

# Who's Profiting From the Coronavirus Crisis?

Amid an economic catastrophe, a few billionaires are still winning.



Story on  
page 26

Bill Ackman, chief executive of the hedge fund Pershing Square Capital Management, made a \$2.6 billion profit with an exquisitely timed bet on debt.

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➤ The Companies That Stand to Profit From the Pandemic

(Page 27)



## Indian passport services resume at some centres in UAE

The five centres have been reopened following the relaxation of coronavirus-related restrictions, including Al Khaleeh Centre and BLS Deira in Dubai, the Sharjah Main Centre, Fujairah ISC and BLS Ras Al Khaimah.



Indian passport services have been resumed at a number of centres in Dubai and the Northern Emirates following a relaxation in coronavirus-related restrictions, the Indian Consulate here has announced. The five centres have been reopened following the relaxation of coronavirus-related restrictions, including Al Khaleeh Centre and BLS Deira in Dubai, the Sharjah Main Centre, Fujairah ISC and BLS Ras Al Khaimah. Dubai announced on Tuesday last the extension of working hours for certain commercial activities within the emirate effective

immediately in a further relaxation of restrictions imposed on trading and business activities as part of the coronavirus lockdown.

According to a Twitter announcement by the Consulate, only passports that have already expired or will expire by May 31 will be accepted for renewals by these centres. These renewal applications can only be submitted after booking an appointment with the centre, which can be done by emailing [info@blsindiavisa-uae.com](mailto:info@blsindiavisa-uae.com), according to the announcement on Sunday.

## Two charged in scam to sell masks to local investors, feds say

(Press Release) New York: Two California men were charged Monday with operating a scheme attempting to swindle two local investors — including a Long Island resident — out of almost \$5 million by fraudulently selling them surgical masks as personal protective equipment against the coronavirus, officials and sources said. The two, Donald Lee Allen, 62, of Riverside, and Manuel Revolorio, 37, of Rancho Cucamonga, either did not own the masks they said were for sale or did not have authorization to sell them, officials said. As part of the scheme, Allen and Revolorio



showed a representative for the investors, who was actually an undercover agent, shrink-wrapped cardboard cartons in their California office which they said contained the personal protective equipment. The cartons were actually empty, officials said. They also displayed a million real masks in a warehouse which they said they owned, but belonged to another

party, officials said. The would-be victims were not identified, but sources said one of them was a resident of Long Island. Allen and Revolorio were arrested Monday in California on wire fraud charges by FBI agents. The two were scheduled for an initial appearance Monday in federal court in Los Angeles, but the case will be tried in federal court in Brooklyn, officials said. It could not be determined if they had attorneys Monday. "The he defendants sought to take advantage of the urgent national need for lifesaving protective equipment through a fraudulent scheme to line their own pockets," Eastern District U.S. Attorney Richard Donoghue said in a statement. "This office together with the [Justice] Department's COVID-19 Hoarding and Price Gouging Task Force, is working tirelessly to ensure that scam artists who seek to capitalize on the worldwide pandemic will be brought to justice."

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# Amardeep Singh of Long Island Charged Under Defense Production Act with Hoarding and Price-Gouging of Scarce Personal Protective Equipment

Defendant's Retail Store in Plainview Sold "COVID-19 Essentials," Including Face Masks, Face Shields, Surgical Gowns and Disinfecting Products, at Inflated Prices

(Press Release) Long Island: A criminal complaint was filed on April 24th 2020 by Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office in Eastern District of New York in federal court in Central Islip. The complaint charged Amardeep Singh with violating the Defense Production Act of 1950 by hoarding personal protective equipment ("PPE") at a warehouse in Brentwood, New York, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and price-gouging customers of his retail store in Plainview, New York. If convicted, Singh faces up to one year in prison.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern

District of New York, Craig Carpenito, head of the Department of Justice's nationwide COVID-19 Hoarding and Price Gouging Task Force, and Philip R. Bartlett, Inspector-in-Charge, United States Postal Inspection Service, New York Division (USPIS), announced the filing of the complaint. "As charged in the complaint, Singh's amassing of critical personal protective equipment during a public health crisis and reselling at huge markups places him squarely in the cross-hairs of law enforcement armed with the Defense Production Act," stated United States Attorney Donoghue.

"This Office is working tirelessly in coordination with the COVID-19 Hoarding and Price Gouging Task Force to prevent a pandemic of greed by profiteers."

"The criminal complaint describes a defendant who allegedly saw the devastating COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to make illegal profits on needed personal protective equipment," stated Carpenito. "The Department of Justice and its partners will intervene whenever profiteers



and scammers break the law by capitalizing on the public's fear to enrich themselves."

"The Coronavirus has created challenging times for all Americans, especially those living in the New York metropolitan area," stated USPIS Inspector-in-Charge Bartlett. "During a crisis of this magnitude, we must come together as a country to fight this common enemy. Unfortunately, Mr. Singh allegedly chose to use this opportunity to make money by hoarding and price gouging PPE. The conduct charged in

the complaint is reprehensible and against our most fundamental American values."

On March 18, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13909 invoking the Defense Production Act making it illegal to acquire medical supplies and devices designated by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) as scarce in order to hoard them or sell them for excessive prices. The charges in the complaint are allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

## NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



### PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



### STAY HOME IF SICK

- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



### PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



### REDUCE OVERCROWDING

- Consider telecommuting.
- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
- Walk or bike to work, if possible.
- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

Text COVID to 692-692 for real-time updates or visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](http://nyc.gov/coronavirus).  
Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.  
*\*Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.*



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# 3 IRS officers stripped of their charge for creating panic with tax hike report

**The three officers, despite having more than 30 years of service, failed to exercise due care and misguided 50 young officers to prepare the report and circulate it, a government official said**

(News Agencies) Three senior Indian Revenue Service officials who had played a key role in preparing a report on raising income tax and placed it in public domain have been chargesheeted for conduct rule violations, people familiar with the development told Hindustan Times. They have also been stripped of their charge. The three officers, according to documents accessed by HT, are Prashant Bhushan, Prakash Dubey and Sanjay Bahadur. The action comes just a day after the Finance Ministry distanced itself from the recommendations of the widely-circulated report that had proposed raising income-tax rate up to 40% from 30% for those with income of Rs 1 crore per year, reimposing a wealth tax on those with a net wealth of Rs 5 crore,

and levy of a one-time Covid-19 relief cess of 4% on those with a taxable income of Rs 10 lakh and above. The government had described the report as ill-conceived and irresponsible. Officials told Hindustan Times that a preliminary inquiry carried out by the government had blamed the three officials.

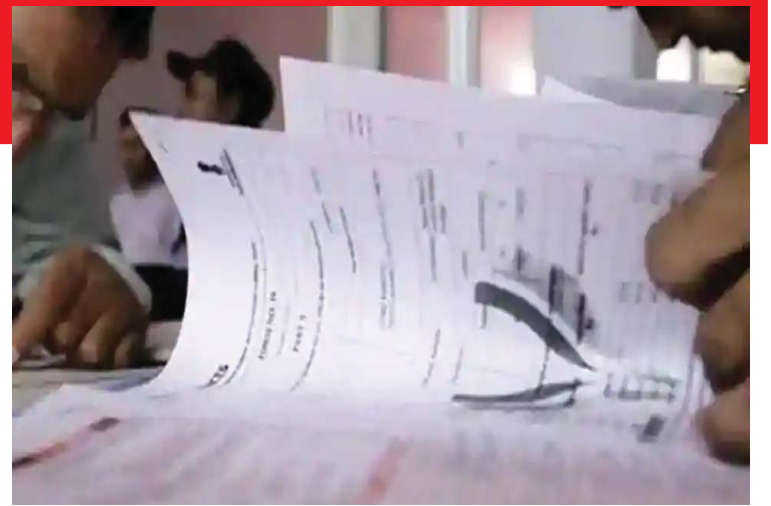
Prashant Bhushan, a 1988 batch IRS officer, is the general secretary of the Indian Revenue Service Association and is alleged to have placed the report, drafted by a group of young IRS officers, in public domain.

Prakash Dubey, the joint secretary of the IRS Association, and Sanjay Bahadur, a 1989 batch officer, have been charged with getting young income tax officers to prepare a report which

they passed on to the IRS Association that ultimately placed it in public domain.

Prakash Dubey was a director in the department of personnel and training while Sanjay Bahadur was the income tax department's Principal Director Investigation, North East Region.

A government official explained that the three officers, despite having more than 30 years of service, had failed to exercise due care and misguided 50 young officers to prepare the report and circulate it. In this case, the three officials of the rank of Principal Commissioner, instead of sending the government through official channels, misguided the junior officers and went public with it. "This created panic and tax



policy uncertainty in the already stressed economic conditions in the country," a top government official said, explaining why the government had moved swiftly and firmly to act against the three officers. Top government officials underscored that the officials had no business circulating reports about an official matter in their personal capacity. They, one of them said referring to the charge sheet issued to other officers,

had ended up creating confusion and uncertainty with respect of the policy of the government on income tax rates, which could have an adverse impact on economy, especially when the country is battling a pandemic and the government is keen to ensure a stable tax regime. It has also been pointed out that the proposals are against the government's existing policy on taxation.

# Don't delay or create hurdles in inter-state movement of goods': Gadkari tells states



(News Agencies) States must take urgent action to remove blockades for the movement of trucks at inter-state borders Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari told state transport ministers on Tuesday. The union minister pulled up state governments for creating delays in clearance of goods transport adding that nearly 3.5 lakh trucks were stranded at present due to delays in inter-state clearance and screening, officials aware of the development said adding that there was no discussion on inter-state public transport.

"States also reiterated that decision on public transport will be taken following the ministry of home affairs' order post May 3," the official said. In a video conference with state transport ministers on Tuesday, Gadkari said states need to take urgent action so that blockades for trucks and

lorries at inter-state borders are cleared at the earliest possible for smooth movement of essential goods to various parts of the country. "Ministers need to intervene in such matters and ensure resolutions through the local/district administrations. At the same time, adhere to health advisories and other guidelines like proper distance, wearing of masks, use of sanitizers, both by the driver/cleaners and also at the dhabaas," Gadkari said. The meeting was also attended by the chief Ministers of Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. "There were several issues on movement of goods and transportation that needed to be resolved. There is delay in supply movement and hence the meeting was called to discuss the hurdles. There was no discussion on public transport yet, that will only take place on May 3," Himachal Pradesh transport min-

ister, Govind Thakur said. Gadkari also told states to provide transportation for labour to factories and ensure food and shelter for labourers. Transport associations have demanded an economic package and relief from the Centre since the lockdown. "Across segments there is an issue of shortage of drivers, money and load. Lack of labour is leaving vehicles stranded and has already led to short-

age of supplies. Movement of vehicles is still a major issue despite MHA advisories. E-pass system is not working properly and movement of staff apart from drivers is still a tedious task. Local restrictions are not helping the transport fraternity as there is no fresh load, no unloading at the factories, go-downs or warehouses and the our vehicles get stuck for days together, apart from harass-

ment by local administration," All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) president Kultaran Singh Atwal said. "Screening process at inter-state borders has left several trucks stranded. There is screening process at interstate borders, e.g. Barobhisha Border (Bengal-Assam Border). There are long queues up to 6-7 kilometres and the drivers and crew are stranded without food and water," he added.

## India's Covid-19 situation 84 times better than top 20 infected countries: Govt

(News Agencies) The Centre on Tuesday cited WHO data to reiterate the point that India was faring much better than the worst coronavirus affected countries in the world because of 'timely' and 'cohesive' containment efforts, including the two-phased 40-day-long nationwide lockdown and other curbs. The health ministry official present at the regular briefing by a joint panel of government officials on the status of Covid-19 in the country on Tuesday said that the combined data of top 20 coronavirus affected countries (excluding China and India) in the world gave a good measure of India's success in relatively keeping the disease under a check.

The health ministry official threw light on the logic behind the comparison by pointing out that the combined population of these 20 countries-- United States, Spain, Italy, UK, Russia, Turkey, Germany, France, Iran, Brasil, Belgium, Canada, Netherlands, Switzerland, Peru, Portugal, Ecuador, Sweden, Ireland and

Saudi Arabia-- was close to India's population, and therefore, offered some perspective on India's virus-fighting efforts. "According to the WHO data from yesterday, confirmed cases in those 20 countries are 84 times more than the positive cases in India. Similarly, the number of coronavirus deaths in these countries are 200 times more than the number of deaths reported in India," Agarwal said. As on Tuesday afternoon, the top 20 infected countries, China excluded, listed on the WHO dashboard have a combined tally in excess of two million at 2,402,403 while India's total tally was at 27,892. According to the latest data offered by the government, India had a total of 29,435 confirmed positive cases on Tuesday, including 21,632, who were under active medical supervision and 6,868 people, who have been cured so far. India's recovery rate of patients had increased by a few notches to reach 23.3%, Agarwal said.



# SC asks Centre to consider 'one nation, one ration card' during lockdown

(News Agencies) The Supreme Court on Monday asked the central government to examine the feasibility of implementing the 'one nation one ration card' scheme during the Covid-19 lockdown so as to alleviate the hardships faced by migrant labourers who have been stranded in other states due to the lockdown. A three-judge bench, headed by Justice NV Ramana, passed the order on a plea by one Reepak Kansal, who had highlighted the plight of migrant labourers because they did not have local identity proof. "...we direct the

Union of India to consider whether it is feasible for it to implement the said scheme at this stage or not and take an appropriate decision in this regard keeping in view the present circumstances," the court said disposing of the plea.

The 'one nation one ration card' scheme formulated by the central government is proposed to kick in from June 2020. The petitioner pointed out that many migrant workers who left their home state to work in other cities have been confined to their rented accommodation

and are unable to return to their home states due to the lockdown. They have run out of food and with no local identity proof like ration card or voter card to avail government benefits like subsidised food grains, they are facing hunger.

"States and Union Territories have been giving preferences to its respective citizens and voters and denying benefits of subsidised grains, shelter, medical facilities to said migrants laborers/employees of other states due to absence of local identity proof i.e. ration card/resi-

dential proof/ voter card," the petitioner claimed. The petitioner, therefore, prayed that the 'one nation one ration card' scheme which is proposed to come into effect from June 2020 should be implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic so that migrant labourers are not denied subsidised food grains and other government benefits. "Indian Government as well as State Governments have to adopt the scheme of 'One Nation One Umbrella' without any discrimination and to save human lives", the plea said.

## India third biggest spender on military last year: Report

(News Agencies) India was the world's third-biggest military spender last year, trailing only the United States and China, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) said in a report released on Monday. This is the first time that India and China have featured among the top three military spenders.

New Delhi's defence spending grew 6.8% to reach \$71.1 billion in 2019, said the report on Trends in World Military Expenditure. "India's tensions and rivalry with both Pakistan and China are among the major drivers for its increased military spending," Sipri senior researcher Siemon T Wezeman said in the report. Russia and Saudi Arabia were the fourth and fifth largest spenders last year.

According to the report, global military expenditure stood at around \$1917 billion in 2019 --- the highest in over three decades. This represents an increase of 3.6% over the global defence spending in 2018 and the largest annual growth in military expenditure since 2010. The five top spenders in 2019 accounted for 62% of the global expenditure.

The Sipri report said India's military expenditure grew 259% over a 30-year period (1990-2019) and by 37% over decade (2010-19). "However, its (India's) military burden fell from 2.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 to 2.4% in 2019," the report said. India's military spending has grown significantly over the past decade because of a raft of reasons including a mounting salary bill for about 1.4 million serving personnel, pensions for more than two million veterans and deals worth billions of dollars to induct new combat jets, air defence missile systems, helicopters, warships and artillery guns to enhance capabilities. The world military burden -- global military expenditure as a share of GDP --- in 2019 was 2.2%, a marginal increase over the previous year, the report said. The US topped the list of military spenders with \$732 billion in 2019 accounting for 38% of the total global defence expenditure. It spent almost as much on its military last year as the next 10 highest spenders combined, the report said. Sipri said China allocated around \$261 billion to the military in 2019, which is roughly equivalent to 14% of the global military expenditure. It added that China's military spending in 2019 was 5.1% higher than in 2018 and 85% higher than in 2010.

## Covid-19 cases near 28,000-mark, PM Modi and CMs discuss the way ahead: 10 points

(News Agencies) The number of coronavirus cases in the country rose to 27,892 on Monday. According to the latest figures updated by the Ministry of Health, there are 20,835 active coronavirus cases in the country, 6,184 patients have been cured or discharged while 872 people have died from the deadly contagion. There were 1,396 new cases of Covid-19 and 48 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday interacted with chief ministers of various states over the prevailing coronavirus situation in the country. While all other CMs, or their representatives, were present during the interaction, chief ministers of nine states could only speak during the meeting.

**Here are the latest developments:**

1. Chief ministers of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Puducherry, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana participated in a

meeting with PM Modi via video conferencing. Other chief ministers were asked to send their submissions in writing.

2. Except for Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh, all other states expressed willingness to lift the Covid-19 lockdown.

3. During the meeting, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar said the state has started door to door screening, similar to the polio campaign. "We are working on a similar mechanism and four crore people have been screened," he said.

4. Gujarat CM Vijay Rupani said in hotspots areas of the state and after the Nizamuddin incident, Surat Vadodara and Ahmedabad have increased surveillance and started treatment of affected people.

5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked chief ministers to ensure no stigma is attached to the coronavirus disease in their respective states.

6. PM Modi stressed on the importance

of maintaining distance to avoid coronavirus. "Do gaj ki doori (a distance of two yards). We have to keep spreading this message and should be a life lesson for all," he added.

7. The RBI announced Rs. 50,000 crore Special Liquidity Facility (SLF) for mutual funds in a bid to ease liquidity pressures on mutual funds (MFs) amid the coronavirus crisis and Franklin Templeton mess.

8. PM Modi on Monday said that the 300 districts across the country where no Covid-19 positive case has been reported "should be treated as sacred".

9. Haryana home minister Anil Vij said people who reside in the state but work in the national capital are "corona-carriers". He has appealed to the Delhi government to make staying arrangements for such people there itself.

10. With 1002 patients, Telangana became the ninth state with over 1000 coronavirus cases in the country.

## Delhi, Mumbai among 15 places that account for over 60% of India's Covid-19

(News Agencies) Delhi and 14 districts across the country account for over 60% of all Covid-19 cases reported in India, according to data from the federal think tank NITI Aayog, whose chief executive officer Amitabh Kant says diligent monitoring, and aggressive testing, treating and containment are required to check the spread of the disease. Delhi, which has 11 districts, account for 12.62% of all cases in the country as of Monday. Mumbai and Indore feature among the list of the 14 other districts.

"Our job is to present the nationwide picture, but it is the state governments that have to take strong, ruthless containment measures, more testing, isolation, and treatment in order to bring the number of cases down," Kant said. "These are the 15 places that have reported more than 1% of India's cases and it is here that

we have to flatten the curve to win the fight against the virus," said Kant. There are 33 other districts that have reported over 100 cases each so far, he said.

Along with the data, NITI Aayog also presented a weekly trend of the number of cases, which shows that most of the states with these 15 high-case burden areas have started showing a decline other than Maharashtra and Delhi. "However, it is not enough to show a decline over one week, this has to be consistent for three to four weeks to be a correct indication of a downward trend. This is the reason I have also put up Kerala's trends, which has shown week on week constant decline. We must learn from what Kerala did," said Kant. Most of the 15 places referred to by the NITI Aayog are big cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai,

Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad. Experts believe this is mainly due to density of the population in these cities and testing bias.

These cities account for a big chunk of cases reported from their respective states -- Mumbai accounts for 33% of cases in Maharashtra; Ahmedabad accounts for 66% of the cases from Gujarat, Indore accounts for 49.5% cases in Madhya Pradesh, and Hyderabad accounts for 55.6% of the cases in Telangana. "If you see the bigger cities, the population is dense leading to a faster spread of infectious diseases like Covid-19. Also, when it comes to testing, we have a track record of testing more in the urban areas -- it was true for H1N1 pandemic, it happens for routine infections like typhoid and even lifestyle diseases like diabetes.



# Mayor sparks outrage after he buys new car amid lockdown

**The mayor claimed that the vehicle was booked earlier and had been delivered on Monday.**

(SAI Bureau) Panaji, Goa: Panaji Mayor Uday Madkaika has come under flak for buying a new car despite the Chief Minister saying no new cars would be allowed to be purchased. The mayor of the Panaji has landed himself in hot water for purchasing a new car at a time when the state government is grappling with the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. Mayor Uday Madkaika sparked outrage after he bought a Toyota Innova Crysta on Monday despite Chief Minis-

ter Pramod Sawant saying that no new purchases of vehicles would be sanctioned. On Tuesday, Madkaika offered a public apology for his purchase that came from the funds of the municipal corporation.

"I apologise to the people of Panaji. I should not have bought a car in this crisis," Madkaika said but hastened to add that a new car for the Panaji mayor was long overdue since the current car was "already seven years old". "The car I was using

was seven years old. I had requested the government for permission to buy a new car. The cost for a new Toyota Innova base model is Rs. 16.70 lakh. The government at that time had sanctioned the Corporation up to Rs. 14 lakh for a new car for an incumbent mayor," Madkaika told reporters.

The Mayor took delivery of the car on Monday but claimed that he had booked it before the lockdown started last month. "The vehicle was booked earlier and it



is just that the delivery has been taken yesterday," Madkaika said. Car dealerships are yet to open in Goa. Several dealerships

have said that they are hopeful that they will open on May 3 subject to guidelines from the state and central government.

# PM Modi gets a SOS message from UAE for Indian healthcare personnel



(SAI Bureau) New Delhi : Prime Minister Narendra Modi being seen off by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan on conclusion of his 3-nation visit at Abu Dhabi in UAE in August 2019. The United Arab Emirates has

requested the government to send Indian doctors and nurses to help the Emirates fight the Covid-19 pandemic, a senior government official said on Tuesday. The UAE, a federation of seven emirates with a population of less than 10 million people, has al-

**The UAE, a federation of seven emirates with a population of less than 10 million people, has already reported 11,000 Covid-19 cases and has been adding an average of 500 patients every day.**

ready reported 11,000 Covid-19 cases and has been adding an average of 500 patients every day. It relies heavily on foreign-educated doctors and paramedics including those from India to staff its hospitals. Some of them were on leave when governments in Delhi and Abu Dhabi cancelled all commercial flights to stop the coronavirus diseases from spreading their respective countries. "We have received two requests. One, to allow the

healthcare providers who were travelling to India when commercial flights were cancelled to return to UAE to resume their duties," a top government functionary told media. The second, is permission to hire or avail the services of doctors and nurses for a shorter duration to tide over the immediate crisis. "The requests are being considered of the government," the official said. Officials said Abu Dhabi had offered to send a special plane to fly the Indian healthcare pro-

professionals employed by its hospitals. Considering the nature of the relationship between the two countries, the first request is likely to be processed first, another official said. The request for additional doctors and paramedical staff, however, requires wider consultations within the government, the official said. The decision would be made after evaluating India's requirements at this stage. But the effort is to find a way out to help UAE at this crucial juncture.

## 2 minor girls raped in Rajasthan in separate incidents: Police

Rajasthan reported two separate incidents of suspected rape of minors from Ajmer and Sirohi districts on Monday, according to the police. In Ajmer, an unidentified person abducted an 11-year-old girl at around 4 am on Monday from the courtyard of the house, where she was sleeping with her parents. "Her mother woke her father when she found that their daughter was missing on Monday early morning," said Mahaveer Sharma, station house officer (SHO), Kekri police station, Ajmer district.

"An hour later, her parents found her in a field about a kilometre away from their home and her clothes were stained in blood. The parents lodged a first information report (FIR) on Monday and a case was registered against the unknown accused under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and Sections 376 (rape), and 363 (kidnapping) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)," SHO Sharma said. In Sirohi district, a 15-year-old minor girl was allegedly abducted and raped for three consecutive days by a person known to her. On Monday, the accused dropped the rape survivor at her home after which she shared the ordeal with her parents. Sumer Singh, station house officer (SHO), Pindwara police station, Sirohi district, said that on April 23 after the family finished their dinner, the teenager's mother told her to lock the entrance gate of the house.

## 'Shame and disgust': Rahul Gandhi amid row over cost of Covid-19 test kits

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged a scam in the supply of rapid test kits to the government to detect coronavirus cases, saying it was beyond belief that some people were indulging in profiteering from the immeasurable suffering of millions. He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take immediate strict action to bring the corrupt to justice.

"That any human being would try and profiteer from the immeasurable suffering of millions of his brothers and sisters is beyond belief and comprehension. This scam is an insult to every Indian. I urge the PM to act swiftly to bring the corrupt to justice," Gandhi tweeted. "When the entire country is fighting against the Covid-19 disaster, some people are still profiteering. Shame and disgust at this corrupt mentality. One detests and feels ashamed of such a corrupt mindset. The country will never pardon them. We demand from the Prime

Minister strict action against these profiteers," he said in another tweet in Hindi.

The Congress cited media reports about rapid test kits for Covid-19 were being sold at around 150% profits to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and asked the Prime Minister to fix the responsibility for it. Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said it was "shameful and inhuman" that people were supplying test kits bought for Rs 225 at Rs 600 to the state exchequer.

"Corruption in Corona Testing Kits OR Profiteering by duping the Exchequer. Import Price of 1 Testing Kit= Rs 225! Purchase Price of Testing Kit= Rs 600! Profit Margin = 166.66 pc! Shameful and Inhuman! Will PM fix responsibility," he tweeted. Senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel too demanded a clarification from the government. "The recent Delhi HC (high court)

judgement has raised a pertinent question - Why was ICMR purchasing antibody test kits for Rs 600 per piece, which was imported for Rs 245?" he asked on twitter.

Later addressing reporters through video-conferencing, Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari demanded that the government should make public details of all purchases made in the last one month to fight Covid-19. He said the government should put an immediate end to the huge profiteering in procurement of equipment. "What is happening? There seems to be absolute anarchy in procurement of equipment for fighting Covid-19. We would like to demand from the government to make public all details made with regard to procuring equipment for testing, PPEs and ventilators. All those transactions must be transparently placed in public domain," added Tewari.



# Nation still awaits a clear lockdown exit strategy: Congress

(News Agencies) New Delhi: The Congress on Tuesday said the nation was waiting for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to spell out a clear lockdown exit strategy after May 3, when curbs imposed to stop the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) come to an end. "We once again appeal to the Prime Minister to come out with a clear exit strategy for the lockdown, to state the road map for economic revival, and to deal with the health pandemic post May 3, as also restrict the lockdown only to hot spot zones,"

Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said, addressing reporters through video-conferencing. The Prime Minister on Monday held a meeting with chief ministers through video-conferencing and sought their views on tackling Covid-19 and also on lifting the lockdown being enforced across the country since March 25. Surjewala said the Congress chief ministers requested the Prime Minister to tell the nation what the exit strategy from the lockdown will be. "What is the government's strategy on the health front and the economic front in terms of post lockdown period? What is the road map for the future course after May 3?" he asked. "How is the Prime Minister going to come out with financial action plan as demanded by Congress president Sonia Gandhi and many other experts to address the issues of starvation, stranded migrant workers, or...small and medium enterprises?" Surjewala said.



# BJP govt waived loans worth Rs 6.66 lakh crore, helped defaulters: Congress



**Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said he had asked a question in Parliament seeking the names of the country's top 50 bank loan defaulters but the finance minister didn't give an answer.**

(News Agencies) New Delhi: The Congress on Tuesday alleged the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government had waived off Rs 68,607 crore due from the top 50 bank loan defaulters, including Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallya. Citing what it said was an RTI reply from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the opposi-

tion party also alleged the NDA government also waived off loans worth Rs 6.66 lakh crore between coming to power in 2014 and last September, and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to come clean on the matter. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said he had asked a question in Parliament seeking the names of

the country's top 50 bank loan defaulters but the finance minister didn't give an answer. "I asked a straight question in Parliament – state the names of the 50 top bank loan defaulters in the country. The finance minister refused to answer the question. Now, the RBI has given the names of Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and many of BJP's 'friends' in the list of bank frauds. That is why this truth was held back from Parliament," he tweeted in Hindi. Mallya recently lost his UK high court appeal against an order for his extradition to India. India has also sought the extradition of Choksi, one of the accused in the Punjab National

Bank scam, from Antigua and Barbuda. Modi is fighting his extradition to India from the UK over charges of fraud and money laundering. On March 16, Gandhi had asked the question about wilful bank loan defaulters during the Lok Sabha's budget session. But he wasn't allowed a supplementary question, triggering protests by Congress members in the House. Gandhi later said his right as a Member of Parliament to ask a supplementary question in the Lok Sabha was taken away as Speaker Om Birla didn't allow him to do so. The Congress leader said he was hurt by the action as it was the Speaker's duty to pro-

tect his right to speak and ask supplementary questions. "This is completely unfair," he had said. However, union minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur took a swipe at Gandhi, saying the former Congress chief considers himself a "privileged" MP and wants to be treated differently than other Lok Sabha members. "Some people consider themselves privileged. They want to be treated differently than other MPs. They want to ask questions even after the Question Hour is over...The answers to his questions were provided in writing to him but still Gandhi and other Congress members made noise," Thakur countered.

## Pregnant woman from Covid-19 red zone made to switch hospitals, dies

**The woman's new-born baby also died of respiratory disorders, a day before she died fighting anaemia and hypertension. The deceased was identified as Jenila, from Yapadinne village of Gadwal district in Telangana.**

(News Agencies) Hyderabad: Telangana state human rights commission ordered an inquiry into the death of the woman after she was forced to move from one hospital to another because she hailed from Covid-19 affected zone in Gadwal.

A 20-year old woman died in Hyderabad on Monday night, a day after delivering a baby boy, as she was forced to move from one hospital to another in three days to rule out the possibility of her being Covid-19 infected, her relatives said. The woman's new-born baby also died of respiratory disorders, a day before she died fighting anaemia and hypertension. The deceased was identified as Jenila, from Yapadinne village of Gadwal district in Telangana. Mahendar, the woman's husband, told reporters that she went into labour on April 24 and was rushed to district hospital at Gadwal, where doctors referred her to a bigger hospital at Kurnool in the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state, which is around 50 km away, as she was suffering from severe anaemia and blood pressure. However, Mahendar could not take her to Kurnool, which was

under complete lockdown as it has highest number of positive cases for Covid-19 (332 cases and nine deaths till Tuesday) in the state and the only government hospital in the town has been converted into a Covid-19 speciality hospital. Having no other option, he managed to move her to Mahabubnagar government hospital, about 60 km away, thanks to the ambulance arranged by the Gadwal police. But the doctors at Mahabubnagar also did not want to take risk, as the couple hails from Gadwal, which also has a high incidence of Covid-19 (45 positive cases and one death) cases. They asked him to shift her to Government Maternity Hospital, Koti, in Hyderabad. On April 25, Jenila was brought to Hyderabad and taken to Koti hospital, where the doctor suggested that she be first tested for Covid-19 virus, as she had come from Gadwal, declared as a red zone. She was rushed to Gandhi Hospital, the designated hospital for Covid-19 in Secunderabad, for the test. A day later, Jenila tested negative and from Gandhi, she was shifted to the government maternity hospital, Petla Burz, where she gave birth to a baby boy.

## Lockdown prompts wild animals to emerge from hiding in Bengal; two leopards killed

(SAI Bureau, Kolkata) There have been no reports of Elephants raiding human habitats in north Bengal since the lockdown began. The 35-day lockdown is not just helping in the containment of Covid-19 cases in Bengal but has also come as a blessing for the flora and fauna in the hills of north Bengal districts. Wildlife experts and forest officials said while man-animal conflict has reduced to zero, there's also no report of poaching from the several sanctuaries and wildlife parks in the region. The blessing in disguise has also taken its toll with two leopards being run over in the last one week. The sighting of a fishing cat---an endangered species and Bengal's state animal--- after a long time has enthused wildlife experts. It was rescued on April 25 near Dasdargah in Jalpaiguri district and released in the wild. A forest official said, "The fishing cat was sighted in this region after many years." Another forest, the ranger of Belacoba forest, said, "I never spotted a fishing cat in North Bengal." The sighting of the animal, which was around three feet tall, initially panicked local people. Experts said leopards have started crossing from both sides of the India-Bangladesh border. "Some days ago leopards were sighted by local people at Chalhati village along the India-Bangladesh border in the Rajganj police station of Jalpaiguri district. These big cats also created panic. A cage has been set up to capture these," said official. Forest officials said that negligible human movement along the international border has prompted the leopards to move freely.



# Coronavirus crisis - Americans can help DOJ fight child exploitation amid pandemic

**We should be particularly mindful about children's use of apps and platforms that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads, and user anonymity, which are often relied upon by predators to contact children and evade law enforcement.**

Over the past few months, our lives have changed dramatically due to COVID-19. We have seen the best of America emerge – our nation's medical professionals, first responders, and supply chain workers have acted heroically, along with so many others.

Unfortunately, criminals are using this unprecedented situation to exploit the most vulnerable among us. While we protect our families from the pandemic, we must be mindful of other dangers, including the increased risk of online child exploitation.

There has been a staggering rise in online child exploitation in recent years, including the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material and enticement of children for sexual acts. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), which operates a centralized reporting system for online child exploitation, received 16.9 million reports of suspected abuse in 2019 alone. Those reports included over 69 million photos, videos, and other files related to child sexual exploitation, many of which involved children younger than 10-years-old.

"Sextortion" cases – where, for example, predators coerce minor victims into sharing explicit images, then blackmail the

victims into paying money, producing more explicit content, or engaging in sexual acts – are also on the rise. From 2017 to 2018, the FBI experienced a 242 percent increase in extortion-related complaints and the majority involved sextortion.

We should be particularly mindful about children's use of apps and platforms that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads, and user anonymity, which are often relied upon by predators to contact children and evade law enforcement.

Regrettably, it is likely that the circumstances resulting from COVID-19 will contribute to a further increase in child exploitation.

According to UNESCO, school closures related to COVID-19 are impacting over 90 percent of the world's student population. As a result, more children are online, potentially exposing them to sexual predators who seek out victims on popular apps, websites, and social media platforms.

Many children are also now using webcams – some for the first time – to participate in remote learning and communicate with loved ones. This increased familiarity with sharing personal images online can lull kids into a false

sense of comfort.

We should be particularly mindful about children's use of apps and platforms that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads, and user anonymity, which are often relied upon by predators to contact children and evade law enforcement.

At the same time, normal childcare has been disrupted – kids are less supervised because parents and guardians must leave for work or spend hours teleworking. And sexual predators have more time to log on, and often rely on anonymity and technology like end-to-end encryption to hide their nefarious activity.

While the specific connections between COVID-19 and child exploitation are difficult to assess, the initial indications are troubling. Law enforcement officials have discovered postings in online forums used by child predators welcoming the opportunity to abuse children who are vulnerable due to the pandemic. And reports of potential exploitation to NCMEC more than doubled from 983,734 in March 2019 to 2,027,520 in March 2020.

Fighting child exploitation is a top priority of the federal government. In January, President Trump

signed an Executive Order to coordinate the government's efforts to prosecute individuals who sexually exploit children online, protect and support victims of child exploitation, and provide prevention education.

The Department of Justice, under the leadership of Attorney General William Barr, stands with its law enforcement partners in the fight against child exploitation. We will continue to use all of the tools at our disposal to investigate and prosecute these horrific crimes.

However, the fight to protect our children can only be won if everyone – including the government, industry, and private citizens – remains vigilant.

The Department of Justice has called upon technology companies to help prevent child exploitation, including by cooperating in lawful investigations and adopting the Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, established in collaboration with allies from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Parents and caregivers also have a vital role to play by discussing internet safety with kids, supervising their online presence, and using privacy settings and parental controls. We should be particularly mindful about children's use of apps and platforms that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads, and



**By Beth A. Williams, US Assistant AG**

user anonymity, which are often relied upon by predators to contact children and evade law enforcement. And we must be alert to signs of abuse and report suspected sexual exploitation to the authorities. For years, television stations aired a public service announcement that asked: "It's 10 p.m., do you know where your children are?" These days, knowing where our children are in the physical world is not enough. We must be equally vigilant about their safety in the virtual world. If you suspect online child exploitation, call 911, contact the FBI at tips.fbi.gov, or file a report with NCMEC at 1-800-843-5678 or report.cybertip.org. Additional guidance can be found on a webpage and tip sheet created by the Department of Justice, Keeping Children Safe Online During COVID-19.

Beth A. Williams was sworn in as Assistant Attorney General on August 21, 2017, after unanimous confirmation by the Senate. (As appeared in Foxnews.com)

## 'Stay at Home' Brings another rife to fight



COVID19 lockdown has taken another turn, due to lockdown DOMESTIC ABUSE has become an additional subject to think about.

Since the lockdown has started; there is increase in domestic abuse complaints. The lockdown has turned into a fence in with the abusers for women

and children.

"Staying at home is a main part of the tactic to put a stop to corona virus from scattering and accumulate lives, but for some people lockdown isn't safe. Things have become quite hard for children and women. With limitations in society, it is difficult for the victims to ask for help to run away from

their abusers. The victims are mostly women and children, who are now caged with their abusers. Insistent act is needed to save victims from harm and avoid crimes to be committed by culprits. It's really difficult to abandon victims in the middle of lockdown because this kind of demeanor of people privately, it was unexpected so there is no arrangement of places to live. "All women who need to escape during lockdown and beyond must be assured of a safe place to stay. Basic reason or Domestic reason could be the fear of the epidemic, which has led many people

to drop their jobs and short of alcohol is all totting up to the aggravation of these offensive men. Reports say that from March 24 till April 1, 257 complaints related to various offenses against women were received out of the 69 complaints are related to domestic violence. As we know the pandemic of covid19 has produced a unease among the people all over the world, on the other hand, it has also shaken the markets around the world. Corona virus has affected our economical, social life but also personal life. Because of this Corona virus, divorce cases have also increased among the people, couple

says that they spent the last two months together during isolation. During these two months, their relationship has reached to divorce. Even just because of curfew marriages are put to test like never before as 30percent of couples have filed a divorce case as they are fed up and unable to cope up with each other. To resolve the domestic matters governments of different nations are trying to handle this situation differently.

For instance: India has provided helpline numbers where private fuss related to women and children will be listen and resolve. On the other hand, France, French

gender equality minister will be helping sufferers of domestic brutality during lockdown. Moreover in some countries NGOs are tackling this problem by giving counseling sessions through video calls and phone calls. But in nation like Spain domestic level has gone to next level because three women are murdered due to domestic abuse in lockdown. Well this pandemic has changed the lives of people completely. This pandemic is not so easy so everyone has to be strong head to fight it and cope with it by co operating with governments of their nations.

**By Sukhmani**



## Has Trump's coronavirus response sunk him? Don't bet on it

any liberal and centrist pundits seem to believe that the Covid-19 crisis is the dawn of a new progressive era – or at least the end of the populist wave that has swept the world in recent years. The New York Times columnist Paul Krugman recently argued that President Trump's handling of this crisis, particularly his “Lysol moment”, has caused a “psychological turning point” that could force even “Trump diehards” to “face up to his essential unfitness”.

We've been here before. Trump has been declared dead as often as he's been declared newly presidential, but pundits somehow believe this time is different. After all, “populists” cannot lie and cheat their way out of a deadly pandemic – right?

Maybe they don't have to. While Trump clearly botched his response to the pandemic, he has found a successful way out of it: refocusing the debate on “Reopening America”. By downplaying the health costs of the pandemic and emphasizing the economic costs, Trump hopes to come out of the crisis as the savior of the US economy. While the grim unemployment numbers might not seem to support this strategy, there are reasons to believe it might work.

It is true that, compared with other democratic leaders, Trump has received a smaller and shorter electoral bump from this pandemic. He has, however, benefited from the usual rallying-around-the-flag effect. He has also benefited from the relative invisibility of the Democrats, most notably the party's presumptive presidential nominee, Joe Biden, who has a hard time establishing himself in the debate as he holds no political office at the moment. Many anti-Trump pundits take hope from public opinion polls that show that a majority of Americans, including a plurality of Republicans, support the current lockdown measures and oppose the anti-lockdown protests. But, as time passes, the US will inevitably have to “reopen” – as even Democratic governors like Andrew Cuomo have argued – and Trump will be able to claim, with some credibility, that he was the one to put this on the political agenda.

Moreover, Trump has always been vague enough about the details of “reopening” America that he can easily distance himself from possible outbreaks of new cases in the most irresponsible states. For example, he criticized Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp, who, ironically in an attempt to please Trump, reopened the state in defiance of both the data and the White House's recommendations.

Recent polls already show that the

mood is shifting, particularly among Republicans. Three weeks ago, 55% of Republicans were more concerned about the pandemic's public health impact than the economic impact; that number has dropped to 44%. Although majorities of Democrats (72%) and independents (57%) are still more concerned about the public health impact, we are starting to see some shifts there, too.

There is no doubt that Biden will make Trump's poor handling of the Covid-19 crisis a key part of his campaign. The opening salvo was a much-praised, but also criticized, video that argues that Trump's incompetence, ignorance and soft position on China has made the crisis worse than it should have been – and would have been, under a President Biden.

Although this is probably true, I doubt this message will resonate much beyond the Democratic base. Even with over a million Covid-19 cases in the US, and almost 60,000 deaths, Trump will find a way to argue that he prevented a worse disaster, perhaps by pointing to actual predictions of millions of deaths.

And if that does not work, there is always Trump's most effective backup card: racism. Like all far-right politicians, the president has emphasized the “foreignness” of the virus from the beginning. He has consistently used the term “China virus” and increasingly blames China for the whole pandemic – a strategy enthusiastically endorsed by the Republican party. But it could get uglier. With a large number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in New York and California, the far right is working hard to characterize coronavirus as an urban, coastal disease that does not threaten so-called Heartland America. This fits perfectly into an existing far-right narrative that casts California and New York as multicultural dystopias.

The Democrats are caught in a classic catch-22. Faced with a misinformation campaign from the White House and conservative media, they might be tempted to overemphasize the Covid-19 threat in an attempt to ensure that even reluctant Americans follow public health guidelines. Yet Democrats have to be careful not to raise the bar too high, and thereby give Trump an opening to trumpet his “Reopen America” policy despite severe casualties. After all, populists don't need to be correct. They just need mainstream politicians to not be correct either.

(Cas Mudde is, Guardian US)

## One nation, one ration card: It will give a cushion to migrant workers

The Supreme Court (SC), on Tuesday, asked the Union government to examine the feasibility of implementing the “one nation one ration card” (ONORC) scheme during the national lockdown. The scheme, which allows beneficiaries to access food grains that they are entitled to under the National Food Security Act, 2013, from any fair-price shop in the country, was announced last June. The SC's nudge to expedite the ONORC is critical. Millions of out-of-work migrant workers are stuck in host cities due to the lockdown. Many have run out of money

to buy food and don't have a proof of identity like ration cards to access subsidised food grains via the well-stocked public distribution system (PDS). States where they are stuck prefer offering relief to their own residents first, and cite the lack of identity documents to deny benefits. And among those states which have opened community kitchens for out-of-job migrant workers, there have been complaints of the quantity, quality and type of food. Some feel that the ONORC scheme will not be of much help during the present crisis since many migrant workers have left their PDS cards in their villages. Instead, the Union government must expand the well-stocked PDS system to cover all individuals, irrespective of

whether they have a ration card or not, for at least six months. While this must be done, the government must also fast-track the ONORC scheme because India's present rights-based regime is based on the assumption



that people are sedentary. This is not true given the high rates of inter- and intra-state migration. Without any safety net, migrants depend either on their employers or labour contractors for food provisions or purchase food in the open market. This increases their cost of living and reduces the additional earnings they might hope to remit to their families. During the lockdown, the crisis has become even more acute. But even after the coronavirus pandemic is over, this will be useful. Migration is bound to restart because of unemployment. When migrant workers again start boarding trains and buses for the destination cities, they must have their PDS cards that are valid across India with them.


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Sharanjit Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) :

Aruna Singh

Chief Photographer : Vijay Shah

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Special Correspondent :

Gagandeep Singh (INDIA)

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

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Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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# Biden should let Trump self-destruct

Joe Biden seems to be inching closer to the White House by simply sitting at home. Although much of the nation has barely heard from the presumptive Democratic nominee since early March, President Donald Trump is struggling to maintain his legitimacy after asking his aides on Thursday whether zapping people with light or injecting them with disinfectants could cure Covid-19. The comments prompted even Fox News anchors to tell their viewers: don't try this at home.

The situation is bleak for the GOP. Republicans are worried about a devastating election in November that might leave Democrats in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress. After a temporary spike in his approval ratings when the crisis started for many Americans, the President's numbers have dropped. Every day, the nation is exposed to a commander-in-chief who is pressing the gas pedal in a runaway car without control of the wheel. That doesn't mean Joe Biden has an easy road ahead. With traditional campaigning brought to a standstill, and media attention rightly focused on the pandemic, there is simply not that much room for the Democratic candidate to make his case to the nation. Biden has been holed up at home in Delaware trying to find an alternative means to steer the national conversation, whether it's social media livestreams or interviews

with the local press. While some of these efforts might be getting through to voters, by and large, Biden has not been very visible on the national stage since Sen. Bernie Sanders dropped out of the race. It might just be that the best thing that Biden can do right now is to lay low and let the President self-destruct — the more that Trump says about the crisis, the worse he looks. Some criticized television networks for airing the

daily coronavirus task force press briefings, which the President sometimes treats as campaign rallies. Those criticisms may hold some merit, but the truth is that these appearances are better than any advertisement the Democratic National Committee could pay for. Each press briefing reminds voters how fundamentally broken our leadership in the White House has become and why the nation needs someone else in command. Historically, a president's reelection campaign presents a referendum on his first-term performance. The elections of 1932 and 1980, for example, were as much about the winners as they were a rejection

of the incumbent presidents. President Herbert Hoover's disastrous economic policies at the start of the Great Depression contributed to Franklin D. Roosevelt's win in 1932. Similarly, the fail-



ure of President Jimmy Carter to free the American hostages held captive in Iran helped tip the election in Ronald Reagan's favor in 1980. In the same way, the 2020 election will be about Trump. This is why it shouldn't be surprising to hear progressives such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez making it clear that they will support the Democratic ticket regardless of their policy differences. Despite the many issues this country faces, nothing will be quite as important on Election Day as how voters feel about having President Trump steer our response to the pandemic and the subsequent recovery for another four years. When the

President recommends exploring the efficacy of dangerous and potentially lethal injections of disinfectant, he doesn't inspire much confidence. Biden faces a struggling incumbent who performs poorly each time he is front of the camera. With every press briefing, Trump spews disinformation and inconsistent messaging, reminding voters outside his passionate base that the country is struggling to survive this national crisis without a stable leader up top. Top officials in his own administration are forced to waste precious time trying to work around their boss and to clean up the messes he makes, while state governors — red and blue — have been left to figure things out for themselves. For the time being, the best thing that Biden can do might just be to stay out of the limelight. Let Trump be Trump, and the odds for a Republican victory are likely to keep plummeting as long as the pandemic continues to pose a threat to the American people. There will be a time when voters need to hear more from Biden to understand who he is and what his platform will be. Even a candidate who has been in the public eye for as long as Biden has needs time to speak directly to voters. But at this moment, nobody is doing more to boost the Democratic campaign than President Trump himself, who flails before our eyes as Americans yearn for their lives to return to normal.

**PUNJABI CHAMBER FOUNDATION**

## JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Please support the Punjabi Chamber Foundation's relief effort to benefit Covid-19 victims globally, irrespective of their race, religion or ethnicity. The Punjabi Chamber Foundation is the charitable arm of the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce (PCC), a nonprofit with 13 chapters throughout North America, England, and India.

Covid-19 has plunged the world into uncertainty and dread. It is greatly impacting the most vulnerable around the world—the poor, homeless, unemployed, daily wagers and the uninsured. They need immediate relief such as food, shelter, and resources.

To help them, we will be partnering with organizations that have long dedicated themselves to helping those in need. Your donation will help those in need, those who are hungry, those who rely on daily wages, those who have lost income or jobs, and those who have no one else.

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On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will have another meeting with chief ministers of Indian states. This is the fourth such meeting on the coronavirus pandemic; and it is a reflection of how the challenge is a common national agenda, requiring both the Centre and states to work together. Despite occasional differences, it is heartening that the federal structure has worked at this crucial time.

But it is time to use this meeting to address three key issues. The first is that of migrant workers. Ever since the lockdown, migrant workers have suffered excruciating conditions and have been seeking to return home. Governments have been reluctant to facilitate their return for good reason — mass travel can lead to the spread of the virus and can take the infection to unaffected areas. But this has not been accompanied with adequate com-

## An agenda for the PM and CMs



munication and relief measures. For both material and emotional reasons, millions of workers are now restless. Some states have sought to organise buses and bring them back home. But there needs to be greater policy clarity on whether migrant workers can

go back home; if so, what are the routes and transport mechanisms they can use; how best to mitigate any danger to public health this may represent; and what are the financial relief measures that can be provided to them. The second issue is the

broken financial condition of the states. While they are in the front-line of the battle — health is a state subject — states are now out of money. Their expenditure has increased; but their revenue has almost collapsed. Many states will soon not have enough

resources to meet their salary commitments, let alone provide enough funding to ramp up health needs and continue with welfare. The Centre has been slow in announcing a stimulus for the economy; it must, alongside, draw up a comprehensive financial package for the states. And finally, there needs to be clarity on what happens after May 3. This newspaper supported the lockdown — it slowed down the rate of growth of the infection and allowed the government to prepare better. But it is now time to lift restrictions in non hotspot areas, and allow economic activity to resume even in other districts. Of course, safeguards must be in place; mass gatherings must remain prohibited; social distancing norms must be enforced; but India now needs to, slowly, open up. Otherwise, the costs are too high.

# Lessons from Bihar on the migrant worker crisis

At the interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, Bihar's chief minister (CM) Nitish Kumar raised the issue of migrant workers and protocols related to their movement. The extended lockdown has firmly brought the spotlight on these workers, with Bihar among the most severely affected states, as millions from the states remain stranded.

Amid hunger, monetary crisis and uncertainty, migrant workers have been treated as outsiders, which is why many set off on foot to their homes. Reports of the exodus of migrant workers from Delhi and other cities were proof of their alienation. With widespread panic, migrants became easy targets on social media and were labelled coronavirus carriers.

Frantic efforts by Bihar — home to India's second-largest migrant labour population — to address the exodus including localised containment measures at the state borders, were not nearly enough to counter this stigma. In many places, the enforcement of lockdown through the use of police force, as well as several infection control measures such as stamping those identified for isolation and/or quarantine, made things worse for them. It was only when the Supreme Court intervened to dispel this prejudice that the media and governance responses changed to some de-



gree.

As states begin devising measures to bring workers back to assembly lines, they could take a leaf out of Bihar's book on how to reach out to migrant workers and treat them in a humane manner. This model is already being replicated by Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand to reach out to workers stuck in other states.

Bihar was the first state to respond to the needs of its migrant workers stranded in other states. CM Nitish Kumar first ensured that people who reached out to the state government in the early days of the lockdown were called back, so that the government could sort out their problems. Their deprivation related to their lack of money and as-

sured food. In one of his first directives immediately after allocating Rs 150 crore from the CM Relief Fund to fight the pandemic (this has now been increased to Rs 250 crore), the CM instructed senior officials on April 2 to remit Rs 1,000 directly to the bank accounts of Bihari workers stranded outside. By April 6, the department of disaster management (DMD) not just developed and tested a dedicated software app for this, but successfully accomplished the transfer of funds to individual bank accounts, while launching helplines for people to continue reaching out to the state government.

The enormity of the task might seem daunting, but it is nothing new for the state machinery that

has extended monetary relief to the vulnerable in the past. This was, however, the first time that migrants living outside Bihar were identified, verified, and reached. The state government, by April 27, had transferred Rs 1,000 through direct bank transfers (DBT) to over 1.6 million accounts of non-resident Biharis.

Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh stand out prominently in this DBT scheme list.

The state government set up helpline numbers for people stranded outside, erected relief centres at state borders for homebound migrant workers, set up community quarantine centres in villages and panchayats, and ensured that local employment through government schemes absorbed as many re-

turning migrants as possible. Even before the partial easing of the lockdown from April 20, the state government directed all departments to use the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to provide employment for the local labourers.

Outside the state, the DMD and the Bihar Foundation have been running 52 relief centres in 12 cities in different states to provide cooked food and food packets. Over 20,000 people are being provided with meals every day at the 12 centres in Delhi alone. Similarly, the 24\*7, 60-line state helpline responded to over a 100,000 calls, facilitating affirmative action for 2.5 million individuals, mostly pertaining to monetary and food issues.

Beyond financial assistance through DBT and support through community centres and phone helplines, the state's initiatives have succeeded in looping hundreds of thousands of migrant workers into an extended community.

This is a challenging time for both, the state government as well as for migrant workers. But taking care of them, through protective mechanisms, while remaining careful that the disease does not spread, is both the ethical and pragmatic thing to do. After all, it is these workers who will have to steer the economy back to its feet when India opens up.





## In Pakistan's fight against Covid-19, religion might not be helping

Pakistan is entering its fifth week under lockdown to control the spread of the coronavirus. But as the Islamic holy month of Ramadan starts this weekend, hundreds of thousands of people will congregate in mosques nationwide to offer special prayers.

The government's submission to demands from senior clerics and religious political parties for mosque exemptions highlights that Pakistan's fight against Covid-19 is more about managing political divides than saving lives.

As of Saturday, the country of more than 200 million people had at least 11,900 confirmed cases and 253 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. That's more than double the number of cases and deaths the country had on April 13. Despite this steady increase, the religious establishment has remained skeptical of the government's pandemic response. Hardline clerics urged worshipers to defy restrictions first imposed in March and gather in mosques in great numbers. Congregations attacked police officers deployed to enforce the lockdown. The onset of Ramadan -- and the promise of generous charitable contributions by worshipers to mosques as part of holy month observances -- spurred religious groups to intensify pressure on the government, with the latter caving to avoid the political fallout.

The Pakistan Medical Association has denounced the decision to permit congregations, saying that protocols agreed between the government and religious groups -- including requirements for worshipers

to remain six feet apart and complete ablutions at home -- are unlikely to be implemented. Doctors, who have already threatened to walk off the job owing to a lack of medical and protective equipment, say the health system will not cope if the virus spreads any faster during Ramadan. Prime Minister Imran Khan's decision to accommodate clerics' demands points to their political influence. Although religious political parties have rarely won more than 2% of the vote during elections, they have immense street power, and can whip religious sentiment and organize mass protests to destabilize governments.

Historically, religious groups also maintain close links with Pakistan's powerful military, a legacy of the anti-Soviet Afghan "jihad" in the 1980s. The military has previously mobilized religious groups to put pressure on civilian governments.

However this time, the pandemic has revealed the limitations of the military's control over such groups. The

military supports a lockdown, and its inability to gain clerics' buy-in will frustrate Khan's administration, which has been left open to criticism for kowtowing to the religious establishment. This



will intensify civil-military tensions, already spiraling since the start of the coronavirus outbreak. The military was impatient with Khan's initial reluctance to impose a national lockdown, and deployed troops to enforce provincial-level restrictions -- forcing the government's hand to take broader measures. Since the start of April, the military has taken control of the national pandemic response, with a lieutenant general sitting alongside the planning minister at the helm of the National Command and Operations Centre, a coordinating body. On Friday, the military's spokesman announced that all the institution's resources would be available for a "track, test and quarantine" strategy to contain the virus's spread.

The military's interests in tackling the coronavirus are clear. A prolonged lockdown or the collapse of the creaking health infrastructure could lead to rioting and widespread civil unrest, which the military would have to manage. This would distract from pressing strategic and security priorities, not least the unfolding peace process in Afghanistan.

A poorly managed coronavirus response would also have a major economic toll, which would impact a military budget already affected by US

President Donald Trump's decision to cut Coalition Support Funds in 2018. The World Bank has predicted that Pakistan will fall into recession this year. Anticipating calls for greater health expenditure after the pandemic, the military knows that it will have to stabilize the economy to protect its interests.

The military also aims to centralize political decision-making to better enable it to exercise behind-the-scenes control. Recent years have seen several attempts to weaken a 2010 constitutional amendment granting

Pakistan's four provinces greater autonomy. This consolidation has been upended by the pandemic, with provinces responding independently to the coronavirus threat. Tensions are particularly high between Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party, which has long controlled the southern province of Sindh. Murad Ali Shah, Sindh's chief minister, has been widely praised for moving quickly in March to impose a lockdown in the commercial capital Karachi and test pilgrims returning from Iran. Khan has repeatedly mocked Shah's approach, terming it an overreaction. The PTI government's laxity on lockdown rules for mosques will inflame tensions at provincial level. On Thursday, Sindh restricted late-night prayer attendance in mosques to five people. An apologetic Murad described his decision as "very difficult" -- yet necessary -- and argued that he wasn't violating the government's agreement with religious groups. Murad knows that he's not just tackling the coronavirus. He's also navigating the power tussle between Pakistan's government, military and religious groups that will determine the country's fate -- pandemic or not.







# How politics will change post the pandemic

**Even after the lockdown is lifted, social distancing will continue to remain an established norm. This means that mass rallies, mass protests, and small public meetings in urban neighbourhoods or village squares may not be possible anymore — at least for the foreseeable future. It will be much harder to get a sense of where public opinion stands.**

In democratic societies, there has been a method of political mobilisation.

Political parties are formed when a group of people with common interests and common ideological beliefs come together. They seek to expand by reaching out to other citizens, by articulating these beliefs and bringing them under a common umbrella. This is mostly done through door-to-door campaigning; through events which see the participation of a large number of people; through the distribution of pamphlets and propaganda material; and through public marches, mass meetings, and large-scale rallies.

As elections approach, these activities become more intense and pronounced — and there is a concerted outreach to every constituent to convince them of the validity of a particular worldview. Those in opposition seek to build an environment against the ruling party; those in power seek to defend their record in office — what is common between them is the use of familiar political techniques of campaigning. Each Indian election has seen a variant of this method being deployed by all sides concerned.

But it is not just parties. Civil society outfits too play a key role in spreading awareness and picking up issues relevant to them. They build opinions

through smaller meetings, seminars and conferences; they organise marches and make demands for laws or changes in policy; and they protest, within the legal and constitutional framework. A range of progressive changes in India — from the Right to Information Act to the employment guarantee scheme, from stronger laws against crimes against women to relief for farmers — has come from these methods.

But this was the world before the coronavirus pandemic. It is now recognised that the pandemic, and the restrictions that have accompanied it as the most effective way to battle the disease, will change the international system, the economic order, how businesses are run, and even the way people live and work.

But one other element it will impinge on significantly is the method of political mobilisation, especially in democracies. Even after the lockdown is lifted, social distancing will continue to remain an established norm.

This means that mass rallies (where hundreds of thousands of people jostled in a common area); mass protests (where thousands of people marched together, standing next to each other, and even pushing each other along); and small public meetings in urban

neighbourhoods or village squares (where political leaders and civil society campaigners relayed their message to residents) may not be possible anymore — at least for the foreseeable future. It will be much harder to get a sense of where public opinion stands.

This does not mean that democracy will necessarily suffer, but it means that all stakeholders in a democracy — political parties, the administrative machinery, civil society groups, and citizens — will have to find new ways to continue with the task of political and social mobilisation. There will also have to be new ways to ascertain public opinion. What will this entail?

The first, obvious, element of the new form of campaigning will be the increasing reliance on technology. Over the past decade, the online medium in general — and social media in particular — has come to play a significant role in building opinion and reaching out to voters. But this will now assume a new urgency altogether. Technological tools may almost become a substitute for a human-to-human interface. It is through video conferences, newly-created customised apps, and social media campaigns that parties will seek to penetrate the homes and minds of voters.

This, in turn, will increase the reliance on data radically. Once again, data has been an important tool in the electoral kit in the last few decades. But now, candidates will begin mining details of each constituent and their preferences at the micro-level — this, in turn, will allow them to deploy technology in what they deem as appropriate ways.

The third will be a change in the way the voting process itself is conducted. South Korea recently held elections, in the backdrop of the pandemic. Voting booths were disinfected; voters had to maintain a distance from each other while queuing up; they were screened for temperature; those who had fever were taken to a separate area, and once they exercised their franchise, they were sent for testing. The United States will have elections later this year — and it is not clear whether it will have to rely substantially on postal ballots or whether regular voting will be held. India will have to carefully look at these examples — the Election Commission is already studying the South Korea polls — and adapt it to its own context.

But, if the form of mobilisation changes, it will also have an impact on the substance of politics. It is

premature to draw any definitive conclusions, but here are the variables to look out for. One, in some ways, local leaders will become more important. After all, they know the constituency; they know the voters; and voters have a sense of their track record of delivery. At the same time, given the limits on campaigning, it will be much harder for those who are starting out at the local level — or those who are not already established leaders — to make a dent. There is a possibility that voters will choose the familiar rather than the unknown in uncertain times. Two, there will be an impact on identity politics. In times of crisis, members of particular castes, communities and religions often find solace in community bonds. At the same time, given that this crisis has affected every citizen across identities — with the poor most severely affected — voters may look beyond identity and vote on either class interests or based on their perception of government performance.

The next big election is in Bihar at the end of the year. This will be a test case to understand how political campaigning, voting processes, group identities and voting behaviour have changed in the post-coronavirus times. What is clear is that politics will not remain the same.





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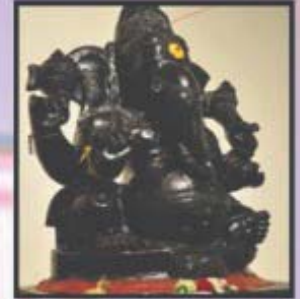
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# Covid-19 and China's wildlife trade are linked more closely than you think

**The coronavirus disease has proven to be a huge disaster for the developed economies, which had the best medical facilities, as well as the underdeveloped economies.**

(News Agencies) Nowadays, terms such as lockdown, social distancing, isolation centers, self-quarantine, vaccine, immunity and ventilators are dominating the media and discussions across the globe. And the reason is Covid-19. A deadly disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or Sars-CoV-2. It spreads when a healthy individual comes in contact with the droplets produced by an infected person when he exhales, sneezes or coughs. The disease has proven to be a huge disaster for the developed economies, which had the best medical facilities, as well as the underdeveloped economies. And governments of different countries and global health organisations are racing against time trying to develop a vaccine to stop it. With a ban on travel through air, rail and road, the world has literally come to a standstill. The loss of jobs, the fall in prices of oil and disrupt-

tion in the supply chains of commodities have been some of the unprecedented fallouts of this fatal disease on the global economy. We have the USA closing its borders and putting a hold on immigration for 60 days to protect its interests and for the well-being of its citizens. One can expect others to follow suit. Everywhere, the economists and policymakers are trying to understand and estimate the aftermath of this lockdown and how the world will recoup from it.

However, the entire focus has been more on the economic implications of the situation. And yes, the world is discussing its spread and origin from China, but barring a few international organisations working for animal welfare, nobody is focusing on the real cause.

The origin and cause of Covid-19, which will help in its containment and eradication. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has indicated that 70 per-

cent of new viruses originate in animals. It has been confirmed that in the past different types of diseases such as AIDS, SARS, Ebola and MERS have originated in wild animals.

Scientists have tentatively concluded that the Covid-19 originated in bats and entered humans from a secondary host animal, most probably pangolins. It is also claimed that Huanan seafood market in Wuhan is the origin for this virus. Unfortunately, seafood markets (in China) have more than just seafood. They have wild animals such as primates, crocodiles, wolf pups, civets, snakes, turtles, bamboo rats, porcupines, live fish and mongoose, packed together in cages.

They are live specimens, most of them illegally smuggled from their wild habitats, and butchered on demand by the sellers. To keep the remaining meat fresh, it is kept on ice slabs from where blood spreads,

as the ice slabs melt, into the small walkways of the market. And this is the reason why these markets are called the wet markets.

Scientists at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) have already declared these wet markets as "Time Bomb" for future diseases. Many viruses are confined to a small population of wild animals and remain in wild habitats for a long time. Such viruses are of zoonotic nature and remain dormant till the animal host comes in contact with a human host. And most of these viruses remain inactive and undiscovered.

Once these wild animals enter, through illegal wildlife trade, the wet markets or are consumed as bushmeat by humans, these viruses being zoonotic in nature multiply in their human hosts. And create a disease that can either be endemic in a community or result in a pandemic. So if we are not able to contain illegal trade of wildlife, it is certain that



we are going to face more pandemics in the near future. Thus illegal wildlife trade is the main reason for a pandemic such as Covid-19.

Chinese wet markets are very popular and have a collection of illegally-traded wildlife from all over world. I visited these wet markets in three big cities in China in the mid 1990s. And a person who is not culturally tuned to such wet markets will leave them immediately. The latest addition in these markets is a section for live insects. Many international organisations working for prevention of illegal wildlife trade viz. IUCN, CITES and TRAFFIC are trying to contain illegal wild trade to stop extinction of many species in their habitat. Unfortunately, Chinese and similar

wet markets in Southeast Asia are a big challenge for them.

Another cause of concern is domestic farming of many wild animals in China for traditional medicines and meat. The production of traditional Chinese medicines has resulted in illegal trade and poaching of many wild animals in India. The tiger, the leopard, musk pods from musk deer, and bear bile are some of the products used in the traditional Chinese medicines. Recently, a few cases have been reported from the USA where the skin of a dead wild animal used for making drums caused a disease in humans. Now it is certain that wild animals can cause unknown diseases to humans even through contact with the body parts of the dead animal.

## Pak's troubled economy is hurting more than Imran Khan wants to believe

**The Pakistani economy was in shambles much before the lockdown and has been so for decades. There is not much scope for downside, it is already scraping the bottom of the barrel.**

(News Agencies) Even as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to hog the limelight with nearly three million cases around the globe, almost daily there are a couple of stories on how the outbreak is likely to impact Pakistan's economy. That the Pakistani economy was in shambles much before the lockdown and has been so for decades, should give people strength. There is not much scope for downside, it is already scraping the bottom of the barrel. As far as the cost of living and quality of life of the masses are concerned, these might get a little worse, but nothing people are not already used to. Pakistan is perhaps one of the poorest countries in the region and had it not been for the bailouts and concessional loans, it would have fallen to pieces years ago.

Before coronavirus

disease struck the world, Pakistan's GDP growth rate was estimated to be 3.3% for 2020 and 2.4% for 2021, its lowest in a decade. Now, Pakistan's real growth rate for 2020 has been projected by the World Bank to go into the negative, between -1.3 per cent and -2.2 percent. Pakistan's total GDP in 2017 was roughly \$305 billion, lower than that of Iran (\$454 bn), and expected to grow to \$340 billion in 2020. Compared to Iran, a country struggling under economic sanctions, Pakistan's per capita GDP in 2018 was \$1,565, much lower than Iran's at \$5,417. It also scored significantly higher than Iran in its debt to GDP ratio which was 71.69% vs 32.18% of Iran. Its defence expenditure in 2018 was 18.5% of its budget, much higher compared to its rival neighbour India at

8.74%. Struggling with a double-digit inflation, almost 13%, and a budget deficit of almost 9%, Pakistan would need to grow in double digits to break even. The likelihood that this will happen is next to nothing. In layman terms, the country will continue to get poorer and deeper in debt as it borrows more and more to meet its expenditure. Low sources of revenue combined with high non-development expenditures has been Pakistan's problem for a long time and with or without Covid-19, it will continue to remain so. Interestingly, Pakistan has one of the lowest tax to GDP ratio (1%) which means that it is basically the poor that bear the tax burden through indirect taxes perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Amid the corruption, mismanagement and misplaced priorities, the one

thing that has kept Pakistan afloat has been borrowings, both domestic and foreign. It has received \$ 1.39 billion under a rapid financing instrument of the IMF to combat the pandemic. The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics has advised economic diplomacy initiatives to reschedule its other bilateral debts to the tune of \$ 24 billion. Even though the Chinese have indicated their willingness to consider Islamabad's request to reschedule debt favourably, the numbers just don't add up for a pretty picture. Its debt to GDP ratio is 85% and expected to increase to 90% with negative GDP growth and a higher budget deficit than the previous year (8.9 per cent). Pakistan's total external debt stands at a whop-



ping \$111 billion. Unless rescheduled, its debt servicing obligation for 2020 is over \$29 billion. The numbers keep increasing as Pakistan borrows more to be able to service its debt obligations and pay for its imports, a classic debt trap. Its foreign exchange reserves at under \$11 billion are barely sufficient to cover 3 1/2 months of imports.

While Pakistan owes over \$11.3 billion to the Paris Club, \$27 billion to multilateral donors, \$5.765 billion to International Mon-

etary Fund, and \$12 billion to international bonds such as Eurobond, and Sukuk, the largest chunk, more than \$22 billion, is owed to China, largely as a result of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). When the project was launched in 2014, it was valued at \$46 billion. By 2019, this figure had gone up to \$62 billion, increasing its indebtedness to China in a very short time. Moreover, this indebtedness has come at a time when the country is already living beyond its means.



# Pak Army publication focuses on Kashmir

**The Green Book 2020, a biennial publication of the Pakistan Army with essays by both serving and retired officers that reflect the military's overall strategy and objectives, also has a message by Bajwa that describes Kashmir as a "nuclear flashpoint".**

(News Agencies) Kashmir appears to be the focus of the 2020 edition of an internal publication of the Pakistan Army, with its chief Gen Qamar Bajwa describing last year's Balakot air strike and the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir's special status as events that impacted regional geo-politics. A majority of articles in the latest edition by army officers, former diplomats, academics and journalists reference the Kashmir issue, and offer suggestions ranging from creating a Kashmir Fund to support people in the Indian Union Territory, and adopting information and cyber warfare by establishing communications links inside the Kashmir Valley.

The Green Book 2020, a biennial publication of the Pakistan Army with essays by both serving and retired officers that reflect

the military's overall strategy and objectives, also has a message by Bajwa that describes Kashmir as a "nuclear flashpoint". In his message in Green Book 2020, posted on the website of Pakistan's National Defence University (NDU), Bajwa says the environment in South continues to be complex, with the lines getting blurred between different types of warfare. "Year 2019 witnessed two significant events which will have lasting imprint on the geopolitics of this region; first, the unwarranted Balakot Strike by Indian Air Force on 26th February and second, the unilateral annexation of Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir by [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi on 5th August, through abrogation of Article 370 and 35A," Bajwa wrote in the message issued as

patron-in-chief of the publication. "Former was a coercive attempt to carve out space for war under nuclear overhang and enforce compellence; adroitly denied by Pakistan Air Force the very next day, through a calibrated and proportionate response – Indian craving for establishing a New Normal was stymied comprehensively. The latter, despite condemnation by the world at large, continues to haunt the lives of over eight million Muslims of [Kashmir]...", he added. "Kashmir is a nuclear flashpoint and in total disregard to international norms, Mr Modi has not only endangered the immediate neighbourhood, but has also raised the ante for the entire World. The scholarly discourse in current edition of Pakistan Army Green Book has accordingly spotlighted the implications of

these events from diverse perspectives and dimensions," Bajwa further wrote. Some recent editions of the Green Book had focused on the internal threat posed by terrorist groups but this year's edition marks a return to the traditional focus on India as Pakistan's greatest threat. Several articles in the Green Book dwell at length on the Pulwama terror attack by the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in February last year that triggered a fresh standoff between India and Pakistan, the Indian Air Force strike on a JeM facility at Balakot and the retaliatory action by the Pakistan Air Force. The articles make references to other events such as the 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, which led to face-offs between the two countries, but make no mention



of the role of Pakistan-based elements in triggering these events. Lt Gen (retired) Raza Muhammad Khan, a former Corps Commander and former president of NDU, in his article, "The prospects and panacea of peace in South Asia", recommended the creation of a "domestic and international Kashmir Fund", saying it could crowd sourced and the Pakistan government "should provide tax incentives for donations". The federal government, in the absence of

resources, "must encourage the provinces to allocate at least one percent of their NFC [National Finance Corporation] shares and earnings" and the Kashmir Fund should be controlled by the prime minister to prevent human rights violations in Kashmir, "informing the Indian masses and liberal intellectuals about the colossal cost...of enslaving nine million Kashmiris...and exposing the lies of the Indian government," Khan wrote.

## Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

**FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW:** If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

- Stay home except to get medical care**
  - Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
  - Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
  - Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation**
  - Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific "sick room" and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
  - Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
    - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
    - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor**
  - Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.
- Wear a facemask if you are sick**
  - If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
  - If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes**
  - Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
  - Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
  - Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean your hands often**
  - Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
  - Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
  - Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
  - Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid sharing personal household items**
  - Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.

**cdc.gov/COVID19**

## STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

**Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.**

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.**
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.**
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.**
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.**
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.**

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# China 'concerned' as India decides to stop use of Chinese Covid-19 test kits

**China's statement came hours after the ICMR, which plays a key role in advising authorities engaged in the fight against Covid-19, said state governments should stop using the rapid antibody testing kits from Guangzhou Wondfo Biotech and Zhuhai Livzon Diagnostics**

(News Agencies) China on Tuesday expressed concern about an Indian medical body's decision to stop using rapid antibody testing kits made by two Chinese firms, saying their products meet quality standards and are exported to many other countries.

"The quality of medical products exported from China is prioritised. It is unfair and irresponsible for certain individuals to label Chinese products as 'faulty' and look at issues with pre-emptive prejudice," Chinese embassy spokesperson Ji Rong said in a statement issued early on Tuesday.

The statement came hours after the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR),



which plays a key role in advising authorities engaged in the fight against Covid-19, said state governments should stop using the rapid antibody testing kits from Guangzhou

Wondfo Biotech and Zhuhai Livzon Diagnostics after several states questioned the efficacy of the kits. Ji said: "We are deeply concerned with the evaluation results and the

decision made by (NMPA), meet the quality standards China and importing countries, and had also been validated and approved by ICMR through the National Institute of Vi-

rology (NIV) in Pune. "The

Covid-19 antibody rapid test kits produced by these two Chinese companies have been exported to and well recognised in many countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America," she added. Ji further said Beijing hopes New Delhi "could respect China's goodwill and sincerity, strengthen communication timely with relevant Chinese companies based on facts, and resolve [the matter] reasonably and properly". She said there are strict requirements for the storage, transportation and use of rapid antibody testing kits. "Any operation which is not carried out by professionals in accordance with the product specifications will lead to the testing accuracy variations," she said.

## South Africa records highest daily Covid infections as easing of lockdown approaches



(News Agencies) South Africa reported its highest daily coronavirus infection in a 24-hour cycle Wednesday, just a day before the nationwide lockdown moves down to the phase-4 of a five-phase plan to combat Covid-19. There had been a 73% daily increase in confirmed Covid-19 infections, with 354 new cases taking the total to 5,350, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said Wednesday evening. There were also 10 deaths overnight, raising the toll to 103.

The Health Department attributed these large figures to a proportionate increase in the number of tests conducted. "The total number of tests conducted to date is 197,127, of which 11,630 were done in the last 24 hours. This is the highest number of tests done in a 24-hour

period, representing a 66% increase relative to the previous day's tally. "Additionally, we have also recorded the highest Covid positive result yield from a 24-hour cycle of testing at 3%," the statement said.

The department also expressed concern that the number of new cases in the Western Cape Province had almost doubled from 133 on Tuesday to 264 on Wednesday. "In the past 24 hours, the Western Cape contributed to 75% of the total new cases nationally, while only contributing 30% of total tests over the same period. "These concerning trends have prompted us to plan for additional support to be deployed to the province to help contain the spread of Covid-19. The province has been asked to recruit additional personnel and 30 Cuban doctors will

**The department also expressed concern that the number of new cases in the Western Cape Province had almost doubled from 133 on Tuesday to 264 on Wednesday.**

also be sent to reinforce the human resource capacity." As many as 200 doctors from Cuba who arrived in South Africa on Monday are currently in quarantine before being deployed to assist local medical personnel across the country. South Africa has been on

an extended 45-day national lockdown that ends on April 30. From May 1, the country will be on the phase-4 of the lockdown, during which there will be slight changes, mainly allowing prepared food deliveries and the sale of cigarettes, both of which were

previously prohibited. Some industries will be allowed to gradually start operating again, with strict restrictions regarding number of workers, social distancing and PPE availability. A decision which was expected this week on the reopening of schools and other educa-

tional institutions has been deferred to an indefinite date amid reports that many schools will not be ready for the required social distancing and sanitisation processes; as well as concerns raised by both parents and teachers about the risks involved.

## Knowledge about North Korea's Kim Jong Un is limited, but crucial

(News Agencies) New rumors about Kim Jong Un pour in daily. The North Korean leader is dead. Or he's very ill. Or maybe he's just recuperating in his luxury compound, or isolating himself from the coronavirus.

As speculation about his health builds, an underlying question looms for professional spies, policymakers, academics and curious news consumers alike. What do we really know about the man who leads North Korea?

The answer is crucial because Kim's intentions, and the as-yet-unknown state of his health, play an outsized role in the workings of Northeast Asia, an uneasy collection of wary neighbors at the best of times and home to two of the three biggest economies in the world and a huge buildup of American mili-



tary machinery and manpower. Sandwiched amid goliaths, North Korea is a small, impoverished, extraordinarily proud nation that through sheer force of will — and a relentless cult of personality built around a single family — has been at the center of a half-century security headache for its neighbors. No matter how successful China, South Korea and

Japan become — and their transformation from war, poverty and domestic infighting into political and economic might has been spectacular — North Korea and its single-minded pursuit of nuclear-tipped missiles meant to protect the Kim family has made itself impossible to ignore, holding the region and Washington hostage to its narrow ambitions.



# Sweden says its coronavirus approach has worked. The numbers suggest a different story

(News Agencies) Sweden has been an outlier during the coronavirus outbreak. The country has not joined many of its European neighbors in imposing strict limits on citizens' lives, and images of people heading to work on busy streets, or chatting at cafes and bars have raised eyebrows. Younger children have continued to go to school, although universities and schools for older students have switched to distance learning. Businesses -- from hair salons to restaurants -- have remained open, although people have been advised to work from home where possible. On April 7, the government introduced a bill allowing it to act quickly and take decisions on temporary

measures where needed. Care home visits were banned from April 1 and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs asked people to refrain from non-essential travel, adding: "Keep your distance and take personal responsibility." Among Nordic countries -- which share similar cultural, geographical and sociological attributes -- the contrast with Sweden is great. Finland declared a state of emergency, closed schools and banned gatherings of more than 10 people on March 16, restricted travel to and from its Uusimaa region on March 28 and closed restaurants, cafes and bars on April 1. Denmark announced widespread closures on March 11 and was among the first in Eu-

rope to close borders, shops, schools and restaurants, and to ban large gatherings. Norway began introducing travel restrictions in mid-March and has since closed schools and daycare centers, banned the use of vacation properties, canceled events and closed businesses such as hair and beauty salons. The death rate in Sweden has now risen significantly higher than many other countries in Europe, reaching more than 22 per 100,000 people, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University, controlled for population. By contrast, Denmark has recorded just over seven deaths per 100,000 people, and both Norway and Finland less than four.

Sweden has registered 18,926 coronavirus cases and 2,274 deaths among its population of 10.3 million people. Denmark has had 9,049 cases and 427 deaths in a population of 5.8 million, Norway 7,599 cases and 206 deaths among its 5.4 million people, and Finland 4,695 cases and 193 deaths in its population of 5.5 million. Denmark and Norway are now beginning to ease their lockdowns, with children returning to school in the past 10 days, in smaller classes with markers to help keep them two meters apart. Salons and other businesses with one-to-one contact will reopen in Norway from Monday. Finland has extended its restrictions until May 13.

## US tally puts infections at over 1 million



(News Agencies) COVID-19 cases in the United States pass 1 million, and US cases now account for nearly a third of the global total.

Transmission rates in Germany have gone up from 0.9 to 1.0. The organizer of the Tokyo Olympic Games says the event would be canceled if the pandemic is not under control next year. France said it would only relax the lockdown if the infection rates stay below 3,000 per day. 23:15 Nine inmates have died in clashes that erupted at a Peruvian jail after a number of fellow prisoners lost their lives to the coronavirus.

Authorities said the nine were killed when prison guards at Lima's Miguel Castro Castro facility opened fire. They added that more than 60 prison officials were also wounded in the unrest. At least 13 prisoners have died from COVID-19 in Peru's overcrowded prison system, while more than 500 have been infected.

Across Peru, a total of 854 people have died from the virus, with more than 30,000 confirmed infections -- the second-highest tally in South America behind Brazil. 22:40 The US death toll from the novel coronavirus has now surpassed the 58,220 Americans killed in the Vietnam War, according to the Johns Hopkins University (JHU). COVID-19 has killed 58,365 people in the US and infected over 1 million -- far more than in any other country. About a third of the cases have been in New York state, followed by New Jersey, Massachusetts, California and Pennsylvania. Some US states are starting to ease stay-at-home restrictions that have taken a heavy toll on the economy. But experts warn moving too fast could cause a new wave of infections.

## Queen phones to check in on New Zealand as lockdown is slowly lifted

(News Agencies) New Zealand's Prime Minister revealed she took a call from the Queen to check in on how the country is coping as it begins to emerge from lockdown. Jacinda Ardern said she spoke with Her Majesty on Tuesday, after receiving a 'wee note' saying the monarch wished to 'catch up and see how everyone in New Zealand was getting on in the midst of Covid-19'. The Queen, 94, is the country's sovereign, but no longer carries out overseas visits so last travelled there in her Golden Jubilee year of 2002. Ms Ardern described the call as 'such a treat', saying on Instagram: 'Her affection for New Zealand, her interest in what's happening here and her memory of places and events that are special to us never ceases to amaze me.' The Queen welcomed Ms Ardern, who was then pregnant with her daughter Neve, to Buckingham Palace during



the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in 2018. MetroUK/New Zealand is edging ever closer to something resembling normality with each passing day after easing some of its restriction measures amid dwindling numbers of infections. Ms

Ardern placed the country in total lockdown within a month of the first reported coronavirus case on February 28. Schools were closed along with most businesses, and people were only allowed to leave home for essential work, to get groceries or to exercise.

## Meat processors warn of shortages. Here's why they're getting hit so hard

(News Agencies) The coronavirus pandemic is wreaking havoc on the supply chain, hitting everyone from farmers to automakers to retailers. But meat processing plants, especially, are in a crisis. Over the past several weeks, a number of major meat suppliers have announced temporary closures as workers fall ill with Covid-19. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union estimated Tuesday that 20 meatpacking and food processing workers have died so far. The situation has gotten so severe, company executives warned, that the U.S. meat supply could be at risk. John Tyson, chairman of the Tyson (TSN) board, warned of limited supply if plant shortages continue. "We definitely can see shortage of products in the grocery stores," said Jeff Sindelar, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences with an expertise in meat processing. If the larger processing plants continue to shut down or operate with limited ca-



capacity, certain products may be unavailable and others could get really expensive, he added. Other food manufacturers, which process shelf-stable goods like cereal or soup, have not issued comparable warnings. And their plants seem to be largely operational, so far. So why is meat getting hit so hard? For years, major meat processors have been ruthlessly tamping down on costs and increasing efficiencies. That has

contributed to dangerous working conditions even before the coronavirus hit. There are many serious safety and health hazards in the meat packing industry," the Occupational Safety and Health Administration says on its website. "These hazards include exposure to high noise levels, dangerous equipment, slippery floors, musculoskeletal disorders, and hazardous chemicals," among others.



# US tightens restrictions on technology exports to China, Russia and Venezuela

**Trump administration's new rule seeks to remove a license exception for exports, reexports, or transfers (in-country) to civilian end-users in countries of national security concern for National Security- (NS) controlled items.**

(News Agencies) The Trump Administration announced new export control actions to prevent efforts by entities in China, Russia, and Venezuela to acquire American technology that could be used for development of weapons, military aircraft, surveillance through civilian supply chains.

"It is important to consider the ramifications of doing business with countries that have histories of diverting goods purchased from US companies for military applications," said Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross.

"Certain entities in China, Russia, and Venezuela have sought to circumvent

America's export controls, and undermine American interests in general, and so we will remain vigilant to ensure US technology does not get into the wrong hands," Ross said.

Prominent among the rule changes include expansion of Military End Use/User Controls (MEU), removal of license exception civilian end users (CIV) and elimination of license exception additional permissive reexports (APR) provisions.

The new rule, expands MEU license requirements controls on China, Russia, and Venezuela to cover military end-users in all three countries, as well as items

such as semiconductor equipment, sensors, and other technologies sought for military end use or by military end-users in these countries.

It seeks to remove a license exception for exports, reexports, or transfers (in-country) to civilian end-users in countries of national security concern for National Security- (NS) controlled items.

The new rule also proposes to eliminate certain provisions of a license exception for partner countries involving the re-export of NS-controlled items to countries of national security concern to ensure consistent reviews



of exports and reexports of US items. US Senator Ben Sasse, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and an outspoken China hawk, in a statement said that this was long due. "This rule is grounded in two basic truths: Modern war is high tech and China's so-called 'private sector' is fake. Chairman Xi has

erased any daylight between China's businesses and the communist party's military," Sasse said. "We didn't win the Cold War by selling cruise missiles to the Soviets, and we're not going to beat China by selling semiconductors to the People's Liberation Army. These rules are long overdue," he said.

## YOU can now buy an antibody test for coronavirus Test which correctly detects immune cells for COVID-19 in 99.5% of patients is available to purchase online



(News Agencies) Quest Diagnostic Inc said on Tuesday individuals can purchase COVID-19 antibody testing for themselves through its website QuestDirect without visiting a doctor's office. Last week, Quest said it was launching its COVID-19 antibody test service for healthcare providers to order on behalf of patients and said it expected to perform more than 200,000 tests a day by mid-May.

Quest said on Tuesday people who buy the test online will be prompted to schedule an appointment for a blood draw at one of its 2,200 patient service centers across the US, and the test results will be available on the company's patient portal MyQuest, within two days of the blood draw.

Through QuestDirect, individuals can request for the test and purchase it online for \$119, the company said. Quest primarily uses a highly-accurate antibody test made by Abbott, which the company says is 100%

specific to coronavirus - meaning it does not mistake antibodies developed against other infections as coronavirus ones - and 99.5 specific, meaning it almost never misses someone who has been infected. The service could help individuals without any COVID-19 symptoms find out if they have been exposed to the virus and have developed antibodies to fight it. US officials and doctors are eager to get as many people tested for antibodies as possible because the results have been widely looked to as the key signal that the US can start reopening safely.

When our bodies encounter a new pathogen, our immune systems start learning that bacterium or virus and produce antibodies - special immune cells - to fight it. Antibodies may protect people who have had the infection from getting infected over again for some amount of time - although it's not yet clear what level of immunity coronavirus antibodies offer, or how long. Tests like those offered through

Quest Diagnostics' services measure levels of these immune cells in patients' blood. The part of the patients' blood that carries antibodies reacts with a chemical concoction that includes the antibodies themselves, often printed with gold on a piece of paper that changes colors when the blood has the immune cells too.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulators have now given emergency use authorization to seven antibody tests in the US. But relaxed regulations intended to help expand desperately needed diagnostic and antibody testing have cleared the way for a rush of antibody tests to come to the market without FDA authorization and amid questions over their accuracy.

More than 100 antibody tests are now available but haven't been reviewed by the FDA's stringent eye for accuracy and reliability. Reports have emerged of some of these un-reviewed antibody tests returning false-positive results. We don't really know how much protection antibodies would afford someone who had been exposed to coronavirus and developed them, but the false-positive result would lead someone who had never been exposed to believe they had - and may have immunity to reinfection. Accuracy in antibody testing is described by two measures: specificity and sensitivity. If a test is highly specific, that means that it runs a very low-risk of reacting to antibodies to a different infection and is instead very exact at picking up antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19.

## Extreme weather disasters and wars displace millions

(News Agencies) Extreme weather displaced 24 million people within their countries in 2019, with conflict and other disasters driving a further 9.5 million from their homes, according to a report published Tuesday by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). Floods and storms — particularly cyclones, typhoons and hurricanes — displaced 10 million and 13 million people respectively, with wildfires, droughts, landslides and temperature extremes contributing to another 900,000 displacements. About one million people fled volcanoes and earthquakes.

The figures are a reminder that displacement uproots millions of lives each year and that "too little is done to find solutions," the report's authors wrote. Some who flee or are evacuated later return to their homes, but the total number of displaced people has grown over years to its highest-ever level. About 51 million live displaced — many in crowded camps with poor sanitation. Now they have a pandemic to deal with. Large numbers of internally displaced people live in conditions where the spread of the coronavirus is going to be all the easier, said IDMC director Alexandra Bilak. "How do you tell people to stay at home when their homes have been destroyed by disaster?" Global crises like climate change, forced migration and the coronavirus feed off each other in unexpected ways. They create "perfect storms where people are hit way harder," said Maarten Van Aalst, director of the Climate Center at the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Physical distancing rules to contain the virus, for instance, could leave school gymnasiums and church halls less able to shelter storm victims and prevent governments from packing people onto busses and driving them from danger. For people forced into camps or displaced in slums, there is not enough soapy water to keep disease at bay.

Taken together, the impact of several crises is bigger than the sum of each of the shocks separately, said Van Aalst, adding that many displaced people do not have financial or food buffers to survive through the next disaster. When the shocks are of a different nature, "people feel they're getting hit from all sides."



# Coronavirus fatalities hit 58,000 with 1,026,000 cases in the U.S.

**The US death toll from the coronavirus outbreak could reach 74,000 by August, according to a leading predictive model - as health experts warn fatalities will increase if states reopen too early.**

(News Agencies) The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation model, often cited by White House officials, raised its COVID-19 death toll projections on Monday. The model now projects 74,073 Americans will die from the coronavirus by August 4, which is up from nearly 67,000 a week ago and 60,000 predicted two weeks ago. The latest figure is down from about a month ago when the model projected around 90,000 deaths related to coronavirus in the US. This model, along with several others cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, predict that reopening states too soon and relaxing social distancing measures will result in even more deaths. It comes as the US death toll reached more than 58,000 Tuesday while the number of infections in-

creased to more than 1,026,000. IHME director Christopher Murray said the death toll would increase if states reopen their economies too early. The model's increased projection is, in part, due to many states experiencing flatter and longer peaks. Daily deaths are not falling very quickly after the peak, which leads to longer tails for epidemic curves in many states, researchers say. Less abrupt peaks and slower declines in daily deaths after the peak could result in many states having a higher death toll, according to the model. The model indicates that seven states - Hawaii, Mississippi, Texas, Wyoming, Utah, Nebraska, and North Dakota - may be experiencing their peaks now or could be in the coming weeks. Other models, including the IHME, that are developed indepen-

dently but cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also offer similar predictions for soaring death tolls depending on how much social distancing and contact reduction is practiced. All national-level forecasts indicate that deaths are likely to continue rising over the next four weeks, according to the CDC.

The forecasts cited by the CDC track the number of COVID-19 death since February and show the estimated deaths across the US in the next month. All of the models assume that existing social distancing measures will continue, while the Columbia University models makes various assumptions on the effectiveness of current social distancing interventions. The CDC says that the models - like IHME - that incorporate strong social distancing measures

suggest that new deaths will continue to occur but will slow substantially over the next four weeks, while models that don't incorporate such strong contact reductions - like the Columbia University ones - will see deaths rise more quickly. A MOBS model by Northwestern's Laboratory for the Modeling of Biological + Socio-technical Systems predicts that there could be nearly 34,000 unmitigated deaths by May 18. If mitigation measures are in place, the deaths could reach just over 600 by that same date. Meanwhile, a COVID-19 simulator tool developed by Massachusetts General Hospital and Georgia Tech University predicts that current restrictions being implemented in various states could see the US death toll reach about 86,000 fatalities by August 30.

## Up to 13.9 million Americans are out of work



(News Agencies) Millions of Americans who have lost their jobs during the coronavirus pandemic have been unable to register for unemployment benefits since the US economy entered a free fall, according to a poll released on Tuesday. The left-leaning Economic Policy Institute found in an online poll that for every 10 people who have successfully filed unemployment claims, three or four people have been unable to register and another two people have not tried to apply at a time of acute economic crisis.

Official US statistics show that 26.5 million people have applied for unemployment benefits since March 15, wiping out all of the jobs gained during the longest employment boom in American history. EPI's survey indicates that an additional 8.9 million to 13.9 million people have been shut out of the system, according to Ben Zipperer, the

study's lead author. Idled workers say they have encountered downed websites and clogged phone lines, as the state governments that administer the program have been overwhelmed by applicants.

'It's a shame how you work for so many years and then when you need it, you can't get it,' said Jim Hewes, 48, who told Reuters he was unable to file a claim online for more than two weeks after he was furloughed from his job at a second-hand store in Orlando, Florida, in March. Hewes said he mailed off a paper application on April 9 but had not heard back from the state.

'It's almost set up to fail. It was made complicated so people would get discouraged and give up,' he said. EPI surveyed 24,607 US adult internet users using Google Surveys between April 13 and April 24. Some 9.4 percent of poll respondents said they had successfully applied for unemployment benefits, while 3.4 percent said they tried but

could not get through. A further 1.9 percent said they did not apply because the process was too difficult. The jobless rate has continued to soar in the days since the survey ended and is expected to reach 14 percent

over the course of the coronavirus crisis, according to a Congressional Budget Office report released last week. The CBO projected that 27 million Americans will find themselves out of work by the

end of the second quarter in June. Long lines have become a mainstay outside unemployment offices across the country as people look to file claims in person to avoid the overwhelmed online process.

## Over two-thirds of Britons say lockdown should stay until coronavirus is 'fully contained'

(News Agencies) Over two-thirds of Britons believe lockdown should stay in place until coronavirus is 'fully contained', according to a poll today - as ministers already appeared to be moving towards an 'exit strategy'. Despite Downing Street insisting that curbs remain in place until at least May 7 there are signs that the rules are already being relaxed in the face of growing Tory alarm over the economic impact.

New guidance is being issued to councils on refuse and recycling sites, while Michael Gove gave a strong hint that garden centres and other shops where social distancing can be most enforced could follow soon. Some construction sites, DIY stores and fast food chains have also stepped up their operations over recent days. Speculation was fuelled tonight as the wording of the government's 'five tests' for easing restrictions was subtly changed. Slides displayed at the daily No10 briefing held by Matt Hancock showed that it is now saying there must be no second peak 'that overwhelms the NHS' - although Downing Street insisted that was always the case.

Frantic work has been going on behind the scenes to produce an exit plan, although officials are adamant nothing will be announced formally this week. Ideas being mooted include letting family and friends mix in 'bubbles' of 10 people rather than just households. The government's key 'stay at home' message is expected to be overhauled to make clear people

should do their jobs wherever possible.

Travellers are likely to be urged to wear makeshift face coverings on the train, tube and bus - after Nicola Sturgeon broke ranks with the rest of the UK by changing the advice to Scots. No10 says it is not immediately proposing to change the guidance. However, a poll today suggests they will encounter significant resistance when they do try to remove the shackles, with 70 per cent convinced restrictions should not be eased until the deadly disease has been 'fully contained'. Support for the restrictions is stronger in the UK than 13 other major economies struggling to cope with outbreaks of the disease, the Ipsos MORI research found. Despite frantic work going on in Whitehall, the timetable for easing the curbs that are strangling the economy is far from certain. Scientists have been warning that even small changes could spark a deadly new peak and inflict even worse damage.

There is little prospect of schools coming back before June - regarded by many as essential for a wide-scale reopening of UK plc. But the outline of the plan is emerging after the PM returned to work yesterday and braced the public for a 'new normal' which will juggle the need to revive the economy with limiting the threat of the infection running rampant again. Tory MP Andrew Griffith asked Mr Gove in the Commons today about reopening garden centres, warning they were 'wilting with every day of the peak growing season that they remain closed'.



# Water firms warn of 20% increase in sewer blockages



ished out of Shoppenhangers Road in Maidenhead on Tuesday. This follows shoppers mass-buying toilet paper, leaving others turning to alternatives such as wet wipes, tissues, kitchen roll and newspapers, the company said. Such items combine with fats, oils and grease when flushed down the toilet - creating fatbergs or ragbergs.

They can often accumulate to far greater sizes than the one removed in Maidenhead. Last year a fatberg the size of a double decker bus weighing around 40 tonnes was removed from a sewer in Greenwich and took engineers three weeks to dispose of. For the larger blockages, a combination of high-powered water jets and removing debris by hand is the approach taken. Stephen Sanderson, area network manager for Thames Water, said: 'Wipes and things like kitchen roll if used instead of toilet paper can't go down the loo.

'As nasty as it sounds, if people do use them as a last resort, they need to be put in a bin and disposed of safely.' Thames Water said before the lockdown it was seeing a reduction of about 10% in blockages.

However, it has since seen a jump of up to 8% compared with the average for the

same month in 2017 to 2019. Their employees are classified as key workers during the lockdown so are regularly being deployed to clear blockages and ensure the waste system is working effectively. Prior to coronavirus, unflushable items had cost

Thames Water a total of £18million a year on averages with around 75,000 annual blockages. They launched the 'Bin it - Don't Block It' campaign to raise awareness but with Brits confined to their homes around the country, that number is on the rise.

(News Agencies) Sewer blockages have increased by 20 per cent during coronavirus lockdown and are creating gigantic 'ragbergs' due to a lack of toilet paper from stockpiling. Thames Water has seen an increase of about 10 sewer

blockages per day compared to normal due to bulk buying of toilet roll leaving some using whatever 'unflushable' alternatives they can find. The latest so-called ragberg - a clump of wet wipes, nappies and sanitary products - was

## US states release formal opening plans

(News Agencies) As many as 35 of the 50 American states have released formal opening plans, as US President Donald Trump on Wednesday exuded confidence that much better days are ahead for the country that has seen more than 61,000 deaths over the past two months due to Covid-19.

"We mourn, and I have to say this so strongly we mourn every life tragically lost to the invisible enemy. And we are heartened that the worst of the pain and suffering is going to be behind us," Trump said, during a White House roundtable with industry executives on "Opening Up America Again". By Wednesday, more than 61,000 Americans have lost their lives due to coronavirus and over 10 lakhs have tested positive with Covid 19; the highest for any country in the world. Most industries and business activities re-

main shut and over 95 percent of the country's 330 million population have been under stay-at-home orders. Over 26 million Americans have applied for unemployment benefits and the number is expected to go up to more than 30 million. The US economy has come to a standstill. It grew by negative 4.8 percent in the first quarter. On Wednesday, Trump exuded confidence that economy would be back to track by the fourth quarter. "We think we really have crossed a big boundary, and much better days are ahead, and I often say I see the light at the end of the tunnel very strongly," Trump said. "We are seeing tremendous pent-up demand, and it's a beautiful thing to see, so it's wonderful to have America industry leaders, and that is what you are, true leaders to the White House," he told the industry leaders.

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# Who's Profiting From the Coronavirus Crisis?

## Amid an economic catastrophe, a few billionaires are still winning.

(SAI Bureau) New York: The invisible killer is testing global capitalism as never before. Some highfliers are getting a long overdue comeuppance. Take, for instance, the Vision Fund, the \$100 billion venture capital fund created by Masayoshi Son, a Japanese billionaire whose mantra is "We only live once, so I want to think big." On April 13, Mr. Son's conglomerate SoftBank announced it expects to lose \$16.7 billion on its Vision Fund portfolio for the year ended March 31, after a string of bad bets on dubious Silicon Valley start-ups.

The Vision Fund invested not just in WeWork, which was a debacle even before the coronavirus outbreak, but also Opendoor, a real-estate start-up; Zume, a restaurant robotics company; Compass, an online real-estate brokerage; and Oyo, an Indian budget hotel chain, all of which have fired or furloughed huge numbers of employees in recent weeks. SoftBank has already written off its \$300 million investment in Wag, a dog-walking start-up, and is likely to lose its \$2 billion equity investment in OneWeb, a British satellite operator, which filed for bankruptcy protection.

The Vision Fund thrived for as long as it did in part because of a decade of super-low interest rates. Investors desperate for higher yields, like the sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, flocked to the Vision Fund because Mr. Son promised them a 7 percent yield on most of what they invested, far higher than could be found investing in, say, Treasury securities. It was the same mentality that attracted other investors to the mountains of risky debt issued in recent years by companies with less-than-stellar credit ratings. (There were \$9.6 trillion in U.S. corporate bonds outstanding at the end of 2019, nearly double the amount of a decade earlier.) This corporate debt bubble has finally burst — another long-awaited reckoning. Companies with too much debt are in an existential struggle. On April 15, Neiman Marcus, the luxury retailer, skipped a \$5.7 million interest payment on its outstanding bonds, setting the stage for its inevitable bankruptcy filing. Another large retailer, Macy's, has hired restructuring advisers. Ford has seen its debt downgraded to junk status, as has Kraft

Heinz.

The United States will soon be awash in corporate bankruptcies, which means a world of hurt for creditors, shareholders and employees of overleveraged companies or companies that have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In fairness, no company could have anticipated the catastrophic effects of the pandemic. But the investors and employees of companies that for years gorged on cheap debt will pay the biggest price. There will be no soft landing for them.

And yet, things are not playing out exactly as one would expect. That's in large part because of the Federal Reserve. It has intervened into the capital markets in a way that dwarfs what it did in 2008, an intervention that has been so big and so fast that it introduces another wild card into America's deeply uncertain economic future.

It started on March 23, when the Fed put together an array of loans and other forms of credit, totaling around \$4 trillion. It was a necessary move, intended to restore calm and liquidity to the financial markets, which had all but stopped providing much-needed capital to businesses and households. The Fed was acting, as it should, in its essential role as the lender of last resort, which happens when financial markets seize up and the usual sources of capital — such as banks and global investors — disappear. The Fed's actions allowed capital to begin to flow again, saving some companies and some jobs.

On April 9, the Fed struck again, by providing an additional \$2.3 trillion in loans to support the economy, bringing its intervention to more than \$6 trillion. For the first time, the Fed said it would also consider buying the bonds of "fallen angels," companies like Ford and Kraft Heinz that are considered so troubled that their debt is now rated by credit agencies as junk after decades of investment grade ratings.

It also said it would be willing to buy high-yield exchange-traded funds. The Fed had never before agreed to buy such risky securities, giving speculators hope it might be willing to buy anything, including equities. Last August, the Fed held around \$3.7 trillion in credit assets on its balance sheet;

it now holds more than \$6 trillion.

Thanks to the Fed, the debt markets sprung back to life. They had been shut for a month, but then in one week at the end of March, 49 companies issued \$107 billion of investment-grade bonds, the single-largest week of issuance on record. Then came a parade of junk bonds: Yum Brands, the parent company of KFC and Pizza Hut, raised \$600 million of new debt on March 30. On April 1, the cruise ship company Carnival issued \$4 billion of new debt.

The Fed's actions may have saved some jobs at struggling fast-food chains and cruise ship operators, but they are also warping the financial markets, just as they did in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. By buying junk bonds, the Fed has created a proverbial "moral hazard" for those investors whose risk-taking had gotten out of control but now may not face the consequences for their profligacy.

This problem is revealed most clearly in a spat that has pitted one group of billionaire investors against another. On one side are private-equity firms including Apollo Global Management and the Carlyle Group, which want some of the Paycheck Protection Program bounty for their struggling, overleveraged portfolio companies. This is an outrage, of course. Private-equity firms have more than \$1.5 trillion of their own capital that they could use to salvage their losers instead of hoovering up money meant for the less fortunate.

On the other side are people like Howard Marks. He is the co-founder of Oaktree Capital Management, one of the largest investors in distressed securities in the world. He made his billions betting that markets will act rationally in challenging times. In recent years, he has been warning that overleveraged companies will fail and that overpriced bonds will return to earth.

In an April 14 letter to his investors, Mr. Marks expressed his ire about the Fed's moves that rescued such companies. "Capitalism without bankruptcy is like Catholicism without hell," he wrote, recalling an old Wall Street truism. "Markets work best when partici-

pants have a healthy fear of loss. It shouldn't be the role of the Fed or the government to eradicate it."

Mr. Marks is correct, in theory. Companies and investors that make poor economic decisions should be penalized for their mistakes. The system won't function properly if, every time there is a major crisis, the bad actors get rescued. The Fed could be inadvertently reinflating another asset bubble right now, although it is comforting that those lucky companies tapping the capital markets are paying investors much higher rates of interest than they have in years. Investors seem to have finally wised up to the meaning of risk.

The Fed's moves, at least for a while, may have saved the pension funds of firefighters, teachers and police officers — which often buy the high-yield securities issued by risky companies — from far worse losses. If in order to rescue those retirement funds and jobs at some troubled companies, we have to live with the Fed's moves, then that's a trade-off worth making. The Fed was created for moments such as this one, and it's a blessing that it has acted forcefully. In such times, there are always a few who somehow see trouble coming and find a way to profit from it.

## 'This never happened', Joe Biden denies sexual assault allegation

"While the details of these allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault are complicated, two things are not complicated. One is that women deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and when they step forward they should be heard, not silenced. The second is that their stories should be subject to appropriate inquiry and scrutiny," the former vice president and presumptive Democratic 2020 nominee said in the statement. He continued, "Responsible news organizations should examine and evaluate the full and growing record of inconsistencies in her story, which has changed repeatedly in both small and big ways." "But this much bears emphasizing," he said. "She has said she raised some of these issues with her supervisor and senior staffers from my office at the time. They -- both men and a woman -- have said, unequivocally, that she never came to them and complained or raised issues. News organizations that have talked with literally dozens of former staffers have not found one -- not one -- who corroborated her allegations in any way. Indeed, many of them spoke to the culture of an office that would not have tolerated harassment in any way -- as indeed I would not have." Allegation presents challenging balancing act. Reade, who worked as a junior staffer at Biden's office in 1993, had publicly accused Biden last year of touching her shoulders and neck and making her feel uncomfortable. Reade first came forward with her sexual assault allegation against Biden in interviews this year with multiple media outlets, including CNN. She told CNN that in 1993, when she was working as an aide in Biden's Senate office, she was asked to deliver a duffel bag to the then-Delaware senator. In a corridor somewhere in the Capitol Hill complex, Reade said Biden "had me up against the wall; he used his knee to spread open my legs," and "put his fingers inside me."

Take, for instance, Bill Ackman, the hedge fund manager. In mid-February, he started buying insurance on various bond indexes — a bet that the debt bubble would burst — based on his hunch that investors would abandon the riskier securities in those indexes as the pandemic spread from Asia to the West. His \$27 million hedge was completed on March 3, and he sold his positions on March 23, the day the Fed announced its first major new intervention, for a profit of \$2.6 billion. Mr. Ackman played the Fed's moral hazard, betting correctly that until the Fed and the Congress acted, the markets would tank. And that once they did, that the markets would start to recover. (He has since plowed his winnings back into stocks.) For speed and accuracy, Mr. Ackman's bet may be the single best trade of all time. For the rest of us, there is more painful uncertainty. Until Americans feel safe — really safe — there isn't going to be much good news from this economy. And there isn't a whole lot that Congress, or the Fed, can do about that.

**(By William D. Cohan for NY Times. Mr. Cohan is a former investment banker and the author of four books about Wall Street.)**



# As Facebook's profit doubles, CEO Mark Zuckerberg sounds off on reopening the economy too soon

The caution Zuckerberg urged stands in stark contrast to the stance of others who want to see the stay-at-home orders lifted as soon as possible.

(By Elizabeth Dwoskin. Washington Post) Facebook reported an 18 percent increase in first-quarter revenue Wednesday, but the social media giant said it wasn't making financial predictions because of the uncertainty caused by the coronavirus and what is expected to be the greatest economic contraction since the Great Depression.

Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg expressed concern about what lies ahead for the country. "While there are massive societal costs from the current shelter in place restrictions, I worry that reopening certain places too quickly, before infection rates have been reduced to very minimal levels, will almost guarantee future outbreaks and even worse economic outcomes," he said. "I am very concerned that this health emergency and therefore the economic fallout will last longer than people are currently anticipating."

The caution Zuckerberg urged stands in stark contrast to the stance of others who want to see the stay-at-home orders lifted as soon as possible. State officials in places such as Georgia have moved to reopen for business, even though the number of new infections remains high. Tesla CEO Elon Musk tweeted late Tuesday, "FREE AMERICANOW."

Zuckerberg's focus on the broader health crisis reflects his personal involvement in this issue: He and his physician wife run the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, a philanthropic effort focused on eliminating disease, and they have personal ties to many public health leaders. Facebook and other tech giants were among the first companies last month to urge employees to work from home, even before the first stay-at-home orders were announced.

But for his business, Zuckerberg sees opportunities to grow. On a call with analysts, he said he believes that times of economic downturn are a time to invest.

"During a period like this, there are a lot of new things that need to get built," he added. "I think it's important that, rather than slamming on the brakes now, as a lot of companies may, it is important to keep

building for the new needs people have and ... make up for the stuff that other companies will pull back."

He noted that Facebook had just launched a videoconference app, Messenger Rooms, that would be a competitor to Houseparty and Zoom. Zuckerberg said the company expects to lose profit in the year ahead but emphasized the social network's strength. Executives have announced that Facebook will hire 10,000 workers this year, a potential strategic advantage to poach the best talent as smaller tech firms lay workers off.

At a moment when other companies are facing huge layoffs and declining revenue because of the pandemic, Facebook's revenue growth is notable and was cause for optimism on Wall Street.

The company's first-quarter revenue was \$17.7 billion, up from \$15.1 billion the same quarter a year ago. That was slightly more than analyst expectations, presenting a rosier picture than many traditional companies that are gearing up for the prolonged crisis. The company's profit doubled to \$4.9 billion from the previous year. Facebook's stock price shot up 10 percent in after-hours trading.

However, Facebook is not immune to the current crisis. The company said it expects profit to fall this year and would not make its usual second-quarter predictions because of uncertainty.

Though the company was not making specific predictions, executives noted that ad revenue was flat in April, a sign that the advertising industry would be significantly hit. Those numbers will be captured in second-quarter earnings.

"The effects of the pandemic didn't hit most of the world until mid-March, and that was reflected in Facebook's earnings report," eMarketer principal analyst Debra Aho Williamson said in an emailed statement. But the flat April revenue indicates that the next quarter will be "much more challenging" than the current one.

The company also said that prices for its ads have fallen because of lower demand and that it did not expect engage-

ment with some of its services to remain at the same levels as during the lockdowns.

"There is a strong evidence in the numbers that Facebook ad revenues aren't receiving the big hits many expected from the covid-19 shock," said Haris Anwar, senior analyst at the financial markets platform investing.com, who said he thought the business would quickly recover from ad revenue losses. Facebook's "stock is well-positioned to outperform its peers," he added.

## The Companies That Stand to Profit From the Pandemic

(By Josh Barro, NYmag) The effects of the coronavirus outbreak have been dire throughout the U.S. economy. About 16.8 million Americans filed for unemployment benefits in the three weeks that ended April 4, a record pace of job loss several times over. The S&P 500 index of large companies fell 20 percent in the first quarter of 2020, and all of its 11 sectors dropped by double digits — even the least hard-hit, information technology, was down 12 percent. Energy stocks lost half their value. And yet a few companies will emerge stronger from the crisis than they went in. Even in the disastrous first quarter, 30 of the 500 stocks measured in the S&P went up. These firms are either positioned to meet the needs of the pandemic economy or have the resources to outlast competitors that will be more brutally affected, and some are at the forefront of efforts to prevent, cure, or mitigate COVID-19. Here, six companies doing the best right now in the race to win the pandemic.

**6. J.M. Smucker Co.** Restaurants and bars across America are closed, but people are still eating, and that has been good for the fortunes of companies like Smucker that make packaged food for the retail market. "As you know, we have experienced unprecedented demand for peanut butter," the Jif manufacturer said in a letter to retailers on March 19, explaining why it would not always be able to fulfill orders for the brand on time or in full. The letter had better news about coffee, which Smucker sells under labels including Folgers and Dunkin' Donuts. With production at or near capacity, it was able to meet the rising call for coffee to brew at home. Smucker stock is up more than 8 percent this year. Thriving for similar reasons: processed-meat-maker Hormel and national supermarket chain Kroger.

**5. Citrix** As tens of millions of Americans have suddenly started working from home, the coronavirus crisis has provided opportunities to companies

Many of Facebook's 2.89 billion users have been quarantined at home around the world and are using the company's services — which include Instagram and WhatsApp — more than ever. In Italy, which was early to enter lockdown, viewership on the company's streaming services doubled in a week, the company has said. Calling for Messenger and WhatsApp more than doubled year over year in many countries that instituted lockdowns. Group video calling has increased more than

1,000 percent since March.

That's welcome news for a company that has seen the number of new users plateau and a significant reduction in the amount of time those users spend with the company's services in recent years.

In general, Facebook and its fellow tech giants are in a better position to withstand the coming recession. The company's market capitalization is \$553 billion, making it one of the most valuable and cash-rich companies in the

world. Tech giants are profiting — and getting more powerful — even as the global economy tanks

Google parent company Alphabet's stock was up nearly 10 percent Wednesday after the company's positive earnings report. But it warned that advertising experienced a significant decline starting in mid-March. Microsoft also beat analyst expectations as the coronavirus drove demand from businesses for its cloud infrastructure.

that sell remote-working technology, and Citrix is one of the biggest players in that space. Its stock is up nearly 26 percent this year. Citrix is doing so well it may even bring down a senator: Georgia's Kelly Loeffler has come under criticism because she and her husband sold extensive holdings in the weeks following a closed Senate briefing on the coronavirus — and bought stock in Citrix. (Loeffler said she doesn't make her own investing decisions and will now liquidate all her individual holdings.) Thriving for similar reasons: Zoom, the video-conference service now used by millions of workers who are naked from the waist down.

**4. Clorox** It's hard to think of a non-pharmaceutical product more boosted by a pandemic than bleach. Clorox makes about half the disinfectant wipes used in the U.S., and retailers have been struggling to keep them on the shelves. Clorox also has an advantage over other makers of consumer packaged goods: While Procter & Gamble has warned investors that an economic downturn owing to coronavirus could cause shoppers to trade down to cheaper, lower-margin brands of products like detergent, Clorox benefits from consumers' desire for a known, trusted name when trying to kill the virus. It doesn't hurt that Clorox has a sideline in packaged foods similar to those Smucker sells; if you buy Hidden Valley Ranch dressing or KC Masterpiece sauce, you're buying a Clorox product.

**3. Amazon** When you can't go out to shop, you shop online, and Amazon has been adding staff to handle increased order volume as department stores like Nordstrom and Macy's are closing all their locations. Still, Amazon is a general-merchandise retailer and is likely finding this crisis to be a mixed bag for the same reason its competitors Walmart and Target are — consumers are spending more on low-cost, low-margin necessity goods like toilet paper and

less on higher-margin items like clothing. But Amazon's other core business, cloud computing, is really shining. More activity moving online means more demand for cloud server space. Thriving for similar reasons: cloud service provider Akamai Technologies and data-center owners Equinix and Digital Realty Trust.

**2. Netflix** Widespread stay-at-home orders could not have come at a better time for Netflix. The streaming-entertainment company had been under serious pressure from competitors; Disney and Apple launched streaming services that stole its market share, and NBC and WarnerMedia expect to be close behind. In addition to poaching customers, some of these companies have been withdrawing content once licensed to Netflix to use for their own platforms. But now, with everyone stuck at home, no live sports on TV, and many shows unable to continue production, customers are less inclined to cancel Netflix and more likely to appreciate its deep back catalogue. The mass popularity of Tiger King doesn't hurt. Thriving for similar reasons: video-game-maker Activision Blizzard.

**1. Regeneron Pharmaceuticals** While Trump talks up hydroxychloroquine, a generic anti-malarial of unproven efficacy for treating COVID-19 (with significant side effects), former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb says certain anti-viral and antibody drugs in development and testing will be our best bets for fighting the coronavirus before a vaccine is available. Regeneron developed antibody drugs that boost the immune system to help combat Ebola and MERS, and the company says it should have one against the coronavirus ready for human trials early this summer. Gottlieb is hopeful about that, and so are investors; Regeneron stock is up nearly 37 percent this year. Thriving for similar reasons: Gilead Sciences, which makes remdesivir, an anti-viral being tested for effectiveness against coronavirus in China (results are expected in May).



# PMO Refuses to Give Details on PM-CARES, Citing Controversial SC Statement

New Delhi: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has refused to make documents related to the PM-CARES Fund public. The fund was set up to receive financial aid from the public to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition, the PMO has also refused to make public details of high-level meetings on COVID-19 and on the decision to implement a lockdown, the correspondence between the Ministry of Health and the PMO in this regard, and files related to COVID-19 testing.

It is significant to note that the PMO has not refused to share information in a straightforward manner but among many reasons, cited a controversial statement made by a bench of the Supreme Court.

A resident of Greater Noida and environmental activist, Vikrant Togad, had filed an application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act on April 21, 2020 seeking information on 12 points from the PMO.

However, the PMO hurriedly sent a reply merely six days later, on

April 27, refusing to furnish information citing that the application contains multiple requests on numerous and varied topics, as a result of which the information could not be provided. The PMO wrote, "It is not open to the applicant under the RTI Act to bundle a series of requests into one application unless these requests are treated separately and paid for accordingly."

The PMO's response does not seem to comply either with the law or decisions of the Central Information Commission (CIC).

The Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) of the PMO, Parveen Kumar, has resorted to an order of the CIC and a statement of a Supreme Court bench in his response. However, it seems that Kumar has misinterpreted both the order and statement, because neither of them prevents officers from providing information.

First argument: A directive from the CIC While refusing to provide information, the PMO has resorted to a 2009 order of the CIC in which the Commission had given its

verdict regarding an RTI application which sought information on multiple topics. In 2007, Rajendra Singh, a resident of Delhi, had filed an RTI at the CBI headquarters seeking information on a total of 69 points.

The CPIO of the CBI sent these questions to the concerned departments to respond. One of the CPIOs sent a reply to Singh stating that he could receive information by depositing Rs 10 per question as the information sought by him was related to varied subjects. Dissatisfied with the response, Singh did not submit the additional fees and instead filed a first appeal. However, the first appellate officer upheld the CPIO's reply.

The matter then reached the first and then chief information commissioner, Wajahat Habibullah, where the appellant demanded that the information sought by him be provided and the CPIO be punished for demanding additional fees. After hearing arguments from both the sides, the Commission reached the conclusion that out of the

questions asked, only one question was related to a different subject. Therefore, the appellant should deposit Rs 10 separately for it, after which the CPIO would provide the information sought by the applicant. It is noteworthy that contrary to the PMO's argument, the Commission did not restrain concerned departments from furnishing information but to provide it after payment of additional Rs 10 for each different subject.

In his verdict, Habibullah observed, "The issue hinges around the application required to be made for obtaining information u/s 7 (1). Under this clause a CPIO, on receipt of 'a request' is expected to deal with it expeditiously when accompanied with a fee. It is, therefore, not open to the applicant under the RTI Act to bundle a series of requests into one application unless these requests are treated separately and paid for accordingly." However, the verdict further added, "We concede that a request may be comprised of a question with several clarificatory or supporting questions stemming from the

information sought. Such an application will indeed be treated as a single request and charged for accordingly."

Several judgements in subsequent years were delivered in various cases based on this verdict. Former chief information commissioner A.N. Tiwari followed Habibullah's directives in giving his verdict in two cases: Suryakant B. Tengali vs State Bank of India and S. Umapati vs State Bank of India. However, in 2011, then chief information commissioner Shailesh Gandhi observed that no 'legal basis' has been given in the verdicts which restricted the scope of the RTI application to only one subject or sought additional fees on multiple subjects. Overturning earlier rulings, Gandhi stated that 'a 'single subject matter' has neither been defined in the RTI Act, nor the rules and regulations framed thereunder. Therefore, the fundamental right to information of citizens cannot be curtailed nor unnecessary money be sought from them.

# Internet 'Not a Fundamental Right', J&K Tells SC as Students' Careers Hang in Balance

"What kind of a logic is this," fumed Professor Mohammad Aslam.

"Have they gone out of their mind?" Aslam, who headed the Department of English at Kashmir University first and the Central University of Kashmir later, said it was unthinkable to separate technology from education in the contemporary world. The abundance of material available on the internet is simply inaccessible to students in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The administration's premise that the internet is not a fundamental right of a citizen of India holds no water," Aslam said. "The Supreme Court has, long ago, declared access to internet a fundamental right." In its 32-page response, of which The Wire has a copy, the Jammu and Kashmir administration has maintained that a "majority of students of class 1st to 12th are studying in 24,018 government schools as compared to 5,690 private schools. Further, majority of government school students do not have mobile/smart phones or computers to access the internet."

"It is submitted that restoration of 4G mobile data services will substantially increase the use of social media and other online platforms in uploading/downloading of videos and other propaganda material and their fast circulation, with resultant deterioration in law and order situation in Kashmir Valley. For any upload/download of a typically heavy data file, the present speed restrictions increase

the time taken or lead to failure....", the reply contends.

The reply also avers that the contentions of "alleged deprivation of access to education, health care facilities/updates" are incorrect as the administration of J&K is "taking all possible steps to ensure minimum impact of COVID19 is felt".

"Ministry of HRD Government of India has initiated some technology-based initiatives for e-learning and further proposal is being shared with it for delivering lessons on 16 DD Channels at national level," the reply added.

The reply stated that the right to accessing the internet was not a "fundamental" right.

Students' aspirations on hold The day Mehran's matriculation result was declared early this year, relatives and neighbours visited his house in droves, bringing bags full of sweets and almonds. In Kashmir, passing the matriculation examination is considered a major milestone in a student's life.

At an impressive Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA) of 9.8, Mehran was poised to enter his professional career in style. He studied physics, chemistry and mathematics. From being a fan of shows like Sony BBC Earth's Seven Worlds, One Planet, Masters Of Our Universe: Einstein and Hawking and Earth's Natural Wonders, he also uses his telescope to immerse himself in the mysteries of the universe.

Mehran wants to be an astronaut with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) as his first stopover in a career he has been dreaming about since his childhood. But despite his talent, Mehran's dreams face the first major roadblock: the internet. For example, it took him three hours to download the Class 11 syllabus which was uploaded on the Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education website. "I've had to grapple with a few kbps when my mind is thinking in terms of astronomical speeds," a visibly frustrated Mehran said. "What can you do when a file of a few MBs takes an eternity to download?"

On August 5, 2019, coincidentally his birthday, the government of India unilaterally scrapped the special status of the Kashmir region guaranteed under Article 370 and Article 35-A of the Indian constitution, annexing it with the dominion as a Union Territory. The clampdown That day, the authorities severed the internet connection, casting Kashmir into an information black hole and leaving tens and thousands of students in a lurch. In a run up to the move, hundreds of paramilitary personnel were rushed to the erstwhile state to quell any possible unrest. After a complete blackout for nearly six months since the revocation of the special status, authorities finally decided to restore the internet on January 25 – albeit with speeds downgraded to 2G. The

restoration of the internet, however, came with a serious rider. Citing misuse by miscreants for propagating false information, the authorities decided to blacklist all social media platforms permitting access to some 301 "white-listed" websites. The number was increased to 1,485 by February 15. To infiltrate the firewall, people started installing VPNs (virtual private networks) in order to access social media sites without being tracked from their original locations for fear of

reprisal from police. The police also quizzed several people – mostly students – on the use of VPNs while registering open FIRs under various sections of the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), Indian Penal Code and IT Act against "hundreds of social media abusers" in the Valley. On many occasions, army personnel intercepted students, asked them to hand over their mobile phones and if any VPNs were found installed, they were allegedly thrashed.

## BJP MLA says stop buying vegetables from Muslim sellers, defends remark

of discrimination and harassment after a global religious congregation in New Delhi in mid-March, held by Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic movement of preachers, turned into a hotspot of Covid-19 cases. "On April 18, I was distributing masks among people in Deoria when I came across general complaints from people who expressed fear that Tablighi Jamaatis are spreading the infection in Deoria. Many of them were worried that Muslim vendors are infecting vegetable with saliva. As a responsible MLA, I asked them not to take law in their hand, but simply stop buying vegetables from them. Tell me, what wrong have I done by saying such things," said the Barhaj MLA. Tiwari's remark drew sharp reaction from the opposition parties. UP Congress president Ajay Kumar Lallu blamed the legislator's party for spreading hatred even at the time of a pandemic. "At a time when the country and state are facing the coronavirus crisis, BJP leaders are busy fanning hatred. It's a shameful act which has exposed the real face of the BJP. The Tablighi Jamaatis who were under attack and blamed for spreading the coronavirus have set an example by donating their plasma to cure patients. I am confident that the countrymen will put up a united fight against Covid-19 by neglecting such comments," said the Congress leader.



# It is time to resume political activity

First, although the pandemic presents a unique political moment with enduring consequences for parties and leaders, it also is a fraught time for political mobilisation. National crises are usually conceived as opportunities for citizens to rally around the flag, perhaps even more so in India than in many other democracies. Therefore, it is not easy for the Opposition to critique the government's handling of the crisis. Second, the government is taking monumental, high-cost decisions with the objective of shielding citizens from the pandemic. But, citizens, the Opposition, and civil society struggle to hold it accountable. On March 24, India instituted one of the most stringent lockdowns in any country in the world. Was this a wise, far-sighted decision or a hasty overreaction? The counter-factuals are too complex to answer this question with precision. Thus, it is hard to pin the blame on the incumbent because the crisis feels unprecedented.

Third, the crisis reveals huge faultlines in India's political economy — poor capital-labour relations, weak protections of migrants and informal workers, neglect of public health systems, and grave disparities between the haves and the have-nots. And yet, given the scale of the mobilisation

and its expected duration, chances are that citizens will be gasping for air when the dust finally settles. At that point, there may be little appetite for translating the lessons of the crisis into actionable reform. The emotional and psychological bandwidth of 1.3 billion Indians will be stretched to its outermost limits.

Fourth, while the states are doing the bulk of the heavy lifting — albeit with significant variations — their efforts are likely to be overshadowed by the central government's unparalleled visibility. Of the scores of measures taken to curb the pandemic, it is state health workers, police officers, and administrators that are on the frontlines. In normal times, state-level differentiation might be possible. But the Centre's invocation of the Disaster Management Act (DMA) has shrunk available political space because it is the Centre that is issuing guidelines on the lockdown, testing, procurement and treatment infrastructure. States are cast as mere implementers of central edicts. Even a success story like Kerala found its attempts to widen the scope of permitted economic activities thwarted by New Delhi. Going forward, politics should not continue to operate in a state of suspended animation. After all,

other democracies have managed — however imperfectly — to balance the demands of democracy with the imperatives of crisis response. In the United States, there is a daily display of political wrangling between Washington and state capitals and in the ongoing presidential campaign. Closer to home, South Korea just held a presidential election — recording the highest turnout in three decades. Politics must resume its course in India as well. While open political contestation faces practical hurdles, some aspects of this crisis actually deserve to be politicised. Perversely, the effort to depoliticise the crisis is itself a form of politicisation.

First, this should not become a purely rally-round-the-flag crisis. The objectives are too ambiguous and trade-offs too complicated to justify such a framing. Although the Bharatiya Janata Party's dominance makes effective critiques of the Centre's decisions difficult, questions must be raised about alternative strategies and policy approaches. Second, even though accountability for outcomes is difficult, the government must be held responsible for its crisis modelling, mitigation efforts, and measurable outputs such as treatment infrastructure. Citizens deserve detailed, data-driven,

model-based explanations for key strategic choices, and regular updates on personal protective equipment procurement, hospital bed availability, intensive care unit capacity and supply of ventilators. Third, since the crisis has revealed huge social and economic fractures — from the issue of seasonal migrants to the urban poor — the challenge for politics is to keep these issues on the front-burner rather than waiting for the crisis to subside. Fourth, states must demand more space to chart their own paths. There is enormous subnational diversity in economic realities, health systems, and administrative capacity. Legally, the states have a case. The Constitution places public health in

the State List, while controlling the inter-state transmission of epidemics is in the Concurrent List. While the Centre has invoked the DMA, it is debatable whether the Centre can supersede the states in an epidemic, especially because the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, empowers the states to regulate activities to reduce virus transmission (and the Centre to regulate ports of entry). However, this space needs to be reclaimed — it will not be easily ceded. Crises are often moments when political fortunes are made or unmade. Pressing the pause button on politics for too long would be both unwise and unhealthy for the long-term prognosis of Indian democracy.

## '99 percent' sure Kim Jong Un is dead, says North Korean defector-turned-lawmaker

(News Agencies) New York: Governments around the world are attempting to solve the mystery of the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un's whereabouts. A North Korean defector now serving as a lawmaker in the South claimed Friday that he is "99 percent" certain Kim Jong Un is dead. Ji Seong-ho made the comment without citing his source, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. Rumors have swirled in recent weeks over Kim's health after the dictator was last spotted in public April 11. "I've wondered how long he could have endured after cardiovascular surgery. I've been informed that Kim died last weekend," Ji told Yonhap. "It is not 100 percent certain, but I can say the possibility is 99 percent," he added, speculating that North Korea, which "is believed to be grappling with a complicated succession issue," may officially announce the news this weekend. But recent satellite photos indicate Kim Jong Un might actually be hunkering down at a luxury coastal resort on the Hermit Kingdom's northeast coast. A key aide to the president of South Korea also insisted on Sunday that Kim, who is believed to be 36, was "alive and well."

## BEWARE OF SCAMS AND FRAUD SCHEMES

The Office of Inspector General recognizes that we are facing unprecedented times and is alerting the public about potential fraud schemes related to economic stimulus programs offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration in response to the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19). The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), the largest financial assistance bill to date, includes provisions to help small businesses. Fraudsters have already begun targeting small business owners during these economically difficult times. Be on the lookout for grant fraud, loan fraud, and phishing.



### Grants

- SBA **does not** initiate contact on either 7a or Disaster loans or grants. If you are proactively contacted by someone claiming to be from the SBA, suspect fraud.



### Loans

- If you are contacted by someone promising to get approval of an SBA loan, but requires any payment up front or offers a high interest bridge loan in the interim, suspect fraud.
- SBA limits the fees a broker can charge a borrower to 3% for loans \$50,000 or less and 2% for loans \$50,000 to \$1,000,000 with an additional ¼% on amounts over \$1,000,000. Any attempt to charge more than these fees is inappropriate.
- If you have a question about getting a SBA disaster loan, call 800-659-2955 or send an email to [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov).
- If you have questions about other SBA lending products, call SBA's Answer Desk at 800-827-5722 or send an email to [answerdesk@sba.gov](mailto:answerdesk@sba.gov).



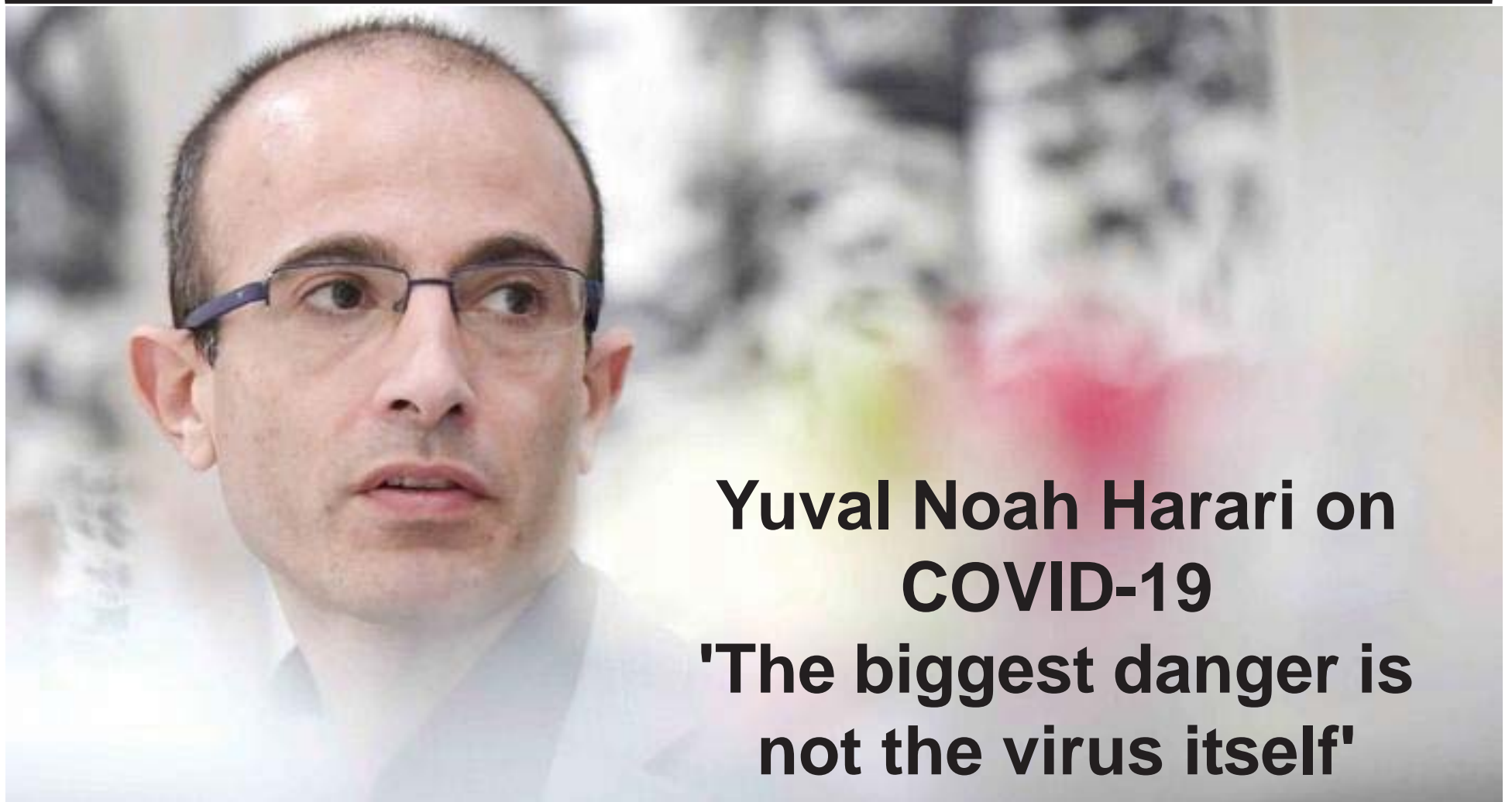
### Phishing

- Look out for phishing attacks/scams utilizing the SBA logo. These may be attempts to obtain your personally identifiable information (PII), to obtain personal banking access, or to install ransomware/malware on your computer.
- If you are in the process of applying for an SBA loan and receive email correspondence asking for PII, ensure that the referenced application number is consistent with the actual application number.
- Any email communication from SBA will come from accounts ending with [sba.gov](mailto:sba.gov).
- The presence of an SBA logo on a webpage **does not** guaranty the information is accurate or endorsed by SBA. Please cross-reference any information you receive with information available at [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).

Report any suspected fraud to OIG's Hotline at 800-767-0385 or online at, <https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/oversight-advocacy/office-inspector-general/office-inspector-general-hotline>.







## Yuval Noah Harari on COVID-19

### 'The biggest danger is not the virus itself'

**A crisis can be a turning point for a society. Which way will we go now Professor Yuval Noah Harari, whose company donated \$1 million to WHO, explains how the decisions we make today on COVID-19 will change our future.**

Yuval Noah Harari: I think the biggest danger is not the virus itself. Humanity has all the scientific knowledge and technological tools to overcome the virus. The really big problem is our own inner demons, our own hatred, greed and ignorance. I'm afraid that people are reacting to this crisis not with global solidarity, but with hatred, blaming other countries, blaming ethnic and religious minorities.

But I hope that we will be able to develop our compassion, and not our hatred, to react with global solidarity, which will develop our generosity to help people in need. And that we develop our ability to discern the truth and not believe all these conspiracy theories. If we do that, I have no doubt that we can easily overcome this crisis.

We face, as you've said, the choice between totalitarian surveillance and citizen empowerment. If we're not careful, the epidemic might mark a watershed in the history of surveillance. But how can I be careful with something which is out of my control?

It's not completely out of your control, at least in a democracy. You vote for particular politicians and parties who make the policies. So you have some control over the political system. Even if there were no elections now, politicians are still responsive to public pressure. If the public is terrified of the epidemic and wants a strong leader to take over, then

this makes it far easier for a dictator to do exactly that, to take over. If, on the other hand, you have pushback from the public when a politician goes too far, then that can stop the most dangerous developments from happening. First, you have past experience. If you have politicians who have been lying to you for a couple of years, then you have less reason to trust them in this emergency. Second, you can ask questions about the theories that people are telling you. If somebody comes up with some conspiracy theory about the origin and spread of the coronavirus, ask this person to explain to you what a virus is and how it causes disease. If the person has no clue, which means they have no basic scientific knowledge, then don't believe anything else this person is telling you about the coronavirus epidemic. You don't need a PhD in Biology. But you do need some basic scientific understanding of all these things. In recent years, we have seen various populist politicians attacking science, saying that scientists are some remote elite disconnected from the people, saying that things like climate change are just a hoax, you shouldn't believe them. But in this moment of crisis all over the world, we see that people do trust science more than anything else. I hope we remember this not only during this crisis, but also once the crisis is over. That we take

care to give students in school a good scientific education about what viruses, and the theory of evolution, are. And also, that when scientists warn us about other things besides epidemics, like about climate change and ecological collapse, we will take their warnings with the same seriousness that we now take what they say about the coronavirus epidemic.

Many countries are implementing digital surveillance mechanisms in order to prevent the virus from spreading. How can these mechanisms be controlled?

Whenever you increase surveillance of the citizens, it should always go hand-in-hand with increased surveillance of the government. In this crisis, governments are spending money like water. In the US, 2 trillion dollars. In Germany, hundreds of billions of euros, and so forth. As a citizen, I want to know who is making the decisions and where the money goes. Is the money being used to bail out big corporations who were in trouble even before the epidemic because of the wrong decisions of their managers? Or is the money being used to help small businesses, restaurants and shops and things like that? If a government is so eager to have more surveillance, the surveillance should go both ways. And if the government says, hey, it's too complicated, we can't just open all the financial transactions,

then you say: "No it's not too complicated. The same way you can create a huge surveillance system to see where I go every day, it should be as easy to create a system that shows what you are doing with my tax money." That works by distributing the power and not letting it accumulate in one person or one authority?

Exactly. One idea people are experimenting with is if you want to alert people who have been near a coronavirus patient. There are two ways to do it: One way is to have a central authority which gathers information on everybody, and then discovers that you have been near somebody who has COVID-19 and alerts you. Another method is for phones to directly communicate, one with the other, without any central authority that gathers all the information. If I pass near somebody who has COVID-19 the two phones, his or her phone and my phone, just talk with each other and I get the alert. But no central authority is gathering all this information and following everybody. Possible surveillance systems for the current crisis go one step further, to what you would call under-the-skin-surveillance. So the skin, as the untouchable surface of our bodies, is cracking. How can we control that?

We should be very, very careful about it. Over-the-skin-surveillance is monitoring what you do in the outside world, where you go, whom you meet, what you watch on TV or which websites you visit online. It doesn't go into your body. Under-the-skin-surveillance is monitoring what's happening inside your body. It starts with

things like your temperature, but then it can go to your blood pressure, to your heart rate, to your brain activity. And once you do that, you can know far, far more about people than ever before.

You can create a totalitarian regime that never existed before. If you know what I'm reading or what I watch on television, it gives you some idea about my artistic tastes, my political views, my personality. But it's still limited. Now think that you can actually monitor my body temperature or my blood pressure and my heart rate as I read the article or as I watch the program online or on television. Then you can know what I feel every moment. This could easily lead to the creation of dystopian totalitarian regimes.

It's not inevitable. We can prevent it from happening. But to prevent it from happening, we first of all have to realize the danger, and secondly, be careful about what we allow in this emergency to happen. Does this crisis make you readjust your image of humans in the 21st century? We don't know, because it depends on the decisions we make now. The danger of a useless class is actually increasing dramatically because of the current economic crisis. We now see an increase in automatization, that robots and computers replace people in more and more jobs in this crisis, because people are locked down in their houses, and people can get infected, but robots can't. We might see that countries might decide to return certain industries back home instead of relying on factories elsewhere.



# Coronavirus plastic waste polluting the environment

**Single-use masks, gloves and bottles of sanitizer shielding us from the spread of COVID-19 are ending up on the streets, in the seas and among wildlife.**

Over a month into the lockdown and the usually bustling streets of Kalamata, a Greek city southwest of Athens traditionally known for its olives, are largely empty.

As in the rest of Greece, residents of the coastal city are allowed out only in strict circumstances, including for short exercise and grocery shopping. But discarded gloves, wipes and bottles of sanitizer are strewn across parks, sidewalks and roads, as people try to protect themselves and others from infection.

The problem isn't confined to the small Greek city. Similar waste is causing problems in bigger metropolises such as New York and London.

And it has even hit the uninhabited Soko Islands. A few nautical miles from Hong Kong, Gary Stokes from the conservation group OceansAsia found some 100 masks washed up over the course of three visits to the beach.

"We hadn't noticed this many masks before in such a remote location," said Stokes, who suspects they came from nearby China or Hong Kong. "When we found them, it only had been six to eight weeks since people had started using these masks." Gloves, masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) are critical for those fighting the pandemic but are also widely used by the public. Still, because they're not

always disposed of properly, environmentalists fear negative consequences for wildlife and the fight against plastic pollution.

"If they're thrown on the streets, when it rains the gloves and masks will eventually end up in the sea," said Anastasia Miliou, a marine biologist and research director with the Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation based in Greece.

And because waste management problems are systemic in Greece, even gloves and face masks that are put in the trash could ultimately end up in nature. Even in Hong Kong, where littering is rare, Stokes said there are dozens of other ways masks can reach the sea.

"People are walking, they pull their wallets out and from their pockets a mask accidentally falls," he explained, adding that even if they are put in the garbage, they are light enough to blow away. And once they get into the water, they pose a threat to marine life.

"[In Hong Kong waters,] we've got pink dolphins and green turtles coming through this place," said Stokes. "A recently published study showed that when plastic is left in the water long enough and algae and bacteria grow on it, it actually smells like food to turtles." PPE items not left to float about in the environment and the sea are not necessarily easy to

deal with either, explained Joan Marc Simon, executive director of Zero Waste Europe, a Brussels-based NGO.

He points to the European recycling scheme under which retailers and producers pay for the collection and treatment of plastic packaging. As gloves aren't considered packaging, they cannot be put into household recycling bins, explained Simon. Even gloves made of latex rubber, a natural product, aren't always an eco-friendly choice, Simon added. It depends on the chemical additives used to produce them, he said, some of which can harm the environment when they decompose. While it's understandable that sustainability practices backtrack in a crisis, said Richard Thompson, professor and director of the Marine Institute at the University of Plymouth, tackling the plastic waste crisis means not losing sight of the whole life cycle of a product — from design until end of life.

"This should be the same thing whether it's a bottle of lemonade or a mask that's used in a hospital," said Thompson. "Of course, it doesn't help that we're in this time of crisis, particularly when everybody is wanting a mask."

Still, the EU Commission spokesperson for environmental matters,

Vivian Loonela, recently told media outlet EurActiv it's too early to assess the impact of the coronavirus on the overall amount of plastic packaging waste generated in 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) told DW that regular hand-washing offers more protection against catching COVID-19 than wearing rubber gloves while out in public areas, while the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that for the public, washable cloth masks will offer the necessary protection. And while PPE used in medical facilities is largely non-recyclable or non-reusable, sustainable innovations are emerging. In the US, the car manufacturer Ford is producing reusable gowns from air bag materials that can be washed up to 50 times, while the University of Nebraska is also testing to see whether ultraviolet light will decontaminate and prolong the life of medical masks, and therefore, reduce waste. Simon from Zero Waste Europe believes countries shouldn't have to choose between protecting the environment and protecting public health.

"That's currently what's happening," said Simon. "In the future we need to make sure we're ready for pandemics like this and that we're ready to deal with them in an environmental way; it doesn't have to be one at the expense of the other."







## After the Pandemic, Will We Rethink How We Plan Our Cities?

**The COVID-19 pandemic is not a crisis of the city, but the crisis of a certain kind of city.**

Between 1896 and 1899, a deadly bubonic plague swept through the city of Bombay. The “native population,” wrote a British historian, “succumbed to a pestilence, as grievous as that which swept through Florence in 1348 or through old London in the time of Defoe.” It slayed “people like sheep” – 44,984 officially – and drove away more than half a million, in panic.

The most devastated were poorer neighbourhoods, and most who fled were the among the city’s working classes. The plague threatened the health and the business interests of the commercial and industrial elite, forcing them to see the connection between both disease and insanitation, and social policy and economic stability.

For the mill-owners, the epidemic was a threat to an elaborate system of labour discipline and control. Over the next two decades, the Bombay Mill Owners Association (BMOA) debated the question of working class housing in the city: “bad housing, and very expensive housing” the president of the Association explained “is the root cause of the migratory habits of the Bombay mill operatives.” Besides, “better housing will mean better health for the workers.” With government intervention, the city could produce housing “in a cheerful environment and sanitary surroundings” that will help in “abolishing the slums of Bombay.”

More than 100 years later, as the city grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic and a government lockdown, the billionaire Ratan Tata, in an online panel discussion organised by CorpGini – “a community of innovative corporates” – worried about the “miserable standard of living in slums with lack of fresh air, hygiene, open space, and close

proximity.” Mumbai’s “redevelopment policies should be revisited to provide a better quality of life to the poor” he urged, and “acceptable standards in terms of quality of life” must be re-examined.

As we welcome these fine thoughts, the sense of déjà vu is unmistakable. The last time the city’s rich and mighty worried about working-class housing was in early 1900s, when “business as usual” was disrupted by the plague. COVID-19 has got them talking once again about putting public health above private profit. The “rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations” – to quote Winston Churchill – have begun worrying about their well-being.

### **Social distancing in cities?**

COVID-19 has unleashed a flood of articles across the world about city planning after the pandemic. Many have been explicitly anti-urban, since living in cities seems to be the anti-thesis of ‘social distancing’. In Mumbai, we are warned about the city’s density – 31,700 persons per square km – as being one of the highest in the world. Some have asked for a “phase-wise decongestion” of Mumbai, which, unless specified how, can only read as: “get the poor out as quickly as possible.” Dharavi, predictably, is in the firing line. “What should we do about Dharavi?” seems to be the question that has prevented ‘experts’ of all stripes from sleeping soundly during the lockdown. It is likely – judging by these concerns – that urban life after COVID-19 may well be about an acceleration of current trends: dispossession and segregation, unemployment and insecurity, intrusive personal surveillance, aggressive policing of physical and social boundaries, and gated enclaves for the rich to ‘socially distance’ themselves

from the ‘dangers’ of urban life. Or, perhaps, COVID-19 may teach different lessons, some good ones.

### **The origins of planning in Bombay**

Urban planning in Bombay began after the plague in the late 1890s. The “horrors of the plague,” historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar wrote, “prompted the most sustained period of state intervention in the affairs of the city.” The conditions of insanitation and overcrowding – that the colonial state neglected and justified as an outcome of ‘dirty native habits’ – could no longer be ignored. In 1898, the Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT) was set up, with the dual mandate of securing the future of commerce and industry, and providing sanitary accommodations for the poor and working classes. The BIT went after Bombay’s landlord-dominated Municipal Corporation and the city’s property owners. A prominent British bureaucrat grumbled that “insanitary rooms” were the result of overbuilding by landlords, who cared for little other than to “reap a rich harvest from [their] property” and have become “speculators in human misery.”

The answer to insanitation was light and air: “nature’s two great healing elements which everyone might have gratis ad libitum if public opinion insisted on every dwelling room having sufficient open space about it.” The Chairman of the BIT demanded a “stiffening” of the city’s building by-laws (tenement densities, set back rules, plot coverage, height restrictions). He called for a new uniform standard that would permit adequate lighting and ventilation in all rooms of every building. Landlords kicked and screamed, accusing the BIT of wanting to “convert the city into a garden city at one stroke.” So as a compromise, it was decided only new developments in the

city will follow the BIT’s stringent regulations.

By the 1910s, the memory of the plague began to fade in the minds of Bombay’s ruling elite. The urgency of the BIT’s housing efforts declined. For the working classes, the housing crisis would persist and even get worse. In quantitative terms, the BIT’s contribution to the working class housing question was negative: it pulled down more houses than it built. It managed to do more in terms of land reclamation, street improvements and suburban developments than in removing urban overcrowding. Yet, the public health regulations that BIT introduced remained enshrined in Mumbai’s planning system till the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Market-oriented planning**

From then onwards, the goals of planning began shifting. The idea took hold that markets should be allowed to determine every aspect of social life. Public utilities began to be privatised. Government regulations for public health, environment, labour – characterised as barriers to growth and prosperity – were dismantled. Public health and sanitation, that provided the justification for public intervention in the pre-liberalisation era, began to be seen as constraints on market activity.

As the private sector was handed over the responsibility of implementing plans and producing housing for the poor, public health regulations came under persistent attack. To ‘incentivise’ the private sector and to make urban development projects ‘viable,’ they were relaxed almost into non-existence. Once a regulator, the state was now a development enabler and promoter.



# Coronavirus and Hunger The bigger killer?

The repercussions of Covid-19 could yet be more deadly than the virus itself. We must act now to save lives



number of those facing acute hunger, pushing an additional 130 million people to the brink of starvation by the end of the year. In all, shortages are likely to affect a fifth of the world's population. Many of them live in overcrowded conditions, with poor sanitation, and a considerable number have pre-existing health problems such as HIV or TB; malnutrition will make them more vulnerable to Covid-19 and other threats. Yet the worst is not inevitable. The food crisis is currently one of distribution and affordability, though in the longer term agriculture is likely to suffer, particularly in places where it is labour intensive. Developing countries cannot afford the support packages adopted elsewhere, and no single nation can solve supply issues. International solutions are

required; UN organisations are uniquely placed to handle border closures, restrictions and transport disruption given their regional presences, contacts and diplomacy. In the long run, warn economists and global health experts, developing countries will need trillions of dollars to recover. The UN is seeking just \$2bn for its emergency appeal; yet as of last week, wealthier countries had pledged only a quarter of that. They must deliver on those promises now, and give more. Particularly essential within that is the \$350m logistics plan, which would allow goods and relief workers to reach crisis-hit areas. Persuading governments to allow essential agricultural and food workers to move within and between countries will be crucial. The UN has warned that trying to protect

domestic supplies through tariffs and export bans will create extreme volatility. Finally, the G20 and International Monetary Fund agreements to suspend debt are a step forward, but insufficient; private creditors too must act. All this is a matter of common decency, but also of self-interest. In 2007-08 we saw how rising food prices can destabilise societies, producing repercussions felt much more widely. In several countries, the spectre of unrest is already emerging. Coronavirus is the latest and perhaps most immediate demonstration of what the climate crisis and wars in Syria and elsewhere should already have told us: that other people's suffering will not be contained. It is our business, too.

The Guardian

Famine is riding alongside pestilence, on the tail of war. Though coronavirus leaves no part of the world untouched, its impact will be harshest in places that were already suffering. Yet the problems it brings with it may prove more deadly than Covid-19 itself. Even in the richest countries, coronavirus has left families in hunger; for the poorest, it could mean starvation. The head of the World Food Programme warns that we are now on the brink of a hunger pandemic, with the prospect of multiple famines "of biblical proportions" within a few months, across three dozen countries. Households already struggling to

survive have lost the work that fed them. Remittances sent home by family members abroad are predicted to fall by around a fifth due to Covid-19. Tourism has vanished. Children are missing the nutritious school meals they depend upon. Quarantine regulations and transport issues are disrupting food supply chains. Covid-19 alone has not created this crisis. Rather, it is one more devastating blow, complicating and deepening the troubles of countries already struggling with the impact of war, global heating, other health crises, and specific threats such as the locust infestations plaguing east Africa. It could almost double the

## Why are Guatemalans seeking asylum? US policy is to blame



A grainy cellphone image from a small indigenous Guatemalan village shows seven-year-old Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin, wearing a blue blouse and jeans and looking diffidently into the camera with her arms hanging at her sides. Not long after the photo was taken, she accompanied her father on the over 2,000-mile journey to try and reach the US. She died while in US border patrol custody after arriving at a New Mexico port of entry to claim asylum. Traveling with a father, like Jakelin was, accounted for the main reasons small children were regularly separated under Barack Obama (the other reason being the mass incarceration program Operation Streamline), though Donald Trump outmatched his predecessor in sheer scale if

not in practice. The father and daughter fled their small village in Alta Verapaz, one of the areas targeted for annihilation during two successive, US-backed regimes over the Carter-Reagan years, atrocities that a 1999 UN truth commission deemed "acts of genocide" perpetrated against indigenous Mayan ethnic groups that included Jakelin's Q'eqchi' people. Of the 200,000 people killed, eight out of 10 were indigenous. The targeted scale of death, contrasted by the lack of global action and public outcry, led a group of international lawyers to call the period a "silent holocaust". The term "holocaust" isn't exaggerated. Just over 100 miles from Jakelin's village, so many bodies were piling up that a Guatemalan military base in Huehuetenango (one of those that proliferated under Kennedy-era military funding programs)

operated a crematorium to incinerate the bodies of "the disappeared". Guatemala's unique national criminal trials in recent years, prosecuting lower soldiers, senior officers and heads of state, have implicated US national security doctrine, first instituted by Kennedy under the guise of fighting communism. US military and embassy officials over the years admitted to, even took credit for, the formation of informal death squads to assist military and security forces in the butchery.

An estimated 10,000 people alone were killed in the first three months after a March 1982 military coup by President Reagan's favorite "man of great personal integrity", General Efraín Ríos Montt, trained at Fort Bragg, whose forces averaged 19 massacres per month. Whole villages (over 400 were destroyed) were literally burned off the face of their earth and their inhabitants killed, often gruesomely.

When people started fleeing the nightmare in record numbers (also from US-backed forces in El Salvador), the Reagan administration stepped up border security with methods first tried and tested in Guatemala's US counterinsurgency "laboratory". Reagan denied asylum claims wholesale to people like Jakelin and her father by referring to them as economic migrants

unworthy of asylum, instead of taking responsibility for creating the conditions of political economy that encompass both migrants and refugees. By 1984 a mere 0.79% of Guatemalan asylum applicants had their requests grants and, by the next year, Reagan was deporting 1,000 Central Americans per month back to the death squads. Then, as today, US civil society sanctuary efforts began.

Jakelin's mother recalls her daughter's dream to send money home from the US, a dream she shared with other members of Guatemalan civil society who implored President Clinton in 1999 to relax immigration controls, which skyrocketed under his watch, so that these valuable remittances could continue. Clinton was in Guatemala City the day the UN released its report on Guatemala. Looking genocide survivors in the face, he admitted the decades of decisive US military assistance "was wrong" but flatly rejected their pleas for immigration reform, because, he said, "we must enforce our laws". Other forms of denial run deep. Obama's former UN ambassador, Samantha Power, wrote an authoritative study on genocide, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, whose index fails to even list "Guatemala". US-

backed torture of Guatemala traces back to the Franklin D Roosevelt years and prior, but today conditions have only grown worse.

Every time the media fail to report this historical wreckage from which Jakelin's people are still fleeing across the US-Mexico border; every time US officials fail to treat these survivors with compassion – indeed massive financial reparations would be more appropriate – contributes to an active case of genocide denial. There's a scene in Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* where the protagonist Oskar Schindler watches, on horseback from the safety of a distant bluff, the Nazi liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. Nazi soldiers are killing people indiscriminately, yet Schindler can't take his eyes off a little girl in a red coat, about the same age as Jakelin, who scuttles, unscathed, along the blood-soaked cobblestones – later to be seen in a pile of bodies. In a 2017 HBO documentary, Spielberg reflects that the red-coated little girl of Jakelin's age "was less about what turned" Schindler's sympathy and "more that the world turned a blind eye on the holocaust and the industrial process of wholesale murder".

(The Guardian)



# Mehul Choksi Tops RBI List Of Defaulters Who Owe Nearly Rs 70,000 Crore

In response to a RTI query, the RBI released the names of top 50 with the highest amount of loans written off.



(News Agencies) New Delhi: Business tycoons Mehul Choksi, the Jhunjhunwala brothers, and Vijay Mallya are among the prominent individuals linked to companies named by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a list of the top 50 wilful defaulters ac-

have been written off till September 30, 2019.

A "write-off" is an accounting term used to denote assets whose value becomes zero. Written-off loans refer to debt that has been factored as a loss even though the lender may continue attempts to recover it.

Fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi's company Gitanjali Gems tops the list of these defaulters with Rs 5,492 crore. Choksi's other firms Gili India and Nakshatra Brands also have loans of Rs 1,447 and Rs 1,109 crore respectively written off.

He is followed by REI Agro with Rs 4,314 crore and Winsome Diamonds with Rs 4,076 crore. Rotomac Global Private Limited owes Rs 2,850 crore which have been written off followed by Ku-

dos Chemie Ltd with Rs 2,326 crore, Ruchi Soya Industries Limited, now owned by Yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali, with Rs 2,212 crore and Zoom Developers Pvt Ltd with Rs 2,012 crore. Vijay Mallya's Kingfisher Airlines figures in the list at number 9, with outstanding of Rs 1,943 crore which have been written off by the banks.

Forever Precious Jewellery and Diamonds Private Limited has loans of Rs 1,962 crore written off while Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited have Rs 1,915 crore written off loans. REI Agro of Jhunjhunwala brothers is already being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate or ED. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and ED are also probing alleged frauds by

the owners of Winsome Diamonds. Vikram Kothari's Rotomac is the fourth in the list. He and his son Rahul Kothari were arrested by the CBI in 2018. The list was cited by the Congress on Tuesday to attack the government. Party leader Rahul Gandhi accused the government of "hiding" the names because they included "friends" of the ruling BJP. "I asked a simple question in parliament - tell me the names of 50 biggest bank scammers. Finance Minister refused to reply. Now RBI has put names of Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and other BJP friends in the list. This is why they hid the truth from parliament," Mr Gandhi tweeted in Hindi along with a video.

## Yes Bank Fraud Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhwan sent to CBI custody till May 4

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) produced Dheeraj and Kapil Wadhawan of Diwan Housing Finance Corporation Limited (DHFL) group before a special CBI court on Monday. Both the brothers were remanded to CBI custody till April 29. The Wadhawan's were arrested on Sunday afternoon from their bungalow at Mahabaleshwar in Satara for their alleged involvement in the Yes Bank fraud.

According to the CBI FIR, between April and June 2018, Yes Bank invested ₹3,700 crores in short-term debentures of Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL). In return, the Wadhawans allegedly "paid a kickback of ₹600 crores" to Kapoor and family members in the form of loan to DoIT Urban Ventures (India) Pvt Ltd. The duo, along with 23 other family members, was under home quarantine for 14 days since April 23, a senior official of the agency said.

The CBI had obtained an arrest warrant against the two brothers after the family was caught holidaying in Mahabaleshwar. On April 18, the brothers had obtained a stay on the execution of an arrest warrant after their lawyer pleaded that the two should not be arrested amidst the coronavirus pandemic. The special court had granted them relief and stayed the warrant. The court order protected the two from arrest till May 5. However, the CBI, which was not heard while staying the warrant, approached the special court to lift the stay. Wadhwan's interim relief was cancelled on Saturday (April 26) and a CBI team from Mumbai reached Satara on Saturday afternoon to arrest the two brothers, a senior officer of the agency said.

## Moody's slashes India growth forecast to 0.2 pc for 2020

Moody's said the economic costs of coronavirus crisis amid the near shutdown of the global economy are accumulating rapidly.

(News Agencies) Moody's Investors Service on Tuesday slashed India growth forecast for calendar year 2020 to 0.2 per cent, from 2.5 per cent projected in March. For 2021, Moody's expects India's growth to rebound to 6.2 per cent. In its report titled - Global Macro Outlook 2020-21 (April 2020 update), Moody's has lowered G-20 advanced economies as a group to contract by 5.8 per cent in 2020. Moody's said the economic costs of coronavirus crisis amid the near shutdown of the global economy are accumulating rapidly. China's economy is forecast to grow by 1 per cent in 2020. "India extended a nationwide lockdown to 40 days from 21 days, but relaxed restrictions in rural areas to facilitate agricultural harvesting in the second half of April. The country has determined that many of these areas are free of the



virus. India also plans a phased opening carry out identification and contract tracing of different regions while continuing to ing," Moody's said.

## Fitch warns India against further deterioration in fiscal outlook

(News Agencies) India's sovereign rating could come under pressure if its fiscal outlook deteriorates further as the government tries to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis, rating agency Fitch said on Tuesday. Fitch currently rates India at BBB-, with a stable outlook, but any downgrade would consign its sovereign debt to junk bond territory.

The rating agency noted that India is likely to post dismal economic growth this year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and the government has limited room to provide fiscal stimulus. "The government may tighten fiscal policy again once the pandemic is under con-

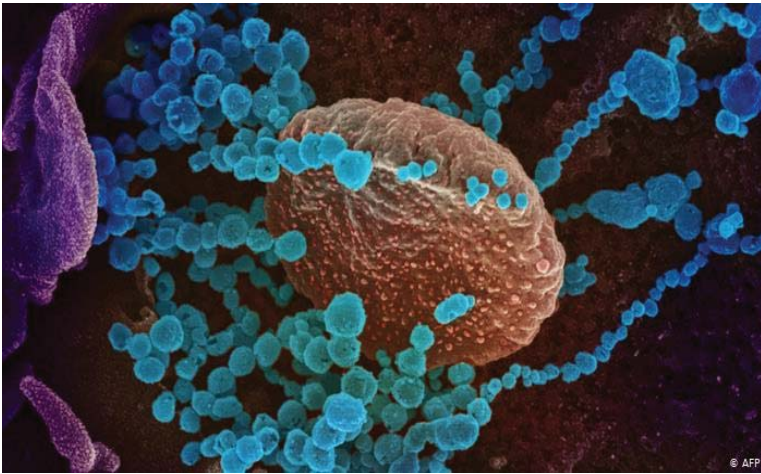
control, but India's record of meeting fiscal targets and implementing fiscal rules has been mixed in recent years, which will colour our assessment of any official commitment to tighten fiscal policy over the medium term," Fitch warned. Fitch did not provide an estimate for fiscal deficit but Morgan Stanley in a note last week said the central government deficit could rise to 6.2% of GDP in 2020/21 versus the budgeted target of 3.5% based on its growth projection of 0.5% for FY21. Fitch also cut the country's GDP growth forecast for fiscal year ending March 2021 to 0.8%, sharply down from its previous forecast of 5.6% before the coronavirus outbreak.





# COVID-19: Nanomachines to be deployed to fight next viral pandemic

Japanese researchers have had success with miniscule robots that are small enough to get inside and neutralize a cancer cell — and they want their creations to be ready to deal with future outbreaks of lethal viruses.



(News Agencies) The fight against the world's next pandemic is likely to be carried out by thousands of nanoscale robots of synthetic polymers, proteins, genetic materials and organic compounds. They could swarm through a human body,

identifying, diagnosing and then infiltrating virus particles to destroy them from the inside, while others "train" immune cells to attack viral particles. If the idea of man-made creations traveling through a body to carry out medical procedures sounds like the

plot of a 1960s science fiction movie, Kazunori Kataoka would agree. He smiles when the idea is put to him. Clearly he has heard it before. He has, however, already demonstrated some positive results in the treatment of cancers. The global coronavirus pandemic has broken marginally too soon for Kataoka and his colleagues at Japan's Innovation Centre of NanoMedicine (iCONM), in Kawasaki City, just south of Tokyo, but they know that sooner or later the world will once again face a previously unknown virus that has even higher infectivity and higher mortality rates. And they are stepping up efforts to combat this new menace. "We have been working on the concept of the 'in-body

hospital' for nine years, with the functions required to carry out internal medical procedures built into a nanomachine," he told DW.

"Numerous devices would circulate autonomously in the body to detect anomalies, provide a diagnosis and then carry out the necessary treatment," he said. The scales at which the iCONM researchers are working are difficult to comprehend. The devices that will be administered to human patients are less than 100 nanometers across, making them around one ten-thousandth the thickness of a sheet of paper. The spherical devices are functional molecules that self-assemble, are propelled by light or heat from the body and can carry out a range of tasks. While some will infiltrate diseased cells and

release medicines to neutralize them from the inside, others will gather chemical and clinical information before returning through the body to an implanted chip, where the data will be transmitted to doctors outside the body for further analysis. Each of the micelles — colloidal, nanoscale spheres formed through the self-assembly of polymers in an aqueous solution — is encapsulated by a hydrophilic shell to make it "stealthy" and ensure that the body's immune system does not reject it. Until now, much of the research has focused on the treatment of cancers, which has been the leading cause of deaths in Japan since 1981. This is partly due to the ageing of Japan's population, with most cancers occurring in people aged 50 or over.

## Eleven poisoned vultures cured and released into the wild in Assam

**Nineteen vultures belonging to two different species had died at Sibsagar district on April 21 after they consumed meat of a poisoned calf's carcass.**

(News Agencies) Veterinarians in Assam have cured 11 vultures who were poisoned after eating a contaminated carcass and released them in the wild on Monday. Nineteen vultures belonging to two different species had died at Sibsagar district on April 21 after they consumed meat of a poisoned calf's carcass at Lepaigaon Pathar in Assam.



"Seventeen of the dead vultures were Slender Billed while two others were White Backed. Preliminary investigation suggests it could be a case of secondary poisoning," said Jayashree Naiding, divisional forest officer, Sibsagar. "The primary target of the poisoning could be some other species, maybe stray dogs or wolves. But the vultures fed on the poisoned carcass and it resulted in the deaths," she added. Thirteen other vultures were res-

cued from the area and sent to the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) near Kaziranga National Park for treatment and rehabilitation. Two of the surviving vultures, one Slender Billed and another White Backed, died during treatment. But vets at CWRC were able to treat the others - 7 Himalayan Griffons, 3 Slender Billed and 1 White Backed. "Secondary poisoning led to vulture deaths and remains a very critical issue. We

are losing this threatened and critically endangered species, also known as nature's cleaners," said Samshul Ali, a veterinarian with Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) working at CWRC. "We tried our level best to stabilize the two seriously ill birds, but they succumbed to death in the early hours of Friday," he added. The cured vultures were released by a WTI and CWRC team in presence of forest officials and conservationists. Last year in March, a similar incident took place in Sibsagar district wherein 39 vultures died after consuming poisoned meat at Panidihing. The CWRC team was able to rescue 30 vultures from that incident and release them to the wild. In April 2018, the team had rescued and released 10 poisoned vultures into the wild.

## Covid-19 lockdown: Pollution in Ganga declines as factories in UP, Uttarakhand remain shut

(News Agencies) Authorities in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have said the quality of water in the Ganga has improved during the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown, with samples collected by a research facility in Varanasi recording a nearly 30% decrease in pollution levels.

A study of Ganga water samples collected on March 24, before the lockdown was imposed, and those collected on April 20 showed pollution had decreased by 25% to 30%, said BD Tripathi, chairman of the Mahamana Malviya Research Centre for Ganga, River Development and Water Re-

source Management at Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

Composite samples of the river water were collected from five locations — Shooltankeshwar Ghat, Samne Ghat, Asi Ghat, Dashashwamedh Ghat and Raj Ghat — on the two dates, he said. He explained that the term composite samples means an average of five samples were collected from different spots of every site to ensure accurate results. "We tested biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and the dissolved oxygen (DO) level in the samples. We found the concentration of

DO increased by 20% to 30% and the concentration of BOD decreased by 35% to 40%. In total, the Ganga pollution load has decreased by 25% to 30%," Tripathi said. "There has been a very positive effect on the Ganga and the river shows it can rejuvenate itself," he added. Tripathi attributed the decrease in pollution to many reasons, including a decrease of around 40% in the number of bodies cremated at Manikarnika Ghat and Harishchandra Ghat, and a check on immersion of remains of cremated bodies in the river.

## Unusually cool and wet April takes weather office by surprise

(News Agencies) It is the end of April but it is unusually pleasant in Delhi. The maximum temperature has touched 40 degrees C here only once compared to eight days by this time last year. Even in other parts of the country, maximum temperatures are mostly below normal or normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). No heat waves have been recorded so far except in isolated pockets of Gujarat and Marathwada (and only for a day in both), which is unusual for this time of the year. IMD scientists are also surprised by intermittent wet spells that have kept maximum temperatures down when the rest of the world is recording above normal temperatures. In northwest India, this pattern is linked to back-to-back active western disturbances (WDs), which are not supposed to be around in April. By this time, these disturbances which start as low-pressure systems in the Mediterranean weaken and move to northern latitudes. Scientists said such changes may be due to weather anomalies in Europe. They could also be linked to favourable sea temperatures over the Pacific. The WDs brought a lot of rain to northwest India; there is also moisture incursion in east and northeast India from the Bay of Bengal, which has been bringing good rains in the pre-monsoon season. According to IMD's rainfall data, between March 1 and April 26, 13 states have recorded "large excess" of rains (60% above normal). "Our models show that wind patterns will not support the development of heat waves till the end of the first week of May.



# Should YOU spend £190 on an immunity test?

Some doctors are charging a high price to find out if you've had Covid-19



(News Agencies) Who will be struck down by Covid-19 and who has already had it are questions that are key to ending the lockdown that began five weeks ago. And central to this is testing. The Government promised to provide 100,000 tests a day by the end of this week — using a swab test — those currently thought to have the infection. The idea was to focus

on ten million key workers — bus drivers, teachers, waste collectors — and allow them to test themselves at home.

But this scheme has rapidly collapsed under the strain of an overwhelming demand, with home testing kits fully booked within an hour yesterday. Meanwhile, efforts to find a method of testing for immunity to the virus have also been problematic. Earlier this month, the Government spent £16 million on 3.5 million fingerprick antibody tests imported from China, and placed further provisional orders for 17.5 million tests from nine firms, including ones based in the UK. But after testing all of them, Public Health England — the agency

in charge of protecting us — decided none was accurate enough to use. Meanwhile, a number of private doctors have been offering antibody tests at up to £190 each. With the range of Covid-19 symptoms widening from a dry cough to a loss of sense of taste and smell, plus eye or stomach problems, many people are wondering if they have had it and may well be tempted to fork out for the test for peace of mind. But some experts are now asking whether immunity tests are actually worth doing at all. The test to detect active Covid-19 infection involves running a cotton wool swab round the back of the throat and up the nose. The swab is then sent off to a laboratory which runs a test

to look for genetic material from Covid-19. What it is looking for is the live virus. Immunity tests work by looking for two different antibodies the body produces that are unique to Covid-19, and use a drop of blood mixed with a 'reagent' that contains a synthetic coronavirus molecule. If the blood contains Covid-19 antibodies, they will lock onto the lookalike virus.

The result can be read using a device that works a bit like a pregnancy test. While claims are made that some of these tests are 98 per cent accurate, Public Health England rejected such figures. (Some of the tests it purchased were apparently only 50-60 per cent accurate.)

**Keep yourself in tip-top condition during lockdown with these simple health checks you can try at home**

(News Agencies) Figures from Cancer Research UK suggest thousands of cancers are being missed every week because people with symptoms are not going to their GP. But many routine tests and treatments are also being postponed as vulnerable people self-isolate and the NHS focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic and the most seriously ill. Here, RACHEL ELLIS looks at treatments you may be missing out on — and what you can take to help yourself. A B12 deficiency can cause symptoms including depression, fatigue and breathlessness. Although it can be caused by diet (it is found mostly in fish, meat, eggs and milk), it is often linked to the autoimmune disorder pernicious anaemia, where the immune system attacks cells in the stomach, affecting the body's ability to absorb B12. While patients with diet-related B12 deficiency may be advised to take a daily 1,000 mcg B12 tablet, available on prescription or over the counter from pharmacies, those with pernicious anaemia normally have an injection every two to three months at their GP surgery. In these patients, the tablets will have little effect as the stomach cannot absorb them, according to the Pernicious Anaemia Society. Some patients may instead be taught how to self-administer the injections by their GP practice.

## Could your 'coronavirus' symptoms be a bad case of HAY FEVER?

(News Agencies) Red eyes, a sore throat, wheezing, fatigue, a dry cough — do these symptoms sound familiar? It's very likely that they do because they are typically associated with hay fever. But the added difficulty now is that they are also the symptoms of Covid-19.

With pollen levels forecast to be among the highest in 70 years, many of the 13 million people in the UK with hay fever are worried that they won't be able to tell whether they are coming down with a bout of that, or Covid-19. So widespread is the concern that the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) last week issued guidance on how to tell the two apart. Dr Jonathan Leach, joint honorary secretary of the RCGP, has expressed concern that an overlap in the symptoms may lead some people to leave the house to go shopping or for exercise, thinking they have their usual hay fever when they actually have coronavirus.

In fact, superficial symptoms apart, the two conditions could hardly be more different. Hay fever, or seasonal rhinitis, is an allergy that occurs when pollen from trees, grass or weeds is



wrongly perceived by the body as a threat. To flush out the 'invader', the immune system pumps out histamine and other chemicals which trigger sneezing, runny noses, watery eyes, coughing and various other symptoms.

While pollen from birch, oak, ash and other trees typically causes problems from late March to mid-May, grass pollen, the most common hay fever trigger, sparks symptoms from the middle of May to July. Hay fever from the pollen of

nettles and other weeds tends to occur during the autumn but is less common. Coronavirus causes many of the same symptoms but, far from overreacting to a harmless substance, the immune system is reacting to a real danger: a potentially life-threatening virus. 'What we are finding,' adds Dr Leach, 'is that some patients are saying, 'look, this is a different thing from what I had last year, could this be coronavirus?' In that case it might be.'

## Health expert explains why getting just 10 minutes of sunshine every day could make you less vulnerable to COVID-19

(News Agencies) An Australian health expert has revealed that stepping out in the sun for just 10 minutes per day can greatly reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19. Skin cancer researcher Dr Rachel Neale said that having low levels of vitamin D, which the skin produces when exposed to sunlight, increases vulnerability to the virus. 'Now, more than ever, is not the time to be vitamin D deficient,' Dr Neale told The Australian. It would make sense that being vitamin D deficient would increase the risk of hav-

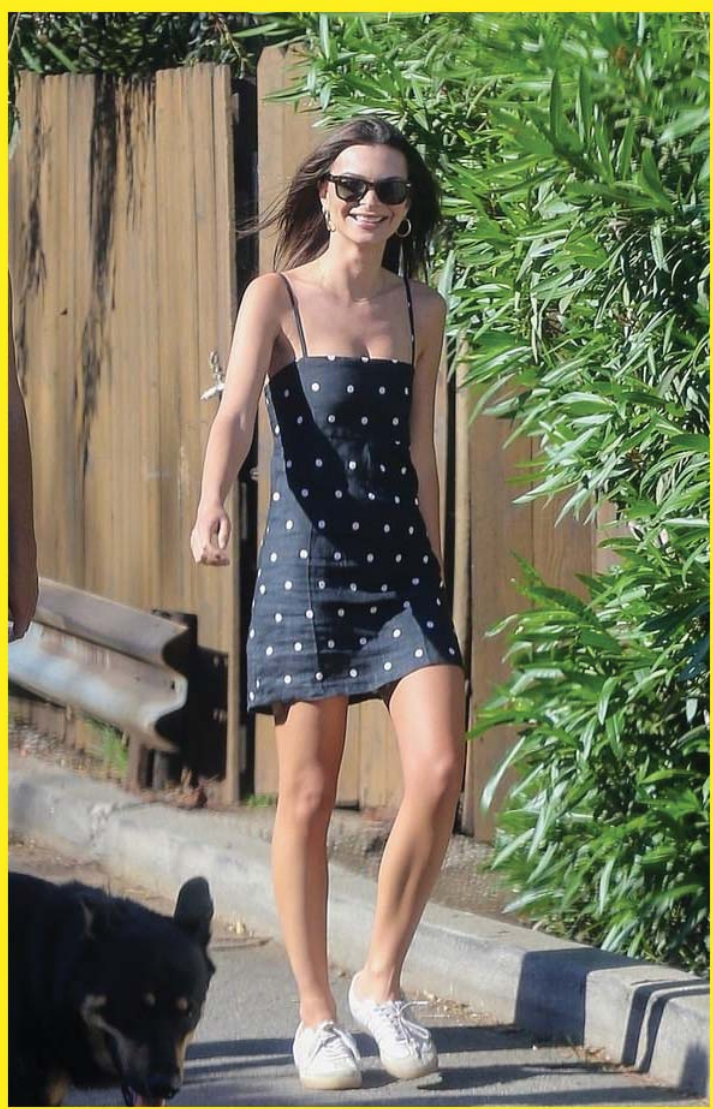
ing symptomatic COVID-19 and potentially having worse symptoms. And that's because vitamin D seems to have important effects on the immune system.' According to the study of 78,000 patients, people with low levels of vitamin D are almost twice as likely as those with high levels of vitamin D of developing acute respiratory infections. In addition, people with vitamin D deficiencies were more likely to be sicker for longer. Dr Neale said she sits in the Brisbane sun for for five to 10 minutes

everyday to stimulate her body's production of vitamin D. She recommended Sydneysiders should get 10-15 minutes of midday sun while Melburnians should aim for a little longer due to the colder climate. The doctor does not take vitamin D tablets as she believes time in the sun provides more benefits - but accepts they are useful for people who can't leave their home. COVID-19 lockdown laws in Australia allow people to leave the house for exercise, during which time they can get a healthy dose of vitamin D.





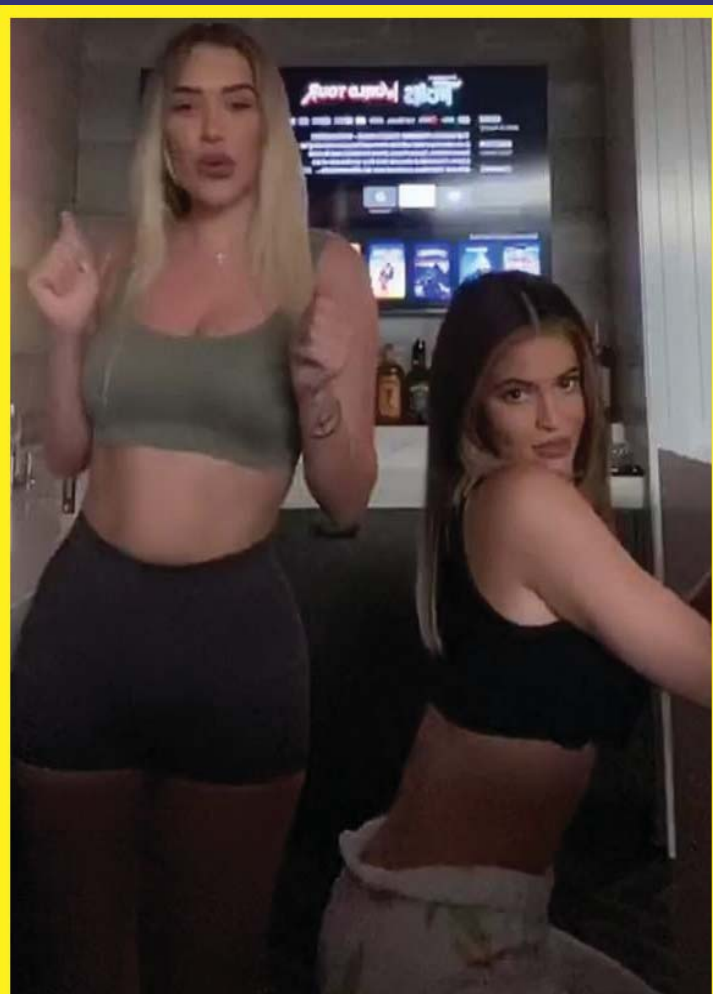
**Emily Ratajkowski looks summer ready in a mini dress for walk with husband Sebastian Bear-McClard**



**Gisele Bundchen, 39, pulls off difficult yoga move with mini-me daughter, 7, as she shares self-isolation caused her to 'reflect on what is most important'**

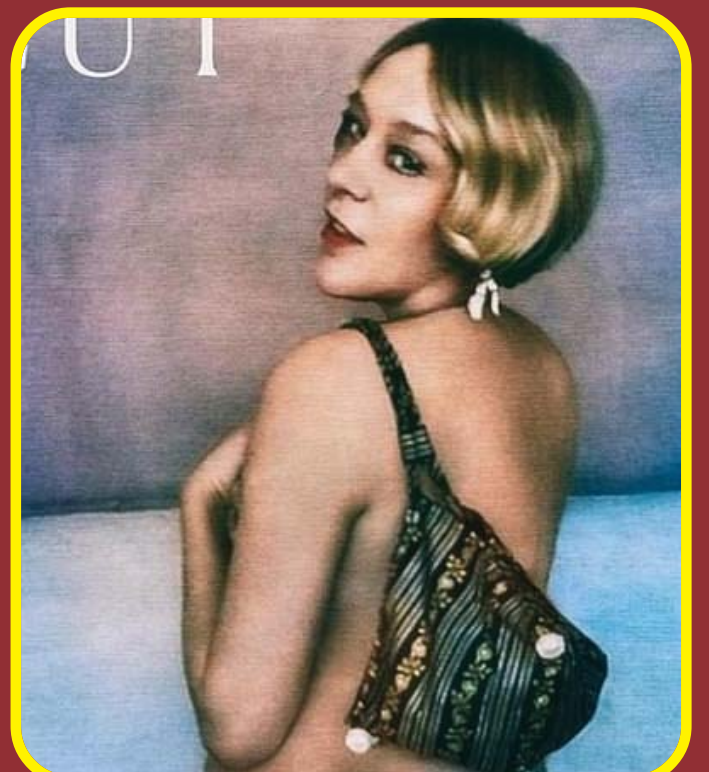


**Kylie Jenner and BFF Stassie show off toned tums in sports bras as they perform choreographed dance for TikTok during quarantine visit**



**WAGS star Nicole Williams English poses in her own swimwear line as she shares her mood during self-isolation: 'I can't wait to travel again'**

**Chloe Sevigny, 45, poses completely nude on the cover of a magazine as she shows off her very pregnant belly at nearly 9 months along**





# THE MAGICAL KHAN LIVES ON

Irrfan Khan straddled both Hindi films and Hollywood with effortless gravitas



(News Agencies) Irrfan dies at 53: Arvind Kejriwal to Shashi Tharoor, politicians mourn his death. Several politicians including Arvind Kejriwal and Shashi Tharoor mourned actor Irrfan's death. Politicians including Arvind Kejriwal, Ashok Gehlot, Prakash Javadekar and Shashi Tharoor bid a fond farewell to actor Irrfan on social media after his death

on April 29. Irrfan died at the Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani hospital in Mumbai. He was 53. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted his tribute, saying, "Shocked to hear of the demise of Irrfan Khan, one of the most exceptional actors of our time. May his work always be remembered and his soul rest in peace".

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that he is "saddened" to learn of the death of "one of our country's most versatile actors". "I am saddened and shocked to know about the untimely demise of one of our country's most versatile actors, #IrrfanKhan. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and fans. May God give them strength. May his soul rest in peace," Gehlot tweeted. Shashi Tharoor also mourned the actor's death. "Saddened beyond measure by the passing of a human being I had never met, but who gladdened my heart and the hearts of millions with his incandescent talent. RIP @irrfank, gone when he had so much more to give," Tharoor wrote in a

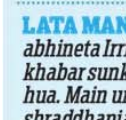
tweet. Minister of Information and Broadcasting Prakash Javadekar wrote, "Irrfan Khan was a versatile actor. Sorry to hear about his demise. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and fans. Om Shanti." Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren wrote, "Absolutely shocked and sad to hear about the demise of #IrrfanKhan. An exceptional actor of our times, he will be remembered for his meaningful & impactful work. Our prayers are with his family and loved ones." Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote, "It is with great sadness that we learnt of the death of actor Irrfan. He was an actor par excellence and his untimely demise is a great loss to the Indian film community. We convey to his family and to every one who enjoys the works of the actor our deepest sympathy." Maharashtra cabinet minister Aaditya Thackeray also expressed grief on social media. "I was saddened to hear the news of the death of actor Irrfan Khan. The actor, who came forward with a lot of struggle, had made his mark in world cinema. With his demise, the country has lost a great artist. A heartfelt tribute to him," he wrote in Marathi. Many other politicians including Rahul Gandhi, Smriti Irani and Home Minister Amit Shah also mourned the demise of Irrfan on social media. Irrfan was diagnosed with a neuroendocrine tumour in 2018. He headed to the UK for his treatment. He was recently admitted in the Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani hospital due to a colon infection. He took his last breath at the hospital. The actor is survived by his wife, Sutapa Sikder, and sons Babil and Ayan.



## A CLASS ACT, REMEMBERED



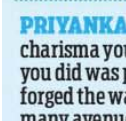
**AAMIR KHAN:** Very sad to hear about our dear colleague Irrfan. How tragic and sad. Such a wonderful talent. My heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Thank you Irrfan for all the joy you have brought to our lives through your work. You will be fondly remembered. Love.



**LATA MANGESHKAR:** *Bahut guni abhineta Irrfan Khan ji ke nidhan ki khabar sunkar mujhe bahut dukh hua. Main unko vinamra shraddhanjali arpan karti hun.*



**KARAN JOHAR:** Thank you for those indelible movie memories...thank you for raising the bar as an artist...thank you for enriching our cinema...we will miss you terribly Irrfan but will always always be immensely grateful for your presence in our lives...our cinema...we salute you



**PRIYANKA CHOPRA:** The charisma you brought to everything you did was pure magic. Your talent forged the way for so many in so many avenues.. #IrrfanKhan you will truly be missed. You inspired so many of us...Condolences to the family.



**KAMAL HAASAN:** Too soon to leave #Irrfan ji Your work always left me in awe. You're one of the finest actors I know, I wish you stayed longer. You deserved more time. Strength to the family at this time.



**ASHWIN SANGHI:** The word "Irrfan" relates to knowledge and enlightenment. I felt Irrfan was one of the most enlightened in the world of entertainment. I had hoped he'll play a character from one of my books.



**WILLIAM DALRYMPLE:** He was the greatest Indian actor of his generation and a loyal friend of the Jaipur Literature Festival. He will be greatly missed.



**KANGANA RANAUT:** This day has come as a dark unsettling grim emotion. Irrfan Khan is a great self-made artist, he rose from doing small character roles in TV soaps to working in academy award winning films as a lead artist. My heart is deeply disturbed at this loss.



# Rishi Kapoor cremated in Mumbai

Ranbir Kapoor, family  
say silent goodbye



**Rishi Kapoor was cremated at the Chandanwadi Crematorium on Thursday afternoon, amid the nationwide lockdown. Ranbir Kapoor led the hearse from the hospital to the crematorium as the nation bade Rishi a silent goodbye.**

(News Agencies) Rishi Kapoor's cremation was held at Chandanwadi Crematorium in Mumbai around 4 pm amid the nationwide lockdown. His son Ranbir Kapoor led the hearse carrying the late actor. Rishi Kapoor's mortal remains were brought from the HN Reliance Hospital to the Chandanwadi Crematorium in Marine Lines, Mumbai, where a few of his family members were present. On a usual day, all of Mumbai would have turned up to bid their favourite

actor, Chintu Kapoor, a fond farewell. But the nationwide lockdown restricted that number to only 20 people, all family members and friends of the Kapoors.

Only a few members of the Kapoor family and friends were allowed to attend the cremation. The list includes the late actor's wife Neetu Kapoor, sister Rima Jain, Manoj Jain, Armaan Jain, Aadar Jain, Anisha Jain, Rajeev Kapoor, Randhir Kapoor, Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor, Abhishek Bachchan, Alia Bhatt,

Dr Tarang, Ayan Mukerji, Jai Ram, Rohit Dhawan and Rahul Rawail. Ranbir led the hearse, as girlfriend Alia followed in her car. Rishi's daughter Riddhima Kapoor Sahni couldn't attend the cremation as the country is under a lockdown and movement is restricted. No flights or trains are running, and Riddhima will be able to reach Mumbai only tomorrow. Kapoor Sahni sought a special pass from the police, and she is driving down to Mumbai from Delhi

today. Rishi Kapoor breathed his last Thursday morning in Mumbai's HN Reliance Hospital. He was admitted to the hospital on Wednesday morning. A message from the Kapoor family this morning announced the passing away of 'our dear Rishi Kapoor'. In their message, the family also urged Rishi Kapoor's fans to follow the laws and rules in place during the lockdown. "He would not have it any other way," read the statement.



## How Sushmita Sen defeated Aishwarya Rai to become Miss India winner

(News Agencies) The Miss India pageant in 1994 was memorable for more reasons than one. In the reckoning were Aishwarya Rai, a model already and a hot favourite to win the crown, and the underdog Sushmita Sen. By her own admission, Sushmita had wondered ahead of the competition if she should leave the contest as Aishwarya was also competing.

However, she persisted and won the Miss India crown and later Miss Universe pageant; Aishwarya went on to become the Miss World the same year. Apparently, it was the tie-breaker round that tilted the competition in Sushmita's

favour. Aishwarya was asked the question, "If you

have to look for qualities in a husband, would you look for the qualities in Ridge Forrester from 'The Bold & Beautiful' or in Mason Capwell from 'Santa Barbara'?" Aishwarya's answer was, "Mason. They do have a lot in common,

but from what we see, Mason has a very caring side to him, and a terrific sense of humour. And that really gels with my character." The question posed to Sushmita was: "What do you know about the textile heritage of your

country? How old has it been and what do you prefer to wear personally?" Sush answered, "I think it all started with Mahatma Gandhi's khadi. It has gone a long way since then, but the basics of Indian textile heritage has been there." Both Aishwarya and

Sushmita went on to chart their success paths in the film industry. While Aishwarya will next be seen in Mani Ratnam's Ponniyin Selvan, Sushmita has been away from the big screen for a while now. She was last seen in 2015's Bengali film Nirbaak.

## Kanika Kapoor has low haemoglobin, will have to wait a few days to donate plasma, say doctors



(News Agencies) Bollywood singer Kanika Kapoor has to wait for some time to donate plasma, a senior official of King George's Medical University said. "Blood sample of Kanika Kapoor was examined and almost all parameters pertaining to plasma donation were found to be appropriate. However, the haemoglobin quantity was found less than the standard. Hence, she has to wait for a few days for plasma donation," KGMU's Vice-Chancellor, Prof M L B Bhatt, told PTI on Tuesday. The Head of Department of Transfusion

Medicine at KGMU, Dr Tulika Chandra said, "The blood sample of Kanika Kapoor was examined for the purpose of plasma donation, and it was found positive. But she has to wait for some time." Kanika Kapoor, who had recovered from Covid-19, gave her blood sample on Monday for testing at the KGMU. The popular singer had tested positive for novel coronavirus on March 20.

She had also come under attack for being "negligent" and "not observing" self-quarantine despite returning from the UK amid the coronavirus pandemic.



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## PMO Refuses to Give Details on PM CARES, Citing Controversial SC Statement

The PMO also refused information regarding the implementation of the national lockdown and how this decision was reached.



(Contd on Page 28)

## It is time to resume political activity



(News Agencies) Five weeks ago, the nationwide lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi placed the Indian economy in cold storage. It also seems to have put politics on ice. As the government prepares to gradually dial down the economic freeze on May 3, politics, too, must emerge from its hibernation. Politics — at its core — is about forging a settlement out of diverse public policy positions. Indeed, the very nature of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) invites divergent approaches to halting the spread of the virus and blunting its impacts. And yet, the current moment presents a set of paradoxes in the political realm.

(Contd on page 28)

### Internet 'Not a Fundamental Right', J&K Tells Supreme court



(News Agencies) Srinagar: "Right to internet is not a fundamental right," the Jammu and Kashmir administration told the Supreme Court in its 32-page report on Wednesday, while filing its detailed reply on a plea seeking the restoration of 4G internet connectivity. Experts rubbished the government's reply, which justified the curbs on the pretext that the number of government school students was far less and they didn't possess a smart mobile phone or computer to access the internet.

(Contd on page 28)

### BJP MLA says stop buying vegetables from Muslim sellers, defends remark

(News Agencies) A Bharatiya Janata Party MLA from Uttar Pradesh's Deoria district kicked off a political row when he suggested to people of his constituency not to buy vegetables from Muslim vendors to avoid contracting the coronavirus infection. In a video, now gone viral, Suresh Tiwari is seen appealing to people: "You all should keep one thing in mind, I am telling you openly: do not buy vegetables from Mia (Muslims)."

When contacted, Tiwari confirmed to have made the remark and clarified that he suggested it as a precautionary measure to check the spread of infection after people complained to him about the role of Tablighi Jamaatis in spreading the deadly virus. There have been several instances of the people from the minority community complaining

(Contd on page 28)

### 'This never happened', Joe Biden denies sexual assault allegation

(News Reports) New York: tJoe Biden released a statement Friday denying a former aide's claims he sexually assaulted her 27 years ago, saying of Tara Reade's allegation: "This never happened." Friday's statement is the first detailed response from Biden to Reade's allegation and comes as pressure built on the presumptive Democratic nominee to personally address the matter. (Contd on page 26)



(Contd on page 29)

'99 percent' sure Kim Jong Un is dead, says North Korean defector-turned-lawmaker  
Speculation continues over Kim Jong Un's absence

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