the victims. Following that interview, Andrew stepped back from royal duties for the foreseeable future.

Through it all, the Queen and the palace have done their best to patch up the damage, scrambling to insert fingers into the leaking dam which threatens to engulf them. It has always felt too little, too late, the statements lacking in empathy, the reduction in the duke's status or exposure a step behind the public mood.

Until now, the greatest crisis for the modern monarchy was the Queen's reserved, almost cold response to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, an attitude which left many of her grieving subjects troubled by the sense that formality and process were more important to her than emotion and family. How different from the indulgence shown the Duke of York, from permitting him to travel the world at British taxpayers' expense under the

guise of trade envoy to allowing the bells of Westminster Abbey to go ahead and peal for his 60th birthday despite his recent disgrace. Worst of all was the error of judgement of the Queen allowing herself to be photographed beside a grinning duke while driving to church two days after legal documents naming him as Giuffre's alleged abuser were published last August.

Whether or not she believed him guilty — and she's his mother, naturally she doesn't believe him guilty — what message did this send to Epstein's alleged victims, indeed, to all victims of sexual abuse? Prince Andrew caught a lucky break this week. The US Attorney's condemnation would no doubt have had far more impact, particularly in the powerful British press, were the world not preoccupied by the coronavirus outbreak. But while the current Covid-19 outbreak will not last forever, the unhealthy atmosphere currently infecting the royal family will not go away until Prince Andrew gives authorities his full account and cooperation.

By Rosa Prince

Four women were serious candidates for president. What happened?

On Thursday, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren announced the end of her presidential campaign after a disheartening performance in the primary elections. Now there is only one woman running for the highest office in the land -- a woman who, by any polling metric, has virtually no chance of winning.

In 2007, when Hillary Rodham Clinton first announced "I'm in, and I'm in to win," she stoked hope in all who dream of political parity -- that a woman could soon be president of the United States. In the immediate aftermath of Clinton's 2016 candidacy, and her loss to a flagrant misogynist, countless women ran for public office.

So, it was promising to see six Democratic women step up to contend for president this time around. Even if two -- author Marianne Williamson and Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard -- seemed to many like longshots, for a variety of reasons, that left four highly qualified women in the race: Warren, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and California

Sen. Kamala Harris. Now, the chance that a woman will win the 2020 presidential race has imploded. There's no question that sexism played a role in bringing us to this point. But social influences are wicked problems: they are diseases, hard to diagnose, even harder to cure.

As is often, perhaps always, the case, these female candidates seemed held to a higher standard when it came to being presidential, electable -- and even likeable. In fact, for women, those three characteristics war with one another. A woman who seems nurturing (likable) pays a steep price. Gillibrand, chose to take a soft approach by wearing dresses in contrast to the suits (with pants) that many female candidates wear. Yet beyond optics, she took on issues more overtly women-focused than those of her competitors.

And Harris. Did her strong show of boldness, as when she confronted Vice President Biden on race, make her unlikeable? Why was she, like Gillibrand, unsuccessful in garnering support? Beyond garden-variety campaign

problems, what unseen forces stood in the way? Harris wasn't simply a black candidate; our former president blazed that trail. She was a black woman.

As the campaign continued, Warren and Klobuchar established themselves as powerful, and presidential -- far more, surely, than most men in the race. Hence The New York Times endorsement of not one, but both. But by then Warren had fallen in the polls. Some questioned her ability to take on President Donald Trump, fueling doubt about her electability. In Nevada, Warren called attention to the no-win situation she faced as a female politician: "If you complain about it, then you are whining," she said. "And if you don't complain about it, the rest of the women think, 'what planet are you living on?' And so, you get caught in between the two." Klobuchar had taken the approach of emphasizing that she was running on her merits, not her gender -- though she would nonetheless be proud to be the first female president.

Unabashedly, she called out sexism when she commented during one debate, in reference to former South Bend Mayor

Pete Buttigieg, that no female mayor of a small city would be in his position in the race.

Was that whining? Questions like this, even when uttered in a seemingly neutral context, are potentially toxic. Women must work doubly hard to not only be tough, but do it in a way that's visibly appealing.

Likeability may be why Warren, in an Instagram video, pulled a Michelob Ultra out of her fridge as she was casually talking in her kitchen.

The irony is, of course, that the most detestable president in memory resides in a White House defiled by corruption, deception, greed, amorality -- in desperate need of a woman to shovel it all out.

Yes, we're seeing progress below the presidential level. Women make up about a quarter of the voting body of the 116th Congress, a record number (although the women in both chambers are predominantly Democrats). Given that 100 long years ago American women gained the right to vote, it's hard for many of us to fathom the fact we have yet to take our seat behind the desk in the Oval

Office. Perhaps in 2020 we'll see a woman vice president. That would be progress, but not the progress the nation needs for truly representative democracy.

In her book "What Happened," Hillary Clinton recounts an apt story that David Foster Wallace told at a 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College. Two young fish are swimming along when an older fish coming toward them nods and says, "Mornin', boys. How's the water?" The young fish blithely swim on. Eventually, one looks at the other: "What's the water?" In fact, the most important realities can be the hardest for voters to see and talk about. But see and talk we must. Sexism was a force in this year's Democratic primary. A day must come when we can watch election results without saying, "We've got to get it right next time." For the sake of our future, the stage must be reset as we advance women's political leadership at the highest levels. Ultimately, the democracy we have is the one we've made. To borrow from Shakespeare, if there's fault it's not in our stars, but in ourselves.

By : Swanee Hunt

Trump's coronavirus travel ban makes sense - here's why

Predictably, the immediate reaction to last night's presidential speech on the battle against COVID-19 — both pro and con — appeared to be driven largely by partisan sentiments. Much attention was lavished on things like the president's delivery. Few attempted to objectively assess the efficacy of the measures already taken by the administration, much less the new measures announced last night.

The big story, of course, was the 30-day ban on travel from most of Europe. Let's put the politics aside and see why the White House went there. In dealing with pandemics, top priorities have to be limiting the spread of the disease and protecting our most vulnerable populations. Social distancing — that is, limiting the contact between people who are shedding the virus and others — is critical to achieving both goals.

And that's where travel bans have a role to play.

Simply put, it is hard to empty the bathtub while the water's running. American businesses, organizations and governments are taking unprecedented steps to drain the tub — from shutting down classrooms to barring fans from sporting events to raining on St. Patrick's Day parades. At a time when we're voluntarily disrupting our day-to-day lives to contain the disease, it makes no sense to risk importing more contagion from abroad. Why Europe? First, let's be clear about what "Europe" means in this instance.

The president's ban is for the "Schengen Zone" — not "Europe," not the "European Union." The Schengen Zone is a grouping of European countries that don't require passports or border controls to move from one to another. Ireland, for example, is in the European Union but not part of the Schengen Zone, so the ban does not apply to the Irish. The United Kingdom is in neither the European Union nor the Schengen Zone, so it, too, does not fall under the ban. Meanwhile, Iceland, though not part of the European Union, is part of Schengen, so it is covered by the ban.

We know that travel bans can effectively retard the advance of pandemics. Early on, the U.S. wisely restricted travel from China and other countries experiencing large outbreaks of COVID-19. That significantly delayed the arrival of the disease here, allowing the U.S. to get through the bulk of the flu season

without a serious outbreak. European nations, on the other hand, imposed no travel bans. They wound up importing a lot of sick people. Italy, with its significant migrant Chinese population, has been hit particularly hard. No doubt some who went home to celebrate the Chinese New Year, returned with the disease.

Italy and other Schengen Zone nations now have travel restrictions in place, but COVID-19 is no longer just "a Chinese disease." It's now on a European tour.

The head of the German government estimates that 70 percent of the country will be infected. Limiting the European transmission here has to be a priority, and a travel ban is the best way to do that. Focusing on the next 30 days makes perfect sense. It will get us through the bulk of the flu season, at which point the U.S. government can take stock and reevaluate. The ban does not include goods, just people. That makes sense. People, not cargo, are the high-risk carriers.

The ban alone, while prudent, will not be enough to stop the spread of COVID-19. Throughout that 30-day period, we'll need to keep draining the tub. That means continued, responsible social distancing. Governments, businesses, communities and organizations can certainly make responsible decisions. Many already have. Quick and reasoned responses will make a big difference.

We also need to be prepared to deal with the economic consequences of this public health problem. America has a strong economy. If COVID-19 subsides with the flu season, this outbreak will be little more than a speed bump to the economy. But we need measures to ensure the economy can pick up where it left off and help folks through troubled times. At the Heritage Foundation, we are recommending an "epidemic tax credit" that would pay for 90 percent of the costs of providing paid leave to employees who cannot telecommute and who work in declared epidemic areas. We need quick, serious responsible action on serious measures like this.

What we should not do is turn this travel ban into another senseless opportunity for partisan squabbling.

By James Jay Carafano

Coronavirus is a disaster. Why hasn't FEMA been brought in?

With every passing day, it's becoming clear that the coronavirus epidemic is not just a health emergency but instead has the potential to become a major disaster. And that means it might be time to turn to the nation's disaster response agency to assist. Right now, the operational hub for the response is the Department of Health and Human Services headquarters in Washington. HHS Secretary Alex Azar highlighted this at the White House press conference on February 26 naming Pence chair of the coronavirus task force: "And I just want to say I could not be more delighted that you've asked the vice president, my old friend and colleague, to lead this whole-of-government approach with us under the Emergency Support Function #8." For people who understand national emergencies, this bit of bureaucratese had a specific meaning: Emergency Support Function #8 is a provision in the nation's disaster playbook—the National Response Framework—which designates HHS as the federal lead for health and medical responses.

While HHS is rightly focused on the health and medical aspects of the response, that statement also means something else: that the full breadth of the federal government's capabilities have yet to be employed. A truly "whole-of-government approach" would engage

all of the 15 capabilities identified in the playbook, including, for example, Transportation (ESF #1), Mass Care and Temporary Housing (ESF #6), Logistics (ESF #7), Public Safety and Security (ESF #13). There's even a function called Cross-Sector Business and Infrastructure (ESF #14) that focuses on, for example, "cascading impacts of health or medical infrastructure or service disruptions." During a major disaster or emergency, it's FEMA's role to coordinate all of these capabilities. FEMA, traditionally thought of as the agency that supports state and local governments during natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, is actually an "all-hazards" agency ready to respond to a range of crises—including pandemics. And FEMA has the experience and access to resources that could prove essential in the not too distant future.

Before I left FEMA at the end of January I saw firsthand the early actions taken by the administration on coronavirus. I was there for the standup of the president's coronavirus task force, which at the time was certainly a step in the right direction. The task force, however, is not the totality of the response that one might assume based on the media coverage. Instead it focuses on setting priorities and adjudicating policy issues, while the operational response remains with HHS.



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The math is inescapable. In late February, Italy had 600 confirmed cases of coronavirus. That number is now in excess of 10,000. Some people are terming that exponential growth. It isn't. But it is geometric growth. And very worrying. Experts in the United States (US), which had around 600 cases at the beginning of this week, are expecting a similar so-called hockey stick curve this week. India has around 60 confirmed cases of

Tackling coronavirus: Lessons for India

Widen testing, restrict travellers, cancel public events, and be ready with Plan B

coronavirus now. This number will increase. The good news is that there's no community transmission as of now — but that too could change. By now, India has had enough time to study the responses of China, South Korea, Italy and the US. What should it do?

The first thing is to widen testing. South Korea cracked down on the disease's spread through aggressive testing. India should make sure it has enough testing kits and also explore using the

shorter-duration test China used (most European nations and the US say it isn't 100% accurate but this is not the time for the great to get in the way of the merely good enough). The second is to restrict and regulate international travel and travellers — inbound as well as outbound. India has already done some of this. It needs to do more, including, and controversially, a restriction on travellers from the US. The third is to cancel public events. Experts call this social distancing. In both China and South Korea, this

helped reverse the trend in terms of new cases.

Finally, India should be ready with Plan B. At some point, when the number of cases crosses 1,000, maybe 5,000, contact tracing will stop making sense. The Union health ministry should, by now, have a mitigation plan. The experience of Italy, South Korea and the US is an indication that, at some stage, prevention will stop making sense and the focus will have to shift to mitigation.

Turn the coronavirus crisis into an opportunity

It is not merely a public health scare. Decarbonise the economy, reduce air travel, and ban wildlife trade



Climate Change Special Report on 1.5°C had said that any warming of 1.5°C is not considered "safe" for most nations, communities, ecosystems and sectors, and poses significant risks to natural and human systems. The same report added: "The principal vectors for dengue fever, chikungunya, yellow fever, and the Zika virus — are projected to increase in number, with a larger geographic range by the 2030s than at present, which could put more individuals at risk of the diseases they carry, with regional differences." And, prophetically, the report stated that incidents of zoonotic diseases will grow.

It's taken a disease in a small province in China to bring the world to a halt. But if we continue to treat this as just a "health crisis", we are signing ourselves up for more pandemics. The Amazon fires and Australian bushfires are symptomatic of our inertia on climate. And, yet, a state of crisis could give us opportunities to heal the planet. The reduced emissions, even if temporary, means a far lesser number of people are exposed to air pollution, and serve as an example that significant policy shifts aimed at decarbonising our economies could help improve lives. Can we use the coronavirus epidemic as an opportunity to decarbonise our economy, and shake us out of our inertia to respond to the climate crisis? We can cut fossil fuel consumption and air travel, and ban wildlife trade to save ourselves from pandemics, and also help the planet to heal.

The planet is in intensive care, and it has taken a possible pandemic to shake us out of our inertia. One of the world's biggest economies, China, came to a halt when the coronavirus was detected. To date, it has affected over 100,000 people in more than 100 countries. Incidentally, the disease was thought to have been transmitted to humans via bats and pangolins, although further research is still needed on its origins.

But the virus is more than just a health crisis. It is symptomatic of all that we have unleashed on our planet in the name of development. As we course-correct to combat the coronavirus, even the short-term measures that have been put in place to contain the virus have helped improve the planet's condition. A recent report of Carbon Tracker, a London-based not-for-profit think tank researching the impact of the climate crisis on financial markets, said that China staved off a quarter or more of its Co2 emissions in two weeks by stopping work at manufacturing units and construction sites to quarantine its workers. These

restrictions led to fewer numbers of vehicles on the road, and air travel dropped by 70%. The European Space Agency and NASA images showed a drop in pollutants like nitrogen oxide that lead to respiratory diseases, asthma and breathing problems.

Another decision made by the Chinese authorities could have far-reaching implications for the planet. Since the coronavirus is believed to have originated from a wildlife food market, the authorities banned consumption of wildlife meat. A massive crackdown has been initiated on wildlife farms and breeding centres. This could help the conservation of a number of species, in particular the pangolin that has been on the verge of extinction. Pangolin meat is considered a delicacy, and their scales are used in traditional medicine. Experts, however, remain sceptical about whether the ban on wildlife trade will be permanent, and if the restrictions will apply to traditional Chinese medicine as well.

Are these measures too little, too late? In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on

Scindia's exit reflects the Congress' systemic weaknesses



If the Congress does not treat Mr Scindia's exit with the seriousness it merits and attempts an immediate overhaul - including radical decisions on leadership- it will sink deeper into a political crisis.

Jyotiraditya Scindia — a former Union minister and Member of Parliament, one of the most important next-generation leaders of the Congress, and a key figure in Madhya Pradesh politics with a substantial mass base — has decided to quit the Congress, dealing a major blow to the party. Mr Scindia's decision is a telling comment on the drift in the Congress, where uncertainty over leadership, organisational disarray, and the absence of a roadmap for recovery have created a crisis.

After the devastating loss in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi quit as party president. After weeks of uncertainty, Sonia Gandhi took charge, but with the understanding that this was an interim arrangement. She is said to be keen to have Mr Gandhi take over again, but he has been reluctant. This has left the rest of the party directionless. It has paralysed the ability of the Congress to accommodate the aspirations of younger leaders. Many such leaders can see their most critical political years being wasted. With no clear signals

from the top, leaders are getting impatient and seeking new opportunities. There has also been a failure to craft a political response to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Congress workers, on the ground, do not have the political vocabulary, resources, and the organisational muscle to take on the BJP — which erodes their morale.

Mr Scindia's exit will possibly lead to the Congress losing power in Madhya Pradesh. But its implications go far beyond that. The party's preference for loyalty over merit, and its desire to play safe by preferring the old guard, could have worked if it was in power. But when it is out, factors such as age, ability and mass base should be given priority. Let alone with new India, the Congress does not seem to be in touch with even its own workers and their sentiments. If the Congress does not treat Mr Scindia's exit with the seriousness it merits and attempts an immediate overhaul — including radical decisions on leadership — it will sink deeper into a political crisis.

What the dip in oil prices means

A possible fiscal dividend will come as a huge relief to India

The world's number two and three oil producers are going to war with each other over how to tackle the number one oil producer, the United States. The result: Bloodletting in the world's energy markets but a huge windfall for India, the world's number two oil consumer. The expectation of an oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia has already driven oil prices below \$ 35 a barrel. If the two fail to come to an understanding soon, both countries will pump millions of barrels of extra oil and keep black gold in the red zone all through this year. A \$20 drop in oil prices reduces India's balance of payments deficit by \$30 billion.

Most of these savings will accrue to the government, providing more than 20% top off to its expected receipts this year. There will be some minuses as well: the value of Indian oil and gas companies will be impacted, remittances from the Persian Gulf will reduce, and the



price tag for a privatised Bharat Petroleum will dip. But, overall, it will be a major fillip for a government struggling with falling revenues and rising deficits. Over the past three years Russia (the third largest producer) and Saudi Arabia have held up oil prices by cutting

production. However, Moscow was increasingly unhappy with this strategy because it failed to address its real problem: the US shale oil industry. Buoyed by windfall profits and increased market share, the US industry was going from strength to strength.

Washington also used this clout to impose sanctions against the Russian energy industry. These geopolitical concerns were not shared by Saudi Arabia (second largest producer). The fall in demand because of the coronavirus was the last straw. Moscow

decided to unilaterally adopt an alternative strategy of increasing production and driving down prices, with the idea of driving high-cost oil producers and US shale out of business. But this would also wreck the Saudi-led Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Riyadh's response is to threaten to drive prices to such a low point that Russia will be forced back to the negotiating table.

If this game of hydrocarbon chicken plays through the year, India will count its blessings. But it must recognise that eventually prices will stabilise at a higher level. New Delhi must safeguard its renewable energy sector and redouble its efforts to gassify its economy. These continue to be the best bets to power India into a more secure and green future. The present instability in the global oil market further underlines the need to move away from the energy sources of yesterday.

Climate crisis: Land is the Key

Sync traditional knowledge and science to build resilience



A recent report by the Union ministry of earth sciences (MOES), Observed Rainfall Variability and Changes, has found that seven Indian states — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland — have witnessed significant decreasing trends in annual rainfall in the last 30 years. Alarming, many other parts of the country have also seen an increase in the number of dry days during the monsoon season. This, the report added, has adversely affected groundwater recharges in these rain-deficit regions. This rain deficit and its impact on groundwater can be attributed to the climate crisis, government officials acknowledge.

The impact of an erratic monsoon on agriculture — and farmers — is direct. This is because between 50% to 60% of the country's agriculture is still rainfed, without access to any form of irrigation. The 2017-18 Economic Survey said the climate crisis could reduce annual agricultural incomes in the range of 15-18% on an average, and

up to 20-25% for unirrigated areas. Other than having a negative impact on agrarian production, the climate crisis also impairs the land's ability to act as carbon sink. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2019 Climate Change and Land report, therefore, warned of massive impact of changing weather patterns on soil fertility, increase in arid and desertified zones, and contraction of polar climate zones and biodiversity. This exacerbates the climate crisis, while the climate crisis, in turn, exacerbates land degradation in different ways. While micro-planning, as India's state climate action plans are supposed to do, and providing farmers with better seeds, climate information, land quality management and irrigation are critical, it is also important to use the knowledge of farmers on these issues. This is because they hold vital local knowledge and practices on how to avoid, improve or adapt to a changing climate. Catalysing this with climate science could have a real impact on framing effective climate action.

Decoding the YES Bank crisis

Rana Kapoor and the bank may have been given too long a rope

The tragedy at YES Bank has been averted — all depositors of the bank have been assured by the government that their money is safe, and the State Bank of India (SBI) has been asked to step in as a white knight — but the crisis at one of India's largest lenders is far from over. There's work to be done in terms of recapitalising the bank; SBI is to hold a maximum of 49% in the bank (for which it will pay around Rs 11,760 crore), and existing shareholders are seeing a significant dilution in their holding to 11%, so other investors will have to be found to pump in around Rs 9,600 crore. While some State-controlled companies and corporations will, no doubt, be conscripted to do this, the government should ensure that banking remains attractive to investors. With YES's restructuring plan writing down to zero, the value of so-called additional tier-1 bonds (there are reports that bond-holders may seek legal recourse), it's not going to be easy for Indian banks to raise money through this route any more. There's also the painstaking process that the bank's new management will have to undertake of sifting through all the lenders' loans to see whether there are any hidden surprises.

Even as this is being done, investigative agencies have been tasked with probing the role the bank's founder and former chief Rana Kapoor played in fostering the crisis. Mr Kapoor sold his and his family's entire stake in the bank after being told, in 2018,



that he could no longer remain chief of the bank. While it is clear that many of YES's loans were to companies with questionable abilities to repay — around Rs 30,000 crore of its book is junk-rated debt — the question to be asked is whether this was a result of poor risk-assessment practices, herd mentality (everyone, including many State-owned banks were lending to some of these companies), or plain old-fashioned kickbacks.

YES's aggressive lending wasn't a secret operation — it has been known for sometime. That, the Reserve Bank of India's treatment of Mr Kapoor, and the promoters' promptness in selling their stake in the bank, are all issues that need investigation, as do other financial transactions involving Mr Kapoor and his family. Meanwhile, both the finance ministry and RBI would do well to assess whether the latter did all that was necessary, and when it was required. In hindsight, Mr Kapoor and YES Bank may have been given too long a rope.

Stand up against anarchy masquerading as activism

By opposing CAA, which was passed in Parliament, the Opposition has sown seeds of paranoia among citizens



The parts of Delhi affected by the riots are limping back to normalcy. Those who indulged in this mindless violence deserve the harshest condemnation and punishment. While the law must take its own course, as a democratic society, we have to think about certain key issues that led to this violence. The most significant is the way one should and can engage in public activism including protests, in a democratic polity.

It is quite apparent that the manufactured unrest, promoted by a section of politicians, over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, or the CAA, led to unfounded suspicions and mistrust. Repeated clarifications by government leaders that the CAA has nothing to do with taking away citizenship, as it essentially aims only at fast-tracking citizenship to persecuted minorities from three specified countries who have taken shelter in India, had little effect and Opposition parties continued fuelling paranoia. This not only legitimised fear-mongering but also encouraged a degree of obstinacy among the protestors.

One of the fundamental flaws in the present-day discourse is in our approach to dissent in democracy. True, democracy will be meaningless if it cannot encompass differences of opinion. However, while dissent is an inseparable aspect of democracy, dissent and divergence of views need not and cannot be the only parameters to measure democracy. Like disagreements, agreements are equally legitimate in a democratic polity. Democracy must not just provide space for, but also respect, differences of opinion. But democracy shouldn't be deemed as suspicious in the absence of different approaches and views.

Sadly, the Westminster model of democracy provides for an inherently flawed approach. It

needlessly presupposes a perennial difference of opinion and institutionalises this. As a result, the Treasury and Opposition are constantly at loggerheads. This divide is not always required nor is it always relevant. There is reason to believe that an unduly strong opposition to the CAA and hardening of positions by several anti-CAA groups are products of this presupposition.

The very presupposition being used to legitimise opposition to the CAA in itself is born out of prejudice.

This prejudice is the product of a systematically cultivated suspicion which goes against the grain of democracy. This unenlightened opposition coupled with exaggerated statements about hypothetical scenarios has provided fertile ground for miscreants to sow the seeds of paranoia. A strong case in point is that of the initiators and organisers of the Shaheen Bagh protest. Although there can be a significant element of spontaneity in this sit-in, everything doesn't deserve to be taken at face value. It is unimaginable that Muslim women — for whom men in their families staunchly refuse freedom from triple talaq — are allowed to spend days and nights out of their homes. Keeping women and children in the forefront, and waging a political struggle while hiding behind them might be considered a smart strategy, but it is also inhuman and anti-women.

Had the judiciary not indirectly

contributed to the legitimisation of this politics of obstructionism, this would have become a fit case for investigation by the National Commission for Women and the National Human Rights Commission. Obstructionism could, at best, be a one-time tool, used in exceptional situations.

However, equating obstructionism with activism is not only erroneous but also an insult to those who oppose this. Giving protection to aspiring law-breakers for months together eventually disincentivises law-abiding citizens, eroding the credibility of the rule of law, irreparably. It is not out of place to question as to how the judiciary would react if a Shaheen Bagh-type demonstration is held, equally peacefully, right in front of a court building obstructing access to litigants, and that too, for months together. Will those demonstrators not site Shaheen

Bagh as a precedent? Is this not a recipe for anarchy?

In a move which smacks of anti-constitutionalism, several chief ministers announced that they won't implement the CAA. Imagine, how the chief ministers of Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states would get roasted should they refuse to implement Acts granting so-called minority educational institutions the freedom to not implement quotas for the socially marginalised sections. Their opposition to minority appeasement notwithstanding, they have to implement what is passed by Parliament. The refusal to accept the supremacy of Parliament in lawmaking is an open invitation to anarchy.

One can understand the despondency of a section of our political class. But the moot question is: How can we as a society afford to allow frustrated politicians to encourage anarchy masquerading as activism?

A royal somersault: On Jyotiraditya Scindia's defection

Jyotiraditya Scindia's departure from the Congress and his arrival in the BJP reveal many traits of both parties and the man himself. That he is termed as the lost future of the Congress is itself an irony, but a more intriguing question is whether the party was intuitive in not humouring any further someone who could so effortlessly cross over to the opposite ideological extreme. His aunt and BJP leader Yashodhara Raje Scindia likened his switch to a "homecoming". In his crossing over, he also betrayed a popular mandate that he himself worked to win for the Congress in Madhya Pradesh in 2018. The Kamal Nath government is likely to collapse, and Shivraj Singh Chouhan who lost the poll appears set to return as CM with Mr. Scindia's collaboration. As for the Congress, which needs every morsel to keep itself alive, it can ill-afford the loss of a State government and an urbane face who has a wider appeal. With his decamping, a new template is on offer for other Congress leaders who are ambitious and impatient at the same time, and are free of the force of conviction. The Congress is drifting into an annihilating eddy. Its interim president, Sonia Gandhi, still its most authoritative person, will have to do what is in her command to steer it back on



course. His exit poses two questions for the Congress — the commitment of its leaders to a core ideology, and what it can do to hold itself together in this moment of crisis. Surely, the party needs to promote a new crop of young and rooted leaders from the country's social diversity, who find it a vehicle of their aspirations and political empowerment. Mr. Scindia's formal ordination as a Hindutva torchbearer will not automatically raise him to a dominion role in a party so overwhelmingly under the personalised command of Prime

Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. True, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the abrupt nullification of Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status last year, but he had also openly called out the BJP government's insensitivity and inefficiency in controlling the communal violence in Delhi in February. Mr. Scindia will have to earn his saffron stripes, and the rites of that initiation will be prolonged and testing. The BJP, and the Modi-Shah combine that rail against dynastic and entitlement politics,

will have to spin a new story for Mr. Scindia, who will be the fifth Gwalior royalty to adorn a formal position in the party. His father, Madhavrao Scindia, who spent most of his life as a Congressman, had started his career as a Jan Sangh leader. While his lineage might be a burden of sorts in the anti-elite politics that the current BJP leadership claims to promote, the aged association of his family with Hindutva politics could make him eligible for a welcome that the RSS usually does not offer to latecomers. As he said, it will be a new beginning.

Iran reports another 85 coronavirus deaths, total tally reaches 514

The coronavirus outbreak in Iran is being seen as one of the deadliest outside China, where the disease originated.



(News Agencies) Iran announced on Friday that the new coronavirus has claimed another 85 lives, the highest single-day death toll in one of the world's worst affected countries. "Sadly, 85 people infected with the COVID-19 disease have died in the past 24 hours", bringing to 514 the overall number of deaths in Iran, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said in a televised news conference. "Across the country, at least 1,289 infected people have been added to the list of confirmed patients," said Jahanpour. "The total number of patients has therefore reached 11,364 cases," he said, adding Tehran province had the most new infections. The outbreak in Iran is one of the deadliest outside China, where the disease originated. Several politicians and officials both sitting and former, have been infected, with some dying from the illness. The latest suspected case of infection was Ali Akbar Velayati, who advises Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on foreign policy.

Philippines diplomat first coronavirus case at United Nations HQ in New York



(News Agencies) A Philippine diplomat in New York has tested positive for the new coronavirus in the first recorded case at United Nations headquarters in the city, diplomatic sources said on Thursday.

The diplomat, who had last visited the UN on Monday, showed symptoms of flu the following day and saw a doctor.

"She got the call today that she tested positive for COVID-19," said a letter from the Philippines mission.

"As of today, the Philippine mission is in lockdown, and all personnel are instructed to self-quarantine," said the letter obtained by AFP.

The diplomat works at the UN General Assembly's Sixth Committee, which deals with legal matters.

About 3,000 people are employed at the towering riverfront UN headquarters. Numerous other diplomats from the 193 UN member countries come and go between their own missions in the area and the Manhattan UN complex. The Philippines has confirmed 52 cases of COVID-19 illness. There have been more than 1,600 cases in the United States.

From cover up to lock down, how China turned the tide on the coronavirus

After more than 4,600 deaths and 126,000 infections across the country, China is now trying to reshape the global narrative in response to overseas criticism, casting itself as a leader in the heroic fight against the virus while other countries struggle to cope.

(News Agencies) As the rest of the world is engulfed in the coronavirus pandemic, China says it has turned the tide against the disease that has killed thousands of people.

From initial attempts to cover up the outbreak to later locking down cities and now declaring it "basically curbed", here is a look at how China grappled with COVID-19:

Mystery virus

The first case emerged in the central city of Wuhan on December 8 before several workers at Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market began to fall sick with a fever. On December 31, Wuhan health authorities announced 27 cases of suspected viral pneumonia linked to the market and notified the World Health Organization.

But officials insisted there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission and that it was "preventable and controllable".

A day later, eight people were reprimanded by Wuhan police for "spreading rumours" about the then mysterious disease. There had been social media talk of a re-emergence of SARS, another coronavirus, which killed nearly 650 people in mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, was among those punished for raising the alarm. The

number of cases in Wuhan jumped to 44 on January 3 and health authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore issued travel alerts.

China announced the existence of a "new type of coronavirus" on January 9 and the first death two days later.

But between January 5 and 17 China reported no new cases of the virus, while Japan and Thailand declared their first infections.

During this time, Wuhan and Hubei province pressed ahead with their annual legislative meetings despite the outbreak.

Meanwhile, doctors were ordered to keep quiet about the

virus and evidence of human transmission they had seen, according to an interview with Ai Fen, one of the earliest medical whistleblowers on the outbreak and a colleague of Li.

An annual mass banquet for 40,000 families organised by Wuhan authorities went ahead on January 18. The same day Beijing sent a team of scientific experts to Wuhan to investigate. On January 20, President Xi Jinping ordered that the virus be "resolutely contained" in his first public comment on the issue. Human-to-human transmission was finally confirmed by a

leading Chinese expert that day. This marked a major turning point in the epidemic, with 291 infections reported nationwide. Panic took hold in Wuhan, a city of 11 million, when it was abruptly placed on lockdown on January 23. The rest of Hubei province was sealed off in the following days. Wuhan hospitals, inundated with patients, reported dire shortages of medical supplies. Many who could not get timely treatment for themselves or relatives relayed personal tragedies on social media.

Pentagon confirms strikes against Iran-backed militia group facilities in Iraq

The strikes were "defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups," the Pentagon statement added.



(News Agencies) The Pentagon on Thursday confirmed that the United States had carried out strikes against five Iran-backed militia weapons storage facilities in Iraq, a day after a deadly rocket attack killed two American and one British service member. "The United States conducted defensive precision strikes against Kataib Hezbollah

facilities across Iraq," a Pentagon statement said. "These weapons storage facilities include facilities that housed weapons used to target US and coalition troops," it said. The strikes were "defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups," the statement added.

India watching China sway at hill monasteries

The directives, given by Modi during the director general/inspector general conference of the Intelligence Bureau between December 6 and 8, 2019, were recently sent to all the states and central agencies

(News Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked central agencies to keep a close watch on the activities of China along the border, especially its influence on the monasteries in the Indo-Himalayan belt, according to government officials familiar with the development.

He has further directed agencies to collate census data of all border villages for the past five years using artificial intelligence and analytics to get a better understanding of demographic changes that are taking place, as well as the pattern of migration in the region.

The directives, given by Modi during the director general/inspector general conference of the Intelligence Bureau between December 6 and 8, 2019, were recently sent to all the states and central agencies. HT has reviewed the directives.

A central intelligence official, who asked not to be named, asserted that the PM's reference to China's influence in the

Himalayan belt was a "pre-emptive exercise" to make sure the border areas and the monasteries in the mountain region were not ignored.

The development comes against the backdrop of China's assertion that it alone can decide the successor to the 84-year-old Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in India since 1959. The US and other nations have opposed China's efforts to decide the spiritual leader's successor. While Chinese officials have said the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama must be approved by their government and the selection should take place in their country, the Dalai Lama says Beijing's pick will not be trusted. He has said that his successor could also come from India.

A national security expert – Sameer Patil, fellow at the international security studies programme at Gateway House – wrote in June 2018 that "China has slowly been increasing its influence, focusing not just on the border but exploiting sectarian differences among the monasteries of Ladakh".

Patil added that the region is the site of India's frequent border face-offs with China.

"For 20 years, China has been quietly paying for the restoration of art and artifacts in Ladakh's many neglected border monasteries. Its beneficence has been focused especially on approximately 260 Drukpa-sect monasteries, which own significant and valuable relics of Ladakhi Buddhist art, revered by the locals," he wrote.

Many of the monasteries are located on Indo-China border, where China is increasing its infrastructure and security presence.

Patil, who also worked at the National Security Council from 2008 till 2013, told HT: "I presume the decision to turn Ladakh into a Union Territory was taken to bring the region to the attention of policymakers in Delhi. I hope it yields results."

The intelligence official cited above said agencies involved in gathering intelligence and securing the border already have adequate



mechanism to monitor Chinese activities at border but following PM's directions, there will be further closer monitoring. Modi also asked that all the pending roads in the border areas be constructed and their quality should be such that permits landing of Indian Air Force (IAF) planes. Subsequently, he has asked that every IPS officer spend one night in a border village, covering 30 villages within a period

of one month to understand the problems there and work required to be done. "Farthest border villages to be covered in this manner. First hand information thus collated and be used for proper border management," the PM said at the police chiefs' meet. He further asked that National Cadet Corps (NCC) units be created in the educational institutions in the border areas.

Muslims safer in India: Indresh Kumar

(By PRAKASH M SWAMY) NEW DELHI: Muslims and other minorities are safer in India compared to other nations and these protests in Delhi and elsewhere were stage managed by the jobless opposition who could not find any fault with the ruling BJP government, said Indresh Kumar, president of Muslim Rashtriya Manch, a unit of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

The Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) is a Muslim organization in affiliated to the RSS. It was formed in 2002 at the initiative of the then RSS chief KS Sudarshan to allow the Sangh Pariwar to reach out to Muslims.

In an interview in New Delhi, the senior RSS leader said a large numbers of Muslims had extended support to abrogation of Article 370 and Triple Talak as they had realized how harmful these draconian laws are in the interest of the nation.

The Government of India led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi treated Muslims on par with other major religions like Hinduism or Christianity and had extended all support to them. "These were the people who said Muslims will leave



India when BJP voted back to power."

None of the CAA, NPR etc is targeted against Indian Muslims and the Government did not include Muslims in the group of persecuted minorities as they chose to live in their land of their own like Pakistan and Bangladesh, declared Muslim nations." No Muslim persecutes another Muslim and if they do, India will give asylum on a case to case basis as this involved national security. Many Muslims like Tasleema Nasreen and Adnan Sami were living in India peacefully and were not deported," he said.

Illegal immigration has been an issue since 25 years when

Congress was in power and this was not something discovered new by BJP Government. "India has been a home to many civilizations and faiths. A large number of Jews were MIGRATED to Gujarat during the Second World War and equal number of Tamils came from Sri Lanka as refugees and India never turned them away," he said.

There had been no riots, communal disturbances and major clashes between communities since Modi ji became Prime Minister six years ago and this can't be digested by the opposition who are keen on fomenting trouble to disrupt the communal harmony in India. These selfish divisive forces are capable of any mischief to achieve their goals, he said.

Muslim Rashtriya Manch is a non political organization working for the welfare of Muslims in India. It is serving Muslims through its 2700 branches in 350 districts across India benefitting about 75 lakh Muslims. It runs food grain bank, first of its kind in the world; family dispute redressal centers; providing scholarships and assistantships to poor Muslim families and offer divorce counseling services to name a few.

Iran accuses US of 'economic terrorism,' urges sanctions end



(News Agencies) Iran's foreign minister demanded Thursday that the United States immediately halt what he called a "campaign of economic terrorism" and lift sanctions, saying they have made it increasingly difficult for the country to export oil and virtually impossible to import medicine and medical equipment, including to identify and treat coronavirus patients.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that U.S. sanctions have also left thousands of Iranians stranded abroad and severely disrupted air links with Europe.

And he said they have led to what he called "Google's immoral censoring" of a new government app designed to help Iranians identify potential symptoms of the COVID-19 virus.

He said "it is imperative" that the government of the United States immediately halt its campaign of economic terrorism against the

Iranian people and lift all sanctions it has illegally imposed on my country," in violation of the Security Council resolution that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six major powers which the U.S. pulled out of in 2018.

"To this end," Zarif said, "It is imperative that the United Nations and its member states join the Iranian people in demanding that the government of the United States abandon its malign and fruitless approach against Iran." The new coronavirus, COVID-19, has swept across Iran, with the Health Ministry announcing Thursday that in the past 24 hours 75 people had died and more than 1,000 new cases had been confirmed, bringing the death toll to 429 and confirmed cases to 10,075.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is "deeply concerned" about the coronavirus outbreak in Iran and the U.N. system is providing support.

(पृष्ठ 10 पर)

As COVID-19 cases go up, here's how cities across India are coping

While 60 coronavirus cases have been confirmed in India, towns and cities across the country, even where no cases have been reported positive, have seen a surge in purchases of items, especially hand sanitisers and masks.



(Insider Bureau) A taxi driver for six years now, Guwahati's Ramjan Ali says "meeting strangers" is a part of his job. And in the times of COVID-19, he has no choice but to be "extra-careful". That involves minimum contact with his customer, including conversation. "I generally avoid looking back, or making small-talk. My eyes are fixed on the road," said Ali, seated behind the wheel, as he ferries customers around Guwahati on a Wednesday morning. A black cloth mask, he bought for Rs 50, is affixed around his mouth. On Friday, news of Bhutan's first confirmed coronavirus case — a 76-year-old tourist from USA

— put Assam on alert. The patient's travel history, which included a seven-day cruise on the Brahmaputra and a night stay at a five-star hotel in Guwahati, was splashed across social media and local news channels that evening. It was then that Ali, who is employed by an app-based taxi service, made a beeline for the market. There he bought ten cloth masks, priced Rs 50 apiece, and 'several' bottles of hand sanitiser from the chemist next door. In Kolkata, for example, traders of medical equipment and employees at medical shops have been struggling

to meet the growing demand for surgical masks and hand sanitisers, despite no COVID-19 cases in the city. In central Kolkata, in close proximity to the Calcutta Medical College, shops had run out of surgical masks. An employee at K.R. Lynch and Co. in Chittaranjan Avenue said there had been no supply of face masks for the past 1.5 months and neither did they know when they would be available next. A five-minute-walk away, at the shop P. Bhogilal Pvt Ltd, there were no face masks or sanitisers available either. In Chennai's T Nagar, a One Plus mobile outlet kept hand sanitisers inside the store for visitors to use before checking out the phones on display. Yet, in other parts of the city such as Pondy Bazaar, stores

had run out of hand sanitisers.

In the heart of Guwahati, one of the city's biggest pharmacies, had neither masks nor sanitisers in stock on Wednesday morning. "I have never seen hand sanitisers purchased in these quantities and so quickly," said Nikunja Talukdar, who has been running the pharmacy since 1998. "On Saturday at 930 pm, I got three cartons of sanitisers, and by Sunday noon, we were sold out," he said. "N-95 masks, surgical masks and regular cloth masks are sold out too. Even the wholesale markets are selling it to us at double the price." As masks and sanitisers fly off the shelves in India, and across the world, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has advised that masks should be only worn by those with symptoms or those who are looking after someone who

may have COVID-19. On March 2, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had also said there was no "need to wear masks in order to ward off infection." While hand sanitisers, in which alcohol content is more than 60 per cent, are effective, the US Centers for Disease Control "recommends washing hands with soap and water whenever possible."

Yet, people like taxi driver Ali — whose only source for updates is local news, Whatsapp and Facebook — are convinced that masks are necessary to guard themselves against the virus. "I wanted to buy the N-95 mask but I could not afford it," he said, adding that he is careful not to fiddle with his mask too frequently. "It was uncomfortable for the first two days, but I am used to it now."

Amit Shah says Delhi riots appear to be pre-planned as BJP, Opposition spar in Lok Sabha



(Insider Bureau) Amid a fiery exchange of words between the Opposition and BJP over the northeast Delhi riots, which left 53 dead, in the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah said a conspiracy could not be ruled out while asserting that anyone involved in the violence would not be spared irrespective of their religion, caste or party affiliation. Replying to a discussion in Lok Sabha on the Delhi riots, Shah said prima facie the violence appeared to be a pre-planned conspiracy. "We are investigating the Delhi violence on the basis of scientific evidence. Such riots can happen only when there is a pre-planned conspiracy behind it. We are also probing the conspiracy angle. All those who caused the violence will not be able to escape the law," Amit Shah said. Amid Opposition criticism over alleged inaction by the Delhi police during last month's violence, which left over 200 injured and ravaged northeast Delhi areas of Mustafabad, Shiv Vihar, Brijpuri, Jafraabad, Shah complimented the force for not allowing the riots to spiral. "Delhi Police contained the rioting

within 36 hours. I would like to place on record that after February 25 no incident of rioting took place. There have been attempts to politicise these riots. From February 27 till today, around 700 FIRs have been registered and a total of 2,647 people have been detained or arrested," the Home Minister said. We wanted a discussion on Delhi violence after Holi to avoid a communal flare-up during festival time," he said. Initiating the discussion over Delhi violence in the Lok Sabha, which saw vociferous protests by the Opposition over the incident in the last week, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying "Nero fiddled while Rome burned". "When Delhi was witnessing violence, Modi was hosting the US President Donald Trump in Ahmedabad," he said. Chowdhury said while some claimed Hindus won, the others said Muslims won in the violence. "The fact is that humanity was defeated," Chowdhury said. Chowdhury also wondered how the riots continued for three days despite the Delhi Police being one of the best equipped in the country.

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Man brings home human hand, asks wife to cook it for dinner in Uttar Pradesh

The man's wife was horrified seeing a human hand and fingers in the pan. She ran out of the house, alerted the neighbours and called the police.



(Insider Bureau) In a bizarre incident, a man brought home a human hand allegedly from a nearby crematorium and asked his wife to cook it for dinner in Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor. Upon seeing the chopped hand, the woman fell unconscious. To her horror, the woman woke up to find her husband, the accused, Sanjay, 32, making dinner preparations to cook the hand by himself, following which she locked him inside and rushed out of the house.

She first informed her neighbour and then called the cops. The man, said to be an alcoholic, has been arrested. The shocking incident, which took place in Bijnor's Tikkopur village on Monday, sent shock waves in the area. According to initial probe, Sanjay went to the cremation ground and brought the flesh from there. Sanjay's wife was horrified after seeing a human hand and fingers in the pan. She ran out of the house, alerted the neighbours and called the

police. The police also found that the man had even attacked his father a few days ago. However, the matter was not reported to the police. Station house officer (SHO) RC Sharma said, "We visited the house of the man and found the human flesh. Police have detained the accused. Prima facie, he had brought it from the bank of Ganga where bodies are cremated." Meanwhile, Sanjay's wife has refused to return home.

IPL, all big events banned in Delhi amid coronavirus outbreak: Manish Sisodia

The Delhi government has invoked the 1897 Epidemics Act which gives officials at state levels powers to take extraordinary steps to combat an outbreak.

(Insider Bureau) The Delhi government on Friday announced a few more preventive steps to curb the spread of coronavirus disease Covid-19, and banned the Indian Premier League (IPL) matches in the national capital.

"We have decided to ban any sports activity where people will gather in huge numbers like IPL. Social distancing is important to curb the breakout of coronavirus," Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said.

No seminars, conferences or any big

event (beyond 200 people) will be allowed in Delhi, Sisodia further said.

He also gave example of South Korea where 30 people were quarantined and social gatherings continued as it is. "The 31st person later spread the virus to 10,000 people. In Delhi, we are trying all means to prevent this. At this time, the biggest solution is social distancing," said Sisodia. The Deputy Chief Minister also said that all the district magistrates and SDMs to ensure strictest adherence of government orders across the city. This

comes a day after the Delhi government ordered closure of all cinema halls in the national capital till March 31. "The Delhi government has declared coronavirus an epidemic. We need to exercise abundant caution to contain the disease. All cinema halls, schools, colleges in Delhi will be shut until March 31, but exams will continue as scheduled. People are advised to stay away from public gatherings," said Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal after a crucial meeting to discuss the issue on Thursday.

Executive of Noida firm living in Delhi tests positive for coronavirus: Official

The number of coronavirus cases has risen to 75. Delhi-NCR region has so far recorded 19 such cases.

(Insider Bureau) An employee of a private firm in Noida near Delhi has tested positive for coronavirus disease Covid-19, news agency ANI reported.

"One employee of a private firm in Noida has tested positive for coronavirus. He has travel history to France and China. He is a resident of Delhi," ANI quoted Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Anurag Bhargava as saying.

The number of coronavirus patients in the country has risen to 75, including a foreign national. The national capital region (NCR) has so far recorded 19 cases of coronavirus.

A Delhi resident, who had a travel history to Italy was the first one to test positive from the region. The largest chunk of those who tested positive for the virus in

Delhi-NCR comes from a group of Italian nationals who were confirmed for the virus at ITBP's quarantine facility in Chhawla, Delhi.

As many as 14 Italian tourists, along with an Indian national, had confirmed positive for the virus. The group had travelled to Rajasthan wherein two other Italian tourists tested positive for coronavirus in Jaipur.

A Paytm employee from Gurugram, a person in Ghaziabad and a man from Uttam Nagar also tested positive for coronavirus last week from the NCR region.

The global death toll from the virus has crossed 4,000 with over 1,00,000 infected with the virus in more than 100 countries. Delhi gov-

ernment declared Covid-19 an epidemic on Thursday and ordered all cinema halls shut. "The Delhi government has declared coronavirus an epidemic. We need to exercise abundant caution to contain the disease. All cinema halls, schools, colleges in Delhi will be shut until March 31, but exams will continue as scheduled. People are advised to stay away from public gatherings," said Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal after a crucial meeting to discuss the issue on Thursday.

The Delhi administration also directed made it mandatory for all offices, shopping malls and other public spaces to be disinfected on a daily basis.

'Shadow CM's post vacant': Shiv Sena mocks Raj Thackeray

On the 14th foundation day of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) on Monday, its chief Raj Thackeray named his son Amit the shadow minister for tourism and law and judiciary departments.



(Insider Bureau) The Shiv Sena on Wednesday took a jibe at the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) over its "shadow cabinet" and said that the chief minister's post in it was vacant.

In an acerbic editorial, the Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamana, said that a "shadow governor" should be appointed to administer oath of office to the shadow cabinet. It also poked fun at the MNS for announcing a shadow cabinet when it has just one member in the 289-member legislative assembly.

"A party with sole legislator has formed a 'shadow cabinet' to keep an 'eye' on the Maharashtra cabinet... The post of chief minister in the shadow cabinet is vacant. There should have been a shadow governor to administer the oath of office and secrecy to the shadow cabinet. If this had happened, the game of shadows would have been more colourful. The developments show there is still humour left in politics," the editorial in Saamana said without naming Raj Thackeray's party.

The MNS announced its shadow cabinet on the 14th foundation day of the party on Monday. Raj Thackeray named his son Amit the shadow minister for tourism and law and judiciary departments, the portfolios held Aaditya Thackeray and Uddhav Thackeray respectively.

MNS leaders Sandeep Deshpande and Ameya Khopkar took to Twitter to attack Sena and Saamana editor Sanjay Raut on Wednesday morning.

Deshpande, in an apparent response to the editorial, "The chief minister's post is actually held by Ajit Dada (Pawar). The Maharashtra chief minister is currently without any important portfolio and is working like a shadow CM. Therefore, Raj saheb must have thought of not appointing a shadow CM." The Sena also took a swipe at former ally Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and said that the principal opposition party is still behaving like a ruling party. "Normally such an experiment (shadow cabinet) is done by a strong opposition. In Maharashtra, the party with 105 MLAs did not form shadow cabinet but the party with only one legislator did it," it said. "In India, there is no leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, and in Maharashtra, the opposition party behaves as if it is still ruling," the Saamana editorial said.

'Good to be on same team': Vasundhara Raje welcomes Jyotiraditya Scindia into BJP

Scindia, a former Union minister and four-time Parliamentarian joined the BJP in Delhi in the presence of party chief JP Nadda.



(Insider Bureau) Former Rajasthan chief minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) vice president Vasundhara Raje on Wednesday welcomed her nephew and former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia into the party and said she admired his strength of character and courage.

Scindia, a former Union minister and four-time Parliamentarian joined the BJP in Delhi in the presence of party chief JP Nadda.

"If Rajmata Sahab was here today, she would be elated to see you put the #NationFirst. I admire your strength of character and courage. It's good to be on the same team. Welcome to the BJP. @JM_Scindia," she tweeted. 'Rajmata' was Scindia's grandmother, Vijaya Raje Scindia, who was one of the founders of the Jana Sangh, the BJP's forerunner. Scindia resigned from the Congress on Tuesday after a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and Union home minister Amit Shah. His resignation ended an 18-year-old association with the Congress and sparked a chain reaction in Madhya Pradesh where 22 Congress legislators quit, bringing the Kamal Nath government to the brink of collapse. On Tuesday, another aunt and former Madhya Pradesh minister - Yashodhara Raje Scindia welcomed his resignation, calling it "ghar wapsi" or homecoming and said that he was being neglected in the Congress.

Why this vegetable is selling at a price higher than chicken

The coronavirus scare has hit poultry business so hard and the Poultry Farm Association recently organized a Chicken Mela in Gorakhpur to dispel the misconception that birds are carriers of the deadly virus.



sold out in the vegetable market and is difficult to find," said Purnima Srivastava whose family savours non-vegetarian food on a regular basis. The corona scare has hit poultry business so hard and the Poultry Farm Association recently organized a Chicken Mela in Gorakhpur to dispel the misconception that birds are carriers of the deadly virus.

"In fact, we gave away plateful of chicken dishes for Rs 30 to encourage people to savour the delicacies. We cooked one thousand kilograms of chicken for the Mela and the entire stock was sold out," said Vineet Singh, head of the Poultry Farm Association. However, the Mela did not do much to dispel the fears about chicken, mutton or fish consumption amid the virus outbreak.

(Insider Bureau) With the sales of chicken and mutton going down due to the coronavirus scare, it is the humble 'kathal' (jackfruit) that is emerging as an acceptable alternative.

'Kathal' is now selling at Rs 120 per kilogram -- an increase of more than 120 per cent over the normal

Rs 50 per kilogram. The jackfruit, in fact, is now higher priced than chicken which is selling at Rs 80 per kilogram due to poor demand.

"It is better having a 'kathal' biryani instead of a mutton biryani. It tastes reasonably good. The only problem is that 'kathal' has been

On 'naming and shaming' anti-CAA posters, Allahabad High Court ruling today

On Sunday, the Allahabad High Court deferred its order and termed the state government's act as an 'insult of state and its public'.

(Insider Bureau) The Allahabad High Court on Monday will pronounce its verdict over the Uttar Pradesh government putting up hoardings of anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protestors in Lucknow. On Sunday, the Allahabad High Court deferred its order and termed the state government's act as an 'insult of state and its public'. The judgment is likely to be pronounced today at 2 pm. Taking suo-moto cognizance of the matter on Sunday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Ramesh Sinha said that the act was "highly unjust" and that it was an absolute "encroachment" on personal liberty of the persons concerned.

According to reports, the state authorities had put up hoardings containing photographs and details of persons accused of violence during anti-CAA protests in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The accused had participated in anti-CAA protests last year in December. The hoardings carried names, photographs and residential addresses of the accused protesters.

Google employee in Bengaluru office tests positive for coronavirus

A Google employee in Switzerland had earlier tested positive for Covid-19, prompting the tech giant to impose travel restrictions on employees to travel to Iran, Italy and China.

(Insider Bureau) One of the employees of tech giant Google, working in its Bengaluru office, tested positive for Covid-19, the disease caused by coronavirus, news agency ANI reported. "We can confirm that an employee from our Bengaluru office has been diagnosed with Covid-19. He was in one of our Bengaluru offices for a few hours before developing any symptoms. The employee has been on quarantine since then," Google said in a statement on Thursday, as reported by ANI. It did not specify when the employee tested positive for the deadly disease. "Out of an abundance of cau-

tion, we are asking employees in that Bengaluru office to work from home from tomorrow. We have taken and will continue to take necessary precautionary measures, following the advice of public health officials," the statement further added.

A Google employee in Switzerland had earlier tested positive for Covid-19, prompting the tech giant to impose travel restrictions on employees to travel to Iran, Italy and China. Earlier, one employee from software major Mindtree and Dell India each had tested positive in Bengaluru following their return from the United States.

India witnessed its first coronavirus death when Karnataka Health Minister B Sriramulu on Thursday confirmed that a 76-year-old man from Kalaburgi in the state's northern region died of Covid-19.

The Union Health Ministry has confirmed 74 coronavirus cases so far. The deadly virus that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December last year has claimed over 4,600 lives and infected more than 124,330 people worldwide. Keeping in view the ramifications of the current global spread of coronavirus on public health and safety, New Delhi on Wednesday

inducted health safety measures for foreign and Indian nationals entering into and exiting from India.

The measures included halt in visa issuance for tourists and non-diplomatic staffs as set criteria to mitigate the further spread of coronavirus in the country. India is part of a US-led global initiative to share information on integrating science into coronavirus response, according to a White House statement. Besides the US and India, the UK, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea are part of the initiative.



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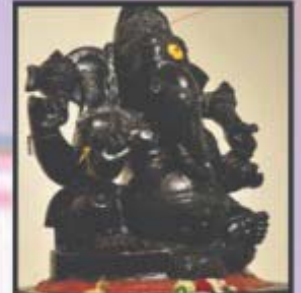
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Coronavirus Pandemic: World On Edge, Cases In India Rise To 81, States Swing Into Action

(News Agencies) The Coronavirus pandemic has the world on edge. It's keeping governments on their toes. On Friday, two high-profile cases came to light. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau and Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro tested positive for coronavirus. Prime Minister Trudeau doesn't have any symptoms, international media reported. The Centre issued a directive to suspend all kinds of passenger movements through all immigration land checkpoints located at India's borders with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar from March 15 midnight. The directive, issued by the foreign division

of the Ministry of Home Affairs, mentioned that the government's decision shall be implemented on an urgent basis in view of the spread of Covid-19. "All types of passenger movements through all the immigration land checkpoints located at Indo-Bangladesh border, Indo-Nepal border, Indo-Bhutan border and Indo-Myanmar border will be suspended with effect from 00.00 Hrs March 15, 2020, till further orders," the directive said. With 17 confirmed coronavirus patients found in Maharashtra, the state government has ordered the closure of cinema theatres, gymnasiums, swimming pools and public parks in cities of Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune and Pimpri-

Chinchwad till March 30. The closure order will come into effect from Friday midnight, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said, announcing that the government has invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to tackle the virus outbreak. The Delhi government has declared COVID-19 an epidemic and announced shutting down of schools, colleges and cinema halls till March 31. Schools, colleges and public spaces have been shut in several states including, Bihar, Punjab, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh as well. In the backdrop of several Indians stranded in the coronavirus-hit Italy, India will send a flight to Milan on Saturday to evacuate

its nationals. The government will also arrange the evacuation of Indians from Iran, officials said. With several players tested positive and multiple events cancelled, sports is another area severely affected by the coronavirus outbreak. English football club Chelsea's Callum Hudson Odoi has become the first Premier League player to be tested for Coronavirus. Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta has also tested positive. The three-match ODI series between India and South Africa has been called off. The first match in Dharamsala on Thursday was washed out and the second and third, slated to be held in Lucknow and Kolkata respectively, were to be played in empty stadiums.

Trump declares national emergency in latest bid to combat coronavirus

Trump said the move would free up \$50 billion in additional funding and waive requirements to speed up coronavirus testing and care.



(News Agencies) President Donald Trump declared a national emergency on Friday to offset lagging coronavirus testing and unlock billions of dollars — accelerating a response plan that has faced weeks of criticism. Trump touted partnerships with private companies that he claimed would allow patients to learn if they need to be tested and locate a testing site, some of

which will be drive-thru facilities at big box retailers across the country. "To unleash the full power of the federal government under this effort today, I'm officially declaring a national emergency," he said at an announcement in the Rose Garden. "Two very big words." Trump insisted the move would eradicate the testing shortcomings that health experts say hindered the

country's ability to contain the virus when it first appeared on American shores. In recent days, Trump's health officials have warned Americans to expect the situation to worsen, spurring much of the country's public spaces to shutter — professional sports have been suspended, concert halls are closed until further notice and many Americans have been asked to self-isolate. Yet even as Trump unleashed \$50 billion in government funding, the announcement had a distinct market-first flavor. Trump outlined a series of agreements with private companies, including Google, Target and Walmart, to facilitate swifter coronavirus testing for Americans. Target and Walmart said they will set aside parking lot space for testing sites, while Google pledged to set up a website to determine whether a person needs a test, and where one is available. "Very soon, Americans will be able to go to these drive-in sites," said Vice President Mike Pence, who Trump put in charge of the administration's

coronavirus task force. Trump said he expected 1.4 million additional tests to be available next week and 5 million within a month — even as he cautioned against everyone rushing to get tested. "We don't want everybody taking this test," he said. "It's totally unnecessary. Trump has faced condemnation over the administration's failure to provide adequate testing and resources for the coronavirus, which has killed more than 5,000 people worldwide and infected tens of thousands. Health specialists have also reprimanded Trump for repeatedly downplaying what has now been deemed a global pandemic. "I don't take responsibility at all," Trump said of the government's struggles to produce enough tests, blaming existing rules set by prior administration for limiting his options. "We were given a set of circumstances and we were given rules, regulations and specifications from a different time." And he claimed to not know that a pandemic preparedness team within the National Security Council was scrapped in 2018. Trump called a question about it "nasty" at a news conference. "I didn't do it," he said. Still, Trump's executive actions on Friday received a positive response on Wall Street and even among Democrats. A faltering stock market swiftly rebounded as Trump was speaking, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average soaring nearly 2,000 points, or more than 9 percent, the largest percentage gain since the 2008 crisis. The comeback reversed nearly all of Thursday's tumble, which was the worst since the 1987 market crash. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), who had urged Trump to act more forcefully, offered rare praise for the president but warned him not to go too far. "As other steps are considered, the president must not overstep his authority or indulge his autocratic tendencies for purposes not truly related to this public health crisis," he said in a statement.

Italy reports record 250 coronavirus deaths in one day

(News Agencies) Italian officials said 250 people have died from the coronavirus in the last 24 hours, marking a record number of deaths from the illness within such a timespan. The Italian Civil Protection Agency reported the increase Friday, which raised the country's death toll from coronavirus to 1,266 people, according to The Associated Press. The spike in cases has shifted the focus on the outbreak from China to Europe. "More cases are now being reported every day [in Europe] than were being reported by China at the height of its epidemic," World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. He also called the reported 5,000 deaths worldwide a "tragic milestone." "Do not

let this fire burn," he said calling for social distancing. "Isolate the sick." The record



number of deaths comes just days after Italy reported nearly 200 deaths in a 24-hour period. Scientists have not yet found a vaccine for COVID-19, which WHO officially characterized as a

pandemic on early Wednesday. "In the days and weeks ahead, we expect to see the number of Covid-19 cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries climb even higher," Tedros said Wednesday. As of Friday afternoon, 1,875 people in the U.S. had tested positive for the coronavirus. Public health officials have estimated that thousands of people likely have the virus but don't know it, partly due to the lack of testing. Trump announced on Wednesday travel restrictions from Europe. He also declared a national emergency over the coronavirus on Friday, freeing up additional resources and funding for the federal, state and local governments fighting the disease.

Scientists believe they've made a huge breakthrough in coronavirus vaccine effort

(News Agencies) A team of Canadian scientists has successfully isolated and grown copies of the coronavirus — bringing the world a step closer to finding a vaccine to fight the deadly illness.

Researchers from the Sunnybrook Research Institute, the University of Toronto, and McMaster University were able to isolate and replicate the virus in a lab using samples taken from two Canadian patients.

The lab-grown copies will now be able to help scientists study the pathogen to develop better diagnostic testing, treatments, vaccines, and gain a better understanding of its biology, the team said in a statement.

"Now that we have isolated the SARS-CoV-2 virus [the agent responsible for COVID-19], we can share this with other researchers and continue this teamwork," Dr. Arinjay Banerjee, NSERC post-

doctoral fellow at McMaster University, said.

"The more viruses that are made available in this way, the more we can learn, collaborate and share." "We need key tools to develop solutions to this pandemic," Dr. Samira Mubareka, microbiologist and infectious diseases physician at Sunnybrook, added.

"While the immediate response is crucial, longer-term solutions come from

essential research into this novel virus."

Meanwhile, eight institutes in China are working on five approaches to inoculations in an effort to combat COVID-19. Chinese officials say it could result in a vaccine ready for emergency situations and clinical trials next month. The outbreak has infected more than 137,000 people in at least 117 countries and regions as of Friday evening — and caused more than 5,000 deaths.



Coronavirus consumes Trump's reelection bid

The president and Joe Biden have had to abruptly change course in response to the crisis.

(News Agencies) When Donald Trump's top campaign advisers met with the president in the White House on Wednesday, they came prepared with reams of polling data on his standing with voters eight months out from the election.

But Trump was focused on something else: The coronavirus.

Before the group could begin its long-planned presentation on the 2020 race, the president launched into a commentary about how travel from Europe was a

"mess" and needed to be shut down. He ordered White House counsel Pat Cipollone and chief economist Larry Kudlow into the room to talk about ideas for addressing the pandemic. And he sent two other top aides, Jared Kushner and Hope Hicks, outside to draft a to-do list. The episode illustrated how the coronavirus crisis has upended the election for both parties. Nearly every element of the presidential campaign is being adjusted or put on hold, from rallies to fundraising to staff work. Advertising campaigns are being

paused and both parties are trying to gauge how to reach voters online.

"You could make a strong argument that the only thing that matters to the president's reelection now is getting the response correct," said Scott Jennings, who served as a top political aide in the George W. Bush White House. "No rally is going to save you if you are judged as having failed as the president."

Critical strategic decisions are also being put on hold. Senior Trump aides have been anxious to start a

massive advertising campaign aimed at defining likely Democratic nominee Joe Biden before the general election campaign kicks into high gear — much like the barrage President Barack Obama unleashed on Mitt Romney in 2012. But with the coronavirus pandemic dominating the news, Republican officials see little point in hitting the airwaves now, saying it will likely have to wait. Strategists are gaming out how the lack of in-person campaigning might affect Trump and

Biden. Trump's signature megarallies, a source of presidential, are on ice. Biden, a tactile politician whose best moments are often on rope lines interacting one-on-one with voters, will be denied those opportunities for the future. Fundraising is also being disrupted. Biden has been forced to move his donor events online. And on Wednesday, the president scrapped a weekend appearance at the Republican Jewish Coalition's annual conference in Las Vegas, as well as a much-anticipated fundraiser there with casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and a planned visit to Milwaukee next week. Trump aides are uncertain when his rallies will resume. Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office Thursday, Trump said he hadn't decided whether he would go forward with a March 25 event in Tampa, Fla.

"We have a lot of things that we're moving around because of what's happening and because I want to be here. This is the nerve center. I want to be right here," he said. "I don't want to be flying around in airplanes all over the place." Some Trump allies, however, are concerned about halting rallies. The president has long used the events as a primary means of reaching supporters, blowing off steam and setting a narrative. His campaign also uses them to gather data.

"Rallies are important to the Trump campaign and

I'd worry about losing them because it would tilt a bit to Biden's advantage," said Michael Caputo, a campaign aide to Trump in 2016.

Biden has put the kibosh on upcoming rallies in Chicago and Miami, refashioning them as virtual events. The former vice president is also opting to hold smaller events, including roundtables and house parties. The Biden campaign has also taken dramatic steps. In its Thursday memo, the campaign announced it is closing all field offices to the public and would instead be organizing "voters across the country through phone banking, text messaging, virtual events, and other distributed organizing models." Despite a series of key primaries taking place next week, the Sanders campaign said it would put a halt to all "door-to-door canvasses, instead moving to digital formats and outreach wherever possible." While Trump advisers are worried about how the president's response to the coronavirus — and accompanying stock market crash — will affect his reelection hopes, they largely remain sanguine. But with schools and offices shutting down and people dying, they also said they recognized the accompanying political danger. People familiar with Wednesday's White House meeting said the president seemed to grasp the urgency of the situation.

Coronavirus pandemic: All the latest updates

US President Donald Trump declares national emergency over COVID-19 as WHO chief calls Europe new epicentre of pandemic.

(News Agencies) United States President Donald Trump has declared a national emergency over the coronavirus pandemic, opening the door to providing what he said was about \$50bn in federal aid to fight the disease. On Friday, the World Health Organization warned that Europe has now become the "epicentre" for the pandemic, called

COVID-19, reporting more daily cases than China did at the height of its outbreak. The pandemic's global death toll has reached almost 5,000, while the global number of cases has surpassed 132,000, according to the WHO, which is the health agency of the United Nations. About 68,000 victims have recovered, according to Johns

Hopkins University, which is tracking the virus. The WHO declared the outbreak a pandemic as Italy tightened its strict quarantine and the US imposed a ban on flights to Europe. Meanwhile, the virus has spread to at least 18 countries on the African continent, with Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and Guinea all confirming their first cases on Friday.

Without Hillary Clinton In The Race, Bernie Sanders' Rural Edge Disappeared

Throughout Michigan, exit polls show Sanders losing rural voters to Biden by a 51% to 40% margin. Sanders won 57% of the rural vote in 2016. Among white voters without a college degree, Sanders won just 43% of the vote in 2020 after claiming 57% back in 2016. The 2020 results suggest there are major limits to Sanders' appeal to the rural white voters who live in these regions, and that his 2016 successes may have been due as much to sexism and Clinton's decades of political baggage as to a thirst for Sanders' progressive policies like "Medicare for All" or a \$15 per hour minimum wage. "People had made up their minds about Hillary Clinton, and there was a large segment of the Democratic electorate who had made their choice," said Mark Longabaugh, a Democratic media consultant who worked for Sanders' campaign in 2016. "There were a lot of more rural, older, conservative voters who moved towards [Sanders]." Longabaugh said Sanders and his allies "underestimated" the role anti-Clinton sentiment

played in assembling his 2016 coalition. Michigan state Rep. Sara Cambensy held on to a Democratic-controlled district centered around Marquette ? a 21,000-person city that is the Upper Peninsula's largest ? in a 2017 special election with the help of a get-out-the-vote robocall from Biden. She said her constituents, many of whom work at two iron mines just outside the city, felt connected to the former vice president in a way they didn't with Clinton and were skeptical of Sanders' most ambitious proposals for free college and Medicare for All. "I think people were looking for someone that didn't have the establi shment connections, and someone that could talk to them in an honest voice," she said of Sanders' victories there four years ago. "This time, even though Vice President Biden has been around in Washington, there's still that honesty when he speaks." "For rural Americans, there's a difference between speaking at you and speaking to you. And Vice President Biden has

a way of speaking to us," said Cambensy, who endorsed Biden. (Biden won Marquette County by a 50% to 42% margin.) Sanders' relative decline in rural areas has been apparent since the New Hampshire primary. While he won nearly two-thirds of the vote in rural areas against Clinton in the Granite State in 2016, exit polls showed him winning 26% of the rural votes in 2020, barely edging out two moderate candidates ? former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar. The pattern of weaker performances with rural voters repeated itself on Super Tuesday. Four years ago in Oklahoma, Sanders had dominated "Little Dixie," a collection of counties in the southeastern corner of the state that were settled by southerners and had been unflinchingly Democratic for decades before slowly flipping to GOP control during the Clinton and Obama administrations. In Pittsburg County, one of the region's largest, Sanders won 56% of the vote to Clinton's 32%. In 2020, Biden dominated the area, nearly doubling

Sanders' vote total in Pittsburg County. Still, the appeal of economic populism in these areas shouldn't be totally discounted. Cambensy said trade deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement remain unpopular in her district, even if Biden wins there. Longabaugh said the divided Democratic field forced Sanders to double down on his ideological base, making him a more polarizing figure. For instance, Sanders has adopted the furthest-left positions on immigration, including the abolishment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "I think Bernie's message on economics and kitchen table issues, on trade and \$15 minimum wage, that message is resonant," Longabaugh said. "Where he gets into trouble with those voters is on social issues. Bernie, over the

course of that campaign, has been pulled off the economic message to talk about things like [Fidel] Castro." There are other reasons Sanders' advantage over Clinton melted away when facing Biden. The most obvious is Clinton's gender, with many conservative Democrats disinclined to vote for a woman. (Four years earlier, Clinton had won in some of these areas because the same conservative Democrats were also disinclined to vote for a Black man in Barack Obama.) And exit poll after exit poll has shown that with Trump already in the White House, voters care far more a candidate's ability to winning the general election than their ideology. Some voters who might otherwise like Sanders' politics could believe the former vice president is a safer bet to defeat Trump.

Just 11% of Michigan voters in 2016 said "electability" was the top candidate quality they were looking for, according to exit polls. While the exit polls didn't ask an identical question in 2020, 57% of Michigan voters said it was more important for Democrats to pick a candidate who can beat Trump, while 38% said it was more important for the party to pick a candidate with the right policy positions. Of the voters who prioritized beating Trump, 63% backed Biden. While Tuesday night's results are likely to give Biden a substantial ? and perhaps insurmountable ? delegate lead, Sanders could stage a comeback with these voters in later states like Ohio, Wisconsin, West Virginia or Kansas. But it will be an uphill climb. "In rural Michigan, we want change, but we're not looking for a revolution," Cambensy said.

Trump tweet seals accord on coronavirus relief package

President Donald Trump backed a coronavirus response package Friday that was hammered out by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, all but ensuring that the measure will pass the House with strong bipartisan support Friday evening. Trump's tweet, just before 9 p.m., ended a week of whiplash as Democrats and the White House appeared, at times, inches from a deal only to see it yanked away amid technical disputes and uncertainty from the president. Trump's backing, though, was essential to ensure support from congressional Republicans for the sweeping, multi-billion dollar plan to provide paid leave for workers, expand food aid and support widespread testing for the illness at no cost to patients. Democratic leaders plan to put the bill on the House floor late Friday evening under an expedited process and quickly send it over to the Senate, which is expected to take it up as early as Monday. It's the product of a painstaking effort by Pelosi to pass a bill with bipartisan support rather than a doomed Democrat-only bill that the Senate would have immediately

spiked. We thought it would be important to show the American people, assure the American people, that we are willing and able to work together to get a job done for them," Pelosi said. "So we thank our Republicans — those who will be supporting the bill. We appreciate the president joining us with his tweet." Pelosi said the final bill came together slowly because of a laborious review process in the Executive Branch, which required approvals from multiple agencies and officials. Pelosi praised Mnuchin for his cooperation, and she acknowledged she never directly spoke with Trump about the bill. "There was no need for that," she said. Alongside Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said he expected House committees to be working through next week's recess on a new bill meant to address the economic damage wrought by coronavirus, which has devastated the airline, hospitality and entertainment industries. For now, though, Democrats said they were pleased to pass a bipartisan plan that they expect to pass overwhelmingly in the House and move through the Senate by Monday.

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India was 2nd largest arms importer in 2015-19, Russia's share of Indian arms market declined

India retained its position as the world's second largest arms importers during 2015-19, with Russia remaining the largest supplier even though its share of Indian weapons purchases declined from 72% to 56%, according to a leading think tank that tracks arms transfers. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in its annual "Trends in international arms transfers 2019" report, released on Monday, the five largest arms importers during the five-year period were Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and China, which together accounted for 36% of all arms imports.

India has been in the second place, behind Saudi Arabia, in SIPRI's list of arms importers for several years as it has moved in recent years to modernise its armed forces by acquiring combat jets, helicopters,

submarines, warships, artillery guns and assault rifles from sources such as Russia, the US, France and Israel.

According to data from SIPRI for the period 2015-19, India also acquired military hardware from other countries, including Scanter-6000 radars from Denmark, Embraer ERJ-145 jets for a home-grown airborne early warning and control system, ACTAS sonar systems from Germany, Super Rapid 76mm naval guns from Italy and K-9 Thunder 155mm artillery guns from South Korea.

The report listed India in the 23rd slot among the world's 25 largest arms exporters, with its main clients being Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Mauritius.

The report said India's arms imports from both Russia and the US fell during the five-year period, though the decline was more pronounced in the case of

Russian arms deals. India accounted for 25% of total Russian arms exports.

"Russia was the largest supplier to India in 2010-14 and 2015-19, but deliveries fell by 47 per cent and its share of total Indian arms imports went from 72 to 56 per cent," it said. Russian arms exports accounted for 21% of total exports during 2015-19 but were 18% lower than in 2010-14. The US emerged as India's second-largest arms supplier during 2010-14 as security ties between the two sides developed into a strategic partnership. "However, in 2015-19 India continued with its policy of supplier diversification, and imports of arms from the USA were 51 per cent lower than in 2010-14," the report said.

In contrast, arms imports from Israel and France increased, by 175% and 715% respectively, making them the second- and

third-largest suppliers during 2015-19.

Total US arms exports to Asia were down by 20% when compared to 2010-14 as a result of decreases in exports to India (-51%), Pakistan (-92%), Singapore (-60%), South Korea (-34%) and Taiwan (-38%).

Between 2010-14 and 2015-19, arms imports by India and Pakistan decreased by 32% and 39% respectively. "While both countries have long-standing aims to produce their own major arms, they remain largely dependent on imports and have substantial outstanding orders and plans for imports of all types of major arms," the report said.

China accounted for 51% of Pakistan's arm imports during 2010-14 and 73% during 2015-19. The overall decrease in Pakistan's arms imports was linked to the US decision to

stop military aid to Pakistan in 2018. The US accounted for 30% of Pakistan's arms imports during 2010-14 but for only 4.1% during 2015-19.

Pakistan also strengthened its arms import relations with Turkey, with orders for 30 combat helicopters and four frigates in 2018. The report also noted that India and Pakistan had used imported weapons in clashes following the 2019 suicide attack in Pulwama by the Jaish-e-Mohammed that killed 40 troopers.

"Pakistan reportedly used combat aircraft imported from China, equipped with Russian engines, and combat aircraft from the USA supported by airborne early warning and control aircraft from Sweden. India reportedly used combat aircraft imported from France and Russia, guided bombs from Israel and artillery from Sweden," it said.

70 Percent Of Germany Could Become Infected By Coronavirus: Chancellor

The government has recommended the cancellation of all events with more than 1,000 people, among other things. Merkel noted at a news conference in Berlin: "You have to understand that if the virus is there, and the population has no immunity yet to this virus, there are no vaccines and no therapy so far, a high percentage - experts say 60 to 70% of the population will be infected." She said the priority is to slow the spread of the disease "so all the measures we are taking are of the greatest significance because they are giving us time - it does matter what we do, it is not in vain." Merkel has made clear that Germany doesn't intend to close its borders in the light of Europe's coronavirus epidemic, arguing that it makes more sense for people arriving from badly hit regions to quarantine themselves at home.

Merkel said at a rare, hastily convened news conference Wednesday in Berlin that it's important for European

leaders to discuss "what are good and effective measures and what aren't." She said "we in Germany, in any case, are of the opinion that border closures are not an appropriate response to the challenge." Germany isn't a direct neighbor of Italy, the epicenter of Europe's outbreak. Austria and Slovenia to Italy's north and Malta to the south have largely closed their borders with Italy.

Jyotiraditya Scindia is BJP's Rajya Sabha candidate from Madhya Pradesh

Scindia had quit Congress on Tuesday, posting his resignation letter on Twitter. His resignation created ripple effect with 22 of 114 Congress MLAs submitting their resignation to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker. He joined the BJP on Wednesday in the presence of party chief JP Nadda. Scindia thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Nadda for giving him a place in their family. He also accused the Congress of living in denial. "In my life two dates have been very significant. September 30, 2001 when I lost my father. It changed my life. The second date is March 10, 2020 which was his 75th birth anniversary when I took an informed decision," said Scindia. "I had a dream when Congress formed the government in Madhya Pradesh in 2018. Eighteen months later, none of the promises are met including the ones that of farmers," remarked Scindia. He accused his former party of going back on its promises as well as indulging in corruption. "Today 'transfer' is an industry in Madhya Pradesh," he alleged, hitting out at Kamal Nath. After his father, the 49-year-old was the only one from the Scindia family to be associated with the Congress party. His grandmother, Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia of Gwalior, aunts Vasundhara Raje, and Yashodhara Raje have been part of the Jan Sangh and the BJP.

Coronavirus spread

How countries are managing cost of treatment

In India, insurance regulator IRDAI had last week asked insurance companies to come out with policies to cover treatment costs for coronavirus infection.

As the deadly coronavirus spreads across the world, governments and health insurance companies are adopting different ways to make sure that out-of-pocket costs do not prevent people from seeking care and the threat of under-reporting of cases can be minimised. America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) had said last week that its members, which include Cigna Corp and Anthem Inc, will cover diagnostic testing when ordered by a doctor, ease network, referral and prior authorisation requirements and/or waive patient cost sharing. The group also said it will "take action so that patients will have continuous access to their regular prescription medications". Some healthcare experts had expressed concern that the type of patient cost sharing seen in many US health plans might make some Americans hesitate to visit a doctor, even if they have valid reasons to be concerned about contracting the virus. In India, insurance regulator IRDAI had last week asked insurance companies to come out with policies to cover treatment costs for coronavirus infection, which has impacted over one lakh people worldwide. In order to provide need-based health insurance coverage, insurers are introducing products for various specific diseases, including vector borne

diseases.

"For the purpose of meeting health insurance requirements of various sections, insurers are advised to design products covering the costs of treatment for coronavirus," the regulator had said in a circular. "All the claims reported under COVID-19 shall be thoroughly reviewed by review committee before repudiating the claims," it further added. There are 62 confirmed cases of coronavirus infection in India. Singapore, meanwhile, has started charging visitors for coronavirus treatment, as it reported new imported infections involving people who had travelled from neighbouring Indonesia. Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous country, reported its first virus case earlier this month and officially has just 19 infections compared to 160 in Singapore. Disease experts have questioned how many cases could be going undiagnosed in Indonesia. Singapore's new measures announced late on Monday came into effect on March 7, when authorities said two symptomatic Indonesian travellers arrived in Singapore. Both had reported coronavirus symptoms in Indonesia before arriving in Singapore. One had previously sought treatment at a hospital in Indonesia's capital Jakarta. Another case involved a Singaporean who had visited her sister in Indonesia who had pneumonia.

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Harvey Weinstein sentenced to 23 years in prison for rape and sexual assault in #MeToo case

Weinstein, who has been accused of violating scores of women, was convicted last month of raping a woman in a New York City hotel room in 2013 and forcibly performing oral sex on another woman at his apartment in 2006.



court Wednesday that the men facing allegations in the (hash)MeToo movement are being accused of "things that none of us understood," saying he was confused by the rape case that was about to put him in prison. "Thousands of men are losing due process. I'm worried about this country," the disgraced Hollywood mogul said after two of his accusers confronted him in court.

Weinstein faced at least five years and up to 29 years behind bars in the landmark (hash)MeToo case. He was convicted of raping an aspiring actress in 2013 and forcibly performing oral sex on former TV and film production assistant Mimi Haley in 2006. A second criminal case is pending in California. Onlookers applauded the two women whom Weinstein

was convicted of assaulting as they arrived in court.

Haleyi broke into tears as she told Judge James Burke that the 2006 attack scarred her deeply, made her rethink her career in the entertainment business and left her feeling paranoid and afraid of retaliation. She said she avoids dating because she doesn't want to hurt people, have them feel embarrassed or distance themselves when they find out what happened to her. "I believe that if Harvey Weinstein was not convicted by this jury, it would happen again and again and again," Haleyi said. The once-aspiring actress that Weinstein was convicted of raping in 2013 recalled the moment during the trial when she left the witness stand in tears and then could be heard screaming from an adjacent room. "The day my

screams were heard from the witness room was the day my voice came back to its full power," she said.

"Rape is not just one moment of penetration. It is forever." She said she was a victim of "rape paralysis" caused by a physically imposing assailant "who had every advantage over me." Like many of Weinstein's accusers, she said he used his Hollywood prestige to befriend her, dangling professional prospects to gain her trust. "It takes a very special kind of evil to exploit connections to leverage rape," she said. The Associated Press has a policy of not naming people who have been sexually assaulted without their consent. It is withholding the rape accuser's name because it is not clear whether she wishes to be identified.

(News Agencies) Harvey Weinstein was sentenced Wednesday to 23 years in prison for rape and sexual assault, a sight the Hollywood mogul's multitude of accusers thought they would never see.

Weinstein, who has been accused of violating scores of women, was convicted last month of raping a woman in a New York City hotel room in 2013 and forcibly performing oral sex on another woman at his apartment in 2006. He faced a maximum of 29 years in prison.

Both women that Weinstein was convicted of assaulting — a once-aspiring

actress and a former TV and film production assistant — spoke in court Wednesday before Judge James Burke announced the sentence, confronting Weinstein again after their testimony helped seal his conviction at the landmark (hash)MeToo trial. Burke also heard from Weinstein's lawyers, who pleaded for leniency because of his age and frail health, and prosecutors, who said the man once celebrated as a titan of Hollywood deserved a harsh sentence that would account for allegations of wrongdoing dating to the 1970s.

Harvey Weinstein told a

Lessons from China's neighbour Taiwan to control spread of coronavirus

Taiwan's government reacted to the coronavirus outbreak early in put in place measures which were widely followed by the public.



Taiwan are taking part in the new scheme to manufacture cloth face masks and face mask protectors to supply their staff and the public. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has, however, said that masks are not effective in controlling the spread of the virus.

In a report to parliament on Tuesday, Taiwan's central bank said the spread of the virus presents a major uncertainty for the economy, which is a key link of the global technology supply chain, and could shave up to 0.7 percentage points from economic growth this year. Taiwan stocks advanced 0.4 per cent on Wednesday morning, but are down about eight per cent so far this year. Taiwan, whose largest trading partner is China, cut its estimate for 2020 economic growth to 2.37 per cent last month. On Monday, as global stocks crashed due to an oil price war and fears over the spreading epidemic, foreign investors sold \$1.82 billion of Taiwan stocks — the largest single day outflow since the 2008 financial crisis.

(News Agencies) It started from China, and quickly spread across the world, but the deadly coronavirus failed to impact China's neighbour Taiwan the way it has affected over 80 countries.

The island has been held up as an example of how to handle an outbreak, with the government moving early and fast to reduce overseas arrivals from infected areas and issue clear medical guidance that has been widely adopted by the public.

Despite being so close to the original outbreak in mainland China, Taiwan has just 48 confirmed cases of the Covid-19 disease with one death,

compared with more than 80,000 on the other side of the Taiwan Strait in China. And this has happened due to stringent checks and contact tracing among its 23 million people. The island is on high alert to prevent further infections. The government said on Wednesday the island's 48th case was a woman in her 30s who had returned from holiday in Britain and had most likely been infected there.

Taiwan was briefly struck by panic buying of medical face masks earlier this year until the government introduced a rationing system. Correctional facilities across

Russia Passes Bill Allowing Putin To Stay In Power Past 2024

(News Agencies) MOSCOW — The Russian parliament approved a sweeping constitutional reform in the third and final reading Wednesday, a move that will allow President Vladimir Putin to stay in power for another 12 years after his current term ends in 2024.

The Kremlin-controlled lower house, the State Duma, endorsed a set of amendments to the constitution and a provision resetting the term count for Putin after the revised constitution goes into force by a 383-0 vote with 43 abstentions. A nationwide vote on the proposed amendments is set for April 22. Kremlin critics condemned the move as a cynical manipulation and called for protests. Putin, a 67-year-old former KGB officer, has ruled Russia for more than 20 years. After serving for two consecutive four-year terms — a limit outlined in the current version of the constitution — Putin shifted to prime minister's seat in 2008, with his close ally Dmitry Medvedev becoming a placeholder president. The length of the

presidency was extended to six years under Medvedev, and in 2012 Putin returned to the Kremlin as president. In 2018, he was re-elected for another six years. The constitutional reform passed by the Duma on Wednesday would allow Putin to run for presidency two more times after 2024. Ahead of the national vote, it will be reviewed by Russia's Constitutional Court.

The changes redistribute the executive powers of the Russian government in Moscow and further strengthen the power of the presidency, while also banning same-sex marriage and listing "a belief in God" as one of Russia's traditional values. The proposal to restart the term clock for the current president was put forward by 83-year-old former Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, now a Duma deputy, during the second reading of the amendments on Tuesday. Following Tereshkova's speech, Putin quickly arrived at parliament to address the lawmakers and supported the idea.

Joe Biden Wins Michigan, Delivering Severe Blow To Bernie Sanders' Campaign



Early results suggest that Biden won with the same coalition of voters who carried him on Super Tuesday 2020.

(News Agencies) DETROIT : Former Vice President Joe Biden has won the Democratic primary in Michigan, according to network projections, demonstrating the breadth of his political coalition and dealing a heavy blow to the campaign of rival Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.).

Six states held primaries on Tuesday, but Michigan was the biggest and, in the eyes of many political observers, the most politically important.

It has been a key target in Democrats' plans for the general election ever since

President Donald Trump narrowly won the state four years ago. It is also the state where Sanders upset Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primary, temporarily reviving his campaign after a series of losses.

Sanders had hoped to repeat the feat this time around, especially after several other presidential candidates recently dropped out, effectively narrowing the primary to a two-man race. The senator spent three days campaigning across the state, drawing more than 30,000 people to his rallies.

"Tuesday is a very, very

important day, and Michigan is the most important state coming up on Tuesday," Sanders said Sunday in Ann Arbor, speaking to a crowd of mostly young voters, his strongest constituency. "We need you to come out or to vote early. We need you to bring out your families and your co-workers." But those voters didn't turn out? or, more precisely, they didn't turn out in sufficiently large numbers. And on Tuesday night it was Biden, who lost early contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, declaring victory.

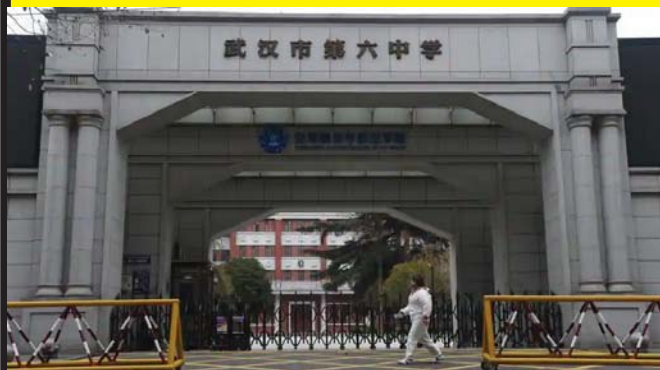
"To all those who have been knocked down, to all those who have been counted out, left behind, this is your campaign," Biden said in Philadelphia, after canceling a planned rally out of concern for the coronavirus outbreak. "Just over a week ago, many of the pundits declared that this candidacy was dead."

The voting pattern was consistent with returns from Super Tuesday a week ago, when Biden won every major contest except California's. Although Sanders enjoyed his customary large advantage among young voters, according to exit polls, Biden won more votes from older people, women and African Americans. Sanders won among voters who said they supported the candidate who shared their views on the issues, the exit polls said, but Biden won among voters who said their main goal was picking somebody who could beat Trump in November. Notably, Biden won among voters who told pollsters they made their choice in just the last few days. He and Sanders basically got equal support among those who had decided earlier. Combined with the results from other states voting this Tuesday especially in

Mississippi, where Biden was on track to win handily Michigan puts Biden well ahead in the delegate count. It has also left Sanders with precious few opportunities to make up the gap with Biden, although the 2020 campaign has defied predictions several times already. Sanders, who like Biden canceled a rally because of coronavirus concerns, declined to make a public statement on Tuesday evening. Biden, in his remarks, made a plea for party unity. "I want to thank Bernie Sanders, and his supporters, for their tireless energy and their passion," Biden said. "We share a common goal. Together, we will defeat Donald Trump. We'll defeat him together. We'll bring this nation together." "Tonight we are a step closer to restoring decency, dignity and honor to the White House," Biden said. "That's our ultimate goal."

Top Coronavirus doctor in Wuhan says high blood pressure is major death risk

Of a group of 170 patients who died in January in Wuhan - the first wave of casualties caused by a pathogen that's now raced around the world - nearly half had hypertension.



(News Agencies) Patients with hypertension appear to be at a higher risk of dying from the coronavirus, said a top Chinese intensive care doctor who's been treating critically ill patients since mid-January.

While there's been no published research yet explaining why, Chinese doctors working in Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the virus first emerged, have noticed that infected patients with that underlying illness are more likely to slip into severe distress and die.

Of a group of 170 patients who died in January in Wuhan — the first wave of casualties caused by a pathogen that's now raced around the world — nearly half had hypertension.

patients there.

"From what I was told by other doctors and the data I can see myself, among all the underlying diseases, hypertension is a key dangerous factor," said Du Bin, one of the most respected critical care experts in China. "Though there is no research published on that yet, we believe hypertension could be an important factor in causing patients to deteriorate, leading to a bad prognosis."

As the outbreak picks up speed in Europe and the U.S., plunging countries like Italy into crisis, doctors are struggling to treat the highly-infectious pathogen that's infected over 108,000 people globally in just three months.

Understanding the course of the

"That's a very high ratio," said Du Bin, director of the intensive care unit at Peking Union Medical College Hospital, in an interview with Bloomberg over the phone from Wuhan. He was among a team of top doctors sent to the devastated city two months ago to help treat

disease and identifying individuals at greatest risk are critical for optimizing care for a global contagion that's killed more than 3,700 people since emerging in China in December.

Answers may lie in studying the large pool of patients in China, where more than 15,000 remain hospitalized although new infections have slowed dramatically. The disease turns critical in 6% of patients and deterioration can happen very quickly.

"We'll keep an eye on old people and those with high blood pressure. They are the key focus," said Du.

Besides the hypertension factor, Du's other insights into treating the disease are:

Du said that doctors should not hesitate to escalate measures for patients facing respiratory distress, as organ failure can set in quickly after. That means doctors should intervene aggressively with invasive ventilation measures — inserting a tube into a patient's throat or cutting the throat open to create an airway — when low blood oxygen levels can't be improved by less invasive measures.

Almost half of the patients who require invasive mechanical ventilation

end up dying, but most of those who recover are those who were put on invasive ventilation early, said Du.

"Patients need to use invasive ventilation as early as possible, there's no point of doing it late," he said.

Respiratory therapists — doctors that specialize in ventilation and oxygen treatment — are becoming all the more important in treating patients critically ill with Covid-19 as they are more knowledgeable and can fine-tune ventilators to suit patient conditions. There is growing anticipation over drugs being developed to treat the virus, with investors adding billions to the market value of pharmaceutical companies testing treatments now. But Du said drugs alone cannot save patients, especially those in severe condition. The experience of SARS, the epidemic 17 years ago that sickened almost 8,000 people, showed that most patients can be cured without a specific anti-viral drug, said Du. And the abundance of antibiotics has not prevented deaths by bacterial infections, he added. "When there's a virus infection, we hope there's a drug that can kill the virus and change the clinical outcome. But there's no magic bullet."

Rana Kapoor's style of functioning left Rs 54,000 crore hole in Yes Bank balance sheet: Report



"He would only say - if you don't invest big, you don't grow big," a senior person working at the bank told Mint. When the going was good, Mint reported, Kapoor was known as the banker who would never say "No". Under Kapoor, Yes Bank would even lend money to corporates who had been refused by other lenders. The bank grew 26 times in size, but so grew its balance sheet hole, which, according to the newspaper, was Rs 54,000 crore. The government then had to intervene and bail the bank out on March 6. As the government formulated a rescue plan for the beleaguered bank, Kapoor was questioned for 20 hours and ultimately, arrested, and his residence raided.

(News Agencies) The government had to ultimately intervene and bail out Yes Bank on March 6. Many of Rana Kapoor's colleagues spoke about his style of functioning to Mint.

Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor is now under police custody after being arrested on charges of money laundering.

Kapoor is known for a flamboyant lifestyle and penchant for publicity. Mint, Hindustan Times' business publication, reported that Kapoor used to reward his bank's top performers with so-called "Golden Pin Awards" and host lavish parties for them at his sea-facing residence in an upscale Mumbai neighbourhood.

Certain restrictions were put in place by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). These restrictions included limit on withdrawals to Rs 50,000 every 30 days which sent customers rushing to the bank's ATMs and branches on Friday and Saturday in a desperate bid to retrieve their deposits.

The State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, said on Saturday it was ready to for a 49 per cent stake in Yes Bank as part of a RBI-backed rescue plan. "Twenty-three potential investors have approached us to invest and they include some very good names," SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar told reporters. The RBI said Yes Bank's weakened position was

"largely due to inability of the bank to raise capital to address potential loan losses and resultant downgrades". India has been grappling with a liquidity crunch caused by the near-collapse more than a year ago of IL&FS, one of India's biggest shadow banks - finance houses responsible for significant consumer lending. Yes Bank's total exposure to shadow lenders and developers was 11.5 per cent as of September, according to Bloomberg News. It has been struggling for some time to raise fresh capital to free itself of an increasing pile of bad loans in order to quell worries about its viability. The bank has over 1,000 branches and more than 1,800 ATMs across the country.

From Vajpayee to Lalu Prasad Yadav: The political colours of Holi

Lalu's Holi celebration is legendary and is still remembered in the corridors of power.

(News Agencies) The coronavirus outbreak has dampened the festival of colours in the BJP circles. From Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah, to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president J P Nadda, a host of party leaders have decided to skip the 'Holi Milan' celebrations. It is unusual as the festival of colours has for long

Vajpayee had said.

The other legendary Holi celebration still remembered in the corridors of power is the one held by Lalu Yadav. The RJD chief's raucous "kurta-phaad" Holi celebrations between 1997 and 2000 were tinged with political bonhomie. Holi, even Opposition leaders would come to attend the celebrations.



Holi, however, became a low-key affair in 2017 for the Lalu household, with the family opting out of celebrations in 2018 and 2019. The family cited Lalu's conviction in 2018 and the CRPF convoy attack in Pulwama in 2019 to not indulge in festivities. Images of Sonia and former party chief Rahul

been used by leaders in the north as a means of political outreach. From former prime minister, late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to Congress interim chief Sonia Gandhi; from former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav - politicians across the spectrum have immersed themselves in Holi celebrations. Vajpayee was among the first to add a political tinge to Holi. In 2004, as his government approached the parliamentary elections, Vajpayee exuded confidence that the people would vote his government back to power during the festivities. "There is a need that everyone plays Holi forgetting differences and making a new beginning,"

Gandhi, along with other senior Congress leaders like late Sheila Dikshit, celebrating Holi at the AICC headquarters, yet again show that even the Congress has often used the festival for outreach. A key example is former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Virbhadr Singh who is known to hold celebrations on the day. For Chouhan, Holi has had many colours. From distributing sweets to playing the 'dhol', the former MP chief minister too has exulted in the festival. Even West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has embraced the festival in her own way, though not with colours. She attended the Holi celebrations hosted by the Marwari community in Kolkata last year.

Without Hillary Clinton In The Race, Bernie Sanders' Rural Edge Disappeared



(News Agencies) In 2016, Sanders' progressive Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders won Michigan's Upper Peninsula handily. He won 14 of the 15 counties in the region and lost the 15th by just 30 votes. It was one of a smattering of white, conservative, rural regions around the country, many of them reliably Democratic until recently, where Sanders was able to top eventual Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. Sanders' victories in these places also see West Virginia, Kansas, North Dakota and Little Dixie in southeastern Oklahoma gave him delegates in his one-on-one battle against Clinton and provided a powerful argument for the Democratic Party's left wing.

Over the past four years, progressives have argued that the 2016 primary results showed white working-class voters in rural areas were more ready for

Sanders' progressive revolution than they were interested in Clinton's center-left incrementalism. Sanders' supposed strength with voters in the Rust Belt and Appalachia, most of whom rejected Clinton and former President Barack Obama, was at the core of the "Bernie would have won" argument from 2016.

This year's primaries have painted a much different picture. On Tuesday night, Biden cruised to victory in the Upper Peninsula. As of 11 p.m. Eastern, he was winning every county in the Upper Peninsula. In Mackinac County, where Sanders had won with 55% of the vote four years earlier, Biden was winning by an identical margin and was 20 percentage points ahead of Sanders. In Gogebic County, Biden had a 30-point lead over Sanders, who had won the county by 7 percentage points in 2016.

(Contd on page 20)

Madhya Pradesh crisis: Indecisiveness hits Congress yet again



(News Agencies) Soon after Congress was decimated in the Lok Sabha elections, the grand old party was plunged into a leadership crisis when Rahul Gandhi resigned from the post of party president on May 25, during a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC).

The announcement of senior leader Jyotiraditya Scindia's resignation from Congress has once again shone a spotlight on the challenges facing the party, which has been struggling to recoup from indecisive leadership since the 2019 general elections, despite subsequent electoral wins at the state level.

Soon after Congress was

decimated in the Lok Sabha elections, the grand old party was plunged into a leadership crisis when Rahul Gandhi resigned from the post of party president on May 25, during a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC).

For 77 days, the top post remained vacant. CWC members exhorted Gandhi to take back his resignation, but he refused to do so. On August 10, 2019, CWC finally nominated Sonia Gandhi to take over the position and pull the party out of this particular crisis.

Indecision has been a serious and recurring problem for Congress. In his resignation

letter, Scindia wrote that the path to his exit had been laid more than a year ago, which is likely to be a reference to not just the party's decision to appoint Kamal Nath chief minister of Madhya Pradesh (MP), but also to Congress failing to appoint a new state president. Nath currently holds both posts because the party has not been able to select a name to replace Nath as its state unit chief.

In Karnataka, Dinesh Gundu Rao has submitted his resignation from the post of state unit president to the Congress high command, taking moral responsibility for the party's poor show in the by-elections held in December 2019. Former chief minister Siddaramaiah also stepped down as leader of Congress Legislature Party (CLP).

After a series of discussions, Congress's central leadership had almost finalised former minister and key troubleshooter DK Shivakumar as the new Karnataka unit chief, but the

decision has been put on hold as Siddaramaiah has pitched Lingayat leader MB Patil for the post.

Similarly, the state chiefs of Telangana (Uttam Kumar Reddy) and Odisha (Niranjan Patnaik) resigned from their posts soon after the Lok Sabha elections, but the party leadership is still struggling to find their replacements.

In Punjab, the central leadership has failed to resolve differences between chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh and his former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu, who resigned in July 2019. Where decisions have been taken, they seem to have cost Congress dearly. For example, in Haryana, Ashok Tanwar was removed as state unit chief weeks before the Assembly elections after six years as president of the Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee. Senior leader Kumari Selja replaced him and election management was handed over to former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda who brought the

party within striking distance of ousting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from power.

In Maharashtra, Congress's leadership was in disarray with many senior leaders, including Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil and Harshwardhan Patil, defecting to the BJP and others, such as Sanjay Nirupam, refusing to campaign for the party. When Assembly election results were announced, Congress had dropped to fourth position and it was forced to cede its 'big brother' role to Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which formed a three-party alliance between NCP, Shiv Sena and Congress. Congress's performance in Delhi was worse in Delhi, where the rudderless party failed to open its account in last month's Assembly elections. The two states where infighting doesn't appear to have affected Congress are Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. All eyes will now be on the stability of these 2 state governments. Aurangzeb Naqshbandi

Amit Shah cleared decks for Jyotiraditya Scindia's entry into BJP

The swift and well-guarded moves that preceded Jyotiraditya Scindia's formal entry into the Bharatiya Janata Party were overseen by former party president and Union home minister Amit Shah.



(News Agencies) The swift and well-guarded moves that preceded Jyotiraditya Scindia's formal entry into the Bharatiya Janata Party were overseen by former party president and Union home minister Amit Shah.

It was Shah who met Scindia on Tuesday and later accompanied him to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence to clear the decks for the former Congress leader's entry into the BJP. The two leaders are understood to have been in touch, both directly and through intermediaries, for

several weeks now. According to one state functionary, the royal family of Baroda also played a role in initiating dialogue between Shah and Scindia. A senior BJP functionary said Scindia's resignation from the Congress will not only help the BJP reclaim Madhya Pradesh, a bastion that it had lost in the 2018 state assembly poll, after being in power for three consecutive terms; but also lead to the emergence of a new leadership in the state. "He is a young, dynamic leader, who has the experience of being in charge

at the state as well at centre. Right now there are senior leaders such as Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Narendra Tomar, but the party has to have younger leaders to take it further," said the functionary quoted above.

A second functionary said Scindia's joining will help the BJP strengthen its position in the Gwalior-Chambal region of the state, considered a Scindia stronghold.

In the 230-member Madhya Pradesh assembly 34 seats are in this region. The region is also considered a pocket borough of the erstwhile royal family of Gwalior. In the last assembly election, the Congress had an edge over the BJP after winning 75% seats in the region, while the BJP's tally went down from 18 in 2013 to seven in 2018.

The BJP has also redoubled its efforts in the region which is the hot bed of caste politics and it was here the protests against dilution

of the SC/ST prevention of atrocities Act was seen the most. The BJP, which has been working on social engineering to expand its vote bank, has been wooing the SC and ST communities in the region.

For now, there is speculation that Scindia may join the cabinet at the Centre, which will provide a boost to the talent in the government, given the former Congress leader's administrative experience, energy and ability to articulate key policy issues.

According to people aware of the developments, even as there was speculation that Scindia would leave the Congress party, a host of state leaders were unsure whether he would join the BJP formally or float his own party.

The negotiations were limited to Shah and Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan. On Monday this issue was also discussed with BJP president JP Nadda

when Shah met him," said the second functionary.

Following a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with Shah, Scindia announced his resignation from the Congress and later joined the Bharatiya Janata Party in the evening.

There was no word on what transpired at the meetings Scindia held with Shah and Modi.

"The BJP had been closely watching the developments unfold in the state, but did not make any move to topple the Kamal Nath government. Only when it became clear that intra-party disagreements which were evident in the form of open rebellion by MLAs made it untenable for the Congress government to continue, did the BJP take proactive steps. Many MLAs had reached out to the BJP, dismayed by their party's leadership," said a BJP functionary aware of the details.

Coronavirus: Attending an event or meeting?

Consider these WHO precautions

All sections of our society - including businesses and employers - must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this disease, said WHO.



**FIGHTING
CORONA
VIRUS**

HERE'S WHEN YOU SHOULD BE WASHING YOUR HANDS

- * Wash them after coughing or sneezing
- * When caring for a sick person
- * Before you prepare food, and also after you are done
- * Before you sit down to have your meal
- * After using the toilet
- * When the hands are visibly dirty
- * After they come in contact with animals, or animal waste

(News Agencies) In view of the increasing number of Coronavirus cases and more than 100 countries being affected, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released guidelines on organising gatherings, especially events, official meetings and the likes, while stating that unless absolutely essential, such meetings should be avoided or carried out remotely. In a press release titled Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19, it said: "All sections of our society – including businesses and

employers – must play a role if we are to stop the spread of this disease." Here's a Twitter thread highlighting the same. Organizers of meetings & events need to think about the potential risk from #COVID19 because: While COVID-19 is a mild disease for most people, it can make some very ill. Around 1 in every 5 people who catch COVID-19 needs hospital treatment," WHO said. Notably, the novel Coronavirus spreads when someone with the disease

coughs or exhales, releasing droplets of the infected fluid. If the droplets fall on surfaces of objects such as tables, desks or telephones and other people come in contact with the contaminated surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth, they too can get infected. As per WHO, while people over 40 years seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40, those with weakened immune systems and conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more

vulnerable to serious illnesses. *Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a teleconference or online event? *Could the meeting or event be scaled down so that fewer people attend it? *Ensure and verify information and communication channels in advance with key partners such as public health and health care authorities. *Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials

including tissues and hand sanitiser for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.

*Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.

*Develop and agree a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (dry cough, fever, malaise). This plan should include at least: – Identify a room or area where someone who is feeling unwell or has

symptoms can be safely isolated.

– Have a plan for how they can be safely transferred from there to a health facility.

– Know what to do if a meeting participant, staff member or service provider tests positive for COVID-19 during or just after the meeting.

– Agree the plan in advance with your partner healthcare provider or health department.

*Make sure all organisers, participants, caterers and visitors at the event provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying.

World Kidney Day: Here are 6 common bad habits that can damage your kidneys

Kidney disease doesn't just affect the elderly and alcoholic. Your lifestyle habits right now can also put you at risk.

(News Agencies) There must have been numerous films where actors have been shown to suffer from kidney disease thanks to their daily dose of tipples. And while their sad predicaments do make a point, alcohol is not the only cause of kidney damage. Rather they form a part of a long list of dietary and lifestyle habits that can prove detrimental for the organs in the human body.

The second Thursday of March every year is observed as World Kidney Day across the globe. A global awareness campaign, it aims to highlight the importance of kidneys for our health and to reduce impact of kidney disease and health problems associated with it.

From having too much protein to indulging in a regular intake of processed foods, there are a number of damaging behaviours which puts pressure on the kidneys leading to chronic kidney disease. Here's looking at a few habits that may harm the kidneys:

1. Eating too much protein

Animal protein generates high amounts of acid in the blood which can cause acidosis—a condition in which kidneys cannot eliminate enough acid, leading to detrimental effects on the organs.

A diet should be well balanced with proteins, fruits, and vegetables.

2. Consuming too much salt

Diets high in salt have a lot of sodium, which can increase blood

pressure and in time affect renal function. A study by the San Giovanni Bosco Hospital, Italy found that too much salt has a direct tissue effect on the kidney, inducing hypertrophy and fibrosis. Too much salt may also cause kidney stones.

3. Overusing painkillers

That continuous headache may lure you to the medicine cabinet for some painkillers on a regular basis, but overusing them can prove dangerous for the kidneys. Yes, they alleviate your aches and pains, but can cause kidney cancer as well. According to a study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, long-term use of painkillers increase the risk of kidney cancer by 50%.

4. Eating too much processed

food

Processed food might be the answer to all your midnight cravings, but those crispy bits of goodness can actually be pretty harmful for your kidneys. Processed foods are a storehouse of sodium and phosphorus and can lead to kidney disease. Studies have shown that diets that rely mostly on junk food and processed food may cause long-term damage to the kidneys and trigger diabetes as well. For diabetics, since the body does not produce enough insulin, the sugar from processed foods can accumulate in the blood and lead to diabetic kidney disease.

5. Not sleeping enough

If you are tired, go to sleep. Work

can wait another day. Wondering why? Kidney function is regulated by the sleep-wake cycle which helps coordinate the workload of the organ 24x7. Researchers from Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital studied the sleep habits of women volunteers and found that too little sleep was linked to a more rapid decline in kidney function.

6. Drinking too much alcohol

Not being able to survive without whiskey or wine could spell doom for your kidneys. Studies have found that more than four drinks a day is linked to double the risk of chronic kidney disease. Experts say alcohol causes changes in the function of kidneys hampering their ability to filter blood.



(News Agencies) A special court in Mumbai on Wednesday extended Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor's custody with Enforcement Directorate till March 16. Kapoor has been held by the probe agency on the charges of money laundering.

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday told the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court that Kapoor had sanctioned loans worth Rs 30,000 crore, out of which loans to the tune of Rs 20,000 crore have turned into non-performing assets (NPA). The agency is now looking into the accounts which have turned

NPA.

Kapoor, 62, former MD and CEO of the private bank, was arrested by the ED in Mumbai on March 8 under provisions of the PMLA as he was allegedly not cooperating in the probe.

Kapoor was produced before the special PMLA court on Wednesday by the ED, which sought his further custody for seven more days. The court later extended Kapoor's custody to ED till March 16.

On being produced Kapoor, was asked by the court if he had any complaints of ill-treatment against the officers of ED. Kapoor, who admittedly suffers from hearing ailment, told the

court that he has been taken for treatment and has no complaints against the agency.

The ED counsel Sunil Gonsalves later began his arguments and told the court that Kapoor and his family are linked to 78 companies. The agency claimed they are scanning the companies which are linked to Kapoor and his family.

Gonsalves contended that the agency is now checking if the money worth Rs 20,000 crore have been diverted to the 78 companies linked to Kapoor and his family and if there was 'quid pro quo'.

The ED also claimed that

Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor's ED custody extended till March 16

Kapoor was produced before the special PMLA court on Wednesday and sought his further custody for seven more days. The court later extended Kapoor's custody to ED till March 16.

they needs to check where the money has gone and if the transactions were genuine. The special judge however, sought documents from the agency to support their claim. "You don't bring documents in support of the ground you raise," the court told agency. The agency later produced records of forensic audit of the Yes bank for the perusal of the court.

The plea was later objected by Kapoor's lawyer Satish Manashinde saying that when Kapoor left the bank the NPA account was only 1% of the total loan. He alleged that Kapoor has been made scapegoat.

The defense raised questions on searches conducted by the Enforcement Directorate at Kapoor's house much before the case was registered. Manashinde argued that when ED conducted searches, CBI had not

registered a case. "Predicate offense was registered much later by CBI and before that ED began probe and case of ED was registered," defense lawyer contended. As per law ED can begin probe only after a predicate offense is registered by other agency for financial fraud. The ED countered the issue and claimed that the searches were conducted in respect of case of money laundering against DHFL. It was during that the agency found material related to money laundering by Kapoor and hence separate case was later registered.

Manashinde further contended that when he left the bank the condition of the bank was much better but the management which subsequently took over failed. "I cannot be held responsible for the failure of the present management," Manashinde argued.

Manashinde denied the allegations that Kapoor received kick backs for giving loan. He added that no bribe was taken. Kapoor was highest paid banker and received almost Rs 50 crores per year from the bank since 2004 till recently, Manashinde argued added that he had received awards from various institution as best banker. The defense further argued that there cannot be allegations of money laundering in the transactions of bank with DHFL as the money taken was much prior to the said transaction. The agency claimed that Yes Bank bought debentures worth Rs.3700 crores of DHFL. In lieu of the same DHFL sanctioned a Rs.600 crore loan to Doit Urban Ventures Pvt Ltd, a company in which Kapoor's daughters are directors. The loan was given without adequate collateral.

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates leaves board

Regularly listed among the world's richest people, Gates was a geeky-looking young man when he and Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft in 1975. Gates left his CEO position in 2000, handing the company reins to Steve Ballmer to devote more time to his charitable foundation.

Microsoft on Friday announced that co-founder Bill Gates has left its board of directors to devote more time to

learned from Bill over the years," Microsoft chief executive and company veteran Satya Nadella said in a release.

"Bill founded our company with a belief in the democratizing force of software and a passion to solve society's most pressing challenges; and Microsoft and the world are better for it." Nadella added that Microsoft will continue to benefit from Gates' "technical passion and advice" in his continuing role as a technical advisor.

"I am grateful for Bill's friendship and look forward

to continuing to work alongside him," Nadella said. Regularly listed among the world's richest people, Gates was a geeky-looking young man when he and Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft in 1975. Gates left his CEO position in 2000, handing the company reins to Steve Ballmer to devote more time to his charitable foundation. He gave up the role of chairman at the same time Nadella became Microsoft's third CEO in 2014.



philanthropy. The 64-year-old stopped being involved in day-to-day operations at the firm more than a decade ago, turning his attention to the foundation named after him and his wife, Melinda. Gates served as chairman of Microsoft's board of directors until early in 2014 and has now stepped away entirely, according to the Redmond-based technology giant.

"It's been a tremendous honor and privilege to have worked with and

Rupee hits record low of 74.50 against US dollar amid coronavirus scare

The dollar stood tall on Friday as investors scrambled for the world's most liquid currency amid deepening panic while the euro nursed losses after the European Central Bank disappointed by not cutting rates.

The Indian rupee dropped to a record low on Friday, weighed down by worries over the coronavirus pandemic that has prompted investors to dump riskier assets and move towards safe havens. The dollar stood tall on Friday

as investors scrambled for the world's most liquid currency amid deepening panic while the euro nursed losses after the European Central Bank disappointed by not cutting rates. The partially convertible rupee dropped to a record low of

74.5075 against the dollar before recovering slightly to trade at 74.4445 by 0355 GMT. Traders expect the central bank to step in to prevent further sharp falls in the currency but don't see it protecting the rupee at any particular level.

Stocks Rally as Trump and Business Leaders Pledge Support

Stocks rallied Friday, rebounding from their worst day in more than 30 years, after President Trump said leaders of private companies in the United States had agreed to help with efforts to test for the coronavirus, and declared a national emergency that would free billions in funding to fight the epidemic. The S&P 500 rose more than 9 percent, making Friday its best day since 2008, with most of the gains coming late in the day as government officials and business executives spoke at a news conference at the White House. Though he was short on details, Mr. Trump said the administration was working with Google

to develop a website to determine whether an individual needs a test — a move aimed at avoiding overwhelming the health system with people who are ill but do not necessarily need to be tested for coronavirus. Google later said the site would initially only be used around San Francisco, "with the hope of expanding it more broadly over time." The chief executives of Walmart, Target and Walgreens all said they had agreed to make facilities available for testing. Executives from CVS Health, Roche Diagnostics and Signify Health were also in attendance at the news conference.

Ghar Ki Murgi review

Sakshi Tanwar shines in Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's short film saluting the silent toil of homemakers

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's nuanced portrayal of a wrung-out homemaker's life has Sakshi Tanwar delivering a solid performance.



Ghar Ki Murgi

Iyer Tiwari

Director:

Ashwiny Cast: Sakshi Tanwar,

Anurag Arora

A homemaker is the glue that binds the family together. From the time she wakes up in the morning till she tiredly falls asleep, she wears many hats. She efficiently runs the household, juggling chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning and shopping for groceries; at the same time, she supports her husband, guides her children and looks after her in-laws. It is a thankless job, but then again, is it a job or is it her "duty"?

The short film Ghar Ki Murgi, which premiered on Sony LIV on Women's

Day, shows the drudgery in the life of homemaker Seema Bhatia (Sakshi Tanwar), who selflessly puts her family's interests above her own, day after day, but it all goes unacknowledged. When her husband mocks her side business of running a beauty parlour one evening, it triggers her feelings of discontent and she decides to go on a month-long holiday to Goa, to take a break from the confines of domestic life.

"Tum kaam thodi na karti ho. Ghar pe hi toh rehti ho (But you don't work. You stay at home all day)," is her bewildered husband's

response. It is only when the household threatens to come to stasis in her absence that her family members sit up and take notice of her contribution. As per a World Bank study in 2018, India ranks 120 among 131 countries in female labour force participation rate. With more than 75 per cent adult women staying home, director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's nuanced portrayal of the wrung-out homemaker's life is as relevant as it is hard-hitting. Sakshi Tanwar makes you feel for her the moment the screen opens with the pressure cooker releasing steam - a

metaphor for her bottled up emotions desperately looking for a release. She infuses the part with the right blend of quiet resilience and vulnerability, and is ably supported by Anurag Arora, who delivers a solid act as the neglectful husband. Ghar Ki Murgi has a linear and predictable graph but still manages to be affecting, without resorting to any melodrama or cliché. As we celebrate the achievements of women in the workforce on Women's Day, let us not forget to honour the homemaker and her invaluable contribution to the family ecosystem.

Spenser Confidential movie review

Mark Wahlberg's Netflix film isn't a good enough reason to stay at home because of the coronavirus

Spenser Confidential movie review: Mark Wahlberg's new Netflix film is perfectly suited for domestic flights and hospital waiting rooms; distracting enough to prevent you from wondering if you've contracted the coronavirus.

Spenser Confidential
Director - Peter Berg
Cast - Mark Wahlberg, Winston Duke, Alan Arkin, Iliza Schlesinger

Only the least demanding members of the audience will be satisfied by Spenser Confidential, director Peter Berg's fifth collaboration (in a row) with Mark Wahlberg. It is an obvious attempt by Netflix to create a franchise of its own, as the streamer attempts to corner every niche market imaginable.

This time, Netflix has set its sights on a sub-genre — Boston crime — that witnessed somewhat of a boom around a decade ago, with hits such as The Departed, The Town, Gone Baby Gone and Mystic River. Based on a series of novels by Robert B Parker and Ace Atkins, Spenser Confidential is like a cousin to Tom

Cruise's Jack Reacher and Jason Statham's Parker — films about mysterious do-gooders whose adventures are perfectly suited for viewing on domestic flights and in hospital waiting rooms; in both scenarios providing just enough distraction to prevent you from wondering if you've contracted the coronavirus or not. Movies like this understand that life is busy, and that one can't be expected to pay undivided attention to Mark Wahlberg, as he scowls his way through bad guys, and prances about with a swagger that could put Salman Khan to shame. And so they routinely insert clunky exposition, periodically peppered with snappy one-liners and loud action to jolt you out of your slumber.

We meet Spenser, played by Wahlberg with that trademark 'is-that-dung-I-smell?' expression on his face, as he pounds a police captain to pulp in his own house. Spenser, a Boston police officer himself, pleads guilty to assault and is locked away for five years, losing his badge and honour. When the police captain is killed the very day Spenser is released from prison, making him the de-facto prime suspect, the former cop goes rogue and launches an investigation that exposes corruption in the highest levels of authority.

He is joined in his mission by his mountainous roommate (played by Black Panther's Winston Duke) and his old friend Henry (Alan Arkin, as dry as ever). Together, the self-styled Batman, Robin and



Alfred conduct stakeouts and foot-chases, infiltrations and busts. It's all meant to be light-hearted and humorous, but like the dusty paperback that it is based on, can't help but feel outdated and obsolete.

Virtually every element of the film — the writing by Sean O'Keefe and Oscar-winner Brian Helgeland, the cinematography by Berg's longtime collaborator Tobias Schleissler, and the non-existent music by Steve Jablonsky — feels generic to the point of

being lazy. No attempt, for instance, has been made to elevate the material into something more than a dad-thriller.

For a film about police corruption and unchecked violence, Berg restricts the drama to one man and his good intentions. The plot twists are foreshadowed with the subtlety of an incoming locomotive at a small-town railway station, and most attempts at humour fall flat.

This isn't to say that the film doesn't achieve what it had set out to do -- which leaves us in an awkward

position. Can a movie be criticised for lacking in ambition even though it had never promised anything of the sort? It can't. But can Berg and Wahlberg be pulled up for delivering their least impressive film together? Absolutely. Spenser Confidential will likely spawn a sequel, especially with Netflix's new viewership metrics — you need to have seen only two minutes of a film for your curiosity to be counted as a 'view' — taken into consideration. But for a service that has already released seven Adam Sandler movies (with five more in the offing) to incredible success, Spenser Confidential genuinely feels like the product of Netflix's famous algorithmic approach to green-lighting films, and not a decision made by a rational human being.

Janhvi Kapoor is the "favourite sibling" and her latest Instagram post is proof!



Janhvi Kapoor and her little sister Khushi Kapoor share a good bond and their Instagram posts have always proved the same. And being the youngest kid in the family, Khushi is everyone's favourite amongst all Boney Kapoor's kids. Janhvi, her brother Anushala Kapoor and actor Arjun Kapoor have always stated the same in various media interactions.

And recently, Anshula took to her Instagram for an ask me session and she collaborated with Janhvi for the same. And during the session, Janhvi got the tag of being a "favourite sibling". In the boomerang video shared by the 'Dhadak' actress, we can see her sitting with Anshula and a few merchandises with Janhvi on it. She captioned the post, "Khushi might be the favourite daughter but I'm the favourite sibling." But what we couldn't miss is the door behind Anshula, which totally resembled the door from the popular TV show F.R.I.E.N.D.S.

Neha Dhupia's Chat LEAKED By Meme Page After Being Called A Hypocrite And Fake Feminist

Neha Dhupia, who is currently one of the gang leaders on Roadies Revolution recently made headlines commenting about cheating in a relationship. In one of the recent episodes, Neha Dhupia was seen losing her cool when a male contestant revealed that he slapped his ex-girlfriend as she was cheating on him with multiple partners. Neha Dhupia was seen getting angry stating that in no capacity he has the right to slap her.

Neha Dhupia also was seen saying that it was the girl's choice to be with multiple partners. These statements made by Neha Dhupia were not liked by netizens who trolled her for being a hypocrite. Now, as per reports, a meme page has revealed their chats with Neha Dhupia who is asking them to stop posting memes. However, it has not been officially confirmed by Neha that the chats are legitimate.



Kim Kardashian 'proves' she's forgiven Tristan just a year after Jordyn Woods scandal



One year on since the Kardashian family was ripped apart by one of its biggest scandals ever, it seems Kim has proven she's finally forgiven Tristan Thompson for cheating on her sister Khloe.

In honour of the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball star turning 29 on Friday, Kim Kardashian tweeted two photos to wish Tristan a happy birthday. One snap featured her and husband Kanye West sitting courtside as she cheered on the player, while the other was a selfie of herself and the birthday boy giving a thumbs up. Kim, 39, captioned the selfie: "I think this is our only pic together @realtristan13." The Keeping Up With The Kardashians star seemed to suggest all was forgiven as she tweeted the pics with the message: "Happy Birthday @realtristan13!!!! Cheering loud for you today! Can't wait to celebrate soon!"

Khloe Kardashian was left heartbroken when her boyfriend Tristan Thompson, the father of her daughter True, was caught kissing her sister Kylie Jenner's BFF Jordyn Woods. It was the second time Tristan, 29, had been publicly outed as a cheat, and Khloe, 35, broke up with him for the final time. A huge feud erupted between her and Jordyn, 22, with Kylie, also 22, awkwardly caught in the middle.



Priyanka Chopra Only Bollywood Female Celeb To Own This Expensive Luxury Car

Priyanka Chopra, one of the most popular Indian actors of the decade, lives a life dreamt by many. The actor, who resides with her husband Nick Jonas in their posh property in Los Angeles' Beverly Hills, has a magnanimous collection of cars in her garage. As per reports, Priyanka Chopra is one of the few female actors to own one of the most expensive cars in Bollywood. Here is all you need to know about Priyanka Chopra's car collection. As per reports, Priyanka Chopra's car collection boasts of luxurious cars like BMW 5 Series, BMW 7 Series, Audi Q7, Mercedes Benz S-Class, among others. However, but one of Priyanka's most expensive cars is the Rolls Royce Ghost. The car that is popular for its starlit ceilings and stardust carpets, is known as one of Priyanka Chopra's favourite cars. The actor, in an old interview, revealed that she loves the luxury car for the recliner seat and comfortable floor rug. Besides Priyanka Chopra, actors like Hrithik Roshan, Sanjay Dutt, Akshay Kumar, and Shah Rukh Khan own cars from the British Rolls Royce brand. Being an owner of Rolls Royce car also makes Priyanka Chopra the only Bollywood female actor to own a car from the brand.



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Harvey Weinstein sentenced to 23 years in prison

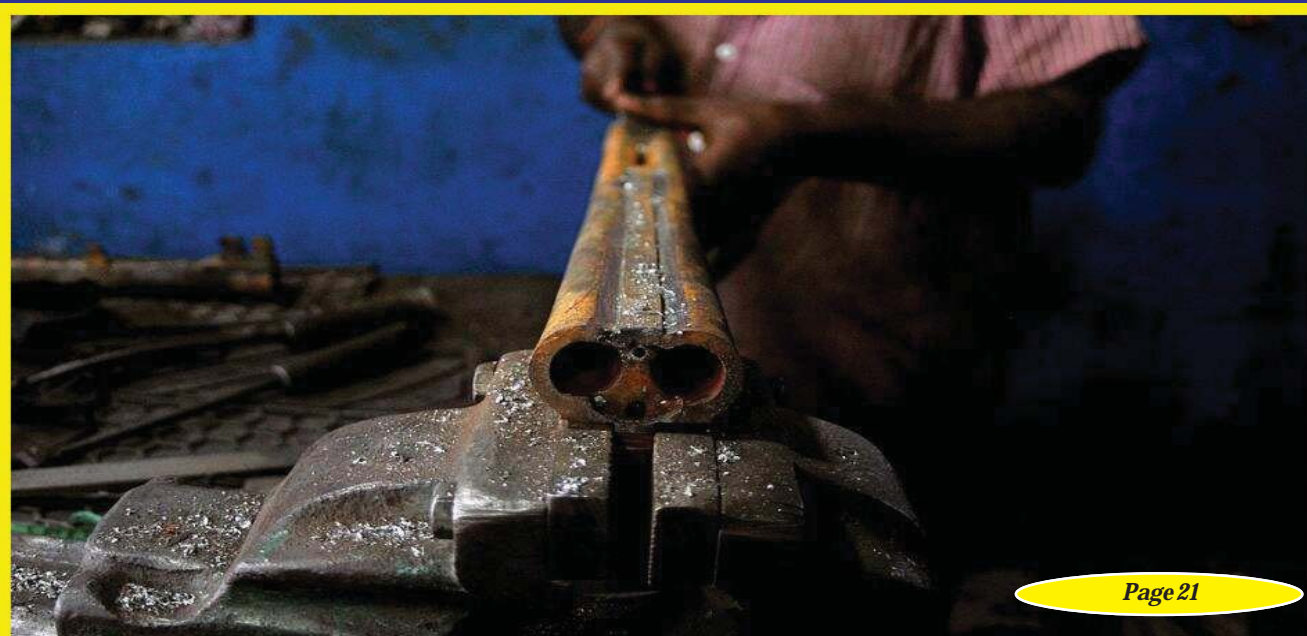


Page 24

India was 2nd largest arms importer in 2015-19

Russia's share of Indian arms market declined

Saudi Arabia, India and China were also among the top five importers during 2010-14. During 2015-19, Pakistan was ranked the 11th largest arms importer in the world.



Page 21

Jyotiraditya Scindia is BJP's Rajya Sabha candidate from Madhya Pradesh

Jyotiraditya Scindia quit the Congress party on Tuesday and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) today.



(News Agencies) Shortly after he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Jyotiraditya Scindia was named one of the two Rajya Sabha nominees from Madhya Pradesh by the BJP. The party released a list on Wednesday evening, which said that Scindia's name was cleared by the central election committee meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday. The Rajya Sabha elections are scheduled for March 26. The last day to file nomination on Friday. The biennial elections will be held to fill three seats from Madhya Pradesh and a change of guard in the state will have an impact on the Rajya Sabha polls as well.

(Contd on page 21)

Coronavirus spread

How countries are managing cost of treatment

In India, insurance regulator IRDAI had last week asked insurance companies to come out with policies to cover treatment costs for coronavirus infection.



Page 21

70 Percent Of Germany Could Become Infected By Coronavirus: Chancellor

German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned the majority of the country could become infected and said her priority is to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

(News Agencies) German Chancellor Angela Merkel is citing expert estimates that up to 70% of the population could be infected by the new coronavirus as she insists on the necessity of measures to slow its spread. Germany had confirmed some 1,300 infections as of Wednesday, with two deaths.

(Contd on page 21)

