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# India can't bear the costs of the lockdown anymore

It is causing grave anxiety, unemployment, and can undermine the nation's agriculture and industry sectors



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# India's Covid-19 Response: Saving 1.3 Billion People



(New York) :When on April 14, 2020 Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India addressed the nation for the fourth time in four weeks to announce that the lockdown in the country will be extended to May 3, 2020, the decision was largely welcomed by all despite the economic hardship it entails for the country, particularly for the poor. There is national consensus that lockdown and social distancing is the only effective way to prevent the spread of the virus and also reduce the burden on the healthcare system.

(Contd on page 26)

## Obama endorses Biden for president in video message



(News Agencies) Former President Barack Obama offered his formal endorsement of Joe Biden on Tuesday, injecting himself squarely in the presidential race for the first time by urging Democrats across the party's ideological spectrum to rally behind Biden and form a unified front to defeat President Donald Trump and win back the White House. (Contd on page 21)

(Contd on page 21)

## Coronavirus takes a serious turn in Russia

(News Agencies) World leaders have been working from home during the coronavirus pandemic, and Vladimir Putin is no exception: On Monday, the Russian President held a videoconference from his official residence outside Moscow with some of the officials leading the government's efforts to tackle the disease. It was an unusually somber meeting. Less than a month ago, Putin had radiated confidence about his government's response to a growing global crisis, reassuring his citizens that the situation was "under control" thanks to early intervention measures. A few weeks later, Putin played the role of international rescuer, dispatching a planeload of medical supplies to New York's John F. Kennedy Airport.

(Contd on page 21)

## Cartels, gangs and rebels around the world join coronavirus fight


(News Agencies) In Afghanistan, the Taliban has dispatched health teams to far-flung provinces to confront the coronavirus. In Mexico, drug cartels are offering aid packages to those feeling its economic impact. In Brazil and El Salvador, gangs enforce curfews to prevent its spread. As governments around the world have responded to the coronavirus, so too have armed insurgents and terrorist groups and drug cartels and gangs, a parallel underworld of public health policy and strategic messaging. It is hardly the first time such groups have attempted to fill the role of government. But few crises in modern times have tested the limits of the



world's nation-states as the coronavirus has, providing an opening for armed groups to step in where presidents, police forces and parliaments have failed. Some groups have attempted to weave governments' failures to control the virus into their own propaganda narratives. In Somalia, al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab fighters say the pandemic was spread "by the crusader forces who have invaded the country." The Islamic State has told followers to prepare to exploit their enemies while they are overwhelmed by outbreaks. In Yemen, Houthi rebels have accused Saudi Arabia of airdropping masks infected with COVID-19.

(Contd on page 21)

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# 'Stay where you are': SC tells Indians stranded abroad

"The numbers are many. Stay where you are. People in other countries cannot be brought back," the SC bench said.



(News Agencies) The three-member Supreme Court (SC) bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) SA Bobde, and Justices LN Rao and MM Shantanagouder, while hearing two separate public interest litigations (PILs) on the

there. How will you get them back" "The numbers are many. Stay where you are. People in other countries cannot be brought back," the bench said.

Advocate Madhurima Mridul has filed one of the PILs, while CM Jayarajan filed the other. The SC adjourned the hearing of both these PILs by four weeks after the petitioners refused to withdraw them claiming the government needs to put in place a mechanism to ensure the safety of stranded Indian students in the UK.

The British authorities had issued around 20,000 education visas to Indian students last year.

A similar plea for the evacuation

of stranded Indian workers from the Persian Gulf countries was also adjourned by four weeks.

**EVACUATION FROM US, IRAN** The SC bench decided to hear on April 20 the petitions demanding the evacuation of Indian students from the United States (US) and Indian fishermen stuck in Iran due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Senior advocate Vibha Dutta Makhija has filed the plea regarding stranded Indian students in the US. The petition stated that the visas of most of these students would expire by Tuesday (April 15) and they were liable to be declared aliens by the US authorities.

The Centre told the SC that in this scenario, countries across the world are extending visas. The apex court asked the Centre to submit a status report regarding stranded Indian students in the US, and will hear the matter on April 20.

On a separate petition filed on behalf of Indian fishermen stuck in Iran, the Solicitor General, Tushar Mehta, sought a copy of the plea, which will also be heard on April 20. The petition claimed that around 860 Indian fishermen, mostly from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Gujarat, are stranded on the shores of Bandar-e-Moqam and Lavan Island in Iran's Hormozgan province.

## Bringing citizens back could pose risk to population here: Govt tells SC

The Centre made the submission in response to a batch of petitions seeking return of Indian students stranded in the United States and the United Kingdom.

(News Agencies) The Centre on Monday told the Supreme Court that evacuation of Indian students and expatriates stuck abroad amid the lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease could pose a risk to India's domestic population. Echoing the Centre's concerns, the bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde and justices LN Rao and MM Shantanagouder said, "Stay where you are".

The Centre made the submission in response to a batch of petitions seeking return of Indian

students stranded in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the U.K alone, there are close to 4 lakh Indian expatriates including 50,000 students.

Several petitions were filed in the apex court seeking the court's intervention for evacuation of Indian migrants stranded in the Middle East, Indian fishermen in Iran and students from the US and the UK.

The petitioners criticized the travel ban on return of citizens at a time when other countries were making arrangements to get

evacuate their citizens from India. The Centre, in its status report said that the country had evacuated citizens from China, Iran, Japan and Italy when the condition in India was not as grim.

"However, given the present situation of the corona virus outbreak in India and the available limited resources, it is not feasible to selectively evacuate Indian citizens from abroad when a large number of them from a number of countries want to return back due to various



reasons," the report by the Centre said.

The Centre's status report said that passengers from these countries are at higher risk of infection. "Travel back of such passengers to different regions of India poses a grave risk to the

country of a population of over 1.3 billion."

The bench also noted the logistical constraints in arranging quarantine facilities for all returnees. It was for this reason, the Centre proposed to the Court, "The approach of the Government has, therefore, been to advise the Indian nationals to stay put where they are in line with Government's approach to contain the further spread of the virus within India and allowing health machinery to focus on domestic containment effectively." The government informed the court that the Indian High Commission in London is making all arrangements to ensure the well-being and safety of stranded Indian students. The Centre's status report did not make specific averment about extension of visas of Indian students stuck in the US.

The court will hear a petition for these Indian students stranded in the US, filed by senior advocate Vibha Dutta Makhija next Monday. The court will also hear a petition seeking the return of some 860 Indian fishermen stranded on the shores of Bandar-e-Moqam and Lavan Island in Hormozgan province of Iran.

## Covid-19: US allows H-1B visa extension, relief for stranded Indians

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in a new notification has said it recognises that there are immigration-related challenges as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.

(News Agencies) In a big relief for thousands of stranded Indian professionals in America due to the coronavirus pandemic, the US government has decided to accept their H-1B visa applications for an extended stay in the country. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in a new notification has said it recognises that there are immigration-related challenges as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. The announcement comes at a time when countries around the world have closed their borders and all international passenger flights have been suspended globally.

The travel restrictions have left a



number of H-1B visa holders stranded in the US with their visa permits soon to expire. However, the DHS will shortly start accepting applications for the extension of expiring visas. "We recognise that non-immigrants may unexpectedly remain in the United States beyond their authorised period of stay due to COVID-19," the DHS said. "We continue to carefully analyse these issues and to leverage our resources to effectively address these challenges within our existing authorities. The DHS also continues to take

action to protect the American people and our communities, and is considering a number of policies and procedures to improve the employment opportunities of US workers during this pandemic," it said.

Generally, non-immigrants must depart the United States before their authorised period of admission expires, it said. Non-immigrants could apply for an extension of stay (EOS) or change of status (COS) permit. Without a visa extension, thousands of students and professionals in the US would have suffered. If applicants put in their forms within the specified time frame, their presence will not be taken as "unlawful" and where applicable, "employment authorization with the same employer, subject to the same terms and conditions of the prior approval, is automatically extended for up to 240 days ...when an extension of stay request is filed on time," the notification said.



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## 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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](https://www.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.



[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)



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# Why The Giant America Appears Helpless Against Coronavirus

**In a country with the world's finest healthcare system and renowned epidemiologists, these crucial early weeks were literally squandered, writes**

When a new virus first hit the Chinese city of Wuhan, the nation's authorities did not have the luxury of 'advance notice'. In the crucial early days of what was going to become one of the deadliest global pandemics in history – COVID-19 – the Chinese government obfuscated and censored important information, which did nothing to halt the contagion of this invisible enemy. It is now, months after the first case was officially reported, that the COVID-19 cases have completely dwindled down in China after an unparalleled, draconian yet systematic "lockdown" of millions of its citizens. The Chinese lockdown was accompanied by measures like forcibly removing people exposed to or infected with the coronavirus and putting them into isolation centres,

shutting down public transportation, high-tech surveillance that helped ensure compliance with mass quarantines, etc.

The United States, on the other hand, had the luxury of 'time' to prepare for this. Yet, in a country with the world's finest healthcare system and renowned epidemiologists, these crucial early weeks were literally squandered. Whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a warning on December 31, 2019, the Trump administration on January 31 of this year suspended entry into the United States for only the foreign nationals who had travelled to China in the past 14 days, excluding the immediate family members of American citizens or permanent residents. If the first signs of this virus

surfaced in November 2019, what about the myriads of people who travelled from China to the United States until January 31? And how many of those were carriers of the virus who inadvertently transmitted it to tens of thousands others? The first novel Coronavirus case in the US surfaced on January 21, 2020. Fast forward to the present: As of April 2, the American state of New York alone has more COVID-19 patients than the entire country of China! With 2,45,000+ cases and counting, America is now the hub. And all of this is albeit the fact that the US population is one fourth that of China! What exactly is causing the number of cases to rapidly proliferate even though President Donald Trump has pumped in

trillions of dollars to tackle this? Well, the reason behind the spread is simple: Lack of complete lockdown.

The nature of this deadly virus is such that social distancing is

the only way to prevent its transmission. Countries like India, Italy, Spain and Germany have locked down entire regions or the country as a whole, following suit with China. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, imposed a mandatory 21-day lockdown for its 1.35 billion people, the largest cordon sanitaire in history!

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is the only magic drug available in the market right now, especially when a medical remedy is beyond the horizon. So what has stopped the Trump administration so far from a prophylactic nationwide lockdown? Well, it turns out that Trump only shares partial blame for this. Initially, Trump did not want the fear of virus' spread to affect the US economy negatively, especially in view of the upcoming Presidential elections later this year. Even after the US had 500 confirmed

cases, he kept downplaying the virus threat and reassuring Americans of the extreme preparedness of the White House Coronavirus Taskforce to deal with it. Trump was banking on what he calls the "greatness" of America's mighty healthcare system to fight the virus. Trump believed he could address this by ordering more ventilators, paying Americans for the lost income, pumping in more money into the economy, etc. Little was he possibly aware that the only cure available was a "complete lockdown"- a remedy even the poorest of the nations could afford. Those measures he took could only complement a mandatory lockdown and not substitute it. Trump even went on to state that America would be "open for business" by Easter, April 12. Further astonishing was the fact that he declared that up to 240,000 Americans would eventually succumb to this evil!

(Contd on page 22)

## India will overcome Covid-19, but will need a 'New Deal'

**After extending the lockdown until 3 May, the government has decided to gradually open up some areas after 20 April, with an exhaustive list of do's and don'ts.**

After extending the lockdown until 3 May, the government has decided to gradually open up some areas after 20 April, with an exhaustive list of do's and don'ts. This step has been welcomed by not only all the major political parties but also by the business community at large. As the rabi harvesting season is at its peak, the government needed to commence the foodgrain procurement operations without any further delay so that no hardship is caused to farmers who are hoping to harvest a bumper rabi crop.

Opening of agriculture produce marketing mandis, permitting trading in food grain and their transportation to warehouses and godowns of the Food Corporation of India had become imperative to enable the farmers to sell their surplus produce at the support prices

fixed by the government. This will, to some extent, absorb the rural labourers and also provide them means of livelihood.

Similarly, the removal of restrictions on the industries located in rural areas, unhindered movement of trucks and allowing the roadside eating joints to operate will certainly help absorb a huge number of workers. Likewise, letting a select group of industries open up will help augment the supply chain. In the coming weeks, based on the spread of the coronavirus disease, the government is likely to ease the restrictions further to bring the economy back on rails.

Another important area that must be uppermost in the minds of decision makers is the critical education sector. Due to this virus, most of the state governments ordered the closure of all the schools, colleges,

universities in the second week of March. As things stand, there is absolutely no possibility of reopening them over the next few months. Fortunately, almost all the state governments had allowed the board examinations to be completed so there is nothing to worry about on that account. The state governments and respective state boards and the CBSE have already taken the decision to promote all the 9th and 11th grade students. That was a wise decision in the interest of students.

It seems the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) could not complete the examination process and still has to conduct tests in a few subjects. This can be accomplished in a short span of time when the situation normalises. Naturally, universities across the country have to go through the

examination process too - which as per present indications - cannot begin before the end of May. So, the most-likely scenario appears to be that the university exams can only be conducted in the month of July.

We, as a nation, have the experience to handle these kinds of unforeseen situations in the past. The early seventies were the JP movement days when strikes in colleges and universities were the norm. During those years, our universities used to normally remain closed for two to three months in a year and students used to protest against the annual examinations scheduled for April-May. As a result, the university used to hold the exams in July. Consequently, the academic session used to get delayed by a couple of months.

To the credit of the teaching community back then, we never

suffered academically in any way.

The time has come for our teaching community to rise to the occasion and handle the situation to the best of their ability, which they undoubtedly have in abundance. Any talk of holding the exam online, or suggesting such innovations to the detriment of the student community, should not be deliberated. Let us wait and watch as things unfold and plan to schedule the examinations in the month of July. The university admissions process should be accordingly planned in the best interest of students.

Similarly, several entrance examinations such as the Joint Entrance Examination had to be postponed. Now, there is a possibility that the prestigious Civil Services Examination conducted by Union Public Service Commission will also have to be rescheduled.



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*We all must come together and join (maintain the social distancing), with faith and with no differences for the benefit of you, your family, your community and your Country.*

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# No matter how you crunch the numbers, this pandemic is only just getting started

There has not been a lot of good news lately. But with the discharge of Boris Johnson from hospital on Sunday, and statements that the “peak” strain on the National Health Service would be over the Easter period, you might be under the impression that the storm is passing, and the Covid-19 pandemic will soon be a memory.

Fueling this mood are reports from studies of communities already hit by the pandemic. At long last we are beginning to see the results of work looking for signs that people have already been infected, through the presence of antibodies against Sars-CoV-2, the virus which causes Covid-19. Some of this data suggests strongly that many infections may have passed unnoticed, with the only symptoms being mild things such as loss of the ability to smell and taste, and that as a result, more people may be immune than had been thought. Surely this is a sign that communities around the world can breathe a sigh of relief and start getting back to work? Unfortunately, it is nothing of the kind.

Talk of the “peak” can be misleading, because it’s not clear whether you are talking about the Matterhorn or Table Mountain – both have a summit, but the peak is far more pronounced in one than the other. In countries such as Italy (unlike Wuhan) the initial surge in the Covid-19 pandemic has not evaporated quickly. There are multiple reasons for this but the most important is that the impact of physical distancing achieved in China has been hard to accomplish elsewhere, mostly because of the freedoms we correctly value in liberal democracies. Worse, there may be a mountain range. In other words, what is happening right now could be just one peak – not the peak. And the reason for this is that despite all those positive signs from antibody testing, the huge majority of the population is not immune.

An editorial in the British Medical Journal has reported data from China suggesting that as many as four in five cases of Sars-CoV-2 infection could be asymptomatic. It then goes on to quote people from the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine in Oxford, who say that if this is true “What the hell are we locking down for?” I wish those people would be brave enough to go and repeat that opinion in an ER in the Bronx right now, in which actual medicine is going on. Worrying about the exact rate of asymptomatic infection, or the currently unknown duration of immunity and a possible “second wave”, is like politely applauding the performance in a jazz club and murmuring “nice” while the building

is demolished around you and the piano player gets decapitated.

There have been more than 93,000 cases of Covid-19 identified in the UK. Let’s round that up and say it is 100,000. So if the reports from the BMJ editorial are accurate, the actual number would be that multiplied by five, in which case there would have already been half a million infections in the UK. If this really is the peak and we see as many cases on the way down as on the way up, that would total 1 million infections from the initial surge in the UK – hopefully all of those people would then be immune.

That would leave about 65 million people in the UK still without immunity.

I am going to be unusually optimistic here, and assume that everyone who has Covid-19 becomes fully immune (not a given), and that the virus is towards the less transmissible end of the range of estimates currently available. If this is the case, you would need half your population to have been infected to achieve a level of population immunity that would stop the epidemic continuing to grow and overwhelming healthcare systems.

As I write the UK is reporting more than 10,000 deaths from Covid-19. Due to the realities of collecting data during an infectious disease emergency like this, that is likely to be an underestimate. Again, if we assume this is the peak and there is the same number on the way down that’s 20,000 total from the initial surge. And to get to population immunity you have to multiply that by at least 30: based on the current data, that’s about 600,000 deaths to get there, minimum.

Finding a vaccine to offer a complete solution to this pandemic is, even in the best scenarios, is still a long way off But it is not hard to see many ways we can slow the pace of the pandemic and save lives. One of them is greatly improved testing to identify cases and their contacts, which could be supplemented by clever digital methods to spot who has been at risk. Governments around the world are attempting ways to keep jobs and businesses afloat while lockdowns are in place – but the pressure remains to swiftly end such shutdowns. I get that this is going to be a mammoth strain on the economy. But the deaths of many thousands of people would be too: it is simply not possible to thoroughly insulate an economy from the impact of a pandemic of this kind.

Where I live, in Cambridge Massachusetts, I keep hearing sirens. This crisis is not close to over, quite the reverse. The pandemic is only just getting started.

By William Hanage, The Guardian

# The State needs to step up, urgently

The harrowing images of migrant workers desperate to go home, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 19-day extension to the nationwide lockdown on Tuesday, serve as an important reminder of just how brutal the last 21 days have been, and how challenging the next 19 days will be for the lives and livelihoods of most Indians. Our political leadership has collectively determined that the blunt instrument of lockdowns are necessary to fight the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). Inexplicably, however, the task of implementing an appropriate national response to the economic crisis this poses has barely begun.

State governments are stymied by the lack of resources. The Centre is yet to announce a robust fiscal relief package. Finances apart, the sheer scale of relief required, combined with the lack of planning when the first lockdown was announced on March 25, has presented our bureaucracy with an unprecedented logistical challenge. The last 21 days have been spent desperately firefighting through a plethora of government orders to get relief measures, supply chains and essential services moving, leaving little time to devise systems that ensure communication, coordination and ground-level feedback. This is one reason why the police have so freely used their lathis and workers for essential services remain in short supply. Now, as the country enters the next phase of the lockdown with a likely phased opening up of the economy from April 20 onward, these logistical challenges will become even more acute and threaten to undermine potential economic gains. India simply cannot

afford to repeat the mistakes of the last 21 days. Going forward, at a minimum, three things need to be done.

First and foremost — this has been said many times since March 25, but it needs repetition — universalise the public distribution system (PDS), expand cash transfers and remove all hurdles to accessing entitlements for the next three months. If any further proof is needed of how acute the crisis of hunger is, especially (although not exclusively) for our migrant workers, here are some frightening statistics. Data collected from 11,000 distressed workers across the country by the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), a group of volunteers working to provide relief, reports that by the third week of the lockdown, 50% of workers had less than one day’s worth of rations. More worrying, 96% had not received rations from the government while 70% had not received any cooked food. There is no time to be lost. Grains need to move immediately from the Food Corporation of India godowns, and, anyone who approaches the PDS stores should be given their entitlement, regardless of ration cards.

In the medium-term, India may well live through periodic cycles of lockdowns and graded opening up. If workers come back to cities, it will be critical to ensure the hunger crisis doesn’t repeat itself. To do this, the Centre and state governments need to, on a war-footing, put in place a secure, portable food-and-cash security system that allows migrant workers access to benefits from any part of the country.

(Contd on page 25)



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# What the pandemic means for Europe

The EU and its member-states were inept. But the Union will survive

Another international crisis, another poor show by Europe. No government or multilateral institution has covered itself in glory in the current coronavirus pandemic. Even by these low standards, the response of the European Union (EU) and its member-states has been remarkably inept. Existing protocols on sharing medical supplies during a health crisis were ignored. Freedom of movement principles so beloved of Brussels was hastily abandoned. There was a eurozone crisis redux over "coronabonds," with frugal northern Europeans fearing they would end up paying for the fiscal irresponsibility of southerners. There was a palpable sense of virus-

ravaged Italy and Spain having to fend for themselves, with China providing the only outside assistance.

Yet, the idea that a united Europe will be one of the victims of the pandemic is an exaggeration. The EU is not responsible for medical crises because the member-states never came up with a common health policy. Euroscepticism has risen, but mostly in Italy, and has been partly offset by the poor example set by Brexit Britain. The supplies provided by China, much of it paid for and subsequently shown to be defective, have been surpassed by what European governments have given to each

other. The European Central Bank has spearheaded a swathe of financial relief efforts, including for developing countries. Much will be forgiven if a post-crisis Brussels uses the opportunity to expand the ambit of the EU's policy action.

New Delhi will be among the capitals that will hope Europe can restore some of its credibility. India and the EU have made progress in their relations, moving beyond seemingly endless trade and human rights disputes, and starting to recognise that they have common strategic concerns that must be prioritised. The hope is that these strands can be picked up again after the virus is defeated.



# Covid-19 and the contours of a new world order

The world will be more integrationist than isolationist. India can play a key role in creating new institutions



The world is grappling with the coronavirus pandemic. People are dying in large numbers. Health care and the economy are under severe stress. Countries are turning inwards, closing borders, to protect their people. As historian Yuval Noah Harari wrote, more and more countries are becoming nationalist and protectionist, even, in some cases, even authoritarian.

But the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has taught us a different lesson, a lesson of interdependence. The pandemic is global. The battle to combat it too must be global. We depend on each other for our health care equipment, services, transportation facilities, and, finally the vaccines, as and when they are invented. India has

imported masks and testing kits from some countries, while exporting critical drugs such as hydroxychloroquine to many countries, including the United States (US). Global supply chains have become critical not only for health care products, but food and other supplies too.

In fact, one big realisation for countries from the pandemic has been that nationalism of the closed kind won't work. Donald Trump's "America first" nationalism didn't work. He had to turn to China, India, and South Korea for supplies. A recurring theme of many a political scientist about American exceptionalism stands shattered today. Isolationists in all countries, including India, must realise that post-Covid-19 world will be more integrationist than isolationist.

For some time now, it

has become a fad with political scientists to talk about multi-polarity. But the 21st-century world is no longer being led by countries alone. We have corporations that have bigger GDPs than many countries in the world. We have players outside the State that wield enormous influence on people across national boundaries. More important, in the era of social media, a number of power groups have emerged in the world that defy national boundaries. While nationalism as a political ideology is making a return, the world is also slipping into what author, Parag Khanna has described as hetero-polarity. It may be premature to predict the post-Covid-19 world order, but it can conclusively be said that we are moving into a hetero-polar world, with multiple State and non-State power players

actively crisscrossing each other's paths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to lead India into that world after the pandemic. Modi described the situation as "World War-like". That has catalysed the building of a narrative around World War II. Comparisons are being drawn between Modi and Franklin D Roosevelt, who led America into WWII.

Incidentally, both Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler came to power in America and Germany respectively in the same year (1932). While Hitler turned into a despot, subjecting European neighbours to domination and aggression, Roosevelt focused on rebuilding America. His "New Deal" led to massive infrastructure building such as highways, bridges and railways in America, and helped the country come out of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Expectations are that Modi will also do something similar.

Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 forced Roosevelt into the war. By the end of the war in 1945, the US emerged as the leading world power replacing Great Britain. But Roosevelt's contribution to the War was not just about the defeat of the Axis powers. Roosevelt was

instrumental in building two global institutions. Through the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, he laid the foundation for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The US dollar emerged as the global currency. In April 1945, the United Nations Organization (UNO) was born with the US and its allies in the driver's seat.

At a time when this post-Covid-19 world order appears to be in disarray, it will be tempting to expect Modi to don the Rooseveltian mantle and take the lead in building new global institutions. Institutions of the WWII vintage such as the World Health Organization and United Nations Security Council have become overtly partisan and lost their credibility today. "The United Nations is far less credible today than it has been through its history", S Jaishankar, India's external affairs minister said recently. With the US facing its worst nightmare, and the credibility of the Chinese leadership at an all-time low, the presumption that Modi should step into the role that Roosevelt played 75 years ago sounds logical.

Perhaps, Modi should go back, not 75 years, but by a century, and look at

the role Woodrow Wilson had played at the end of World War I. "Wilson saw America's mission in World War I not as material aggrandisement but as leading all nations into a new international community organised to achieve right ends," wrote political scientist, Joseph Nye. Wilson's famous 14-point charter for world peace, outlined in his address to the American Congress in January 1918, underscores the moral leadership of America.

Wilsonianism of the 20th century was represented by liberal internationalism, democracy, non-intervention, collective security and humanitarian cooperation. In the last six years, Modi has shown his commitment to all these political ideals. In fact, during his Covid-19 consultations with the G20 and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation partners, he presented his model centred on humanism as "human-centric development cooperation".

Modi-ism of the post-Covid 21st-century world can be borne out of the democratic and humanist credentials that he has displayed in the fight against Covid-19.



# Time for Parliament to meet, virtually

It is an institution of public trust and needs to scrutinise executive actions, especially in a crisis



With the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) upon us, it is inevitable that there will be changes in how we engage to get things done. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is holding Cabinet meetings and interacting with political leaders through video conferences. Last month, 82 Congress leaders discussed the party's response to Covid-19 on a video call. The Supreme Court is using video conferencing to hear cases. Government conferences are moving online.

Parliament has been disrupted and the Budget session was cut short by eight days, delaying the debate on key bills. Many state legislatures such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala curtailed their sessions. Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh issued ordinances to enable them to spend money in the new financial year.

It is here that technology-centric solutions can ensure work continuity in the law-making institutions. Parliament has been agile in its adoption of technology through its history in three key areas. First, to empower members of Parliament (MPs) to work more efficiently, as early as 1954, a teleprinter was installed in the lobby of the Lok Sabha to enable MPs to keep up to speed with important developments. Now MPs can access

wireless Internet on their phones and tablets inside the Houses. Gone are the days when MPs or their staff had to visit the Parliament House to submit notices for their interventions. Now, there is a dedicated portal where they can electronically file their questions, zero-hour submissions and other notices for participating in debates.

Second, there has been rapid technology adoption in the two parliamentary secretariats. They started using computers for their work in the mid-1980s. An example of their digital prowess is the daily uncorrected debate: A transcript of proceedings in the Houses is uploaded online on the same day the debate takes place.

Making Parliament an open and transparent institution is the third area where the institution has leveraged technology. The proceedings of the Houses are broadcast on dedicated TV channels and also streamed online. The parliamentary websites maintain records of all its work, and the two secretariats have also digitised parliamentary debate since 1858, and made them freely available to the public.

The pandemic challenges the ability of the institution to physically assemble and debate matters of national importance. There are two occasions when MPs have to assemble in

person. One, when they meet as a whole to constitute a sitting of the House. This situation will arise in July when MPs assemble for the monsoon session of Parliament. Parliaments around the world are gearing up to ensure that some parts of their proceedings can be conducted online. For example, the Scottish parliament recently conducted its question hour virtually for the first time. Meanwhile, in London, 100 MPs signed a letter calling for the creation of a virtual parliament. In response, the Speaker of the House of Commons has urged the government to ensure that some part of parliamentary

proceedings can be done virtually before the house resumes next week. The second occasion when MPs meet in person is during meetings of parliamentary committees. These committees are smaller sub-groups of MPs which meet outside the House to deliberate on issues. The committees play a critical role as they are tasked with the in-depth examination of government bills. Currently, there are six bills being examined by different committees.

There are international examples that our Parliament could examine to restart the functioning of committees. For example, the House of Commons has successfully completed a trial in

conducting the proceedings of their committees digitally. Its treasury committee recently heard witnesses on a video conference on the subject of the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In New Zealand, the Epidemic Response Committee, led by the leader of opposition, has been operating via video conferencing to evaluate the government's response to Covid-19. The proceedings of the committee are streamed on social media and on the Parliament website. The Australian Parliament also has a provision in its rules of procedure to allow for audio and video links to be used for committee proceedings.

The workings of legislatures

in India and around the world are marked by ceremony and rigid rules of functioning. But they also have an advantage. They can regulate their functioning, allowing them to effect institutional changes quickly. Working remotely is the new normal, and for Parliament to adapt to it is a necessity.

This disruption by the pandemic is an opportunity for our Parliament. It should evaluate which aspects of its functioning are amenable to being done online. The virtual working of parliament in other countries underlines one key principle. Parliament is an institution of public trust and needs to continue its role of scrutiny of government's actions, especially in times of crisis.

## There is an oil deal. But India need not worry

Production cuts have pushed up oil prices, but conditions still favour buyers

Russia, Saudi Arabia and other major oil producers have agreed to reduce oil production. Combined with other measures, the amount of oil sold in global markets will fall by nearly 15 million barrels a day. The entire price drama has led oil prices to rise about 2% a barrel, but they remain half of the \$60 to \$70 spread they enjoyed just a few months ago. The main consequence of the present agreement is an end

to the price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia. The enormous drop in oil demand that followed the pandemic outbreak has rendered the price war meaningless. Even with Moscow and Riyadh patching up, the resulting production cuts will make

up just half the drop in global demand. India, along with other major oil importers, will remain overall



beneficiaries of historically low oil prices. Even if the pandemic comes to a grinding halt, the future of oil prices remains bleak. A supply-demand mismatch will remain. Oil producers will immediately open up their spigots. The United States shale

industry will come back to life. Also, Saudi-Russian rivalry will continue in some form or another to some extent — India will benefit as a consequence. Saudi Arabia has offset the oil price increase by offering Asian buyers a discount of over \$4 a barrel while increasing its demand price for Europe and North America. This reflects a determination to hold and increase market share in Asia

at the expense of other producers such as Russia and the United States. In the meantime, India can continue to expect low oil prices as well as a useful period of price stability in the coming several months.



# Covid-19: What India must do next

This war will be won by smart data-driven defence, coupled with strategic offence

The decisive action taken by the Indian leadership in flattening the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) curve is laudable. In choosing between the proverbial kuan (well) and khai (chasm), one takes steps to avoid the most catastrophic scenario. With the Prime Minister announcing the extension of the lockdown, the valuable time that has been bought must now be used to prepare. But for what? A defensive war or an offensive one? The first will be fought by socio-political measures such as lockdowns and care of the vulnerable; the latter will be fought by science and technology.

When physician Harvey Fineberg recently talked about 10 weeks to crush the curve in America, he outlined six key steps. With slight modifications, these are the following: One, establish a clear command system. Two, test widely. Three, protect health workers with proper gear and equip hospitals for a surge in demand. Four, determine and track who is infected, likely to be infected, exposed, unexposed, or recovered. Five, inspire and mobilise the public. And last, but not



the least, learn from research to continually improve. These principles apply equally to India, but the relative difficulties of each step are very different. For India, the command system is clear and active, the public is engaged, but testing is low, the determination of the five classes (of step four) is not yet clear, and supply chains of protective gear and hospital equipment are thin and fraying.

The sixth step, research, has to not only meet these defensive challenges, but also launch an all-out

offensive against the enemy. We must innovate at every step, use our fabled "jugaad" as a stop-gap defensive measure, while our premier research institutions work to provide new weapons in this fight. While the challenges are severe, the unified response of the government, industry and academia in this time of crisis has been heartening. For example, to test widely, we need diagnostic kits. As global supplies of kits and their components start becoming scarce, Indian industry and start-

ups, supported by academia, are developing indigenous alternatives. Medical researchers, epidemiologists, molecular biologists, and technocrats are jointly formulating strategies for minimum testing for maximum insight.

Apps like Aarogya Setu leverage India's digital and telecom infrastructure and tech talent to supplement community testing and provide virtual intelligence. Previous investment in high-quality basic research is also paying off. The recent development of

futuristic alternatives such as a Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR)-based paper strip test, which may eliminate the need for expensive and scarce real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machines, came from years of background work.

While issues remain in expeditiously bringing new tech to market — for example, sufficient quantities of the input materials for the CRISPR test are difficult to find — a strong academia-industry combine is working hard to overcome the obstacles. Meanwhile, numerous research labs across the nation are using their infrastructure to enhance the national Reverse Transcription (RT)-PCR testing capacity. Young companies funded by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Department of Biotechnology industry programmes are coming out with affordable and simple indigenous diagnostic systems that can be used by local centres without advanced infrastructure. Together, these form a viable plan to widen the testing net and effectively determine local and personal risks.

Similarly, procurement challenges in personal protective equipment (PPE), hospital beds, oxygen, ventilators, and newer anti-viral drugs, must

be met by focused science. Towards this, Indian research organisations are using cross-sectoral strengths to create the necessary pipeline of products. When biohazard suit production was constrained by the unavailability of seam sealing tape, a sealant glue from submarine applications was substituted by Defence Research and Development Organisation, ensuring that these suits can be produced in large numbers, forming a robust line of defence for frontline health workers. An indigenous oxygen concentrator from the CSIR Venture Centre may make the difference between life and death for hypoxic patients, if central oxygen supply runs short. Lifesaving drugs, with promise in Covid-19 treatment, are being synthesised by CSIR labs in collaboration with pharma majors. Inspiration from traditional medical systems is guiding the ministry of Ayush's efforts. The idea is to not blindly copy anyone, but to take the best of what is available and by using universally-recognised scientific principles, modify it to local contexts and needs. We have bought ourselves time to prepare and have the scientific capacity to deliver. This war will be won by smart data-driven defence, coupled with strategic offence.

While the medical side defends with what they have, the research side must support them with what they need. Importantly, we must not take our eyes off the real solution — effective treatment and vaccines; developed in India for the world. We have the leadership to inspire and mobilise the public. Can science guide decisions to shape the public health response and to restart the economy? If we do this well, not only will we save grief to hundreds of thousands of Indians, but also contribute to global good and emerge a stronger nation.

## PM Modi's speech: A mixed bag

*Extending the lockdown is right. Address economic issues now*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the extension of the national lockdown for 19 more days, till May 3. This means India will have a lockdown of 40 days — the longest any country, especially of India's size, population and complexity, has had in the world so far. To be sure, there is a caveat. Depending on the spread of the disease over the next week, there will be relaxations, starting April 20, for necessary activities in states, districts, or subregions which have not witnessed cases, have brought it under control, or have succeeded in the controlling the situation in hotspots — clusters with a high number of cases.

The PM is right about the lockdown. Till there are medical remedies to deal with the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), social distancing remains the most effective tool to prevent the transmission of this highly

contagious virus. India, with its weak health infrastructure, does not have the capacity to deal with a high number of cases. The hope remains, just as it was when the lockdown was originally announced on March 24, that this period will help India "flatten the curve"; it will also give time and space to the government to enhance testing, focus on containment zones, provide personal protective equipment to health workers, embark on antibody testing, and gradually prepare the country for a return to economic life.

But this can only be one part of the story. The public health strategy has enormous economic costs. It is true lives have to be saved. But along with the lockdown, India should have announced a comprehensive stimulus for the economy just as other countries have. Around the world, countries have unveiled economic relief packages for

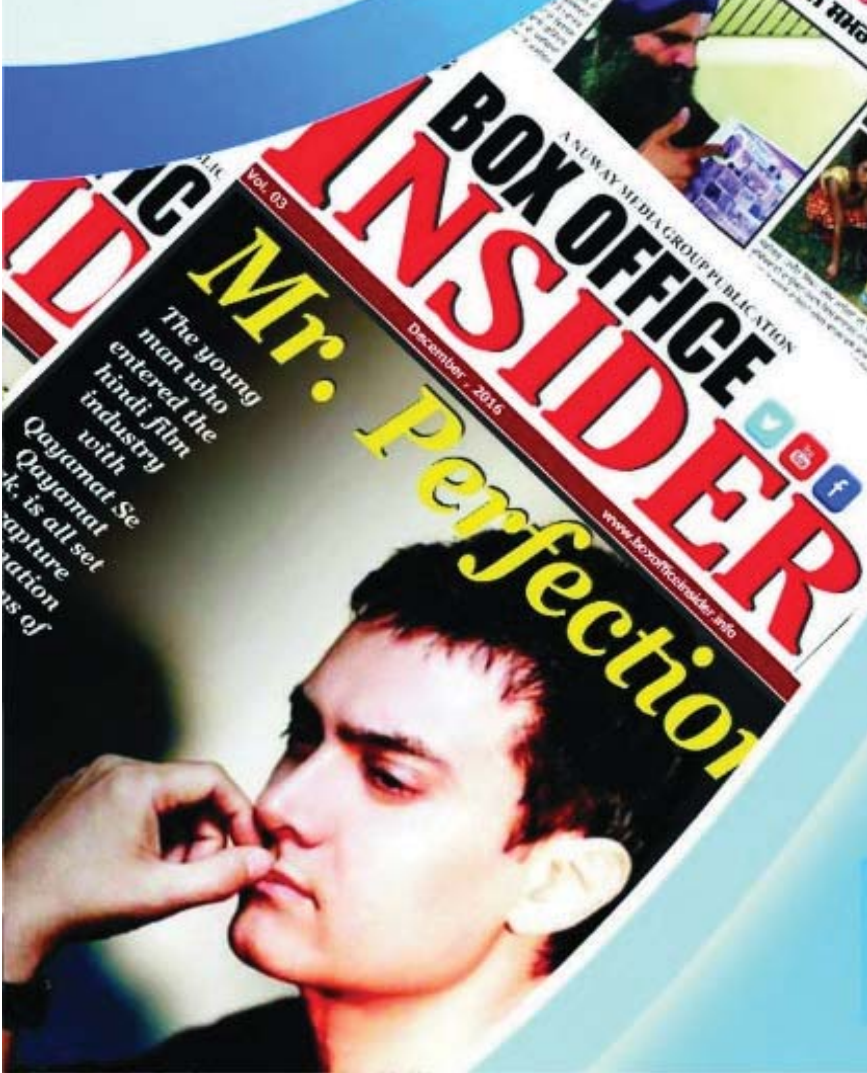
everyone — individuals, businesses, and provinces. Just as India has led on the lockdown front, it has lagged on this. India should have, by now, outlined specific measures for businesses which are becoming increasingly unviable; workers who stare at long-term unemployment; the poor who are already confronting the possibility of starvation and hunger; and states, which are at the frontlines of the battle but are fiscally constrained and have been seeking support. It was not enough for the PM to acknowledge that he was aware of these difficulties; it was time to show, in detail, how the Centre plans to help specific sectors, vulnerable citizens, and state governments in this battle. This must be the next step in the government's plan — and the PM should take personal ownership and announce it himself.





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# The pandemic will change public life as we know it

The State's role will expand. There will be more welfare projects, and a greater openness to technology



No one should seek to read much into the economic predictions at the moment with the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in full flow. However, Covid-19 is likely to profoundly impact the way governments, companies and citizens behave, changing public life as we know it.

Former United States President Ronald Reagan famously said that the nine most scary words in the English language are: "I'm from the government and I'm here to help". This approach influenced political thought for a quarter-century. But Covid-19 has put governments at the forefront of the response. There is now a greater questioning of why the role of the government has been needlessly reduced in many countries. India too has edged towards an erroneous consensus that we need to keep government small. This is likely to change.

Former national security adviser and foreign secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon, wrote in Foreign Policy that governments will take on a renewed confidence in their power to shape the destinies of their nations. In responding to the crisis, governments have perhaps found powers they either did not know they had or were unwilling to use.

This new-found power will influence how other matters of state are dealt with later. The climate crisis fraternity may now see greater receptiveness to demands for more stringent environmental emission standards. Demands for strengthened health care, better social security nets and the like have been denied for long, due to various fiscal reasons. The boundaries of

the envelope of what government can do has clearly been expanded way beyond what people would have expected only a few weeks ago.

For long, there has been an uncritical acceptance of lower wages in some jobs such as nursing and teaching. Caught in the middle of a pandemic, we now see that these groups take on an unusual level of importance. To this list of critical roles are included not just doctors and nurses but also teachers, delivery staff, store clerks and bank tellers. While granting that, in most cases, wages will be determined by market forces, other forms of benefits such as additional income support could be promised to such groups to partially offset the personal risks taken by these groups when they are expected to keep essential services afloat.

Historically, governments have claimed an absence of fiscal space to fund such welfare activities. In India, there should now be a strong case to increase spending on health care and insurance. Budget 2021 will hopefully place greater importance on these. As we debate how adverse individual health outcomes impact society at large, there will also be a recognition that large-scale unemployment, partly caused by a potential economic slowdown, too damages the economy. Governments will need to implement Keynesian steps to create more jobs and would be well advised to breach their current fiscal target. Now they should have the confidence to push back on the deficit hawks. Fiscal deficits in the United States rose to 10% of GDP under Roosevelt's "New Deal" in the mid-1930s. That was a

major factor in enabling the US economy to recover. India must move to a 5% fiscal deficit for some years — as long as the money is used in a directed manner.

Greater governmental powers do come with their own risks. Kishore Mahbubani, dean at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, has pointed out that at a cultural level, so far, East Asian economies have demonstrated better capability in handling the pandemic. Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore, all stand as poster children of good administration. This crisis will be a shot across the bow of those in the West who claim that their models of government have little to learn from others. Citizens, in many countries, seeing governments with stronger

hand work well could perhaps push democratic nations towards greater authoritarianism.

Another medium-term impact of Covid-19 should be a greater openness to using technology. Telemedicine, which has been untapped, will see a surge. It has always seemed unambitious that this market is estimated by India to be just about \$32 million, roughly one day's revenues of one of the many IT majors. In the sphere of education, several lobbies have taken the position that no version of online education will be acceptable for the award of formal degrees. Now, they have scrambled to find ways to make online learning and assessment possible.

In a similar vein, for long, working mothers, those with ageing parents, and the disabled have requested

organisations to display greater flexibility in offering work-from-home (WFH) options. However, even enlightened companies have generally offered WFH facilities for a maximum of two or three days a month. The pandemic has shown that it is indeed possible to manage some parts of our business on a remote basis. This is a dramatic change in lifestyle for those who need it. One would expect the share of women in the workforce, which has been dropping in India in recent years, to see some revival. The 2008 financial crisis led to a distrust of experts, especially those prone to making economic prognostications. This distrust of a small part of the educated elite spilled over into scepticism of other classes of experts who indeed had something useful to say. A consequence of this trust deficit was the inclination to

vote persons without meaningful expertise in public office. Governance is for serious persons who have dedicated their time to politics and administration. It is no surprise that the best administrative responses have come from thoughtful leaders in Singapore, South Korea, or Germany. One hopes that we will see a diminished enthusiasm to vote for TV stars, actors and sportsmen. Several of these changes may well usher in a period of more egalitarian growth, driving investments the government should always have made and enabling a wider base of consumption.

The trente glorieuses (three decades of high growth) in France and the Golden Age in the US were driven by deep-rooted and sensible governmental interventions. India has to do the same.

## Trump rages at criticism while governors craft their own plans to reopen the economy

With 23,000 Americans dead and millions without a paycheck, President Donald Trump dimmed the lights in the White House briefing room, fired up a misleading propaganda video and boiled over. In one of the most unchained presidential tantrums ever captured on television, Trump's Monday display flouted every notion of calm leadership by the commander in chief in a crisis. He claimed powers never envisioned by the Constitution and insisted his "authority is total" to order states and cities to get moving again to break out of the frozen economy. His warning came as two blocs of Eastern and Western hot-spot states banded together in an implied challenge to his vow to get people back to work soon, setting off a brewing confrontation over the power of the federal government.

During the news



conference, Trump moaned that the press was not giving him credit because "everything we did was right" in the coronavirus pandemic. Raging at reporters, the President used the campaign-style video to mislead the nation about his sluggish recognition of the threat from the virus, after once predicting a "miracle" that would make it go away. He called up his top medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, to publicly repudiate his own words Sunday on CNN, which had been interpreted as criticism of early

administration actions. When the Category Five presidential storm had blown out, Trump had offered no new guidance on the key issues -- for instance, the continued inadequacy of testing, which will hamper the nation's economic opening. He vowed that the economy would fire up "ahead of schedule" but did not explain how, when many states are at or are approaching their peak infection rates. And he appeared to warn he would try to force open state

economies, including shops, schools and restaurants closed by governors and mayors. He did not explain, either, how he would convince the public to get back to normal if people did not feel confident they were safe. "The President of the United States calls the shots," Trump said. But after the briefing, Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he disagreed with Trump's interpretation of his powers, stating that the President is not a monarch.

(Contd on page 22)



# Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi urges Muslims to avoid congregating during Ramzan

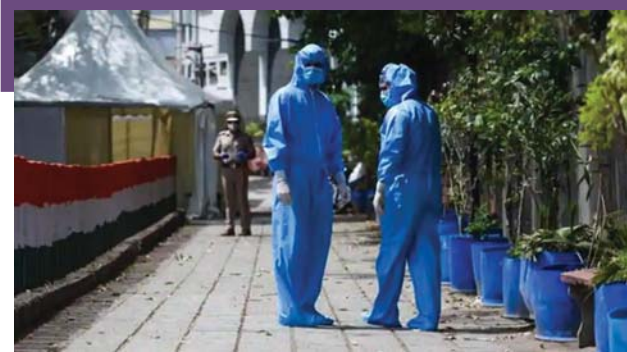
**Union minister for minority affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Monday urged the Muslim community to follow the social distancing protocol and adhere to the lockdown guidelines during the holy month of Ramzan starting later in April.**

(News Agencies) Union minister for minority affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Monday urged the Muslim community to follow the social distancing protocol and adhere to the lockdown guidelines during the holy month of Ramzan starting later in April. In a statement, Naqvi asked the people to pray and practice rituals such as breaking the fast inside the safety of their homes instead of congregating in mosques and other public places. Naqvi told Hindustan Times on Monday that he would reach out to the State Waqf Board members, custodians of various mosques and Ulemas to drive home the message of adhering to the lockdown guidelines and also stress the importance of breaking the chain of coronavirus pandemic. Naqvi said on behalf of the Central Waqf Council, of which he is the chairperson, messages urging the community members to desist from congregating have been issued. There are seven lakh registered mosques and Imambaras and dargahs under the Central Waqf Council. In the wake of restrictions imposed on public meetings during the lockdown, religious activities and festivities in



temples, mosques, churches and gurdwaras have been cancelled.

## Jamaat brought collective shame and Islamophobia, Muslims say



**To some Muslims, the war on coronavirus has begun to look like a war on the community itself. The community finds itself blamed for the spread of the coronavirus.**

(News Agencies) Jehirul Islam, a coronavirus disease patient, made a final call on April 10 from his hospital bed in Maharashtra's Akola to his family in Assam. He sounded grim, fearing something he imagined to be far worse than dying of Covid-19. The next day, hospital staff found him dead, his throat slit, in an apparent suicide.

"He was worried he won't be able to make it back home and that, if he were to die, his body would be cremated, rather than buried in a Muslim cemetery," his brother Moinul Islam said from Singimari, a village in central Assam's Nagaon district.

Two suicides have been driven by stigma, rumours and slurs directed toward India's 200-million Muslims.

To some Muslims, the war on coronavirus has begun to look like a war on the community itself. The community finds itself blamed for the spread of the coronavirus. This followed a global religious congregation in New Delhi in mid-March, held by Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic movement of preachers, which met in defiance of official restrictions.

The gathering of nearly 2,500 delegates, some

from Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan, led to a dramatic spike in Covid-19 cases in the country, with Indian attendees presumably infected by the foreigners then going on to infect people across the country. At one point the congregants or their contacts accounted for a third of the total cases.

Fears of cremation of Muslims, based on rumours, were unfounded. "The government's guidelines state that Muslim Covid-19 victims should be buried at a cemetery closest to the place where the patient died," Maharashtra

minister Aslam Shaikh said. The religious event led to outrage among both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, Muslims then began to be accused on social media sites of deliberately spreading the virus as part of a "jihad".

The hashtag "coronajihad" was circulated 300,000 times, according to Equality Labs, a digital advocacy group, quoted by Time magazine. Ordinary Muslims say the Jamaatis were "irresponsible and condemnable", but the incident has given rise to reprisals.

There have also been several reports of them misbehaving in quarantine, including at Delhi's LNJP hospital where the police had to be called in.

In Delhi's Bawana, a mob attacked Mehboob Ali, who had attended a similar Islamic gathering in

Madhya Pradesh, leading to three arrests, according to the Delhi Police.

On April 4, Mohammed Dilshad, who had a connection to Tablighi Jamaat, hanged himself in Himachal Pradesh's Una Bangarh village, allegedly because of social boycott. In Assam's Nalbari district, Hindu shopkeepers refuse to serve people from a Muslim village, according to Rehmat Ali, a farmer of the area. In another instance of Islamophobia, an official of the State Foreigners' Tribunal in Assam on April 7 wrote a letter to the state's health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that shocked Muslims. In it, Kamallesh Gupta, the official, said he and his colleagues had made donations to the state's coronavirus fund. However, he urged that "help may not be extended"

to Muslims linked to Tablighi Jamaat, who he labelled "jihadi", a synonym for terrorists. Crucially, officials like Gupta are tasked with deciding the fate of people stripped of citizenship in the state on suspicion of being illegal foreign migrants.

It is true that the Tablighi Jamaat congregation led to a steep spike in the number of Covid-19 cases. A senior health ministry official, Lav Agarwal, addressing reporters, said on April 5 that the number of days it would have taken for India's coronavirus cases to double had quickened to 4.1 days from 7.1 due to the congregation.

"The Jamaat people should have deferred their meet. They have brought miseries on the community," said Maulana Asghar Ali, the imam of a

mosque in Delhi's Kotla Mubarakpur.

The government seems to have been slack too, said Naved Hamid Moemin, the chief of All India Majlis-e-Mushwarat, a Muslim advocacy organisation. "The police made no effort to separate foreigners from Indian preachers at the gathering despite serving a notice on them," Moemin said.

Last week, the Union home ministry issued an advisory on preventing "social stigma" attached to Covid-19 patients or their communities. It said "certain communities and areas are being labelled purely based on false reports", adding that such prejudices need to be "countered urgently". The federal health advisory urged officials to "never spread the names or identity of those affected".

## For Dharavi's sanitation problems, K VijayRaghavan pitches for some frugal solutions

**Principal Scientific Adviser K VijayRaghavan said the foot-operated hand wash stations was an example how frugal and effective tools could have a disproportionately positive impact**

(News Agencies) The country's top scientist's team has come up with a 'do it yourself' hand wash station that could be used in densely populated neighborhoods such as Dharavi to raise the sanitation bar. This one is operated by foot and can be assembled by community volunteers and authorities using affordable and locally available material even during the lockdown's supply-chain challenges.

These foot-operated hand wash stations not only reduce the

chance of transmission of disease by eliminating direct contact with potentially high-infection areas but also reduce the amount of water used to wash hands, the office of Principal Scientific Adviser K VijayRaghavan said in a statement on Monday. "Our densely populated places, Dharavi is but one example that needs special attention. The manual, put together by the team at the PSA's office, brings out how frugal but effective tools can have disproportionate positive

impact," K VijayRaghavan said. He urged community leaders, NGOs and corporate houses to take up to implement such solutions.

Mumbai's Dharavi, Asia's biggest slum cluster, has already reported 49 Covid-19 cases. Five of them have died. Given how the residents of Dharavi are short on space and basic amenities, there has been a lurking concern that the highly contagious disease could spread rapidly prompting the state to bring in hundreds of reserve police personnel to

enforce the lockdown and social distancing norms.

The sprawl of shanties spread across 240-hectare is home to 8,50,000 people. At a population density of 66,000 people per square kilometre, it is one of Mumbai's most congested spaces. A set of guidelines issued by VijayRaghavan's office on Monday said some basic steps would, with precautions and measures, help control the spread of Covid-19 in such densely populated areas where toilets, washing or bathing facilities are shared.



# The Cost Of COVID-19 Lockdown: Rise In Bonded Labour And Human Trafficking In India

**Foresight and preparedness in the midst of the current lockdown can save the lives of crores of women, men and children and avoid an impending humanitarian crisis**

(News Agencies) As most parts of India seek a seamless supply of essential goods in the midst of the countrywide lockdown to fight COVID-19, the central question that assumes importance is – what are the conditions under which the labour force is meeting the demand of mass production and delivery at low costs?

The national lockdown came into effect on March 26, backed by health experts as a necessary step for containing the rapid spread of the virus. There are, however, consequences of the contagion that go beyond the health-related challenges, and raise, possibly, more long-term humanitarian concerns.

The huge number – over 39 crore – of unorganised and migrant workers on the fringes or outside the socio-economic security umbrella, are the most vulnerable. This

makes them the easiest target for the organised crime network of human trafficking. Deprivation and hunger await them before and after they reach their villages across several states. They will be forced into debt and predatory interest rates even for their daily subsistence. This will trigger decades of inter-generational bondage and wage-less labour. Hundreds of thousands of children will be enslaved.

Once the lockdown is lifted and normal manufacturing activity resumes, factory owners will look to cover their financial losses by employing cheap labour. Increasingly, desperate and vulnerable populations of unorganised workers, who are in no position to negotiate wages or their rights, will be a massive pool for cheap labour.

A large number of these labourers will be children,

forced out of school, bearing the burden of sustaining their families. Thousands of children will likely be trafficked across the country to work in manufacturing units where they will be paid meagre to no wages and will most likely face extreme physical, mental and sexual violence. Underage girls will be married and bought and sold into prostitution. According to government data (2007), there are at least 30 lakh women, including 12 lakh girls below the age of 18 years, involved in sex work. The forces behind the business of pushing girls and women into commercial sexual exploitation have faced 'financial loss' as a consequence of the lockdown will seek to overcome this loss through high-return investments, i.e. a girl from a family which has lost its means of subsistence and survival.

Pornhub, the largest pornography platform in the world, has seen a 20-time jump in India, from 0.9% on February 24 to 18.1% as on March 16. A large segment of this 'content' includes trafficked children who are exploited to create pornographic material. Adults and children who consume this content are likely to 'normalise and fetishise' child rape and sexual violence, which may translate into offline sexual violence.

Preparedness to counter bonded labour and trafficking As the central and state governments struggle to contain the immediate health and economic challenges, a great amount of planning must go into dealing with the imminent impact of this crisis, especially in terms of the safety of the most vulnerable children.

1. Assessment and review of legal framework: The central

government must assess the existing criminal law on trafficking and its ability to counter the crime and meet the needs of the victim. The lapsed anti-trafficking bill needs to be amended and passed in Parliament urgently.

. Inspections of factories and manufacturing units: Small and medium business will try and operate through unregulated manufacturing units to subvert inspection and must be contained within the system of accountability. The enforcement and compliance of child labour and bonded labour laws will require increased focus, including extensive combing exercises of registered factories and other manufacturing units, for at least two years, to prevent the use of child labourers.

3. Increase in budgetary allocation for law enforcement and victim rehabilitation: There is a gross deficit in the

budgetary allocation to combat bonded labour and trafficking. Up to 2016, 3.13 lakh bonded labourers have been rescued. The rehabilitation framework for rescued bonded labourers was strengthened in 2016, though, a central government scheme provides for compensation up to Rs 3 lakh to victims. From the date of the notification of this scheme till December 2019, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, founded by Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, has rescued 1,550 child bonded labourers and 2,823 child victims of trafficking. The rehabilitation of these children alone required a minimum of Rs 100.2 crore. Yet, the total allocation for the scheme in the national budget is only Rs 100 crore annually. This calls for an immediate hike, especially focused on the rehabilitation of rescued bonded labourers and trafficking victims.

## 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.



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- 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.
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## 'Cry, my beloved country' Chidambaram takes on PM Modi's lockdown extension



(News Agencies) Shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced lockdown extension till May 3 to fight Covid-19, Congress leader P Chidambaram attacked the central government saying the poor have been left to fend for themselves.

"We reciprocate the PM's New Year greetings. We understand the compulsion for extending the lockdown. We support the decision. CMs' demand for money elicited no response. Not a rupee has been added to the miserly package of March 25, 2020. From Raghuram Rajan to Jean Dreze, from Prabhat Patnaik to Abhijit Banerji, their advice has fallen on deaf years," Chidambaram said on Twitter on Tuesday.

"The poor have been left to fend for themselves for 21+19 days, including practically soliciting food. There is money, there is food, but the government will not release either money or food. Cry, my beloved country," he said in another tweet. PM Modi on Tuesday extended a nationwide lockdown until May 3 as the number of coronavirus cases crossed 10,000 despite a three-week shutdown.

PM Modi, in his third address to the nation, said the challenge was to stop the virus from spreading to new parts of the country.

"Till May 3, every Indian will have to stay in lockdown. I request all Indians that we stop the coronavirus from spreading to other areas," he said. The current three-week-old lockdown was scheduled to end at midnight on Tuesday.

## US clears sale of Harpoon missiles, torpedoes for India's P-8I aircraft

The US State Department approved the sale following a request for these two military hardware made by the Indian Government, the Pentagon said amidst China flexing its military muscles in the strategic Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean.



(News Agencies) The US State Department has cleared two deals to sell India Harpoon Block II air launched missiles and lightweight torpedoes worth \$ 155 million. The anti-ship missiles and the torpedoes would be integrated with the P-8I aircraft, also called the "submarine killer".

The 10 AGM-84L Harpoon Block II air launched missiles that have a range of about 124 km is estimated to cost \$ 92 million. The 16 MK 54 All Up Round Lightweight Torpedoes and three MK 54 Exercise Torpedoes are expected to cost \$ 63 million, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in two separate notifications to the Congress.

According to the Pentagon, the Harpoon missile system will be integrated into the P-8I aircraft to conduct anti-surface warfare missions in defence of critical sea lanes while enhancing interoperability with the United States and other allied forces.

"India will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional

threats and to strengthen its homeland defense. India will have no difficulty absorbing this equipment into its armed forces," the Pentagon said.

The proposed sale, it said, will improve India's capability to meet current and future threats from enemy weapon systems.

The Harpoon missiles will be manufactured by Boeing and will be integrated into the P-8I aircraft, the Indian variant of Boeing's P-8s. This is a multi-mission aircraft designed for long-range anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission.

The 3.84 metre long missile has a 500-pound penetration, high-explosive blast warhead that gives it enough firepower to destroy coastal defence and surface-to-air missile sites, industrial installations and docked ships.

According to the Pentagon, this proposed sale will support the foreign

policy and national security of the United States by helping to strengthen the US-India strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defensive partner, which continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region.

China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Beijing has also made substantial progress in militarising its manmade islands in the past few years, which it says it has the right to defend, according to news agency PTI.

China claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea. But Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims. In the East China Sea, Beijing has territorial disputes with Japan. The South China Sea and the East China Sea are stated to be rich in minerals, oil and other natural resources. They are also vital to global trade.

## Prashant Bhushan, Kannan Gopinathan booked by Gujarat police

**Bhushan was charged for allegedly using objectionable tweet against the Ramayana and Kannan Gopinathan was booked for using government orders on social media to mislead people.**

(News Agencies) Lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan and former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Kannan Gopinathan were booked by Gujarat police over their social media posts on Sunday. While Bhushan was charged for allegedly using objectionable tweet against the Ramayana, Kannan Gopinathan was booked for using government orders on social media to mislead people. The first information report (FIR) was registered at Bhaktinagar police station of Rajkot city on Sunday evening. Later, the investigation was transferred to the special operations group (SOG). "A complaint was submitted by a retired captain from

the army identified as Jaydev Bhai Joshi, a native of Rajkot. In his complaint, Joshi accused Bhushan of using word opium with Ramayana and Mahabharata in a tweet made on March 28 which has hurt the sentiments of many Hindu people," Rohit Rawal, a police inspector with SOG, said. Rawal is also the investigating officer of the case. "As crores starve & walk hundreds of miles home due to forced lockdown, our heartless ministers celebrate consuming & feeding the opium of Ramayana & Mahabharata to the people," Bhushan had tweeted on March 28. The complainant also alleged that Gopinathan and Ashlin

Mathew, the news editor of National Herald newspaper, tweeted government orders in a misleading manner which can lead to a disturbance of peace in society. "On the basis of the complaint, we have registered a case against the trio under section 34 (criminal act done by several persons), 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage the religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or the religious beliefs), 505(1) (publishing or circulating any statement, rumour or report which can cause fear and alarm amongst people) and section 120-B (criminal conspiracy of the Indian Penal Code. We are

verifying the tweet. Further investigation is on," Rawal added. Prashant Bhushan refused to comment. Gopinathan had tweeted on Monday that Gujarat police registered an FIR against him for allegedly misinterpreting government order. "Nice try. You can arrest. But you won't silence. No one is afraid of you here," he said. The former IAS officer was recently asked to join his duty immediately in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic but he said he will extend his "services in health, wealth and mind to the government in this fight against Covid-19 pandemic, it will be as a free and responsible citizen and not anymore as an IAS officer."





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# Obama endorses Biden for president in video message

Obama, in a lengthy video taped on Monday and posted on Tuesday, lauds Biden's character and resilience, touting him as the right kind of candidate to lead the country through a crisis like the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Obama also highlights the stakes of the 2020 election by arguing Trump and Republicans in the Senate are solely interested in power, not making progress for Americans.

"If there's one thing we've learned as a country from moments of great crisis, it's that the spirit of looking out for one another can't be restricted to our homes, or our workplaces, or our neighborhoods, or our houses of worship," Obama says in the over 11-minute endorsement video. "It also has to be reflected in our national government." He continues: "The kind of leadership that's guided by knowledge and experience, honesty and humility, empathy and grace — that kind of leadership doesn't just belong in our state capitols and mayors offices. It belongs in the White House."

"And that's why I'm so proud to endorse Joe Biden for President of the United States," he adds.

The endorsement reunites the former running mates and positions Obama, whose endorsement of Biden was seen as a forgone conclusion once Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders dropped out of the race last week, to be one of Biden's most powerful surrogates in the race against Trump.

It also marks the public re-emergence of Obama into the political arena. The former president kept a low public profile throughout much of the Democratic nomination fight, but he was active behind the scenes.

Biden thanked Obama for the endorsement on Tuesday shortly after the video posted.

"Barack — This endorsement means the world to Jill and me," he wrote. "We're going to build on the progress we made together, and there's no one I'd rather have standing by my side." Two people familiar with Obama's video say it is intended as more than a simple endorsement of his friend and former vice president. His message is

designed to address this particular moment in America and around the world, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Obama also spoke directly to progressives, praising the spirit of their movement before outlining why he believes they should embrace Biden's candidacy. The former president also offered full-throated praise of Sanders and noted what his candidacy has meant for the pursuit of liberal ideals.

"Bernie's an American original — a man who has devoted his life to giving voice to working people's hopes, dreams, and frustrations. He and I haven't always agreed on everything, but we've always shared a conviction that we have to make America a fairer, more just, more equitable society," Obama says.

The former president also offered some of his most direct criticism yet of his successor without calling Trump out by name.

"One thing everybody has learned by now is that the Republicans occupying the White House and running the

US Senate are not interested in progress," Obama says. "They're interested in power." Obama casts Trump as a leader who is more interested in helping the wealthy in the midst of a pandemic than average Americans. He argues that the President and Senate Republicans have repeatedly "disregarded American principles of rule of law, and voting rights, and transparency," and have been helped by "a propaganda network with little regard for the truth," seemingly a knock against Fox News. While those comments are meant to rally loyal Biden supporters against Republicans, they are also aimed squarely at some liberal Democrats skeptical of the former vice president by clearly highlighting the stakes of the election. Many Democrats who ran for president made this argument throughout the campaign, but top Democrats believe it could be more powerful coming from someone who had previously handled the decisions before Trump right now. Obama in November said he had spoken to all of the candidates during the

campaign, often giving them advice both before they announced their bid and after they dropped out. Advisers to the former president said his advice was often the same: Consider why you believe you should be president, what impact it will have on your family and whether you can actually win. "We have a field of very accomplished, very serious and passionate and smart people who have a history of public service," Obama said at a private fundraiser in late 2019. "Whoever emerges from the primary process, I will work my tail off to make sure they are the next president." Obama had long said he would get behind the eventual nominee, but the former president's deep affection for Biden was well known to all those who ran against the former vice president this year. Biden even jokingly posted an homage to Obama on "Best Friends Day" in 2019, featuring a friendship bracelet that featured the names "Joe" and "Barack". That relationship, though, did not keep Obama from giving counsel to other

candidates. As Sanders worked to determine the future of his campaign, Obama and the Vermont senator spoke multiple times, a source familiar with the conversation told CNN. Sanders endorsed Biden on Monday in a livestream, pledging to help him defeat President Trump. "We need you in the White House. I will do all that I can to see that that happens, Joe," Sanders said to Biden. In the few moments where Obama did speak out about the race, the former president warned voters of worrying too much about the bruising nature of a primary, reminding them that he and then-Sen. Hillary Clinton had a tough primary in 2008. And the former president told the candidates to avoid going so far left that they go beyond where voters actually are. "My one cautionary note is I think it is very important for all the candidates who are running at every level to pay some attention to where voters actually are," Obama said in November, specifically saying he doesn't think candidates should be "deluded into thinking that the resistance to certain approaches to things is simply because voters haven't heard a bold enough proposal." It is this period of the campaign, however, when some supporters of other candidates, especially Sanders backers, feel like their hopes were dashed once their candidates dropped out, where Obama's team believes the former president can be most useful. "He is uniquely positioned to galvanize the party around the nominee and increase voter turnout so that a Democrat is successful in the general election," Valerie Jarrett, a longtime Obama adviser, told CNN in March. Jarrett said that they believed it was "important" to let all the candidates "stand on their own two feet" but that once a nominee was selected, Obama would use the support he enjoyed from a "a broad spectrum of the Democratic Party, both the progressive and moderate wings" to bring the factions together.

## Coronavirus takes a serious turn in Russia, and Putin no longer radiates confidence

How quickly things can change in the time of coronavirus. In his Monday videoconference, Putin took stock of a worsening situation. "We have a lot of problems," Putin said. "There is nothing to boast about, and we must not let our guard down, because in general, as you and your specialists say, we have not passed the peak of the epidemic yet."

The trendline speaks for itself. While Russia has comparatively few cases compared with the United States or the hardest-hit European countries, the number of confirmed cases has surged in recent days. On Monday, Russia reported a record one-day rise in cases, with 2,558 confirmed over the previous 24 hours. On Tuesday, Russia hit a fresh record: 2,774 confirmed cases. And Putin is coming in for serious criticism over his handling of the crisis.

In a recent essay, Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Moscow Center said the coronavirus pandemic had underscored Putin's isolation from ordinary Russians. "One of the main topics today is why Putin is almost imperceptible

in the coronavirus situation," she wrote. "He only addressed the nation briefly twice and went to the [coronavirus] hospital in Kommunarka, but he neither gave his own assessments of the crisis nor proposed a plan of action, but limited himself to scattered measures and general words. No drama, empathy or attempts to mobilize."

Putin, Stanovaya argued, does not wish to be associated with harsh or unpopular measures, leaving such chores to local subordinates. In the case of the coronavirus, the task of rolling out some of the most heavy-handed restrictions has fallen to Sergey Sobyenin, the mayor of Moscow.

The Russian capital has been the hardest hit by the virus. Officially, Russia has 21,102 cases, according to the government's official tracking website, and the death toll has reached 170. Around half of the country's recorded cases — 11,513 — are in Moscow, and 82 Muscovites have died.

Sobyenin has taken the lead in enforcing lockdown measures, including the introduction of a

controversial digital tracking system designed to keep residents indoors. A recent outbreak in China has also underscored the severity of the situation in Russia. Health authorities in Shanghai recently reported a surge in imported cases, tracing dozens of cases to a single flight that arrived in Shanghai from Moscow on April 10. Chinese authorities are also fighting an outbreak in city of Suifenhe, on the border with Russia's Far East, a wave of cases attributed in large part to Chinese nationals returning from Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday deflected questions about the planeload of coronavirus cases that arrived in China, referring reporters to other agencies. But the spike in cases imported to China from Russia has raised a larger question: The reliability of Russian official statistics.

The Russian government says it has carried out over 1.4 million tests for Covid-19. But Moscow doctors have recently begun diagnosing patients as positive based on lung scans because of questions over

the accuracy of the tests.

In his Monday videoconference, Putin said the next few weeks would be critical for determining whether Russia is able to effectively flatten the curve and reduce the spread of coronavirus. And he said that the Russian military "can and should be deployed here, if necessary."

The next two or three weeks may be critical for another reason. The Kremlin is still planning for an important date: the May 9 Victory Day parade, a major celebration to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. The Kremlin says plans are still underway to hold the event, which centers around an impressive display of military hardware rumbling through Red Square. Officials are reviewing plans amid coronavirus. But this prestigious event — on a holiday that is an occasion for near-religious reverence in Russia — presents a hard deadline, and a hard problem, for Putin's anti-coronavirus campaign.



# India can't bear the costs of the lockdown anymore

On Sunday afternoon, an SUV tried to enter the sabzi mandi in Patiala. The Punjab police personnel on the premises tried to stop the vehicle. The driver veered into the barricades and tried to push on ahead. But since the barricade got entangled with the car, it got stuck. Upon this, five Nihangs (a Sikh sect, members of which specialise in traditional martial art) got out of the car and assaulted the more than half-a-dozen policemen who were present. A violent conflict took place in which an assistant sub-inspector was grievously injured. Taking advantage of the ensuing chaos, the offender left the scene and took refuge in a nearby gurudwara.

They were later arrested by commandos of the Punjab police. They recovered weapons and lakhs of rupees from the gurudwara. I could not help but think what would have unfolded had the perpetrators of violence been maulanas hiding in a

mosque instead of Nihangs in a gurudwara. I suspect it would have led to a public furore. Sikhs and Muslims both are minority communities, but the incident reflects the kind of contradictions we live with as a society.

The national lockdown has led to serious unemployment issues. This has led to frustration and misery. This explains why some workers from other states came out on the streets in Surat on Friday, their helplessness and anger turning very quickly into violence. The police responded with force to disperse them. It was migrant workers like them who fled cities and went back home after the lockdown was declared. Given their numbers, no action was taken against them. But the workers in Surat were smaller in number and so the police did not hesitate to take them on. One could argue that the police was left with no choice. But the frustration and helplessness caused by this

sudden unemployment can very well lead to violence in other places.

If the lockdown period is extended — some states have already done so — substantial efforts have to be made to give daily-wage workers assistance. This lockdown has become a cause for anxiety, hunger and restlessness among them. The government must be sympathetic to their plight.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for a majority of the people and the rabi crop is ready to be harvested. Workers will be required for the harvesting, which seems difficult given the lockdown and the norms on social distancing. Even if harvested in time, the crop has to reach the mandis and farmers have to be given a fair price for their produce. For this, the supply lines will have to be opened up. Not doing this will create several challenges, the consequences of which could hurt us for a long

time.

The shutting of industries and small-scale industries for a longer duration will harm not just the people but also the economy. Industrialists and entrepreneurs have voiced their fears, and demanded that they be allowed to run at least one shift daily. Air routes, trains and national highways will also have to be opened alongside.

This is not to undermine the scale of the health challenge. Some restrictions can be enforced to prevent the spread of the pandemic. For example, the number of passengers travelling in buses, trains and planes can be limited so that social distancing rules are not compromised. This will not only restart the economic process but create a sense of hope for the future. In districts still free of the virus, the rules can be relaxed to a greater extent.

According to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce

and Industry (FICCI), India cannot sustain the burden of a lockdown for much longer. The federation has also appealed to the government to advise district magistrates that they should take the help of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for workers engaged in harvesting the rabi crop. It has also suggested imposing heavy taxes on imports for the next six months to help the domestic small-scale industry get back on its feet.

It's obvious that while grappling with this pandemic, the government will have to find ways to deal with the economic crisis. As far as the communal virus is concerned, all of us, as a society, will have to fix it. If we don't, then the future generations could well ask us whether even an enormous blow like the coronavirus was not enough to bring us to our senses and make us banish the communal virus forever.

# Cartels, gangs and rebels around the world join coronavirus fight

In eastern Afghanistan, where the Afghan government and the Taliban have clashed for nearly two decades, the rivalry over which group has a more effective health policy is now on full display. Esmatullah Asim, a provincial council member from Wardak province, watched the arrival of Taliban forces in medical gear this month and was impressed. Asim said the government quarantines only those who show symptoms at the border, but the Taliban quarantines every person who has returned recently from Iran.

"The Taliban quarantine is much better than the government," he said. The group also raises awareness about the virus in the territory it controls, he said. "They stop the vehicles, telling the passengers how to prevent the spread of the virus."

Even the U.S. State Department conveyed kudos. "We join the Afghan Ministry of Public Health in welcoming the Taliban's efforts to raise awareness against #COVID19 and their offer of safe passage to health workers & international organizations working to prevent the spread of the virus," the department wrote in a tweet.

Analysts who study the organizational structure of armed groups are now cataloguing dozens of instances of rebels and bandits making forays into public health policy.

"In some cases, the government just isn't coming to help, so this is a chance for nonstate armed groups to appear to be the responsible, accountable actor," said Sarah Parkinson, an assistant professor of political science and international studies at Johns Hopkins University. "In other cases, it's concern for their own members. And in others, it's an attempt to use a piece of evidence in their own propaganda war."

Some governments have acknowledged that armed groups could exploit their weaknesses after the virus fades, seizing on the aftermath of economic dislocation. The mayor of the Italian city of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, warned this month that "a den of Mafia jackals" is poised "to exploit the desperation of the new poor from coronavirus." Other Italian officials have suggested that the mafia could provide its own loans or cash handouts to undermine the government.

In Mexico, at least two drug cartels have begun providing aid packages to residents in places partially controlled by armed groups. In Michoacán, a video emerged last week of the Los Viagras cartel handing out plastic bags of food to hundreds of people. In Tamaulipas, a Mexican state that borders southern Texas, photos circulated of boxes full of sugar,

oil and other staples distributed in large piles. On the top of each box was plastered the name of the donor: "Gulf Cartel," they said, "in support of Ciudad Victoria," the state capital.

Falko Ernst, an analyst with the International Crisis Group in Mexico, said there was an "obvious tension" in the effort.

"These groups are trying to be seen as catering materially and providing a notion of security in places where they are also directly preying on the population through extortion and kidnapping and violence," he said. "But in a lot of places, these groups are the least bad solution for populations that don't have anywhere else to turn."

In Brazil's favelas, the messages come through WhatsApp.

"Whoever is caught on the street will learn how to respect the measure," one gang warned a Rio de Janeiro slum. "We want the best for the population. If the government is unable to manage, organized crime resolves." Last month, as the Salvadoran government was enforcing one of Latin America's earliest and most stringent lockdowns, leaders of MS-13 decided that they would institute their own curfew. It was a rare overlap of policy between the gang and the government, which

have fought each other for years.

But it also reflected a reality in much of El Salvador: The police have limited access in neighborhoods under criminal control, and in those places, only a gang-enforced curfew would be observed. MS-13 explained its reasoning to the San Salvador newspaper El Faro: The policy was about protecting its own members, who probably wouldn't have access to medical treatment if they were infected.

"If there are no respirators left and one of us is gravely ill, all tattooed, and an old woman appears who is in serious condition, they are going to disconnect the gang member and they are going to let him die," one member said.

A similar overlap in policy has occurred in Afghanistan, where the Taliban has dispatched teams that distribute gloves, soap and masks in areas under its control.

But while the insurgents and the government agree on the need to combat the virus, they continue to fight each other.

"We can't completely stop our attacks," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said. He blamed the government for "compelling" them.

Advocacy groups have encouraged more coordination between the Taliban and the Afghan government to tackle the coronavirus. Human Rights

Watch proposed videoconferences with "representatives from the Public Health Ministry, the Taliban's health commission, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and key international humanitarian agencies."

In many countries, police have been redeployed from rural to urban areas, giving criminal groups more room to operate with impunity — and to enforce their own health policy as the pandemic spreads.

In some cases, "criminal groups will play the role of enforcer with full agreement and even at the request of the state," wrote Vanda Felbab-Brown of the Brookings Institution. "Such deals in which governments outsource the rule of urban and rural peripheries to criminal groups long preceded COVID-19."

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the militant group that dominates Syria's northern Idlib province, has used the virus to burnish its credentials as a legitimate governing body, issuing orders restricting gatherings and distributing health information to the public.

No cases have been reported in the province. Public health officials and aid workers say the spread of the virus in the crowded refugee camps of Idlib, among a population with little access to health care, would be calamitous.





# Migrant Workers in India May Shun Cities After Lockdown

Migrant workers fled India's cities en masse last month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's lockdown left them suddenly unemployed. Now the employers that let them go may need to offer big incentives to lure them back. Sontosh Das, 24, lost his job driving for a family of doctors in India's capital of New Delhi and fled to his village in West Bengal some 1,400 kilometers (870 miles) away, just before the lockdown took effect on March 24. Now home in eastern India, he said he'd rather try his luck with the government's rural job-guarantee program than risk being left with nothing once again.

Tens of thousands of workers who returned to villages are now similarly weighing whether to return at the end of the lockdown, which Modi this week extended to May 3. Companies are already reporting labor shortages at ports and factories, potentially exacerbating an economic slowdown. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. this month slashed its annual growth forecast for India to the slowest pace since 1992, around when a balance of payments crisis brought down the sitting government.

Automobile makers, which include the local units of Nissan Motor Co., Ford Motor Co. and Suzuki Motor Corp., are discussing potential labor shortages after India lifts its lockdown, according to people familiar with discussions. Jewelers, India's second-largest export sector, see production suffering for at least two months, said N. Anantha Padmanaban, chairman of the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council. Real estate developers, an industry that includes investors Blackstone Group Inc. and Brookfield Asset Management Inc., predicted more incomplete apartments and office buildings that could ripple through the financial sector in the coming

year as a surge in defaults. Companies such as Jindal Steel Ltd. are facing a shortage of crane operators at ports.

## Unprecedented Hardship'

The labor shortages could persist for as long as six months before broader unemployment becomes a bigger concern, said Sujana Hajra, Mumbai-based chief economist at Anand Rathi Financial Services Ltd. About 20% of India's workforce comprises migrants journeying from another state, while a larger share is made up of people who travel from different parts of the state where their workplace is located, he added. "The unprecedented hardship faced by migrant workers since the outbreak of Covid-19 might result in fear psychosis," Hajra said, predicting a worsening of India's "already precarious employment situation."

Modi has apologized for the

hardship caused by the sudden lockdown — announced at dinnertime March 24 and brought into force at midnight — which denied as many as 100 million workers the chance to collect their pay and triggered the biggest forced migration since the partition of India in 1947. Yet, for the hundreds of thousands of laborers who began trudging back to their villages after being rendered unemployed and homeless, anger against Modi will depend on how long the pain lingers. "Modi's government has been clever about putting the onus of safety and health on the citizens and not on the state," said Yamini Aiyar, president at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi who formerly worked with the World Bank on rural development. If fatalities stay low, "the Modi government could spin this as a victory — say 'yes, you faced

hardships but at least people stayed alive," she said. "But if the numbers grow, their handling will be questioned along with the bungling in the economic sphere, which is significant and severe." The government is aware the country will need to address labor shortages to restart the economy, Nitin Gadkari, minister of roads and small and medium scale enterprises, said in an interview. India will allow makers of information technology hardware, farmers and industries in rural

around the time when a balance of payments crisis brought down the sitting government and led to the creation of a new administration focused on economic reform rather than political in-fighting. While India's economic fundamentals are far stronger today than two decades ago, the nation's poorest citizens have been directly hit for the second time since 2016, when Modi abruptly invalidated almost all bank notes in a similar late night edict aimed at combating corruption. Yet, unlike during demonetization when

areas to resume operations after April 20, the Ministry of Home Affairs said in a statement on Wednesday. It will also lift restrictions to allow e-commerce companies, goods movement by roads, as well as restart port and air cargo operations.

## Seasonal Labor

India's internal migration flow changes with the seasons, with millions of workers heading to cities for most months of the year to build cars, load ships, or clean houses, before going home in time for the village harvest. Bihar, a state due to hold elections this year and home to India's second-highest migrant labor population, will be worst hit due to the reverse migration, economist and workers' rights activist Jean Dreze wrote in the Outlook magazine. Goldman forecasts India's gross domestic product will grow 1.6% in the year that started April 1, the slowest pace since 1992,

workers felt the rich man suffered more, the virus lockdown hurts mostly the poor, said Chinmay Tumbbe, an Ahmedabad-based economist with the Indian Institute of Management and author of 'India Moving: A History of Migration.' He sees closer parallels with the Bombay bubonic plague of 1896, when migrants fled the city (since renamed Mumbai) and locals perceived the colonial government's handling of the outbreak as excessive, leading to the slaying of a British bureaucrat that foretold the start of militant nationalism in India. Tumbbe predicts the coronavirus crisis will force businesses to offer incentives to retain workers for coming months, just like the 1896 exodus shifted bargaining power to labor from capital at the turn of the century. "We will see tremendous labor shortages," he said. "There will be a psychological impact."

## \$4 a Day Indian Worker Worries: If Virus Won't Kill Me, Hunger Will

Chandrakant Thakur ekes out a living by zooming around Mumbai on his beaten up scooter dodging pedestrians, street dwellers, cars and sometimes cows to deliver meals. Now, with the streets eerily empty amid the city's virus lockdown, he faces a stark choice: stay and survive on half his regular pay or return to his family in the state of Bihar. "If the virus doesn't get me, hunger will," said the 28-year-old. While his income from delivering dishes like chicken curry and fried rice has been as low as 300 rupees (\$4) a day recently -- barely enough to survive on -- he's going to stick it out for now in the nation's financial capital as the outlook in his home province is even grimmer.

India's formal economy -- the part that can be measured through tax receipts -- was just starting to show some signs of bottoming out after a poorly conceived ban on high-value currency, new sales tax and shadow banking crisis had hobbled growth in recent years. Then the virus came, prompting an unprecedented 21-day lockdown of 1.3 billion people to prevent its spread.

It's gig workers and migrants like Thakur,

many of whom work in India's vast informal sector, that are the most vulnerable. Hundreds of thousands of them decided to leave for their homes before the lockdown kicked in on March 25, sparking an exodus that many are making by foot back to their villages -- a scene reminiscent of the days immediately after India's independence in 1947. "India's large informal sector is likely to be the worst hit," said Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC Holdings Plc in Mumbai. "Informal firms have insufficient access to formal finance and can go into distress quickly when cash flow becomes irregular." In Delhi, the usual hustle and bustle of business on the roads and in markets has fallen silent -- the little shops and food vendors on the sidewalks are gone and almost every shop except the odd grocery store or pharmacy in usually crowded shopping areas is shut. It's a similar scene in Mumbai, where the few people who do venture out maintain distance from each other in queues at grocery shops, which are exempt from the lockdown. Informal enterprises -- the so-called parallel economy

-- account for around 85% of overall employment and around 40% of GDP. As millions are reduced to subsistence living, and even worse in some cases, consumption is set to spiral lower, weighing on a sector that makes up some 60% of India's economy. It's yet another headwind for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of doubling the size of the economy to \$5 trillion by 2024. In a bid to cushion the blow, the government has announced cash support for informal sector workers and Modi has even made a rare apology for the hardships they face. Meantime, the central bank stepped in on March 27 with unprecedented measures that included lower borrowing costs, \$50 billion of liquidity to banks to expand credit and freedom to lenders to suspend some loan repayments for three months. Even with that fiscal-monetary combination, the economy is poised to shrink in the quarters ahead. While slower growth means economic hardships and joblessness in developed nations, that scale of slowdown in India is set to see millions suffer in poverty, struggling to even feed their families.



# How Unfortunate, Migrants Treated As Black Holes And Black Boxes Of Corona Chronicles

**During corona times, the migrant discovered he was marginal, suspect and jobless. Haunted by vulnerabilities, he had to face hunger and humiliation, writes academician Shiv Visvanathan**



A trauma is a physic wound that goes beyond the physical to damage the soul. It carries shades of stigma. It is usually confined to the backstage of most disasters and is constructed as an afterthought. The trauma of the coronavirus pandemic faces a similar fate.

As India sees itself as a middle-class society, it defines itself in middle-class terms. The whole idea of the lockdown was seen as a disciplinary exercise, an attempt to redefine life as a timetable. The middle class lives by timetables. It is a mindset and a way of life. When timetables are frozen, the middle class goes into confinement and its certainties are destroyed. With the lockdown, the upper middle class discovers boredom, isolation, anxiety, leisure and, of course, work from home. Yet the middle-class mentality displayed a complete indifference to the marginal, the migrant, the nomad—and the trauma induced by the coronavirus begins with these very categories.

The trauma of the informal society accelerated at the very moment the national lockdown was announced, when the worker faced the very temporariness of its citizenship and being. The migrant discovered he was marginal,

suspect and jobless. Haunted by vulnerabilities, he had to face hunger and humiliation. He was treated as a mass organism and was sprayed with chemicals at the borders. The middle-class tourist also discovered this underside of life as he rushed borders that had been shut down, confronting the police that had fused the migrant and the tourist in his mind. Suddenly, the ordinary Indian faced fear, anxiety and aloneness as he found there was no sense of homecoming. The migrant as an ambiguous creature was trapped in a liminality that bureaucracy refused to understand. The Bihari workers who had left their ration cards home found themselves confronting a hunger that left them helpless. Sadly, their anxiety and fear found no narrative, and the mental woes went backstage. Added to the indignity of treatment, they also found the absence of their place in the emerging narratives. They were the black holes and black boxes of the corona chronicles. The migrant discovered that some disasters are more equal than others. For example, cyclones and floods have rituals of response and narratives, but the coronavirus had a few explanatory myths to make life easier.

The slum, usually throbbing with life and activity, had completely emptied out. With the lockdown

began the police crackdown on all the little shops and dhabas. The daily-wage worker found he had no employment. He had to wait day after day to watch the scene unfold. Joblessness, hunger and uncertainty haunt the informal economy. As a woman in a Chennai slum told me, “A few woman as domestic workers hold on to their jobs, but what about our men who hang around and wait?” Waiting is the trauma that the rich do not understand. Waiting empties identity, breaks confidence and questions competence. Waiting is greeted in silence because it is cloaked in anonymity. The slums fester in a trauma of waiting and uncertainty, yet the media had little place for them. It celebrates ‘work from home’ for corporate executives.

One has to face the stark uncertainty of what is called civic life today. A lockdown creates a Hobbesian policy, a set of authoritarian territories patrolled by cops and clerks. The police handle all such challenges by reducing it to a law-and-order problem, where everyone is by definition suspect. They lathicharge people thoughtlessly, including even those returning from official responsibilities. The terrifying indifference of cops is complemented by landlords creating a web of stigma around patients, doctors and social workers. The landlord is

convinced that all of them are infectious and wants to extern them. This places doctors and social workers in an ironic situation. The sadness is that both the trauma and the authoritarianism of the city go unreported. To be fair, while trauma, unstated and unreported, haunts the informal economy, it is beginning to haunt the middle-class as well. Here time is a major factor because the certainty of timetables is what defines middle-class identity and stability. A housewife complains that people had little place for her fears; she told me she suffered from the guilt that she might infect someone innocently. She also complained she gets haunted by fears that are further exaggerated by the rumours and reports from the street. One of them mentioned the story of a mob attacking a man merely because he coughed obsessively. The ordinary cough, once a mark of everyday presence, now becomes sinister. She also added that old people now feel vulnerable as they have been statistically singled out. Vulnerability and susceptibility now become marks of stigma. As a 70-year-old man put it, “I felt hard as a rock, but now people treat me as a question mark.” Worse, old people, especially those

with senile dementia, now appear obsolescent. They feel apologetic in the presence of company, clear that time is no longer on their side.

Our society has few narratives or myths to make sense of the trauma of mass death.

Yet, what includes all citizens is that the coronavirus has created an ecology of death, mass death, around the Indian city. An individual death is understandable, but mass death creates fear and trembling of a different kind. It has an apocalyptic inevitability that puts a stop to ordinary life. This everydayness of mass death is measured with the banality of weather reports as newspapers announce body counts for the day. The word exponential has a magical quality of fatalism. People feel helpless and sense that the virus could claim one and all. Mass death creates a deep sense of trauma and our society has few narratives or myths to make sense of it.

Vulnerability, violence, non-being, an ecology of indifference and uncertainty, create wounds that are not visible but real, and whose force corrodes the human being by making him feel less than human. India needs to take mental trauma seriously and systematically. We have to consider trauma medically and psychologically as part of the violence of our lives, and respond to it professionally and ethically.

Trauma is more than loneliness and isolation. It is a festering wound that needs society to help it heal. Care, community and communication are the basis of cure. Our society must learn to listen to suffering again. The tragedy is, trauma is still an embarrassment, a taboo word. One hopes the virus brings all these narratives into the open. Democracy needs to look systematically at the travails of the worker, the homemaker and the patient as it does for the voter and the consumer.



## Blame It On COVID-19: No Work, Empty Stomach And The Mind Of A Daily Wage Earner

For over two weeks, Sahadat Ansari has been spending sleepless nights. When he drifts into sleep, the image of his three-year-old daughter's wailing face jolts him awake. Ansari is consumed by guilt as he imagines that his daughter is crying from hunger. Till dawn breaks, the 36-year-old daily wage paces up and down the cramped room he shares with four others. The future looks grim for Ansari, who came to Delhi 16 years ago looking for a job. He has been working as a mason and earned Rs 500 daily. But with no work in the last fortnight, he's gone to bed hungry most days. The uncertainty and helplessness is now driving him into despair. A psychiatrist is a foreign term to him; he reads the Quran when things reach a breaking point.

Ansari's family of nine, including his elderly parents, lives in Bihar and he is worried about how to feed them. Contrary emotions tear at him from opposite directions: he wants to be with them, yet knows that his village has nothing to offer. The Delhi government has announced some piecemeal measures which is not helping labourers much, he says. Though some government agencies and NGOs are distributing food, Ansari says the serpentine queues, or the unruly jostle to grab the meagre meals, dissuades him from joining them.

Nimesh G. Desai, director, Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) Delhi, says that his team has already started reaching out to migrants stranded in the city. He says though life for them is uncertain, progressive policies should help the community. "Migrant labourers do not worry about larger issues. If their basic needs such as food and shelter are fulfilled, they feel assured. Our team finds that they are mostly amenable," says Desai.

# Breaching The Lakshman Rekha! From Mega Religious Gatherings To Labourers, How An Underprepared Government Was Caught Napping

A sense of nation-wide emergency, across all aspects of life, now pervades governance. Coordination is maximum, and conflict minimum, across Centre and states—indeed, across the political sphere. Everyone realises how crucial this period is. The expression 'Lakshman rekha', a recent appearance in the lexicon of words associated with the fight against COVID-19, reflects that. A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 21-day lockdown on March 24, Doordarshan began a rerun of Ramanand Sagar's TV serial Ramayan, and soon someone realised this metaphor from the epic resonated particularly well in these unusual circumstances. What was this new proscription—stay at home, going out would invite danger—if not a modern form of Lakshman rekha?

Reality, of course, soon defied the epical metaphor. Thousands upon thousands of Indians had no option but to observe it in the breach. Having left their villages for a hardscrabble life in the glittering cities—where they worked on highways, built condominiums for others, served tea, cleaned, and did hundreds of other jobs—they never had the safety net implied by a Lakshman rekha. The national lockdown left them without work, money and food, or even buses or trains to go home. So they packed their meagre belongings and started on a determined long walk, on highways they had themselves built. If anything, it resembled another image from the epic—that of a collective vanwas.

The government had clearly not seen it coming. Much like it did not foresee several other things. Take the fortnight-long Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi, which became a 'hotspot' unto itself. No religious congregation had yet been banned (the event was from March 1-15)—crowds still thronged Vaishno Devi, Keoladevi in Rajasthan and Shani Shingnapur in Maharashtra. Even on March 20, thousands gathered in 'literate' Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram for an 'arattu' procession at a local temple. Even without a ban, each one of them spoke of the criminal

insularity of congregation leaders. Corona fears were widely known by then, and each was a likely super-spreader event.

The fears proved acutely true with the Tabligh event, where the organisers really should have known better—their footfalls are typically global, and their February event in Malaysia had already been designated the "largest viral vector in Southeast Asia" by New York Times as early as March 3. As it transpired, some 1,900 people had to be evacuated on March 31 from their Nizamuddin HQ and sent into quarantine, weeks after they arrived from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia et al. Over 100 of them have been confirmed as coronavirus positive. Many had travelled across India, almost certainly infecting others, and who are now being traced. The Nizamuddin colony has been sealed. March 31 also saw the biggest spike in cases—237 in 24 hours.

But if the Tabligh was myopic, so also other religious congregations; was it not part of a larger myopia at the level of government? Policy has to be fed by sharp information-gathering. Both were sloppy. The fact that the Tabligh event went on for a fortnight is now being seen at least as an 'intelligence failure' (if not an administrative one). So is the exodus of migrant labour—which produced intense concentrations of humans, the very opposite of the effect intended by the PM. Another potentially spreading web not foreseen. So far, so flat-footed.

What now? A mess had been created, it had to be cleaned up. An urgency previously missing was now in evidence—some of it desperate. The government scrambled to stop the exodus, closing all district and state borders. Before that, heart-wrenching scenes were witnessed at Delhi's Anand Vihar bus terminal as migrants jostled to get a seat on buses arranged by the Delhi and UP governments (the chain of authority not very clear), and also at the Bihar border where they were all kept locked up in a facility—for a disease best prevented by maintaining physical distance. Some semblance of order

was finally restored after states set up shelters for migrants, whose homeward march was halted. In a shocking revelation, the Centre told the Supreme Court that the exodus had to be stopped as almost one-third of the returning migrants could be infected. The apex court, in turn, said large-scale migration out of "fear and panic" was a bigger threat than the pandemic itself. Not that the latter isn't. In a status report filed on March 31, home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla told the SC: "So far rural India has remained safe from this infection. If migrant labourers are allowed to... reach their home village(s), there is a serious and imminent potential of the infection penetrating rural India also." That would make it "unmanageable to contain," he wrote, "dangerous for the migrant workers" and "also for rural India". The Centre was working in close coordination with the states to ensure food, shelter and medical facilities to the migrant workers, he added. "Around 6,66,291 persons have been provided shelter; 22,88,279 persons have been provided food," the status report said. The system had cranked into action, if belatedly.

The policy drift that defined much of March was now being analysed at large. Among other things, Union home minister Amit Shah had been keeping a noticeably low profile all through. MHA officials say he has been holding regular review meetings at his Krishna Menon Marg residence. But that's one aspect. Overall, says former cabinet secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar, the situation should never have come to this pass. "The PM had no choice other than the national lockdown to 'flatten the curve'. But it should have been handled in a better way," he tells Outlook. According to him, Modi could have signalled an imminent lockdown when he addressed the nation for the first time on March 20. His March 22 'janata curfew' also created contrary effects on the streets, and lockdown day finally set off a panic shopping frenzy too, after word came at 8 pm.

## The State needs to step up, urgently

One positive fallout of the current crisis is that chief ministers (CMs) have willingly taken on financial responsibility for the citizens of their states, while their host state has been entrusted with providing benefits. Domicile states are also experimenting with finding ways of delivering cash to their migrant populations through mobile apps. These emergency responses need to be institutionalised and could serve as the basis for portability.

Second, Centre-state coordination. This column has repeatedly made the case for robust coordination mechanisms in dealing with this crisis. Hiccups in the last 21 days, from difficulties with inter-state

movement of essential services to delays in procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing kits and the multiple clarificatory orders issued, have only underscored why coordination matters. In recent days, forums for deliberation with states have begun to emerge. Consultations with CMs are more frequent and individual ministries too are setting up issue-specific coordination centres, but we need a more systematic institutionalised response to reduce the kind administrative failure witnessed in these last weeks.

Going forward, the coordination challenge will likely become far more complex. The

fiscal package, when it is finally announced, will require consultation and coordination with states. To explain, Covid-19 outbreaks will be localised within states placing differential financial needs, linked to state-specific health capacities and socioeconomic profiles. The appropriate financial response will thus have to be agile and mindful of state- and disease-specific needs. This can only be achieved through an institutional platform for consultation with states, akin to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) council. Such a platform will also serve as a check against deploying a central government-controlled fiscal package that fails to respond

to ground-level needs. Reviving the inter-state council is one option that ought to be considered. Third, better communication and transparency. In this phase of graded lockdowns with states, districts and clusters moving between red, orange and green, and local economies abruptly, the government will need to be far more transparent and credible about its data, district compliance levels and the rationale behind decisions for locking down, about testing strategies, health system preparedness, economic relief and exit plans. Transparency is the only tool

to ensure compliance without State coercion and harassment of citizens. Finally, as the hardships of the lockdown mount, we must remember that a democracy that treats its citizens with callousness and a complete lack of compassion, cannot survive, regardless of the consequences of an epidemic. The very fact that migrant workers have been denied the basic dignity of going home and two square meals a day, in a moment of crisis, is a serious blot on our democracy. Responding to an epidemic requires a compassionate State. On this metric, the Indian State has thus far failed. It needs to step up, urgently.



# Trump rages at criticism while governors craft their own plans to reopen the economy

"We don't have a king. We have an elected president," Cuomo said during an interview with CNN's Erin Burnett. "The Constitution clearly says the powers that are not specifically listed for the federal government are reserved for the states, and the bounds between federal and state authority are central to the Constitution -- one of the great balances of power."

The Founding Fathers "didn't want a king, otherwise we would have had King George Washington," Cuomo added.

Trump's anger erupted at a time when there are encouraging signs that the virus may be reaching its apex in some hot spots, such as New York -- despite a continuing terrible death toll. More than 23,000 Americans have now died and there are more than 580,000 confirmed infections.

But there are worrying indications of the virus spreading among workers vital to the food chain in meat-processing plants in South Dakota and Colorado and in supermarkets that suggest normal life is nowhere near resuming. And a crew member died from Covid-19 after serving on the USS Theodore Roosevelt,

the nuclear aircraft carrier that had its captain fired for warning that the disease was ravaging his command.

Shortly before the briefing, two groups of states on each coast encompassing millions of people banded together to study when and how to ease social-distancing restrictions in a way that does not lead to a resurgence of the virus. Many local officials have warned that far more diagnostic and antibody testing -- on the order of millions per day -- is needed so that states can safely relax distancing precautions and isolate those who are infected.

The President's remarks raised the prospect of a massive constitutional confrontation with governors if he sticks to his position ahead of his hoped-for May 1 opening date.

And they threatened to carve the nation deeper on partisan lines between mostly Democratic-run states that have been heavily hit by the virus and GOP governors who want to please Trump politically.

Trump's performance was a product of a weekend fuming at news coverage, including a New York Times report based on

emails by officials that suggested he had waited weeks to recognize the threat of the virus and did not act quickly enough.

The report is supplemented by numerous public remarks by Trump early this year in which he predicted the virus would fizzle out in the US.

It was the latest indication of how, even in a pandemic, Trump's primary concern is his own image. And it hinted that he believes the final verdict on how his administration handled the outbreak could be the key issue in November's presidential election.

The irony was that the President's tirade overshadowed some good news on the crisis, albeit at a tragic time. There are signs that the murderous rates of infection and death in hot spots such as New York and elsewhere are stabilizing. The President's top medical lieutenants, Fauci and Dr. Deborah Birx, sat grim-faced in the briefing room for more than an hour while his temper raged.

But while Trump's behavior was alarming, it is also certain to cement the divides opened by his presidency. His conservative media boosters were jubilant in

their early reviews, judging that he had torched his media questioners.

The lesson of every previous Trump outburst and controversy is that his supporters are far more likely to believe his version of events than media fact checks and that the President may see some of his intended effect -- causing confusion and controversy that obscures the true story of the federal response. Earlier in the day, governors on the coasts announced that they had formed their own pacts to coordinate the steps they will take to reopen the economy in their states. With that move, the governors were essentially calling Trump's bluff, asserting their own authority hours before the President proclaimed that his authority was "total" and prepared to announce his "Opening Our Economy" task force Tuesday. Governors on each side of the country hammered out the notion that their decisions will be driven by facts, science and public health professionals, not politics. On Monday morning, the Democratic governors of New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware and

Rhode Island and Massachusetts' Republican governor announced that they each planned to name a public health and an economic official to a regional working group, along with their respective chief of staffs. That group will immediately begin working to design a reopening plan. Cuomo noted that health officials in his state believe they have reached a plateau in cases, but he cautioned that a regional approach was necessary to avoid a resurgence. He said it was important to do so step-by-step with a "smart plan," evaluating data at each juncture and working in concert with states in the region. "Because if you do it wrong, it can backfire," Cuomo said. "We've seen that in other places on the globe." "Everyone is very anxious to get out of the house, get back to work, get the economy moving. Everyone agrees with that," he said. "What the art form is going to be here is doing that smartly and doing that productively, and doing that in a coordinated way, doing that in coordination with the other states that are in the area, and doing it as a cooperative effort, where we learn from each other."

## Why The Giant America Appears Helpless Against Coronavirus

As the number of cases started rising exponentially, many of the 50 American states started acting to contain the viral spread by suggesting closures of non-essential businesses and simply "advising" its people to stay home. The nebulousness of the definition of "non-essential" is an entirely different story. Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, America's health protection agency) has been issuing "recommendations" amidst a still-exploding pandemic. However, in the absence of a nation-wide order, such measures are not uniform across the entire country and Americans could still easily travel within the nation, potentially carrying the virus from the hot spots such as New York and New Jersey to the low-risk regions.

The other portion of the blame goes to America's Federalist system. Even if President Trump decided to take stronger action, the Federalist system would hamper a nation-wide

response. The United States' constitution does not directly allow the President to order and enforce major public interventions such as social distancing and mass quarantines. That authority lies primarily with the U.S. states' Governors (the equivalent of Chief Ministers in India) and local authorities through their "police powers" and that is where America differs from countries like China, Italy and India. The President's powers are expansive at the country's borders, which allowed Trump to ban travel from China and Europe and close borders with Canada and Mexico, even if he was a little late in doing so. Inside the states, the President has little to no power to act because of the states' sovereign rights to exercise their police powers. Even in a national emergency, the President is not empowered to direct the governors to enforce or not enforce anything. And the governors can only restrict intra-state travel to a certain extent. The Congress (the equivalent of Parliament in

India) on the other hand can restrict travel among the states or give the President the authority to do so. Even if any of that happens, Americans opine that the nation would not tolerate extreme limitations on individual liberties like the right to travel or associate. The use of electronic surveillance for quarantining like China could result in an invasion of personal privacy. The only option that then remains with the state Governors and local Mayors-and many of them did utilise it- is a "virtual lockdown" through a multitude of measures including "stay at home" advisories, recommending non-essential businesses to temporarily shut down, having assembly limits and travel restrictions. These would be deemed virtual since they are not enforceable by law. For instance, if you were to roam around on the streets of New Jersey for recreation, you would not be objected by law enforcement officials. Although most people in America have voluntarily stayed at home for the fear of contracting the virus, there are

a few negligent others for whom its "business as usual" in the absence of a lawfully enforceable mandate.

If Americans are expected to comply with these "guidelines" of physical distance and self-imposed lockdown over a period of maybe months, the government has to reciprocate with measures to make this compliance safe and feasible. Social distancing would have to be accompanied by easy access to key necessities like food, medicines, testing and treatment. Another major assurance that the government has to provide to people under self-quarantine is 'job security', especially to people who are voluntarily staying home or who are taking care of their kids who are out of school. Prime Minister Modi's plan lacked these measures which eventually led to outbursts of incidents in several parts of India which further made the lockdown somewhat inconsistent throughout the country.

All in all, this goes to show

that a compulsory lockdown would not be legally possible in the United States. Unfortunately, that was the only and sharpest tool in the shed to prevent the spread of this noxious monster and buy some time to prepare for the worst that lay ahead. The only other way to make lawful social distancing work in America would have been the presence of a Modi-like figure who could strongly appeal to the masses who in turn would meticulously obey his word just like they did during the recent "Janata Curfew" in India. The apprehension in Modi's speech and body language automatically conveyed the seriousness to its billion plus citizens while that of Trump was completely deficient in it. The unlawful yet essential restrictions would work in the United States if it had some "real" leadership to make its citizens grasp the gravity of this disaster. With that absent, tens of thousands would unnecessarily perish- the unfortunate road America seems to be headed on.



# India's Covid-19 Response: Saving 1.3 Billion People

However, India's anti corona virus strategies are not limited to the lockdown. In fact a layered multi-pronged strategy is India's governance response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is noteworthy that India, a country of 1.3 billion, has been able to limit the number of deaths to 488 in the period since January 30, 2020 when the first case was detected to April 18, 2020. Reported cases in India are much lower than the global incidence rate. The pandemic has also been contained geographically with negligible "community" transmission.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led a pandemic response that is historic in its ambition and complexity. Technology and administrative methods are supplemented by the strengths of our collective consciousness and our ancient philosophy. It is a sui generis crisis management operation. The strategy leverages the deep reservoir of national resolve to confront the current challenge as one nation and one people. It is being conducted in a democratic setting. Parliament has debated this crisis extensively. Prime Minister has also consulted and sought inputs from the entire political spectrum. In fact, this is a time when our federal structure has stood the test of need and is an example of cooperative federalism at its best.

Union and State executives have mobilized and are working as an integrated unit. Prime Minister manages the effort at the highest political and executive level. A Group of Ministers, Committee of Secretaries and Empowered Groups provide political leadership and operational direction. At the operational level, Cabinet Secretary and Health Secretary are coordinating in real-time, through multiple video-conferences, a system-wide response that is being harmonized across all of India's 728 districts. The decisive Indian response was initiated much before WHO declared COVID 19 to be "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" on January 30, 2020 and before the first confirmed COVID positive case was reported, also on January 30, 2020. This was a day before Italy saw its first case on January 31. By that time, surveillance and screening of passengers had commenced in India and States had been alerted. The crisis management system had started operating at full speed. What are the strategies in place? Let's look at some of them.

## LOCKDOWN

The whole country had been placed under a lockdown since March 25 for 21 days. The lockdown which was intended to break the transmission through social distancing met with unprecedented and voluntary nationwide response. As we all know prior to the lockdown, on March 19, the nation had placed itself under a "Janata" or people's curfew. The extent of

the lockdown and the compliance it has received are unique. It was an India specific crisis response measure tailored to Indian conditions and has demonstrated results. Governments, central and states, have used this period to trace and isolate positive cases and their contacts. The graph of COVID 19 cases is flattening. As of April 17, 2020 cases are doubling in 10 days.

Projections of the trajectories the pandemic would have taken had there been no lockdown or only a partial lockdown are frightening as can be seen in the graph.

The lockdown was not the beginning but the logical continuation of a strategy. Surveillance at points of entry (airports, major and minor ports, land borders) was initiated on January 17, 2020. Visa and travel restrictions were imposed on foreign nationals on February 5. All visas were suspended on March 11 and incoming flights were suspended from March 19. Incoming passengers were placed under daily surveillance through the Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) Network and monitored through a national online portal. The portal aggregates data and maintains a log of all community contacts of positive cases. 621,000 passengers were monitored and not a single positive case in this universe has been able to mix with the general population.

## MEDICAL PREPAREDNESS

The lockdown is accompanied by a nationwide effort to enhance medical preparedness. A network of labs across the country has been set up to facilitate early and timely sample testing. 223 labs are operational. State Nodal Officers have been appointed and specific labs have been designated for States. A national Hospital preparedness effort is underway to ensure availability of beds. Health facilities of the Defence, Labour, Railways, Home (para military forces) and Steel Ministries and other Central and State government Institutions can be enlisted to augment hospital capacity if required. Currently there are 1,71,415 isolation beds available in Govt. Sector, in addition 24,383 beds are available through Army, Para-Military forces, Railways and Labour Ministries. In a major innovation, Indian Railways have converted their coaches into isolation beds. Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), ventilators, essential drugs and other consumables are being stockpiled and buffer stocks are being constantly monitored. Guidelines on every aspect of COVID-19 management have been widely disseminated. Medical and paramedical personnel and Rapid Response Teams nationwide are receiving orientation on infection prevention, clinical management and protocols etc. Video-conferences are held regularly between central and state authorities to review status.

A massive contact tracing operation is continuing on a nationwide scale to pre-empt transmission. A public health communication exercise has been in operation since January 2020. Social media platforms and webpages of the Government are pushing out information about basic preventive steps. TV & Radio channels were mobilized and an advertisement campaign launched. Aarogya Setu (<https://www.mygov.in/aarogya-setu-app/>), a mobile app has been developed by the Government of India to connect essential health services with the people of India in our combined fight against COVID-19. The App is aimed at augmenting the initiatives of the Government particularly the Department of Health, in proactively reaching out to and informing the users of the app regarding risks, best practices and relevant advisories pertaining to the containment of COVID-19.

## MIGRATION OF WORKERS

As expected, the lockdown produced a number of challenges. A movement of migrant labour occurred during the initial period of the lockdown. A national effort was launched to mitigate the hardship faced by them. A detailed protocol was evolved to manage the migrants, and guidelines were issued to ensure essential supplies, rations and food packets for them. Relief camps providing food and shelter were organised on an unprecedented scale within days. This massive administrative effort across a number of states established more than 27,000 camps and shelters housing 1.25 million individuals. An additional 360,000 workers have been provided shelter by industry. 7.5 million individuals are being fed through this network of camps and shelters plus another 19,460 food camps/distribution points. The public health aspect of this movement has not been neglected and the camps have been linked to a network of quarantine facilities and testing laboratories. The nationwide response to assist these workers and their families highlighted the popular understanding of the rationale behind the lockdown.

## MITIGATION MEASURES

Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) was launched to mitigate the hardships being faced by the poor and disadvantaged. It attempts to create a security net particularly for the disadvantaged sections of society that are worst affected in such situations. Senior citizens, widows, the physically challenged, women, workers and others who are most vulnerable have been identified. Food supplies, cooking gas, financial support and other forms of support are being delivered on a nationwide basis. This enormous exercise involves a financial outlay of INR 170,000 crore/ USD 22 billion. Disbursal has commenced and the support is reaching those who need it the most. The management of essential services for the general

population is a very high priority and is being constantly monitored.

## PM CARES

Keeping in mind the need for having a dedicated national fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected, a public charitable trust under the name of 'Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund' (PM CARES Fund) has been set up. Its objectives include:

- undertake and support relief or assistance of any kind relating to a public health emergency or any other kind of emergency, calamity or distress, either man-made or natural, including the creation or upgradation of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, other necessary infrastructure, funding relevant research or any other type of support.
- render financial assistance, provide grants of payments of money or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees to the affected population. Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund. The fund consists entirely of voluntary contributions from individuals/ organizations and does not get any budgetary support. The fund will be utilised in meeting the objectives as stated above. PM CARES Fund has also got exemption under the FCRA and a separate account for receiving foreign donations has been opened. This enables PM CARES Fund to accept donations and contributions from individuals and organizations based in foreign countries. Finances available from this fund will go a long way in supporting the sections of the society most affected by the Covid pandemic and the resultant lockdown. Those willing to contribute from abroad to the fund may please do so.

## INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

This is a global pandemic and requires a global response. Prime Minister Modi has led the SAARC initiative and is also actively involved in G-20 wide coordination. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has created a COVID cell and is actively coordinating the global response. It is monitoring the condition of stranded Indians on a regular basis. A global procurement and supply chain support effort has been launched to enhance our medical preparedness. More than 4000 requests from 63 countries/ regions for medicines like paracetamol have been cleared on humanitarian grounds. It is part of India's efforts to contribute to the global efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also a symbol of our solidarity towards all the countries who require



**PM CARES FUND**  
Donate to PM-CARES Fund to help India's fight against Covid-19

**FOREIGN DONATIONS**  
Credit/Debit Card

**Step 1:**  
Select your payment method Credit/Debit card or Wire Transfer/SWIFT

**Step 2:**  
Enter your Name, Address, Identity Card and Donation Amount and complete the payment. In case you have any questions you can find the FAQs page on PM Cares website.

Here are the details of where and how you can make donations to the PM-CARES fund from abroad as an NRI. Go to PM Cares official website: [pmcares.gov.in](http://pmcares.gov.in)

संस्कृत शक्ति  
Consulate General of India  
New York

these medicines during this hour of need. MEA has also coordinated inward and outward evacuations on a massive scale. It is also important to note that evacuation is possible only under very special conditions and for a limited number of people. For some countries such as the USA, evacuation is not a readily feasible option due to the large number of people involved as well as the risks posed by international travel.

Team India USA led by Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu based out of India's Embassy in Washington and Consulates in five cities including New York are actively involved in supporting the members of Indian community who are facing difficulty due to the lockdown in India and suspension of flights. The Consulate General of India in New York has created a special facility in its Primit web application for addressing the needs of people (www.indiannewyork.gov.in). We have been able to assist in a wide range of situations including support for accommodation, food, medicines and even personal counseling. In this we are receiving valuable support from community organizations. As people are doing their bit by staying at home, we are doing our bit by taking our programming and events directly to their homes by innovative use of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter. I would encourage readers to like our Facebook page (@indiannewyork) so that they remain virtually connected while being socially distant.

The Government of India is acutely aware of the need to balance our central concern about the welfare of our citizens with our global responsibilities. India is a major source of pharmaceuticals. We are committed to acting responsibly during this crisis. There is no outright ban on exports of critical drugs and requests are being examined and responded to appropriately. The UN Secretary General has commended India's supply of essential medicines to a large number of countries. Several consignments of critical medicines have been cleared and dispatched to the United States. Cooperation between Indian and US scientific organizations is also going ahead on how to mitigate and combat the virus. In a tragic way this crisis has brought us together and we can visualize much greater India-US strategic and economic cooperation in a post-Covid world.

**By Sandeep Chakravorty,**  
Consul General of India,



# 'No DTC or UP buses to take you home': Kejriwal asks Delhi migrants to stay put

Migrants rush in Bandra triggered fears of a re-run of the Anand Vihar fiasco

(News Agencies) Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday moved to pre-empt a repeat of migrant workers' exodus from the national capital, seen last month at the beginning of the first phase of three-week-long national lockdown, by issuing a clarification in advance that it was impossible for anyone to take them home right now and that they should stay put in the national capital until May 3, when the second phase of the national lockdown-- announced today-- comes to an end.

Kejriwal was forced to issue the clarification after a similar crisis erupted in Mumbai, where migrant

labourers, said to be mostly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, gathered at a bus stop near the Bandra railway station demanding the resumption of transport services enabling their return home. They had to be lathicharged first followed by assurances that they will be provided food and taken care of in the migrant camps in the state till the duration of the lockdown.

The scene was an instant reminder of the crisis that unfolded on Delhi streets and its borders with Uttar Pradesh last month when hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers gathered at the interstate bus stations near UP border in

the false hope that they will be provided transport home. The incident had led to a political war of words between the UP and the Delhi government with the former alleging that the Delhi government conspired to drop the migrants at Anand Bihar Bus Terminal using Delhi Transport Corporation buses in violation of the lockdown norms. The incident also led to action against senior bureaucrats in the Delhi government. Kejriwal, on this instance, made it clear that the migrants should not believe even if told that there were DTC buses ready to ferry them to some other place. "People may try to spread

rumours. Someone will say they can take you to your home if you pay them so much. No one can take you to your home or village right now. Someone might tell you DTC buses are standing somewhere. No DTC bus is taking you anywhere..." Kejriwal said. He asked migrants from other states to show little bit more patience so that the gains made in the first phase of lockdown are not lost by showing impatience.

"Several of you have come to Delhi from other states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar or Haryana. Some of you are desperate to return to your home. I pray to you with folded hands to wait till



May 3. Control your anxiety and desperation now, because chaos at this stage will create huge problems," Kejriwal said. The Delhi chief minister added that his government had made more than sufficient arrangements for food in the national capital and no one needed to worry on that count.

"We are arranging for medicine and food. If you

want anything we will have it delivered at your home," Kejriwal added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, told people this morning that the country needed to extend the lockdown by another couple of weeks if India was to not go the way of the European nations overwhelmed by the pandemic, and the resultant loss of thousands of lives.

## Hundreds reached Mumbai's Bandra railway station to go home; lathicharged

The huge crowd of migrant workers at Mumbai's Bandra railway station prompted Maharashtra minister Aditya Thackeray to attack the Centre for not accepting its demand to send the workers home.



(News Agencies) In a replay of scenes at Delhi's border with Uttar Pradesh last month, hundreds of migrant workers gathered outside Bandra West railway station on Tuesday evening to demand that the railways run trains to take them home. The migrant workers, who defied the lockdown to reach the railway station, were eventually dispersed by the police after a lathicharge was ordered. "The workers were protesting against extension of the lockdown, saying they do not have access to food and other essentials," said a western railway official who was present outside the railway station. Scores of police personnel, who were rushed to the railway

station to augment the strength, however, prevented them from entering the station premises. Police resorted

to lathi charge to disperse the crowd outside the station.

"The city police tried to convince the workers to move

from the area but they did not relent... The crowd only dispersed after lathi charge," added the railway official.

Maharashtra minister Aditya Thackeray took to social media to announce that the crowd had been dispersed but also took a swipe at the central government.

Thackeray said the migrant workers wanted to go back to their hometowns and many were refusing to eat and stay in labour camps. "The current situation at Bandra Station, now dispersed or even the rioting in Surat is a result of the Union Government not being able to take a call

on arranging a way back home for migrant labour. They don't want food or shelter, they want to go back home." tweeted Aditya Thackeray. Thackeray also reiterated the state government's demand to operate trains for 24 hours for migrant labourers.

"Right from the day the trains have been shut down, the State had requested trains to run for 24 hours more so that migrant labour could go back home. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray raised this issue in the PM- CM video conference as well requesting a roadmap for migrant labour

to reach home," he said. Thackeray said a mutual road map set by the union government will largely help migrant labour to reach home from one state to another safely and efficiently. Time and again this issue has been raised with the centre. The law and order situation in Surat, Gujarat, largely has been seen as a similar situation and the feedback from all migrant labour camps is similar. Many are refusing to eat or stay in. Currently more than 6 lakh people are housed in various shelter camps across Maharashtra." tweeted Thackeray

## Long queues in the sun for a meal, yet hundreds go hungry in Chandigarh

Almost 3,000 families of labourers are struggling to make ends meet as jobs have dried up following the curfew because of the Covid-19 outbreak

(News Agencies) Chandigarh: It is 9 am, but hundreds have gathered at the Tin-Shed Colony in Sector 52 for free meals to be distributed four hours later.

Among them are 14-year-old Ranjana and her 8-year-old brother. They are surviving on the two meals provided by the UT administration in a day as their parents remain stranded in Uttar Pradesh. Sometimes, however, the food finishes quickly before their turn comes.

Food not sufficient

Hindustan Times on Tuesday found the queue for free meals stretching almost up to one km. Almost 3,000 families of labourers here are struggling to make ends meet as jobs have dried up following the curfew because of the Covid-19 outbreak. In fact, some people, in their desperation to be ahead of others, have left their plates to reserve places in the queue by as early as 7 am. One hour after lunch distribution begins at 1 pm, the food, comprising

cooked rice and pulses (dal) and rice, is over, while over a 100 people wait to be fed. Others say whatever food they have collected is not enough to feed their families. "There are eight members in my family, but I've got food for just three. I was turned away when I asked for more," rues 40-year-old Sunita. "We are dying of hunger. What will we do with just a handful of rice and daal?" questions 35-year-old Sandeep. "Issey acha hai ki hum mar jaye (It's better to die)." For many, a whole day goes by waiting for

meals "I spend the whole day standing in line for lunch and then dinner. I don't know how long this ordeal will last," says 28-year-old Rashmi Soaring temperatures a big challenge The heat as temperatures in Chandigarh cross 36 degrees Celsius, is making things worse. Bimla, 45, worries she will get a heat stroke after standing in the sun for hours. "My husband is ill. I have three daughters, what can I do?" she asks. "What if I also fall ill? Who will take care of me and my family?"



# How nutritious is your diet?

***Maintaining a good diet and keeping a check on your nutritional intake is easy now with cool apps and gadgets***



One of the key factors of staying healthy is maintaining a good diet and keeping a check on your nutritional intake.

Most people just focus on their workout routines or opt for self-

researched crash diet programs, but thankfully, like with most things these days, there are smarter and seamless ways to go about it now.

If you use a Fitbit or Apple Watch

or similar wearables, you can keep a tab on your calorie count by logging your food intake on their companion apps. But that's that.

If you are in the market for a new

one, you might want to consider GOQii, a fitness tracker that is backed by an ecosystem of nutritionists, personal trainers, and wellness experts. GOQii aims to tap the otherwise meaningless stream of data that fitness wearables throw at you and make it useful for you via intervention of qualified experts remotely.

An easy way to get started with diet management is via smartphone apps that help you with logging your food intake and keeping a tab on your diet, with additional features like customized diet plans, nutrition charts, weight tracking, et al. Calorie Counter by FatSecret is a basic, and completely free, dietary diary to keep a record of the food that you eat and the calories that you burn. It also features a diet calendar and a reference guide to check nutritional value of a variety of foods. Then there's Fooducate that goes beyond diet and weight loss management by not just counting your calories but also helping you analyze the value of the calories consumed to improve your diet.

If you use other fitness apps already to track your runs or workouts, you should look at apps like Lose It!, Lifesum, MyFitnessPal, or MyNetDiary which sync with RunKeeper, Endomondo, Strava, et al as well as Apple HealthKit, Google Fit, and Samsung Health.

LifeSum is actually very good and includes meal plans for several popular diets like keto, low carb, and others. You can also try MyNetDiary if you want to keep a track of things like your blood glucose, heart rate, cholesterol, and more. MyFitnessPal is one of the more popular and older ones in this segment and is easily one of the most well-rounded fitness and nutrition app.

There's also HealthifyMe which is quite popular in India since as a homegrown service, it has the broadest catalogue of Indian food items.

These apps also connect to your Fitbit, Misfit, and Garmin wearables so that your workouts and everything else are also integrated for comprehensive health management.

## New drug to treat deadliest TB approved by US drug regulator

***Pretamonid, a novel compound developed by the non-profit organization TB Alliance, was approved by the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) on August 14.***

The US drug regulator has approved a new tuberculosis (TB) drug for treating hard-to-treat drug-resistant TB that makes the treatment regimen shorter and simpler.

Pretamonid, a novel compound developed by the non-profit organization TB Alliance, was approved by the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) on August 14.

TB is the leading infectious cause of death worldwide, killing at least 1.6 million people annually. There are more than half a million cases of multi drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) annually, with about 6% of those cases being extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) cases. India accounts for nearly a quarter of the global TB cases.

The new drug was approved under the Limited Population Pathway for Antibacterial and

Antifungal Drugs (LPAD pathway) as part of a three-drug, six-month, all-oral regimen for the treatment of people with XDR-TB or MDR-TB, who are treatment-intolerant or non-responsive.

The LPAD pathway was established by FDA as a tool to encourage further development of antibacterial and antifungal drugs to treat serious, life-threatening infections that affect a limited population of patients with unmet needs.

"FDA approval of this treatment represents a victory for the people suffering from these highly drug-resistant forms of the world's deadliest infectious disease," said Mel Spigelman, MD, president and CEO of TB Alliance. "The associated novel regimen will hopefully provide a shorter, more easily manageable and highly efficacious treatment for those in need."

The three-drug regimen consisting of bedaquiline, pretomanid and linezolid - collectively referred to as the BPaL regimen - was studied in the pivotal Nix-TB trial across three sites in South Africa. The trial enrolled 109 people with XDR-TB and also MDR-TB.

Nix-TB data demonstrated a successful outcome in 95 of the first 107 patients after six months of treatment with BPaL and six months of post-treatment follow-up. For two patients, treatment was extended to nine months. TB, in all forms, is treated with a combination of drugs; the most drug-sensitive forms of TB require six months of treatment using four anti-TB drugs. Treatment of XDR-TB or MDR-TB takes longer and is more expensive, with patients currently taking a combination of as many as eight antibiotics,



some involving daily injections, for 18 months or longer.

"Until very recently, people infected with highly drug-resistant TB had poor treatment options and a poor prognosis," said Dr. Francesca Conradie, principal investigator of the Nix-TB trial.

"This new regimen provides hope with 9 out of 10 patients achieving culture negative status at 6 months post-treatment with this short, all-oral regimen."

The drug is likely to be available in the US markets by the end of 2019.

TB activists want the drug to be made affordable so that poor

patients could also access it.

"As the third new drug developed for TB in over half a century, and the first to be developed as part of a ready-to-use treatment regimen, pretomanid's approval represents another potent tool for tackling difficult-to-treat drug-resistant forms of TB," said Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), in a statement.

"However, it must be made affordable to everyone who needs it, especially considering the substantial taxpayer and philanthropic contributions that went into its development," it added.



# Shoppers are back on the streets in Italy and Austria while Spanish police hand out millions of masks as Europe takes its first steps out of lockdown



Shoppers were back on the streets in Austria and Italy today as Europe takes its first cautious steps out of the coronavirus lockdown.

Italy is opening a handful of stores including bookshops and stationery shops in a trial to see how social distancing measures can work after the lockdown, which otherwise remains in force.

However, some regions have chosen not to take full advantage. Bookshops will not open for another week in Rome and will stay closed altogether in Lombardy.

In Austria, which was the first European country to announce specific plans for ending the lockdown, shoppers were queuing outside hardware stores wearing compulsory masks as small shops reopened today.

Experts are not expecting a surge in customers, because some people will still be too worried to make unnecessary shopping trips and certain stores may choose to stay closed.

Meanwhile, industrial and construction work is resuming in Spain where some workers were back at their jobs yesterday while other regions are returning today after an Easter Monday holiday.

Some commuters in Spain said they felt reassured by the 10million masks which authorities are handing out this week.

Elsewhere, Denmark is lining up a quicker-than-expected end to the lockdown after hospital cases continued to fall while Iceland says it will start easing restrictions next month. In Italy, most lockdown measures have

been extended until May 3 but bookshops, stationery shops and stores selling children's clothes are allowed to re-open from today.

The slightly loosened restrictions also include forestry and the wood industry on the list of permitted economic activities.

A worker in a full protective suit including gloves and a mask was today examining the stock at a children's clothes shop in Rome, with a full bottle of sanitary gel nearby.

Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte wants a wider economic restart 'as soon as possible' but the government says that 'the conditions are not yet in place'. Italy has been under a nationwide lockdown since March 9, longer than any other European country, and has seen the infection rate slow considerably in that time.

There is also some disagreement among regions. The governor of Lombardy says bookshops in his hard-hit region will remain closed, but the leader of Liguria wants some construction sites to re-open, Italian media says.

The Lazio region which includes Rome will delay the re-opening of bookshops until next week so that they can be cleaned, while Campania will open the children's clothes shops only two mornings a week.

Piedmont, which includes Turin, is not loosening the lockdown at all, according to news agency ANSA.

Some people were out and about in Venice today, travelling on the city's water buses and buying from newsstands.

Austria is opening a wider range

of small shops today, and is hoping to open larger stores and shopping centres on May 1 if things go well.

Shops up to 4,300 square feet - about twice the size of a tennis court - can open today, along with home improvement stores and garden centres.

There are limits on the number of people allowed inside, and customers are required to wear face masks. Most people are still being advised to work from home if possible.

'Economically, too, we want to come out of this crisis as quickly as possible and fight for every job in Austria,' said chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Restaurants and hotels could reopen progressively from mid-May, Kurz has said.

However, Peter Buchmueller of Austria's chamber of commerce said traders were not expecting a surge in customers because many shoppers will still be concerned about going outside.

'It will take a bit of time before it

eventually gets back to normal,' he told Austrian media, saying that people would have to get used to shopping again.

Shops are not being forced to open against their will. Austrian media said there were 4,654 shops eligible to re-open in Vienna today, but it was unclear how many actually would.

Austria's infection rate has stabilised and it has only reported 368 deaths in total, despite sharing borders with hard-hit Italy and Germany. In Spain, workers in the construction and manufacturing sectors returned to their jobs on Monday after a two-week 'hibernation' of all non-essential business.

Spain had imposed the measure on March 30, going further than other nations such as Britain where people have always been allowed to travel to work if they cannot feasibly work from home.

But the measure has not been renewed, and many returned to

their jobs yesterday while others will resume today because Easter Monday is a public holiday in some regions of Spain but not others.

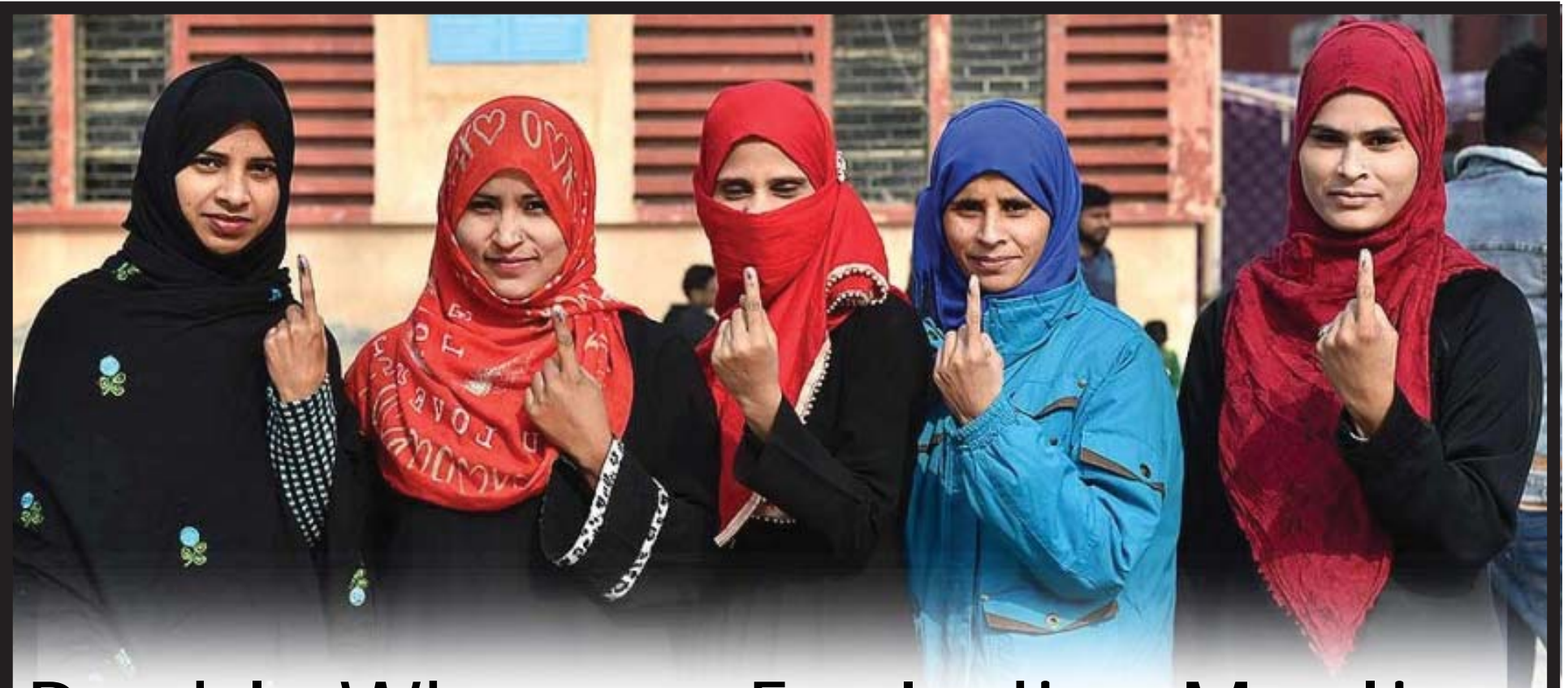
Figures released by the Madrid metro showed passenger traffic on Monday was up 24 percent compared with the same time last week.

With workers heading back to their jobs, the government began a huge operation to distribute 10million masks this week.

Some 4,500 police, Red Cross volunteers and security guards handed them out at 1,500 locations across the country, the interior ministry said. Masks have been hard to come by in recent weeks and some commuters said the handouts put them at ease during their trips to work. 'It's wonderful because it's so necessary and it helps those of us who have to use public transport,' said office worker Jose Antonio Cruces.







# Double Whammy For Indian Muslims

## A Failed Secular State And Lack Of Progressive Leadership

**Muslims are openly being demonised as the religious and cultural other who must be hated, maligned and thrown out**

Recently, Outlook published two articles – one by Shajahan Madampat and another by Nissam Syed – on the future possibilities for Indian Muslims to organise themselves politically. Both make some valid points although their approaches differ.

After reading their arguments, I put across my thoughts based on two decades of my work within the community.

After seven decades of India's independence, Muslims live in poverty, social and educational backwardness in ghettos across the country. The constitutional promise of justice, equality and non-discrimination has not translated into reality for the largest minority in India. The Sachar Committee highlighted that besides socio-economic deprivation, Muslims live with a sense of fear and insecurity owing to communal riots and violence. Avowedly secular governments did not take serious steps for inclusion of Muslims in the democratic processes. They did not do much other than pandering to conservative clergy within the community in the name of secularism.

With the political rise of Hindutva, the onslaught on the community became direct and more strident. Today, Muslims are openly demonised as the

religious and cultural other who must be hated, maligned and thrown out. With the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the looming NPR-NRC, the threat to citizenship has become real.

The social and political marginalisation of the Muslim community predates the Modi government. On one hand, the secular state failed to deliver on the Constitutional obligations and matters were made worse by the lack of progressive social leadership within the community. Today, all political parties have abandoned the Muslims and their disenfranchisement is imminent. The Muslims should have socially and politically organised much earlier but as someone said, better late than never!

Indian Muslims do not have a tradition of democratisation within the community. There have not been any noteworthy efforts to build critical consciousness of our women and men in the last several decades. Unfortunately, we have not had an Ambedkar or a Phule or social awakening movements. Adversely, we have had the singular misfortune of being led by the orthodox clergymen! It is high time middle-class Muslims who have had the advantage of education and economic empowerment

stand up and be counted as democratic voices. There is a lot to learn from Dalits and other communities towards engaging in social education and reform. Educated Muslims must engage with the poorer sections in whatever measure possible from one's respective location. Just giving annual zakat or fitra has not proved to be enough. Only a democratically empowered and organised community can make the state and political parties accountable.

Muslims would need guiding values and principles to organise themselves. Thanks to the way religion is [mis]understood and practiced in our country, ordinary Muslims are perpetually in a state of dilemma. How much importance should be given to Islam and to the temporal exactly? The clergyman is continuously telling him that 100% time and energies should be devoted to religion and nothing else. Ordinary Muslims are hard-working, patriotic and law-abiding citizens. Most religious leaders have an obsession with after-life and no concern for the here and now. They have no interest in democracy and affairs of the state. In the absence of any alternative leadership, ordinary women and men often do not get the opportunity to empower

themselves to think independently. There is a need to build critical consciousness among ordinary people based on democratic values.

What should be the values guiding social organisation for Muslims? The Constitution of India with its intrinsic values of justice, equality and pluralism offer abundant guidance. These values are in consonance with the Quranic values of justice and fairness. Kindness and compassion are enshrined in both. The Constitution is an article of faith; the Quran teaches Muslims watanparasti or love for the country. It must be said that our demand for justice and equality from the Indian state is lame without our belief and adherence to these principles in our own lives. The violation of women's rights in the name of Shariat will have to stop. The right to religious freedom granted by the Constitution is a cherished right which cannot be played around with to justify patriarchal and misogynist practices. There has to be unequivocal recognition of our nation being multi-faith and multi-cultural as we demand and practice mutual respect and understanding from those who believe in other religions.

No community is perfect and that includes the Muslim community too. There has to be

an unequivocal recognition of what is wrong with the community. There has to be a serious reflection on what can be done differently and to fight the stereotypes. Even as religious polarisation is at a severely high level, most fellow Indians do not subscribe to Hindutva politics of violence and hate. Many of them do not understand our behaviour.

Let me take a recent example. The movement against triple talaq was led by Muslim women. It received extensive support from ordinary Indians, both Muslims and non-Muslims. And yet, there have been several notables who wrote extensively to justify the practice and undermine the movement. Some Muslim intellectuals dismiss the issue of triple talaq as a political gimmick of the BJP. They forget that the entire country is watching the women undergo pain and suffering owing to this un-Quranic practice. They can't acknowledge that lack of support from so-called secular parties has left the ground open for the BJP to fill in. This partly illustrates the double standards adhered to by leading lights within the Muslim community. This hypocrisy must end. Any movement for equality and justice cannot be a compartmentalised one.





## Animals reclaim lost territory, courtesy Covid-19 lockdown

**Some wildlife experts termed it as a behavioural change, saying curiosity was driving animals out of the jungle.**

The lockdown to contain coronavirus pandemic has sent humans scurrying indoors but has widened the artificial boundaries for wild animals in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, spread over 1200 square kilometre in Bahraich and Lakhimpur Kheri districts of Uttar Pradesh. Wildlife enthusiasts and foresters in the area say that since there is no movement of vehicles on the connecting roads, the animals venturing out in human territories can be spotted easily.

Some wildlife experts termed it as a behavioural change, saying curiosity was driving animals out

of the jungle. "The lockdown has impacted the forest area as well because there is no human movement on roads passing through it. Only a week ago I saw a flock of about 35 elephants on Gauri Panta road that passes through the core forest area and ends at Nepal border," said Sanjay Narain, a wild life enthusiast, who owns a farm on the periphery of Dudhwa forest.

Narain said Gauri Panta Road was usually quite busy, with movement of more than 200 heavy and light vehicles every day. "But during lockdown, there is no traffic on the road

and the animals venture out as if they are trying to reclaim their lost territories," said Narain.

On the same day, he said he also saw a tiger on the main road, which was a rare sight. Sanjay Pathak, director of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, said the lockdown was a big change for animals. "Now since they do not hear hearing any honking, or engine roars along the road, they can be seen moving freely on the roads through the forest area. This is certainly a big change in the behaviour of wild animals," said Pathak.

Recollecting an incident, he said, "I was on the way to Pilibhit via Kishanpur road in the evening when I noticed a leopard sitting along the roadside. I asked my driver to stop the vehicle and wait until it disappeared into the forest. But the leopard seemed in no hurry. After waiting for 15 minutes I asked my driver to proceed. Leopard is a shy animal, so this kind of behaviour is quite strange." He said that before lockdown, more than 300 vehicles moved on this road on a daily basis. The scene is no different in other parts of the forest

reserve. Anil Patel, DFO North Kheri, said spotting animals had become common during lockdown. "Perhaps the animals are moving out due to curiosity. Initially, the animals ventured out on roads only at night when there was little or no traffic. But now since the roads are deserted even during the day, the animals are moving freely and also in human habitats," said Patel. The forester said wild boar, spotted deer and elephants were commonly seen on Dhira Kukra Road and Pilibhit-Basti Road in Mailani range.

## Starving 'cannibal' rats are on the march during the coronavirus pandemic



In parts of some U.S. cities, starving rats have been taking to deserted streets amid the coronavirus lockdown. Some have even resorted to cannibalism in their desperate search for food.

Lockdown-related rat sightings have been reported in a number of U.S. cities, such as New

York, Seattle and New Orleans, as well as other parts of the world.

"It is not a case of MORE rats occurring; it is more rat sightings that is occurring but only in some areas," urban rodentologist Bobby Corrigan told Fox News via email. "Rat sightings are a case of block by

block; more rats are being seen in those specific areas where the rats were heavily dependent on commercial food trash of restaurants and stores that have closed since the COVID outbreak." In a recent tweet, Corrigan, who is based in the New York City area, warned that some panicked rat populations are infighting and killing, dispersing openly and even invading buildings under door gaps.

"Starving rats in these blocks are now wandering both day and night; in different directions, and if they smell food leaking from people's door gaps, they will try to follow their noses and squeeze below the doors (i.e., enter the property)," he told Fox News. "Starving rats of course like most mammals will become aggressive and

violent, killing and then eating other rats in order to stay alive," added Corrigan, who is also a consultant at RMC Pest Management. "Rat carcasses are being seen on the streets partially eaten by stronger or other rats."

Corrigan said that while some rats in New York City have resorted to cannibalism, others have not had to change their behavior. If their food source -- such as sloppy trash cans or dumpsters -- has not changed, then there will be no change in the rats. "They will be active at night and remain mostly unseen," Corrigan said.

CBS reports that rats have swarmed the empty streets of New Orleans in search of food amid the city's lockdown.

"It's a difficult time to be a rat,"

said Claudia Riegel, director of the city's Mosquito, Rodent and Pest Control Board, during a recent press conference. "Because the food is limited, they are going to start fighting with each other."

With an increased number of rats on the street, Riegel also voiced concern for the potential impact on New Orleans' homeless population. "There are pathogens in these rodents, fortunately we don't see many of the health outcomes," she said. "We don't have very many disease cases that are actually related to rodents, but the potential is there."

Authorities in New Orleans have used the lockdown to "hit commercial areas hard with pest control," according to the city's mayor, LaToya Cantrell.



# TikTok is the social media sensation of lockdown. Could I become its new star?

**With families and couples filming themselves dancing or performing skits, the app has become even more popular in recent weeks. I asked its British stars to help me get started**

Andy Warhol predicted a time everyone would have 15 minutes of fame. He was nearly right – it is actually 15 seconds. That is the maximum duration of a video clip with music (non-music clips can last up to a minute) on TikTok, the video-sharing platform that has taken the world by storm. Favoured by under-25s, who make up its core audience, TikTok this year surpassed Facebook and WhatsApp as the world's most downloaded non-gaming app.

TikTok's content doesn't take itself too seriously, and ranges from food to fashion, pranks to pets – as well as the ubiquitous dance challenges. It is a perfect fit, in other words, for the lockdown, when many of us are stuck inside and in desperate need of some silly fun. This may be why, even if you haven't downloaded it, you suddenly find, clogging up your social media, clips of Justin Bieber dancing to I'm a Savage by Megan Thee Stallion, or Jennifer Lopez and Alex Rodriguez swapping outfits to Drake's Flip the Switch. It seems everyone from doctors and nurses in PPE to bemused parents quarantined with teenagers are flocking to the app – and sometimes going viral in the process.

What makes it stand apart from Snapchat or the now defunct Vine is one crucial difference: the closely guarded algorithm that produces the app's opening dashboard. Unlike other apps, this home screen is not full of people you are following. That is because the algorithm searches for new clips rather than pushing already popular ones. Translation: you don't need lots of followers to go viral. It is this tantalising prize that gives the app its USP, and what keeps TikTokers ticking over.

But how easy is it to become a TikTok influencer? I decided to try my hand at becoming TikTok's next big thing, with the help of some of the app's current British stars.

I am not a total TikTok novice, having tuned in almost daily for a year. I like the food and travel videos, as well as young female comedians (in particular Brittany Broski and ChivithaC). Mostly though, I'm in it for the cat videos. (I'm not the only one: the #catsoftiktok hashtag has 5.9bn views.) In fact, my first foray into creating TikTok content was a (now deleted) video of a kitten grooming. I filmed it on Instagram, added a filter to give it a heavy-metal soundtrack and flames to make it look as though the cat was headbanging. Hilarious, right? It



received a handful of views and no likes. Later, while complaining to a friend's little sister that headbanging cats is objectively great content, I was instructed that the issue was using the wrong hashtags and not using a TikTok filter.

Her explanation tells you a lot about TikTok culture. The app, which launched in 2016 in China under the name Douyin with a focus on lip-syncing, was specifically designed with teenagers in mind. The hashtags invite you to take part and set challenges. Any user not sure what to create has not only topics but tools at their disposal, from image filters to options to use other users' music or visuals.

I start by figuring out what is popular in the hope that I can ride the wave. As usual there is a dance challenge, currently #blindinglights, which sees people do a set sequence to a song by the same name from the Weeknd. But as dancing is not my strong point, I pass. Luckily, nearly all the other current trends are related to lockdown. As I too am in lockdown, I smell an opportunity.

I try out the tools by using two clips I already have. First, using my clip of a fox yawning in my back garden, I'll shoot myself looking bored around the house. Then I'll add music so it looks as if the yawning fox is singing. For my second video, I'll try a traditional "hands in pans" food instruction clip. I have a video of a big box of Cornish fish I received from relatives, as well as pictures of the process of prepping, portioning up and freezing it. I know haddock storage doesn't sound the most appealing subject for the under-25s, but I need something.

That is when I encounter my first

hurdle. The great illusion of TikTok is that the best content is off the cuff. Some is, but for those who do TikTok seriously, it is a craft. I was shocked by how long my first few videos took. I needed to convert all my pictures into short videos, then find a song that delivered the right high note, at just the right moment, so it would look as though my yawning fox was singing – genuinely one of my most tricky journalistic assignments.

The hours I spent honing my little clip was no surprise to Arshdeep Soni, AKA @arshsoni10, a 24-year-old TikTok user with 6 million followers. "Sometimes I stay up until two or three in the morning," he tells me. Based in Shepherd's Bush, London, Soni performs magic tricks on his TikTok. "There's a lot of work that goes into it. Planning ideas, rehearsing the right tricks for the right moment, then editing the video. Then I have to figure out the best time for me to post. There's lots of tactics."

Soni posts on other platforms, including Instagram and YouTube, but his biggest audience is on TikTok. When he is recognised on the street, "it's usually TikTok". His TikTok reputation helps him get corporate bookings, but he is beginning to generate income working with brands such as Burger King to promote their products, as well as record labels who pay him to use certain songs in his clips in the hope others will borrow that music – and so on – until it goes viral. Indeed, TikTok's influence on the music industry is huge. It is seen as an incubator for smash hits and a way to turn lesser-known artists into stars: Lizzo's Good As Hell and

Doja Cat's Say So became hits after being repeatedly used in clips on the site while Lil Nas X's Old Town Road was popularised through a viral dance challenge.

Soni's passion for magic shines through on his clips. I realise that if I want to be a big TikToker, I need a focus. I choose "London lockdown nature moments" as my subject. I figure that seeing flowers, bees and beautiful trees thrive in the green spots near where I live is exactly what people want to see.

I check on my first two videos. Weirdly, fish storage is outperforming the fox. I pull together another video from clips and pictures of a walk I had taken in a secluded wood as part of my government-approved walk. A friend gives me a tip about some nearby fields and I plan to head there the next day for my daily exercise. But when I wake up, I feel camera shy. I had not worn makeup in the previous posts and am suddenly self-conscious.

"I try to go makeup-free, or not look so great some days," says Abi Else, AKA @aaaaaaaaaabi, a 22-year-old TikToker from Brighton who focuses on style. "I think it's important that younger people know that it's fine to not look perfect all the time." Pressure to conform to certain beauty standards is one of a range of pressures women face online; their appearance is often targeted in the abuse they receive. And TikTok has come under fire after reports that moderators were told to suppress videos from ugly, obese, poor and disabled users. TikTok claims the policy was to prevent bullying and has since changed its guidelines. Else, however, says her 80,000 followers are "really nice ...

When I've had videos go viral, that's when all the hateful comments come in. I think a lot of the time it's because it's a young audience. They don't understand that it is actually someone on the other side." She tells me that it is important to engage with your audience and let them get to know you. Else likes to ask her audience questions so they feel part of the clips. I shoot a video of me in a tree with a fact about London's green spaces so that my new followers (all two of them) can get a sense of who I am. The next day I find it is my best performing video so far. Well, after the one about fish.

If anyone can tell me about how to build an audience based around personality, it is Perrin Hooper, AKA @persworld, an 18-year-old TikToker with 380,000 followers. Hooper's style is to talk straight to camera and muse on life – a video diary with the odd dance thrown in. Hailing from Cornwall, Hooper says: "Where I live, social media is your main way of reaching out." Hooper spends roughly three days a week working on TikTok, and the rest of the week is spent running an Etsy store selling pendants and other crafts. Recently, Hooper – who uses the pronoun they – has started producing and selling their own merchandise, a project they are working on with their mother. Mum does the "nitty gritty, stuff like costs, margins, packaging" while Hooper takes care of the creative side of things. Despite its focus on young people, TikTok as a family business is not uncommon. One of the most famous TikTok families is the Harfins (@refelicity) – AKA Felicity and her sons, Finlay and Harrison – from Edinburgh, Scotland. Their 1.8 million followers watch the family play pranks, dance, cook and generally muck about. Felicity, a former marketer, runs the account and has helped to turn it into a business giving clients – from Mattel to the Brits – the chance to be mentioned or promoted in their videos. Indeed, it is now Felicity's main job. But it was the boys who initiated the project. "They grew up watching videos online and always wanted to create themselves." It took them years to persuade her. "I didn't realise how much fun it was going to be."





**Avneet Singh**

Though you have left this world so young; You, your good deeds and sweet memories will forever live in and rule our hearts.

God bless your soul, and give your grieving father Jasbir Singh, mother Lovely Kaur & family strength to shoulder this loss.

I join countless other individuals & organizations in sending our deepest condolences.

**Sharanjit Singh Thind & Family**



# India now needs a new and bold economic plan

The plan must aim to preserve businesses, save jobs, and minimise pain. It needs to be to the order of 4-5% of the GDP - around \$10 trillion.



(News Agencies) The trajectory of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in India makes it clear that the first 100 days (since China admitted there was a problem) have been relatively kind on

India. The second 100 days will be the real challenge. It is time to accept this.

Even if India manages to dodge the Covid-19 bullet, parts of the country will remain so-called containment

zones with significant restrictions on the movement of people and goods and the operation of businesses. Mumbai, given the current situation there, 1,100 cases and rising, is sure to be a

containment zone — if not the entire city, then large parts of it. And this, the best-case scenario, could play out till the end of June, maybe even July. It is time to accept this.

The economy will likely shrink in 2020-21. It is time to accept this too.

A recent report in Mint (published, like Hindustan Times, by HT Media), quoted India's former chief statistician and economist Pronab Sen as estimating that roughly 50 million people may have already lost their jobs in India. With the first quarter (April-June) pretty much a write-off, the impact on production will be brutal. The United States (US) economy will produce 34% less in the first quarter, according to some reports.

Corresponding numbers for India are not available, but no one will be surprised if the number is at least 34% here. In fact, given the completeness of the lockdown in many parts of the country, it could be 50%. That's the kind of blow some businesses may not be able to withstand — they will simply go under. Many others will cut costs and jobs. Tens (some say hundreds) of millions of people, may be plunged back into poverty. Investment will suffer, as will consumption. The damage could set India back three to five years, maybe a True to the name of this column, here's a possible economic plan for India to deal with such a scenario. First off, some

important questions and answers. It should prevent businesses from going under or making deep losses; safeguard jobs (to the extent possible); lessen the blow for those being retrenched; and provide cash (liquidity) to both businesses and individuals. There are benchmarks available. The US has announced a package that is 10% of its GDP. The United Kingdom has announced one that is almost 15%, but some of this is in the form of credit guarantees, and the actual magnitude will be far lower. Anything between 4% and 5% of GDP should be fine. That's between Rs 7.6 trillion (lakh crore) and Rs 9.5 trillion. A Mint edit called for the round number of Rs 10 trillion. That would do.

## Amazon halts its shipping service that competed with UPS and FedEx



(News Agencies) New York : Amazon is halting its third-party shipping service in the United States, which competed with FedEx and UPS, the company said Wednesday. The service, called Amazon Shipping, was being piloted in a handful of US cities. Amazon would pick up and deliver shipments for third party companies that sell on its site but don't keep products at Amazon (AMZN) warehouses.

The company said it paused the service after a regular review meant to ensure that the company is best serving its customers. The pause comes amid a huge surge in business for Amazon, and online shopping more broadly, as people are urged to stay home and shops remain shuttered because of coronavirus. Last month, Amazon announced it would hire 100,000 new distribution workers to keep up with the demand. It also warned customers they could see longer-than-usual delivery times because of the large volume of orders. Amazon also said it would limit shipments of non-essential goods coming into its warehouses to make room for crucial household and medical products. Amazon Shipping is available in the United Kingdom, where it will continue to operate.

## Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Chanel put their fashion muscle behind face masks

(News Agencies) New York : Ever at the forefront of haute couture, Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Chanel are celebrated by fashion connoisseurs for defining style in handbags, dresses and shoes. Now they are putting their fashion muscle and supply chain expertise behind making protective clothing for those on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, which has infected more than 1.9 million people and killed at least 119,000 worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University. The rapid spread of the virus since December has created a global scramble for protective gear, such as face masks, gloves and gowns. French couture brand Louis Vuitton said it was

joining the global effort to make more supplies to protect healthcare workers. The company, via Instagram, said it had repurposed several of its workshops across France to "produce hundreds of thousands of non-surgical face masks" for healthcare workers. "This initiative will donate the much-needed protective gear to frontline healthcare workers. Thank you to the hundreds of artisans who have volunteered to create these masks, as well as everyone doing their part to fight this global pandemic," the company said. Louis Vuitton also said it was making and donating thousands of hospital gowns for six Paris hospitals in urgent need of protective gear.

French financier Bernard Arnault is chairman and CEO of LVMH Moët Hennessy — Louis Vuitton.

British fashion brand Burberry, (BURBY) too, has pivoted part of its fashion production machinery to make masks.

The company said it was using its global supply chain "to fast-track the delivery of 100,000 surgical masks to the UK National Health Service, for use by medical staff." Known for its iconic coats, Burberry said it was repurposing its trench coat factory in Castleford, Yorkshire, to make non-surgical gowns and masks for patients in UK hospitals.

Another legendary French fashion house, Chanel, said it is contributing to the effort by

making face masks.

The company last month said it was seeking approval for raw materials and prototypes so that its sewing specialists, who typically make the brand's haute couture and ready-to-wear fashion collections, could start to make face masks and hospital gowns.

Last month, in Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic, Italian luxury fashion brand Prada started the production of 80,000 medical overalls and 110,000 masks for healthcare workers in the Tuscany region.

The company said the protective gear was being produced at a Prada factory which has stayed open specifically to make the supplies.

## Shortage of workers, choked ports disrupt supply chains

The closure of factories has also left cargo grounded (or in ships in anchorage) . India's 7,516.6 km long coastline caters to more than 90% of India's trading by volume.

(News Agencies) At least 50,000 shipping containers have been lying orphaned at container freight stations and private container terminals at three large ports in Tamil Nadu with no trucks available to transport them. Most Indian ports have declared a so-called force majeure -- declared when unprecedented events overtake them and prevent them from doing their job. At ports across India, cargo terminals are operating at capacities less than 30%. On April 3, in a video conference with Union minister of shipping

Mansukh Mandaviya, port operators, importers, and shipping companies raised some of these issues, including the unavailability of trucks (and drivers), the shortage of workers in ports and cargo terminals, and choked ports. The 21-day lockdown enforced by India on March 25 -- it ends midnight April 14; the Prime Minister is to address the nation on Tuesday morning on whether it will be extended and if so, fully or in part; several states have already extended it till the end of the month -- has hit the handling of cargo

across Indian ports, choking shipping lines. There has been a shortage of workers to handle cargo and a dearth of truck drivers to ferry the cargo to factories leading to a huge inventory pile up at ports. The Centre's move to waive demurrage charges during the lockdown is acting as a disincentive for importers to figure out ways to move cargo. The closure of factories has also left cargo grounded (or in ships in anchorage) . India's 7,516.6 km long coastline caters to more than 90% of India's trading

by volume. The statistics are worrying because a snag in the supply chain could stoke distress. Cargo volumes at the Indian ports were already witnessing some slowdown in FY2020 on the back of various factors such as the US-China trade war and the ongoing economic slowdown, according to credit rating agency ICRA. Bottlenecks in the shipping and logistics part of the supply chain, which are critical for timely movement and evacuation from ports, could be an aggravating factor, the firm noted.



# Google expands its automated AI calling service Duplex to Australia, Canada and the UK

An AI service was rolled out by Google in late 2018 in the US followed by New Zealand. Christened as Duplex, the AI is used for restaurant bookings or to book appointments on behalf of its user. Now it has been made available in Australia, Canada and the UK.



an automated system or a manual operator.

A list of numbers which Google states as legitimate are posted on the support page.

alls from these phone numbers will be from Google: Australia: +61-2-9160-9443, Canada: +1-780-851-3579, New Zealand: +64-9-884-7777, United Kingdom: +44-207-660-1362 and United States: +1-650-203-0000, +1-650-206-5555.

VentureBeat was the first to note the addition in the list of numbers from where Google Duplex will make calls. Google stated that it will use these numbers while calling from a distinct country using Duplex. Last year in April, Google Duplex started rolling out its

beta version in iPhones. However, this was limited to the users in the US. For iPhone and Android users, users only have to download Google Assistant App from the App Store and Playstore respectively and they are good to go.

This feature is currently available on Phones with the Google Assistant app, devices that can access Search or Maps, Google's support group page said. Google Duplex was launched back in 2018 but it has its limitations. The first issue was that there was no consent drawn from businesses or restaurant owners while these calls were made by the AI.

Secondly, there was no

certainty if the voice on the other end was that of an AI or a human. Google, since then has taken ample efforts to maintain more transparency with its users and businesses.

Google has tried addressing these issues by giving a disclosure at the start of the call. Moreover, the support page says that any business owner has the option to opt out if he does not feel like talking to an AI.

Previously, Google had stated that businesses could either tell the company over the phone - presumably in the form of feedback during or after an ongoing call -- or change their settings in Google My Business section of their Google accounts.

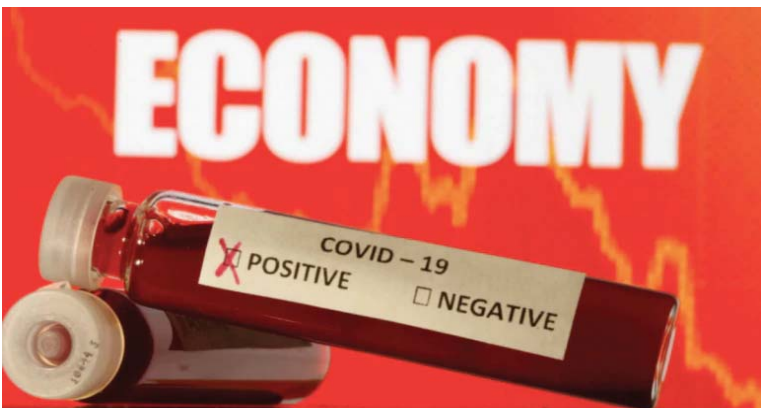
(News Agencies) Google's AI-powered calling service Duplex is now being extended to Australia, Canada and the UK. Initially, this service was available in the US and New Zealand. Google Duplex is used for hotel bookings or booking appointments on behalf of its

user. It is supported by devices which have Search, Maps or Google Assistant app.

Google's support page explains a how-to-know if a call is legitimate. It states that at the start of the call, the reason for the call will be stated. It further states that the call will be from

## Coronavirus: Global economy to witness worst fallout since Great Depression, says IMF

Observing that the world is faced with extraordinary uncertainty about the depth and duration of this crisis, IMF MD Kristalina Georgieva said that it is already clear, however, that global growth will turn sharply negative in 2020.



(News Agencies) The year 2020 could see the worst global economic fallout since the Great Depression in the 1930s with over 170 countries likely to experience negative per capita income growth due to the raging coronavirus pandemic, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday. Georgieva made the remarks during her address on "Confronting the Crisis: Priorities for the Global Economy" here ahead of next week's annual Spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. "Today, the world is confronted with a crisis like no other. Covid-19 has disrupted our social and economic order at lightning speed and on a scale that we have not seen in living memory," she said.

The virus is causing a tragic loss of life, and the lockdown needed to fight it has affected billions of people. What was normal just a few weeks ago -- going to

school, going to work, being with family and friends -- is now a huge risk, she said.

Observing that the world is faced with extraordinary uncertainty about the depth and duration of this crisis, she said that it is already clear, however, that global growth will turn sharply negative in 2020.

"In fact, we anticipate the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression," Georgieva said.

"Just three months ago, we expected positive per capita income growth in over 160 of our member countries in 2020. Today, that number has been turned on its head: we now project that over 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth this year," she said. The Great Depression was the worst worldwide economic downturn that lasted for 10 years from 1929, beginning in the US when the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street crashed and wiped out millions of investors.

The IMF chief said that given the necessary containment measures to slow the spread of the virus, the world economy is taking a substantial hit.

This is especially true for retail, hospitality, transport, and tourism. In most countries, the majority of workers are either self-employed or employed by small and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses and workers are especially exposed, she added.

Of the view that emerging markets and low-income nations -- across Africa, Latin America, and much of Asia are

at high risk, Georgieva said with weaker health systems to begin with, many face the dreadful challenge of fighting the virus in densely populated cities and poverty-stricken slums, where social distancing is hardly an option.

With fewer resources to begin with, they are dangerously exposed to the ongoing demand and supply shocks, drastic tightening in financial conditions, and some may face an unsustainable debt burden, she said. In the last two months, portfolio outflows from emerging markets were about USD 100

billion, more than three times larger than for the same period of the global financial crisis. "Commodity exporters are taking a double blow from the collapse in commodity prices and remittances, the lifeblood of so many poor people, are expected to dwindle, she said. The IMF, she said, estimates the gross external financing needs for emerging markets and developing countries to be in the trillions of dollars, and they can cover only a portion of that on their own, leaving residual gaps in the hundreds of billions of dollars. They urgently need help, she said.

## Wall Street firm dangled up to 175% returns to investors using U.S. aid programs

(News Agencies) BOSTON (Reuters) - A New York investment firm pitched wealthy investors in recent days on a way to make returns of 22% to 175% using U.S. government programs designed to help Americans keep their jobs and boost the coronavirus-stricken economy, according to a marketing document seen by Reuters. Following questions posed by Reuters, Arcadia Investment Partners LLC, which has about \$1 billion under management, said it had put its plans on hold. The idea was in "formative stages" and the firm was not "presently moving forward with this strategy given reasons that include uncertainty surrounding the regulations," Dahlia Loeb, managing director at Arcadia, told Reuters in an email on Wednesday. She did not elaborate further. The firm had sent the pitch as recently as this weekend to "a limited number of sophisticated investors," according to the marketing materials, which are dated April 4 and marked confidential. In an email sent Sunday,

and seen by Reuters, Loeb wrote it was a "highly time sensitive opportunity" and had offered to discuss it with investors that day or early in the week.

Arcadia's pitch offers a glimpse into how some private investors are looking to quickly take advantage of the unprecedented government intervention after the novel coronavirus brought economic activity to a screeching halt. Under Arcadia's plan, which has not been previously reported, the firm would have raised money to finance loans to small businesses guaranteed as part of a \$2.2 trillion government aid package, the marketing materials show. It called the new vehicle the "Paycheck Protection Program Fund," named after the government initiative for small businesses launched on April 3. Arcadia proposed to juice profits by borrowing 90% to 95% of the money from funding markets that were backstopped in recent weeks by the U.S. Federal Reserve.



# Apple and Google are working together to help track the coronavirus

(News Agencies) San Francisco (CNN Business) Apple and Google are partnering to help authorities track exposure to the coronavirus using Bluetooth technology.

The two Silicon Valley giants will work on a platform to enable contact tracing, a measure that identifies people who have been exposed to the virus and who they have been in contact with, the companies announced Friday.

The companies will first release interfaces built on existing public health apps in May that can work on iOS or Android systems, followed by a more comprehensive platform in the coming months to which users

will be able to opt in. A smartphone user that tests positive for the coronavirus can input their result into an app from a public health authority, which will feed into an anonymous "identifier beacon," according to an explanation from Google. That identifier will then be anonymously exchanged with anyone the user comes into contact with who also has the service enabled.

Users then upload their identifier records to the cloud, following which they will receive a notification if they have been exposed to anyone who has tested positive for the virus. Authorities around the world have identified contact tracing as one of the key

solutions to stop the rapid spread of the coronavirus, with several governments around the world, including Israel, Thailand and Hong Kong, using technology to track exposure and enforce quarantines.

The US government has been looking to Silicon Valley for solutions, with Facebook (FB) and Google (GOOGL) confirming last month they were looking into the use of cellphone location data to help track the spread of the virus. Some companies have also used location tracking technology to track spring breakers who flouted social distancing warnings in Florida. The state of North Dakota launched its own platform — made by the

designers of a popular bison tracking app — to enable contact tracing.

Privacy advocates and experts around the world have flagged concerns with contact tracing technology, saying it could potentially be used as a surveillance tool once the pandemic is over. Some experts have also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of Bluetooth-enabled contact tracing.

President Donald Trump also hinted at the privacy concerns when asked about Apple and Google's partnership during a briefing on Friday.

"It's very new, new technology, it's very interesting but a lot of people

worry about it in terms of a person's freedom," he said.

"We're going to take a look at that." Apple (AAPL) and Google, fierce rivals with the two most popular mobile operating systems in the world, said privacy will be central to their contact tracing efforts. Users will have to provide explicit consent for the platform to work, and no information that can be used to identify individual users will be collected, they added.

"Privacy, transparency, and consent are of utmost importance in this effort," the companies said in their statement. "We will openly publish information about our work for others to analyze."

## Covid-19: Phones may hold key to catching up with the pandemic

Technology lawyer Rahul Matthan, who advised the Indian government in the development of the Aarogya Setu app, said the features in the application need to be looked at in the context of the circumstances of the epidemic.



(News Agencies) Tools such as cellphone-based contact tracing are becoming increasingly important in the fight to contain Covid-19, a disease spreading too quickly and silently for conventional disease control measures to contain it, according to experts and researchers who say this could fundamentally involve some compromises on personal privacy.

The problem stems from the insidious nature of Sars-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19: it can be spread by a person who does not show symptoms (thus probably unaware of the illness), and merely breathing, coughing and sneezing could pass it on to anyone close by. Tracing contacts through conventional methods, therefore, may be

ineffective, require too much manpower, and take too much time for effective containment.

"To defeat this virus, you either need a vaccine or testing, contact-tracing, quarantine, which is the hallmark of epidemiological containment. The issue is that normally viruses don't spread as fast. Most that kill or are serious are infectious at a stage when someone gets very sick," said Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist at Harvard University, who was one of the first prominent public health officials to raise an alarm about the virus in January when it spread mostly within China.

"Contact tracing only works if you trace far enough and people remember well enough. And it needs a huge manpower. In Wuhan alone, they deployed almost 10,000 people,"

added Ding during an interview over video.

With a mobile phone-based tool, "you don't need the manpower and it is instantaneous — the speed is the most crucial aspect. Problems in recalling who an infected person met or where they were too get taken care of," he said. Ding led efforts to create one of the first such mobile applications back in 2014 called Germ Theory. "During the Ebola crisis, we realised contact tracing is a tedious effort and people have terrible recall," he said.

The idea was also floated by researchers from Oxford University in a paper published on March 31 in which they said, "a mobile phone app implementing instantaneous contact tracing could reduce transmission enough for

sustained epidemic suppression, stopping the virus from spreading further."

On April 2, the Indian government launched its own contact-tracing mobile application and roughly a week later, Apple and Google — who together dominate the cellphone software platform market almost entirely — announced they are working on similar mechanism for iPhone and Android-based phones.

The apps work on a simple premise: a phone will exchange details — converted into a random, unique alphanumeric — with another phone if the two are in the range of their Bluetooth radios. Bluetooth is a short-

distance radio wave, which is picked up only when someone is close enough to, say, be in the same flat or office.

The data will be shared with health authorities in the event that either of the device's users test positive for an infection, triggering an alert to all other devices that may have been in the contact chain, according to the workings disclosed by India's Aarogya Setu (health bridge) app and the proposed Google, Apple

mechanism. Union health ministry joint secretary Lav Agarwal, during the daily briefing on Covid-19, said the Aarogya Setu application was downloaded by 35 million people till Monday.

### PRIVACY WORRIES

The approach, however, has drawn questions about privacy violations. "People will wonder: who profiteers from these apps? Will there be government intrusion?" said Ding. India's Aarogya Setu has drawn criticism by privacy advocacy groups such as the Internet Freedom Foundation, which says the programme has "a systemic lack of auditability and transparency". "[There] appears to be a much wider collection and possible sharing [of data] outside of the device, than envisioned under other apps," said a working paper by IFF, which analysed a similar application used in Singapore and one developed by researchers at MIT.

## ICMR researchers detect coronaviruses in two bat species in India

(News Agencies) Researchers of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have detected coronaviruses (CoVs) among two species of bats in the country, highlighting the need for continuous active surveillance in the mammal to identify the emerging strains of the viruses that can cause an epidemic. Bats are considered to be the natural reservoir for many viruses, of which some can potentially infect humans. Many viruses have had their origin in bat species over the last two decades. Bats have been recognised as the natural reservoirs of a variety of pathogenic viruses such as Rabies, Hendra, Marburg, Nipah, and Ebola. Bats are known to harbour CoVs and serve as their reservoirs. In India, an association of Pteropus medius bats led to the Nipah virus disease outbreak in

Kerala a couple of years ago. It is suspected that the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes coronavirus disease (Covid-19), can also be traced to bats. India has a diverse population of bats. Around 117 species of bats have been recorded in the country, with around 100 sub-species coming under 39 genera belonging to eight families of the mammal. "To assess the presence of CoVs in bats, we performed identification and characterisation of bat CoV (BtCoV) in P. medius and Rousettus species from representative states in India collected during 2018 and 2019," said the researchers in the paper published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research on April 13.



# Nearly a third of Americans didn't pay rent this month, new data shows

(News Agencies) With nearly 10 million Americans filing for unemployment in March, April 1 was always going to be a difficult day for US renters.

Now we know just how difficult: Nearly a third of American renters didn't pay their rent this month.

That's according to data from the National Multifamily Housing Council, a trade association for the apartment industry. Of more than 13 million units in the US that the report covered, 69% of renters paid their rent between April 1 and 5. During the same period in April 2019, 82% of households paid their rent on time, the report said.

And just last month, 81% of renters paid rent by March 5.

It's evidence of just how the

coronavirus pandemic is devastating the US job market, and as a result, Americans' financial health. The federal government's \$2 trillion stimulus bill will pad some Americans' falls: Renters in federally subsidized affordable housing can receive aid, including a 120-day moratorium on evictions and late fees.

But most rental properties are owned by private landlords and therefore aren't eligible, though some multifamily landlords with federally backed mortgages may receive a forbearance on their payments as long as they don't evict their tenants.

Ahead of the steep uptick in unemployment claims, at least half of states and dozens of cities temporarily halted evictions in March,

but rent was still due. And while missing a payment may not immediately result in eviction, continuing to skip them would.

There are other avenues for aid, though. Solomon Greene, a senior fellow in housing policy at the Urban Institute, suggested that tenants alert their landlords to their inability to pay and seek out aid from nonprofits, or use their stimulus check included in the \$2 trillion bill to cover some of their expenses.

And in other cases, strangers are footing bills. A CNN viewer surprised a guest on Erin Burnett OutFront by paying her rent. The guest, like millions of other service industry workers, had lost her job. While the data is concerning, it should be put into context, said Priscilla

Almodovar, CEO of Enterprise Community Partners, a national nonprofit developing affordable housing.

There are 44 million renter households in the country, and the NMHC data only reflects data from 13.4 million rental units and does not include subsidized housing, a lifeline for many low-income people.

Also, Almodovar said, there were likely logistical challenges to people paying the rent on time in April. Many offices were closed and standard operating procedures for much of daily life was disrupted. The 5th of the month, often when a late fee is incurred and when the NMHC survey period ended, also fell on a Sunday. We won't really



have an accurate picture of what the impact of policy at Enterprise Community Partners. "In millions of people filing for unemployment will be until April, there is still time to get money flowing. What happens when eviction moratoriums are lifted? Now there is a critical window to get emergency assistance to those who need it."

"People were working in March. April rent may have come from their savings," Almodovar said. "The rent check is probably the first thing they pay. Now they may be unemployed, and we don't know what resources will get to them in time for May."

Her organization is calling for direct rental assistance, in which struggling tenant's rents are paid to landlords by the government.

Nearly 70% of his renters took advantage of the discount, saving them nearly \$400,000 in rent altogether.

## Coronavirus update: New York reports record 824 Covid-19 deaths in 24 hours despite flattening curve

The latest spike in deaths, which lag as an indicator of the virus's spread, comes as the rate of hospitalizations in the city and state is dropping sharply.

(News Agencies) New York City reported a record 824 deaths from the coronavirus in 24 hours, a grim reminder that despite flattening infection curves and lower hospital admissions, the health crisis in the largest US city is far from over. Statewide, the fatality rate

has worsened by the day. New York reported 799 new deaths on Thursday, on top of about 1,500 in the prior two days. Total coronavirus deaths in the state now exceed 7,000.

The city and state take snapshots of the virus's effects at different times of

day, which may partly account for why the city reported more deaths than the state did. A spokesman for the governor, Rich Azzopardi, said the city and state were working to come up with a unified reporting system to eliminate their discrepancies. The latest

spike in deaths, which lag as an indicator of the virus's spread, comes as the rate of hospitalizations in the city and state is dropping sharply. At his daily virus briefing on Thursday, Governor Andrew Cuomo said there had been only 200 net new hospitalizations



over 24 hours, the lowest number since the crisis broke out. That number had been as high as 1,400 just a week ago. Likewise, the rate of new intensive-care admissions and intubations -- when patients are put on a ventilator -- also plummeted. But New York State also reported more than 10,600 new positive cases on Wednesday, a second day above 10,000 after multiple days when the number was trending downward. At more than 159,000 infections, New York's cases have now eclipsed those of Spain and Italy. It's unknown how many people have been infected but never tested. About 18,000 people in the state are hospitalized for the virus. If New York is indeed reaching a plateau, the statistics suggest that the state will need far less hospital capacity than it raced to build at the onset of the crisis. After early models predicted a wave as big as 135,000 coronavirus patients, New York nearly doubled its hospital capacity to about 90,000 beds, with hospitals filling hallways, lobbies and conference rooms with them. If the spread continues to slow, the question may become what to do with the excess capacity the state no longer needs. That wasn't a question Cuomo was prepared to answer on Thursday, saying it was too early to begin making such assessments.

## US threatens to block China Telecom from serving American market

US agencies said China Telecom is vulnerable to "exploitation, influence and control" by the Chinese government.

(News Agencies) The top departments of the US government have endorsed cutting off Beijing-controlled China Telecom from serving the US market because of legal and security risks, the Justice Department announced Thursday. The departments, including Defense, State, and Homeland Security, said after a broad review that the Federal Communications Commission should "revoke and terminate" all authorizations for the Chinese giant's US subsidiary, China Telecom (Americas), to provide international telecommunications

services to and from the United States. "The Executive Branch agencies identified substantial and unacceptable national security and law enforcement risks associated with China Telecom's operations, which render the FCC authorizations inconsistent with the public interest," the Justice Department said in a statement.

The agencies -- which also included the Justice Department, the Commerce Department, the US Trade Representative and US counter-intelligence -- said China Telecom is

vulnerable to "exploitation, influence and control" by the Chinese government. They said it has inaccurately reported to US authorities where it stores its US records and how it manages cybersecurity.

The agencies also made the recommendation based on "the nature of China Telecom's US operations," which they said allow Chinese government actors "to engage in malicious cyber activity enabling economic espionage and disruption and misrouting of US communications."



## Bamfaad review

## Aditya Rawal and Shalini Pandey's romance implodes

**Aditya Rawal makes a promising debut but Ranjan Chandel's directorial debut is riddled with clichés of small-town love stories.**

**Bamfaad**  
Director: Ranjan Chandel  
Cast: Aditya Rawal, Shalini Pandey, Vijay Varma, Jatin Sarna

In his directorial debut, Bamfaad, Ranjan Chandel manages to capture the old-world charm of Allahabad - not Prayagraj, but Allahabad -- as the locals would say. It is the perfect setting for dramatic young love, but Aditya Rawal and Shalini Pandey's romance is not quite the explosive and heady passion that it promises to be.

Nasir Jamal aka Naate (Aditya Rawal), the hot-headed and impulsive son of politically ambitious Shahid Jamal, falls in love

at first sight with Neelam (Shalini Pandey). She is 'bamfaad' herself, but has a dark secret of her own, which ties her to local strongman Jigar Fareedi (Vijay Varma).

The inter-religious aspect of the relationship is unimportant in the scheme of things in Bamfaad; there is a one-off reference to 'love jihad' but it is quickly forgotten. Instead, the villain in this story is Jigar, who is determined to strip Nasir of his ego. But this face-off, too, lacks intensity. And while Nasir's volatile behaviour is established right from the opening scene, when a major conflict arises, he

puzzlingly hops on the first bus to Lucknow with Neelam to get away from it all.

Writers Ranjan Chandel and Hanzalah Shahid fail to do justice in their attempt to embed Nasir and Neelam's romance in the power struggles and politics of a small town. The subplot of Nasir's friends and their romances is an unnecessary diversion, and despite having potential, Jigar's character arc is undercooked. Bamfaad

does not really offer anything that we haven't already seen before in small-town love stories; I was reminded of

Tigmanshu Dhulia's Haasil, Neeraj Ghaywan's Masaan and even Shashank Khaitan's Dhadak in some scenes. Despite its share of clichés, the film has its merits.

Aditya Rawal makes a promising debut and is a refreshing departure from the star kids with enviable physiques but zero acting chops. He delivers a restrained performance, with a convincing UP accent. Shalini Pandey is up to the mark as the feisty-yet-vulnerable Neelam but reminiscent of her Arjun Reddy act.

Jatin Sarna is impressive as the treacherous friend, and while Vijay Varma



stands out as the local strongman with political ambitions, the weak writing lets him down. Bamfaad loses steam in the second half and has a been-there-done-that feel to it. However, it is buoyed by its performances, and makes for a decent watch during the lockdown.

## Season's Greetings review

# Lillette Dubey shines in this poetic film that marks Celina Jaitly's comeback

**Lillette Dubey is in top form in this film. She barely says a word through half of the film but conveys so much through her body language and expressions.**

Actor Celina Jaitly has returned to the screen in Season's Greetings, a film that she shot during trying circumstances -- the actor has said that she lost a child and her mother while she did the project. However, it can be safely said that she has worked through that immense pain to deliver one of her finest performances.

Season's Greetings opens with a touching, heartbreaking description of a woman and her feelings. Lillette is reading the poem written in a letter addressed to her as she prepares her lavish house for a guest's visit. Soon, we are taken through the relationship Romita (Celina Jaitly) and her live-in boyfriend Usmaan (debutant actor Azhar Khan) share. It

begins with the couple making love, and soon, we get to know it is an inter-religion relationship. While the discussion is rather cold, the occasional poetry and shayari the two use and the background score complete the picture of emotions involved in such a relationship - especially when the couple is equally attached to their respective families. Celina, Lillette's daughter in the film, is set to bring her boyfriend home to meet her mom.

While Celina continues to describe her parents fondly, and mentions how her mother must be lonely, Lillette is shown happy in her space. She is happy with her dance and music and has a special relationship with Chapala (Shree Ghatak). The disconnect between

how she is and how her daughter perceives her is already established, even before we see Lillette open her mouth to deliver a dialogue. Directed by Ram Kamal Mukherjee, the film explores the fragile nature of human relationships - be it between lovers or between a mother and daughter or a daughter and her father. It also focusses on how love can be both beautiful and cruel.

The subtle yet strong and rather deep emotions portrayed in the film - from those of a grown up, independent woman in love, to those of a person conflicted between love and responsibilities to the mixed feelings of joy, excitement and fear as one prepares to confront one's own child over a relationship.

The dialogues offer perfect perspective into the double-edged sword that the filmmaker is trying to use with his films - he targets emotions as well social consciousness with Season's Greetings. Sample some of the lines:

"Allahabad ko Prayagraj bante dekh, kuch nahi bole. Thoda waqt do. (They silently watched as Allahabad was changed to Prayagraj, give them some time)."

"Aag me chalna padta hai Sita ko aur Purushottam kaun banta hai?" (In the Hindu mythological epic Ramayan, Sita walks on fire but who is declared the best among men? The answer is Lord Ram, Sita's husband)"

Much as expected, Lillette is the winner when it comes to



performance - she does not say a single line through half of the film but conveys a lot through her majestic body language, perfect facial expressions and her eyes. Celina, too, does quite an impressive job. It is wonderful to watch her in the scenes where she doesn't have any dialogues. Season's Greetings, can be easily considered one of Lillette's best works. The short film stretches - at one hour, it is unlikely to keep you hooked till the end. While the poetic portions are well done, the part supposed to take the narrative forward and establish a modern way of life appear superficial. But if you do stay with the film, the climax sequence has some beautiful rewards - not only does the narrative take a surprisingly different turn, the brilliance of Lillette's performance is at its epitome in the last shot.



# Prince Harry finds new life in North America 'a bit challenging,' friend says



It's been just a few months since Prince Harry and Meghan Markle embarked on a new chapter in North America amid their departure as senior members of the royal family — and one pal close to the Duke of Sussex claims he's still struggling to find his footing.

British primatologist Jane Goodall says she has remained in contact with Harry, 35, who made multiple trips to join his wife Meghan, 38, in Vancouver, Canada, at the start of the year before officially making the move to the Duchess of Sussex's hometown of Los Angeles, Calif., last month.

Goodall spoke to the Radio Times about some big changes Harry is facing in his day-to-day life now that he's thousands of miles away from the British royal family. It turns out

Goodall is unaware of how Harry will transition to earning his own keep in the States. "I don't know how his career is going to map out, but yes, I've been in touch, though I think he's finding life a bit challenging now," Goodall shared, according to The Guardian.

The ethologist imagined that Harry has likely put a halt to one of his the traditional royal pastimes he once shared with his older brother, Prince William.

"They hunt and shoot," Harry's pal told the outlet. "But I think Harry will stop because Meghan doesn't like hunting so I suspect that is over for him."

Over the years, Harry and William enjoyed hunting trips together, at times being criticized for the controversial sport. In 2014, William

launched an appeal to stop the illegal hunting of wildlife, according to The Guardian.

Goodall, also an environmental activist, was interviewed by Harry for a special edition of British Vogue guest-edited by Meghan last year. During the chat, Goodall claimed Harry "hinted" at raising Archie differently than he was.

"I made Archie do the queen's wave, saying, 'I suppose he'll have to learn this,'" Goodall recalled. "Harry said, 'No, he's not growing up like that.'" Since settling down in Los Angeles, Harry and Meghan's desire to become financially independent has been a topic of debate. The couple confirmed in a statement to Fox News last month that they have a plan in place to "personally" cover their security costs.

# Priyanka Chopra shares a sunny selfie from lockdown in LA

Actor Priyanka Chopra is inspiring her fans to stay positive and look forward to better days amid the coronavirus lockdown. The actor is at her home in Los Angeles with singer husband Nick Jonas. The couple are practising social distancing together.

On Thursday, Priyanka shared a sun-kissed selfie from her house. "There is always a light at the end of the tunnel... Hang in there world," she captioned her post. Her fans complimented her in the

comments section. "Beautiful light on a power woman," wrote one. "Absolutely Gorgeous" wrote another. Make up artist Pati Dubroff wrote, "I miss this face."

Priyanka will soon be a part of One World: Together At Home, a globally televised and streamed special in support of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. Launched by international advocacy organization Global Citizen, and the World Health Organization, it will

show unity among all people who are affected by COVID-19 and will also celebrate and support brave healthcare workers doing life-saving work on the front lines.

Curated in collaboration with Lady Gaga, One World: Together At Home will include performances and appearances by Billie Eilish, Camila Cabello, Chris Martin, David & Victoria Beckham, Ellen DeGeneres, Elton John, Jennifer Lopez, Lilly Singh and even Shah Rukh Khan

among many other celebrities.

Priyanka recently shared that she is helping the students in Los Angeles in adapting to virtual classrooms amid lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic. Priyanka took to Instagram, where she shared a video of herself talking about helping students with the new concept. Priyanka last week pledged to donate \$100,000 to women doing their bit in the health crisis.



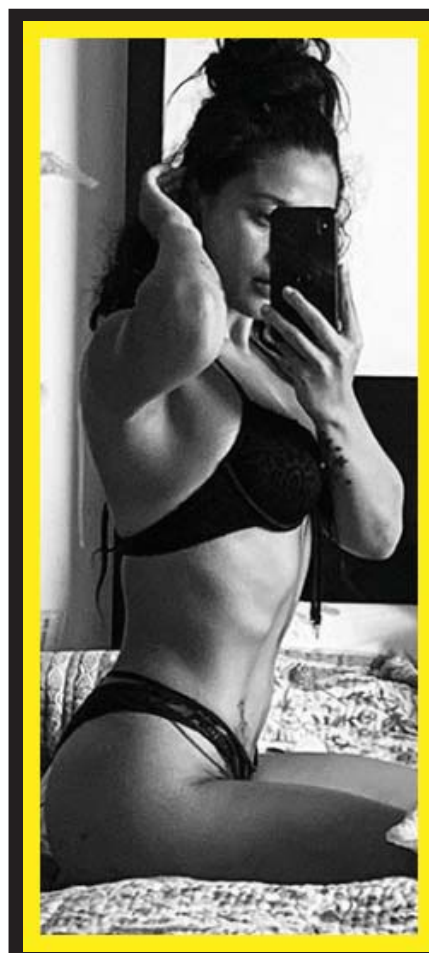
Priyanka and Nick have Cares Fund, Unicef, also donated to Feeding America and organisations like the PM-Goonj.

## Arjun Kapoor on wedding plans with Malaika Arora



Actor Arjun Kapoor held a virtual date with a few fans on Thursday and raised funds to feed 300 daily wage earners' families for a month. In another live interview with Bollywood Hungama, fans asked him questions about his work and also his personal life. One fan asked about his wedding plans with girlfriend Malaika Arora, Arjun gave a witty reply. "I will tell all of you all when I am getting

married. There are no plans as of right now." Arjun added, "Abhi shaadi hogi bhi toh kaise, agar karni bhi hogi (Even if we wanted to, how will it be possible now)?" "Not planned and not thought about it right now, but like I always say, I will not hide it," Arjun said. The couple have been dating for over a year now and are often spotted together on dates and at holidays.



## Tiger Shroff has the most brother-like reaction to sister Krishna's racy new post

Actor Tiger Shroff had the most brother-like response to his sister Krishna Shroff's racy new Instagram post. On Monday, Krishna posted a picture of herself in a bikini, to which Tiger responded in the comments with an emoji of a monkey covering its mouth with its hands.

Krishna reacted to Tiger's comment with a kiss emoji. Krishna has been sharing several posts during the nationwide coronavirus lockdown. She has quarantined herself with boyfriend Eban Hyams. Tiger, meanwhile, has been sharing videos of himself pulling off athletic moves. Their mother, Ayesha, recently posted a throwback picture of the two as children, being held by their father, actor Jackie Shroff. Jackie is currently stranded away from his family at his Khandala farmhouse. Ayesha said in a recent interview to

SpotboyE, "He was there to do some new plantations and pre-monsoon work and got stuck there. But thankfully, he has his staff with him and best fresh air, space and all his own organic veggies." Jackie, meanwhile, shared a video from his farm, urging everyone to obey laws and stay indoors. He said in the video, "It's your duty to obey the rules of the lockdown, do it for your child, think about your family. Stay at home. I think you all should be staying home, take it easy, do pranayam. Consume mustard oil, salt and turmeric at home. Look into the eyes of your mother, your wife, your kid, your lover or whosoever you love. Listen to your heart, if you plan to go out, you end up taking tension and giving tension to your family. Sudhar jao. Even God is relaxing above. Breathe a bit, just relax at home."



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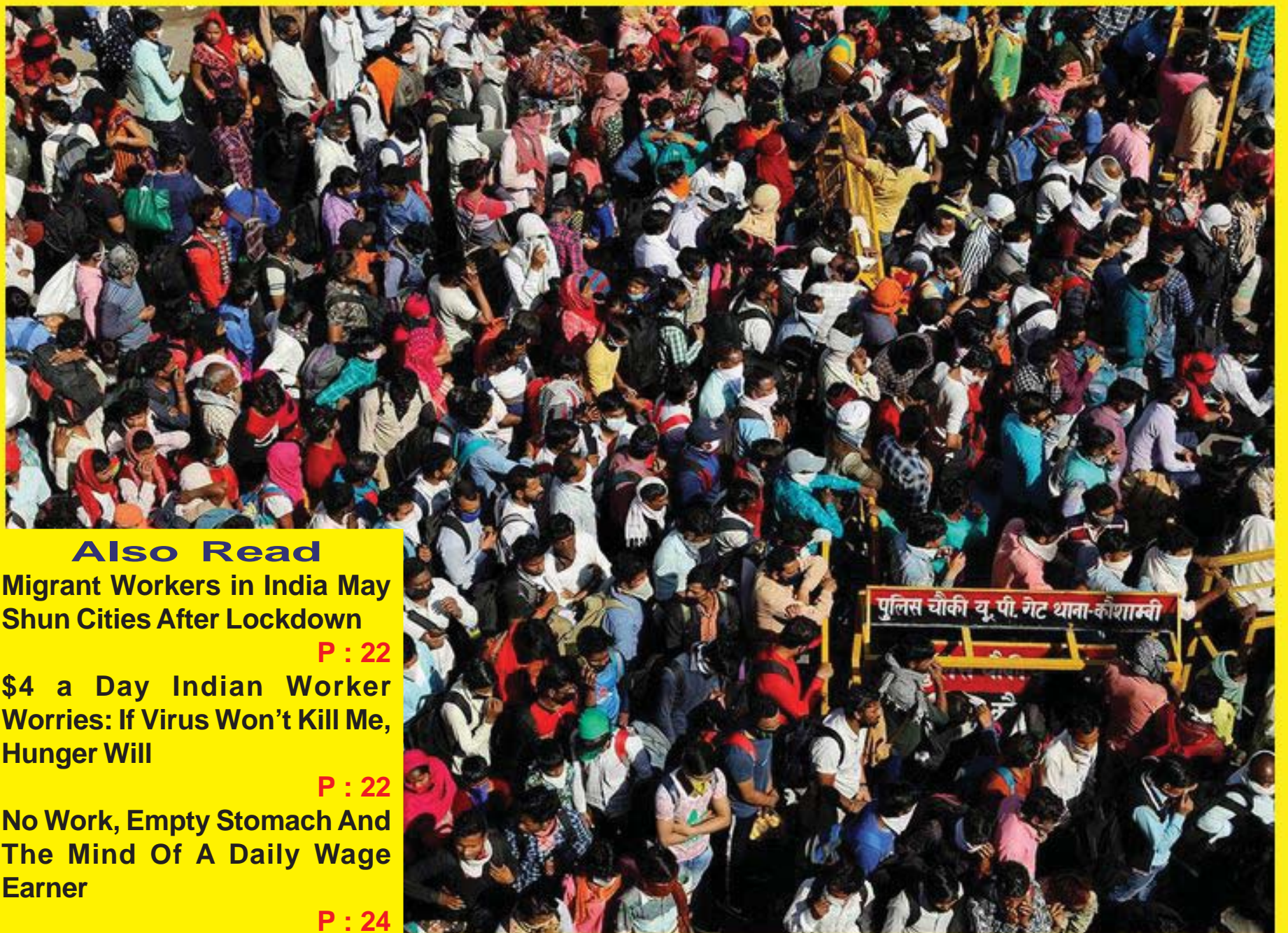
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## Hunger and Humiliation

- How Unfortunate, Migrants Treated As Black Holes And Black Boxes Of Corona Chronicles.
- During corona times, the migrant discovered he was marginal, suspect and jobless. Haunted by vulnerabilities, he had to face hunger and humiliation

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