

## All-Out Combat?

Are China and India about to start a war in the Himalayas? If historical precedent holds, the continuing standoff involving thousands of troops in multiple places along the contested 2,200-mile boundary likely won't escalate to armed combat. But one thing is clear: Ties between the world's two most populous nations are fraying rapidly.



(Story on  
Page 26,27,  
28, 29)

<b>Also Read</b>	➤ Migrant movement creates fresh spike in Covid cases in India	Page : 05
	➤ The end of autonomy for Hong Kong	Page : 09
	➤ Decoding the Centre's plan for migrant workers	Page : 11
	➤ 'This shouldn't be 'normal' in 2020 America'	Page : 40

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(See Full Page Advt. on Page 16)



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## Rahul Gandhi on border row with China

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has said that the government must come clean on the border face-off between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The stand-off started in the Ladakh region after China took an aggressive stand and deployed around 6,000 troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Sources in the government say that China wants India to stop the infrastructure projects in the border area.

## Home Minister meets PM

Union Home Minister Amit Shah today met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and informed him about the views of all chief ministers on the extension of the ongoing nationwide lockdown beyond May 31. Majority of the chief ministers wanted the lockdown to continue in some form but also favoured opening up of the economic activities and gradual return of the normal life. The central government is expected to announce its decision on the lockdown within the next two days.

## India and China are locked in a border stand-off

India has declared to involve bilaterally with Beijing based on five established mechanisms to address border issues between the two. It's clear hence, that it is not open to US President Donald Trump's offer to mediate on the Sino-Indian border row.

## Special KLM flight brings home 276 Indians from Netherlands

As many as 276 Indians stranded in the Netherlands due to the coronavirus-induced global travel restrictions have returned home on board a special KLM flight as part of the 'Vande Bharat Mission'. The Indian government launched the 'Vande Bharat Mission' on May 7 to bring back Indians stranded in various countries. Under Phase I of the mission, the government evacuated a total of 6,527 Indians from the Gulf region and from countries like the US, the UK, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Malaysia and the Maldives.

(The South Asian Insider Bureau, New Delhi)

# In highest single-day spike, Telangana reports 169 new Covid-19 cases

The Telangana government has attributed the rise in the number of Covid-19 cases in the state to migrant workers and deportees or foreign evacuees returning from other countries.

(News Agencies)

Telangana on Friday reported 169 new Covid-19 cases, the highest-ever number of positive infections reported in a single day in the state since the outbreak of the coronavirus. With this, the southern state's tally has risen to 2,425. The state also reported four deaths, taking the overall toll due to Covid-19 to 71. Telangana been witnessing a steep rise in the number of positive cases and deaths due to Covid-19 since lockdown 4.0 came into force on May 18. The number of deaths has gone up by 37 and the number of positive cases by 833 in the last 12 days. In the last two days, as many as eight deaths and 286 positive cases were reported in the state. According to the official bulletin released by the state medical and health department, out of 169 cases



reported on Friday, 100 cases were that of local residents of Telangana, including 82 in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits, 14 in Ranga Reddy district and two each in Medak and Sangareddy districts. Five migrants and 64 deportees were also found Covid-19 positive. The four deaths included a 53-year-old man suffering with Carcinoma Thyroid who died after being treated in hospital for a week,

a 59-year-old man, suffering with Multiple Myeloma, who died after his admission in the hospital three days ago, a 62-year-old man suffering with Hemiplegia, who died after undergoing treatment for 13 days and a 60-year-old woman suffering from hypertension and associated co-morbidities, who had been hospitalised for five days. The government attributed the rise in the number of cases

to migrant workers and deportees or foreign evacuees returning from other countries. So far, as many as 458 people have returned from abroad and they were quarantined in government centres in the state. Of them, 207 have tested positive for Covid-19. Similarly, a large number of migrants have been returning from other states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Bihar. These migrants are being home quarantined and monitored by the district authorities. Till date, 180 migrants have tested positive for Covid-19 and are being treated, the bulletin said. The state health department requested the people to inform the local authorities in case they identify any new persons and migrants who have newly arrived in the towns and villages.

## Kerala reports 62 new Covid-19 cases, one death

(News Agencies) Kerala has reported one death and 62 new virus cases on Friday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said adding among the infected two are Air India crew and two prisoners and a health worker. Among 1,150 total cases, 577 are active and more than 1,24,000 are under observation in the state. A 65-year-old man, who returned from the middle-east, last week died in Kottayam on Friday taking the death toll to 9. An acute diabetic, he was on ventilator for last two days. The CM said the state expected a sharp rise in cases with the return of expatriates and people stranded

in other parts of the country and there was no need of panic on this count.

The CM reiterated that the state has got best recovery and lowest mortality rates in the country and its testing rates were in commensurate with new cases and infection rate. "When you test 100 people in the state 1.7 are testing negative whereas in the country it is 5 per cent. And the fatality rate is 0.5. We are going by the directive of the Indian Council of Medical Research," he said dispelling doubts over low rate of tests in the state. Recently many from the opposition had questioned the state's low testing rate.

## Delhi records 792 coronavirus cases in a day

Delhi has recorded the highest single-day point in the coronavirus cases as 792 fresh cases were reported in the past 24 hours which reached 15,257. At least 7,264 patients have recovered from coronavirus so far in Delhi while 7,690 cases are active according to the Health Department. Reports state that 15 new deaths were added to the total COVID-19 toll in the national capital to 303. Delhi Health Department further stated that the total number of containment zones in Delhi is 96 at the moment.

## All airports functioning smooth

After two months of being grounded, India resumed its domestic flight services on Monday with 428 flights functioning on day one. On the second day of the recommencement of domestic flight services in the fourth phase of lockdown in India, a total of 445 flights operated which carried 62,641 passengers, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said today adding that all airports functioned smoothly.

## Union Minister hits out at Rahul Gandhi on lockdown criticism

You say lockdown is not the solution then don't you explain this to your chief ministers': Ravi Shankar Prasad

(News Agencies) Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad today slammed Rahul Gandhi over the Congress leaders 'national lockdown a failure' comments as he pointed out that the Congress-rules states were among the first to impose restrictions. Union Minister while addressing the Press conference today wanted to know why not Rahul Gandhi explain this to the chief ministers. The first state to announce a lockdown was Punjab followed by Rajasthan, then Maharashtra and Punjab were the first ones to extend the lockdown till 31st May, even before the meeting of chief ministers with the Prime Minister.



## Railways, Metro services plan, post-lockdown 4.0

(News Agencies) With the fourth phase of the nationwide lockdown ending on May 31 and the Centre deliberating on the roadmap ahead, the Railways is gearing up for the graded resumption of passenger train operations from June 1. Metro rail services, on the other hand, are yet to get a green light from the Centre as they remain in the list of restricted activities across the country under the latest lockdown guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs.



# Adityanath makes u-turn

## UP says no permission needed to hire its workers

The government also said it was working on modalities to set up the commission to provide jobs and social security to migrant workers returning to the state.

(News Agencies) Two days after Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said other states will also need permission from the state for engaging its workers, his government said Tuesday that it would not incorporate, in the migration commission bye-laws, the 'prior permission' clause for states seeking to employ manpower from UP.

The government also said it was working on modalities to set up the commission to provide jobs and social security to migrant workers returning to the state. It has named the migration commission

as the 'Kamgar/shramik (sewajojan and rozgar) kalyan ayog (Workers/labourers employment welfare commission). About 26 lakh migrants have already returned to the state and an exercise to map their skills is being carried out to help them get jobs. On Tuesday, Adityanath discussed the modalities for setting up the commission and told his officers to complete the skill mapping exercise in 15 days. "The chief minister discussed the modalities for setting up the commission, as well. There will be no provision requiring other states to seek UP

government's prior permission for employing our manpower. The commission is being set up with to provide jobs and social security to the workers. We will also link the migrants to the government schemes to provide them houses and loans etc," said a senior officer, who didn't want to be named.

Adityanath said a letter should be sent to all state governments to find out about migrant workers willing to come back to Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking at a webinar on Sunday, the CM had said: "The migration

commission will work in the interest of migrant workers. If any other state wants UP's manpower, they cannot take them away just like that but will have to seek permission of the UP government. The way our migrant workers were ill-treated in other states, the UP government will take their insurance, social security in its hands now. The state government will stand by them wherever they work, whether in Uttar Pradesh, other states or other countries." The 'permission' statement sparked a row with some political leaders and parties questioning it.



Earlier in the day, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had severely criticized Adityanath's stand saying the workers were not the chief minister's personal property.

"It is very unfortunate that the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh views India in such a way. These people are not his personal property. They are not the personal property of Uttar Pradesh. These people are Indian citizens and they have the right to decide what they want to do and they have the right to live the life they want to live," Gandhi said.

## PM Modi speaks to leaders of Austria, Egypt and Qatar to discuss Covid-19 crisis

The telephone conversations were part of PM Narendra Modi's ongoing outreach to heads of government around the world to ensure the welfare of Indian expatriates and to bolster cooperation in the fight against Covid-19.

(News Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday reached out to the leaders of Austria, Egypt and Qatar to discuss the Covid-19 crisis and steps to counter the coronavirus. The telephone conversations were part of Modi's ongoing outreach to heads of government around the world to ensure the welfare of Indian expatriates and to



bolster cooperation in the fight against Covid-19 and to address the economic fallout of the pandemic. Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen condoled the damage caused in India by cyclone Amphan and the two leaders exchanged views on steps taken in their countries to manage the health and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. They agreed on the importance of global collaboration to deal with current challenges. They also "reiterated their shared desire to further strengthen and diversify India-Austria relations in the post-Covid world", the external affairs ministry said. Modi highlighted the opportunities for enhanced cooperation in infrastructure, technology, research and innovation, and SMEs. The leaders shared the hope the

world will soon overcome the health crisis and focus on longer-term concerns such as the health of the environment. During his phone conversation with the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Modi

conveyed greetings on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr and appreciated the personal care taken by the Amir for ensuring the welfare of Indian citizens amid the pandemic. The Amir

appreciated the contributions of the Indian community in Qatar, especially the role played by health workers. Modi highlighted the attention being paid by Indian authorities to avoid any disruption in supply of essential goods to Qatar. Modi also conveyed greetings for Eid-ul-Fitr to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, who expressed happiness at the fast expanding bilateral ties. Modi also expressed his appreciation for the support extended by Egyptian authorities for the safety and welfare of Indian nationals during the Covid-19 crisis. Referring to his planned visit to Egypt earlier this year, which was postponed due to the pandemic, Modi conveyed his desire to meet Sisi as soon as circumstances permit.

## No major side-effects of HCQ in studies in India, can be used as preventive Covid treatment: ICMR

The ICMR's statement came against the backdrop of the World Health Organization (WHO) temporarily suspending the testing of the drug as a potential treatment for Covid-19 over safety concerns.

(News Agencies) No major side-effects of antimalarial drug Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) have been found in studies in India and its use can be continued in preventive treatment for Covid-19 under strict medical supervision, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said on Tuesday. The ICMR's statement came against the backdrop of the World Health Organization (WHO) temporarily suspending the testing of the drug as a potential treatment for Covid-19 over safety concerns.

"The Covid-19 is an evolving field and we do not know which drug is working and which is not working. Lots of drugs are being repurposed for Covid-19, whether for prophylaxis (treatment given or action taken to prevent disease) or for treatment of the disease. "During these six weeks, we got some data in India, mainly observational studies and some case control studies. We found there were no major side affects except for nausea,



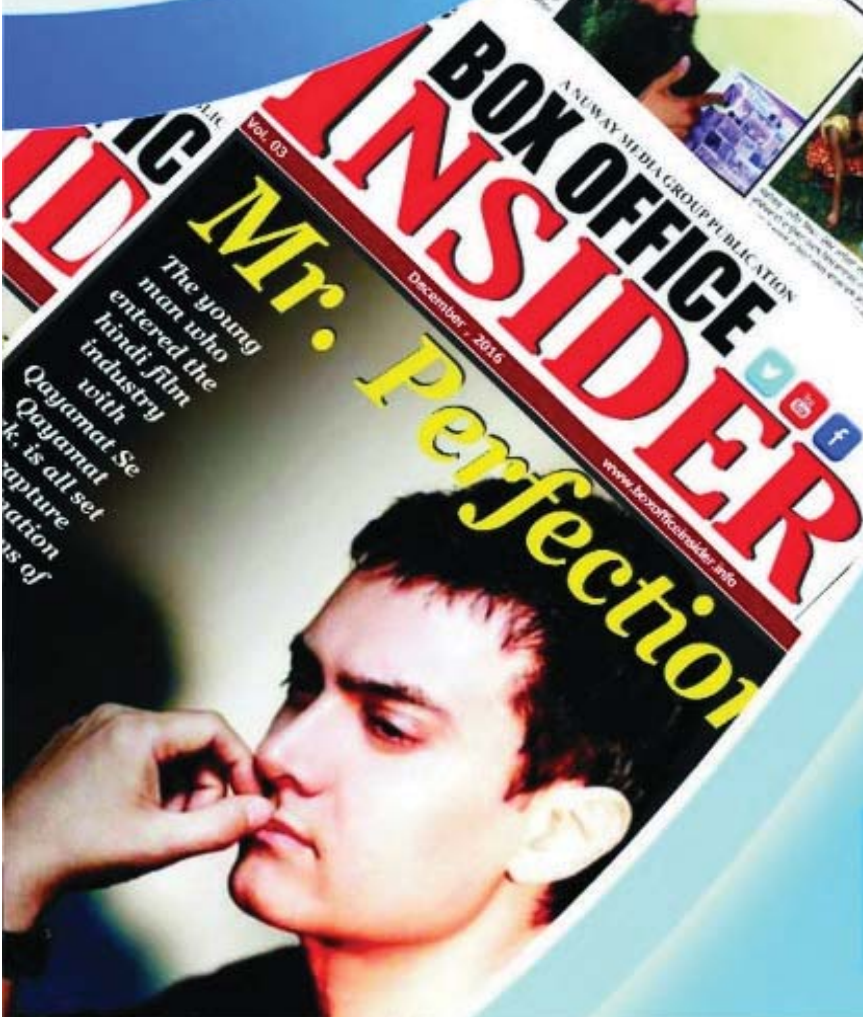
vomiting, palpitation occasionally. Hence in our advisory, we've recommended that it should be continued for prophylaxis as there is no harm. Benefit may be there," ICMR Director General Balram Bhargava said at a press briefing here on Tuesday. He said it has been "clearly advised that HCQ should be taken with food, not on empty stomach". "We also emphasized that one ECG should be done during the treatment. We expanded the use of HCQ from healthcare workers to front-line workers also, considering the potential benefits," he added. Bhargava said that Chloroquine is a very old antimalarial drug used for nearly 100 years and Hydroxychloroquine is even safer and is widely used for malaria. "Taking biological plausibility, in-vitro data and the availability and safety of this drug [HCQ], we had recommended it for use under strict medical supervision," the ICMR DG told the press conference. "It was very popular drug suddenly when the American government also started using it and they got fast track approval or emergency use authorisation for it. We also thought that it may be a useful drug for prevention of Covid," Bhargava said.





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# Migrant movement creates fresh spike in Covid cases in India, tally reaches 1.45 lakh

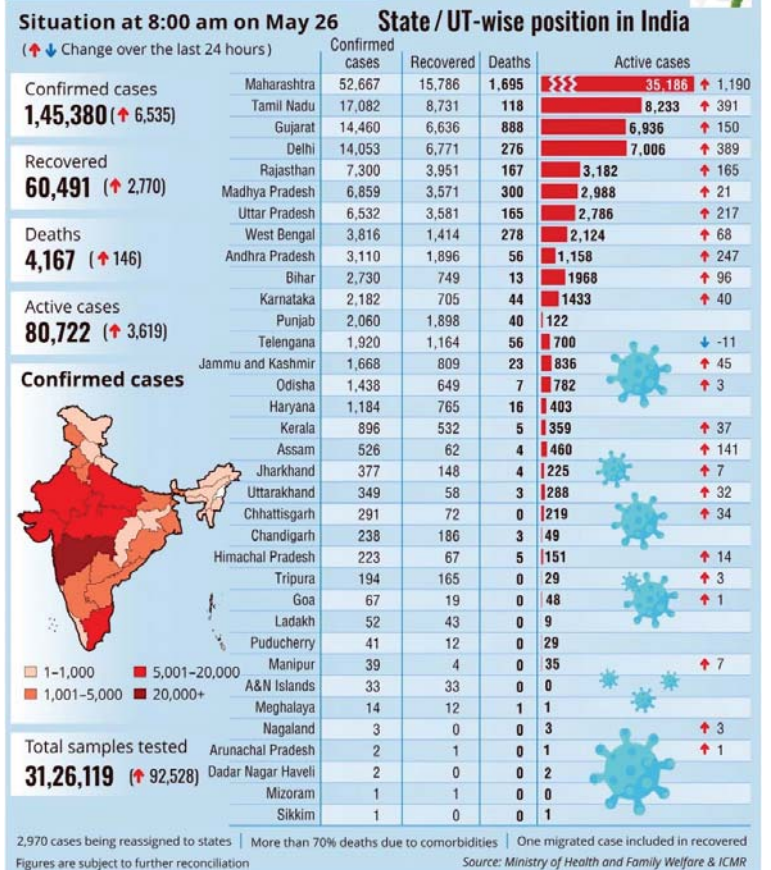


In its latest update, the Centre said the Covid-19 death toll has risen to 4,167 and the number of cases has climbed to 1,45,380 in the country, registering an increase of 146 deaths and 6,535 cases since Monday.

(News Agencies) The nationwide tally of Covid-19 cases crossed 1.45 lakh on Tuesday with states like Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Odisha reporting a significant rise in their numbers amid the large-scale return of migrant workers from other states. The numbers also rose further in the worst-hit states including Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, while Delhi, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, among other states and union territories, also reported more new cases. Indian Railways has ferried over 44 lakh migrant workers on board 3,276 'Shramik Special' trains since May 1. According to Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri, an additional 41,673 people had traveled to their home states via flights till 5 pm on Tuesday. To control the fresh spike in cases created by the mass movement, several states on Tuesday announced mandatory institutional quarantine on arrival for all. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court directed the central and state government to immediately provide adequate transport arrangements, food and shelters free of cost to migrant labourers stranded across the country due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said that the Modi government

failed in controlling Covid-19 outbreak through the nationwide lockdown. The Congress leader asked the Centre to share its Plan B to contain the pandemic. In its latest update, the ministry said the Covid-19 death toll has risen to 4,167 and the number of cases has climbed to 1,45,380 in the country, registering an increase of 146 deaths and 6,535 cases since Monday 8 AM. It put the number of active cases at more than 80,000 and recoveries at over 60,000. The Union Health Ministry, however, said the recovery rate for Covid-19 cases in the country has seen an upwards trend and is better than many other countries, while the

## CORONA WATCH



fatality has fallen further. At a press briefing, Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said, "The recovery rate in the country continues to improve and is presently 41.61 per cent. The Covid-19 fatality rate has reduced from 3.3 per cent on April 15 to 2.87 per cent which is among the lowest in the world." India is now among the ten worst-hit countries by the novel coronavirus and several experts have attributed the surge in cases to easing of travel restrictions and movement of migrants besides enhanced testing capacity. The coronavirus death toll in Delhi itself has mounted to 288, while 412 fresh cases of Covid-19 infection were reported during the day, taking the virus tally in the city to 14,465.

## North Bengal hospital refuses to test samples sent by Sikkim due to spike in Covid-19 cases



(News Agencies) The Himalayan state of Sikkim alleged on Friday that the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital (NBMCH) in Siliguri town, West Bengal government's biggest hospital in the region, has refused to test swab samples it sends for Covid-19 tests.

NBMCH had been regularly testing swab samples sent from Sikkim where only one citizen was infected so far. Though Sikkim carries out the Truenat-Beta-CoV test, samples were being sent to

NBMCH for a second confirmation. Pempa Bhutia, health secretary of Sikkim, said, "Eighty-five samples were returned by NBMCH on Thursday while 750 samples sent earlier are yet to be tested."

Sikkim stopped sending samples from May 19. Officials in Sikkim said NBMCH authorities told them that the hospital was carrying out more tests than before since the number of cases in Bengal has gone up. Sikkim's health minister Mani Kumar Sharma said, "We

understand the pressure being faced by NBMCH. We are hopeful that the samples lying there will be tested even if the process may be delayed."

Praloy Acharjee, chief medical officer of health, Darjeeling district, said, "We are augmenting the testing capacity at NBMCH. We will, however, test samples from Sikkim that are marked urgent." NBMCH's Viral Research and

Diagnostic Laboratory is testing up to 1,500 swab samples a day now. It receives more than 2,000 samples a day from different parts of north Bengal.

The number of Covid-19 cases is rising fast in the region. Four people tested Covid-19 positive in the Darjeeling hills on Friday. An NBMCH doctor, who did not want to be quoted, said, "The reason for refusing samples from Sikkim is the pressure the hospital is facing due to increased testing."

## Crises of Migrant Workers Continue, Need Action: Supreme Court Issues Notices to Centre and States

(News Agencies) After innumerable stories of their plight and agony, the Supreme Court on Tuesday decided to finally look at the problems being faced by migrant workers left stranded in different parts of the country due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown. The top court admitted that "crises of migrant labourers is even continuing today with large sections still stranded on roads, highways, railway stations and state borders", requiring effective concerted efforts to improve the situation. A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan took suo motu cognisance of the issues relating to migrant workers and sought a response from Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. Fixing the matter for hearing on Thursday, the bench recorded in its order that "there have been inadequacies and certain lapses" although the Centre and states have maintained they were taking all necessary steps. "We are of the view that effective concentrated efforts are required to redeem the situation," said the bench, which also included Justices Sanjay K Kaul and MR Shah. The bench asked the law officer to assist it and bring to the notice of the Court all measures and steps taken by the Government of India and to be taken in this regard. It also issued notices to all the states and union territories, seeking their responses at the earliest. In its order, the bench referred to newspaper reports and media reports that have been "continuously showing the unfortunate and miserable conditions of migrant labourers walking on-foot and cycles from long distances".





(News Agencies) The Covid-19 fatality rate in India is among the lowest in the world at 2.87 per cent, the government said on Tuesday, attributing the timely lockdown, early detection and management of coronavirus infection cases as the main reasons for the low death toll. From 3.38 per cent in April, the fatality rate in the country has come down to 2.87 per cent as against 6.4 per cent globally. The death toll due to Covid-19 rose to 4,167 and the number of

cases climbed to 1, 45,380 in the country registering an increase of 146 deaths and 6,535 cases in a 24-hour span till Tuesday 8 AM, according to the Union health ministry.

Responding to a question at a press briefing on why the country's death rate is one of the lowest in the world, ICMR DG Balram Bhargava said there is no substantive factor behind it. "We have surprisingly found a low fatality rate in India and which is a very good thing. Ultimately we

are interested in a patient surviving whether he gets Covid-19 or not.

"There are several hypothesis such as we are living in bad hygiene, have higher immunity and have been given certain vaccines like BCG and those for tuberculosis, but these all are hypothesis and we cannot say anything clearly on any factor. So long as the fatality rate is low it a good thing and I hope it continues," he said.

Joint secretary Lav Agarwal, however, said

that the country's graded response to Covid-19 and timely identification of cases along with their clinical management played a major role in keeping the death rate low. One of the main components of infectious diseases is early identification, he said.

"We had started screening of passengers and activated our healthcare workers even 13 days before the WHO declared it a public health emergency of international concern. If cases are detected on time they do not turn serious and to the extent automatically the fatality rate will be low," he said.

France has a fatality

rate of 19.9 per cent followed by Belgium at 16.3, Italy at 14.3, UK at 14.2, Spain 12.2, Sweden 11.9, Canada 7.6, Brazil 6.3, the US at 6.0, China 5.5 and Germany at 4.6 per cent. India has 0.3 deaths per lakh population as against the 4.5 deaths per lakh population respectively.

Referring to the WHO Situation Report 126 dated May 25, he said Belgium has 81.2 death per lakh population while Spain has 61.5 deaths per population and UK has reported 55.3 deaths per lakh population.

Italy, France, Sweden,

US, Canada, Brazil and Germany have 54.3, 42.3, 39.3, 29.3, 17.2, 10.5 and 10.0 deaths per lakh population respectively.

Aggarwal further said that while Belgium has reported 800.72 deaths per million, Spain, Italy, UK, France, US and Russia have reported 614.95, 542.24, 541.98, 434.59, 295.22 and 24.96 deaths per million respectively.

"India has reported only 3.08 deaths per million. Further, the trajectory is relatively flat, there is no spike in the curve," Aggarwal said showing a graph to present global perspective: death per million population (as per European CDC situation update dated May 25).

## Former Maha CM Fadnavis denies attempt to topple Uddhav govt, says it will fall due to its own differences

Maharashtra Leader of Opposition and former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday alleged that the state government is trying to divert the attention from its failure in controlling the Covid-19 situation in the state by fanning speculation over its possible toppling.

(News Agencies) Maharashtra Leader of Opposition and former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday alleged that the state government is trying to divert the attention from its failure in controlling the Covid-19 situation in the state by fanning speculation over its possible toppling.

"They are trying to divert the attention from the failure in handling the Covid-19 situation by

fanning debates like the Opposition is trying to topple the government. It is an attempt to provide cover fire to hide its wrong deeds," Fadnavis said at a virtual press conference.

Fadnavis's statement assumes significance in the backdrop of the speculation that Uddhav Thackeray government's fate was in limbo after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi earlier in the day said that the party does not have any right to take decisions even though it is a part of the government.

"I would not judge Uddhav Thackeray but I can say that the state now needs an assertive

leadership," Fadnavis said. He reiterated that there has been no co-ordination among various

departments of the government.

"This government will fall due to its own differences. We do not want to bring it down but we want wake them up," Fadnavis said.

Fadnavis suggested that the state government needed to take bold steps.

"Maharashtra has the maximum cases of Covid-19. Within the last one month only, 3,500 tests are being done daily. Out of them, 32 per cent are testing positive. In last two-three days, the rate of positive cases has gone up to 40 per cent. Patients are not getting beds, there is no place to keep the corpses,

people are dying on streets," Fadnavis said. He alleged that the state government is not in a position to spend money provided by the Centre.

"If you look at the expenditures and bills, you will know what the priority of the government is. It is only creating gangs of trolls to counter the points raised by Opposition. If you are doing good job, why do you need trolls?" the former chief minister asked.

Fadnavis claimed that the Union government has provided help of Rs 28,104 crore in all to the state government.

"As far as GST is concerned, every year compensation cess is provided to states. This year the cess amount was low due to low inflow of taxes. But still, the Centre went out of the way and cleared amounts till November 2019," Devendra Fadnavis said.

He defended Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on his statement that other states would need permission from UP for to hire the state's labourers.



## India now ninth-worst hit country in the world 1,65,799 COVID-19 cases



India has climbed to 1,65,799 today, making it the world's ninth worst-hit country by the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Health and Family Welfare Ministry, the death toll rose to 4,706 in the country, while the number of cases climbed to 1,65,799, an increase of 175 deaths and a record jump of 7,466 cases. The Health Ministry said the number of active COVID-19 cases stood at 89,987, while 71,105 people have recovered and one patient has migrated. The total confirmed cases include foreigners.

## Google warns limited users in India Targeted by state sponsored cyberattacks

Google's security experts have notified between 51-100 Indian users accounts were targeted "state-sponsored" attackers in April, the tech giant has announced. Google however, did not specify whether the attackers were backed by the users' own governments or a foreign party. On a global scale, the company claims to have sent out 1755 warnings to users related to government-backed threatening. According to Google, the attacks have taken place across 50 countries worldwide.



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# China Up To Mischief, It's Instigating Nepal Against India

**China hopes to turn the relationships between India and Nepal sour and is ready to bet anything to make it happen.**

On October 3, 2017, when the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) decided to merge, Indian government should have taken a note. And when the leader of this alliance, Khadga Prasad Oli, was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Nepal on February 15, 2018, this note should have been promoted to a level of 'security warning in neighborhood'.

The present territorial dispute over Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani is not something that will escalate into anything major. But it surely can be a trailer for things to come. Nepal has been India's oldest, social, cultural and military friend and ally. Hence it is more surprising than anything else as to why is Nepal raking up these issues now.

Across around 1700 km long Indo-Nepal border, the movement for citizens of both the countries has been free. The trade routes, well-defined, have been enabling bilateral trade at an average of around 6-7 billion USD annually. India is home to around 10-12 million Nepalese, spread across the country, settled permanent and temporarily and earning their livelihoods, which 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty has ensured. Around 25-30,000 Nepalese soldiers are on active duty in Indian Army in

Gurkha Regiment. Indian Mission in Kathmandu also supports around 1.2 lakh pensioners and dependents in Nepal, amounting to around Rs 2800 Crore in 2016-17 alone, which is around 4600 Crore in Nepalese currency. There are number of scholarships for Nepalese students in India, and for students in Nepal, managed by Indian embassy. India recently gave 2 ALHs (Advanced Light Helicopters) to Nepal during PM Modi's visit to the neighbouring country. All in all, India has always been a responsible and loving 'Thulo Dai' (Elder brother) to Nepal. There is a genuine warmth and affection when we deal with people from Nepal and it is the biggest the testimonial of our solid relationships. However, presently there is a dispute over territorial issue brewing up over area in Lipulekh area in Uttarakhand. Nepal has been claiming that the South part of the area belongs to them, as per the Sugauli treaty that was signed on 2 December 1815 and ratified on 4 March 1816 between the East India Company and Raj Guru Gajaraj Mishra for Nepal following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16. British did a solid 'Alsace-Lorraine' to Nepal, taking away lot of territory and coming up with lot of one-sided clause in this treaty, amongst which the seeds of British India Gurkha regiment were sown. On territorial

side, the Nepal's border was limited between Mehakali river on west and Mechi on East with Himalayan range on North and Terai to its South. It is on the river Mahakali, that the Lipulekh territory is being contested by Nepal now. The river is joined by two tributaries in the area. While India wants to follow the original river's route, Nepal is claiming area till extent of Westernmost tributary.

The issue has been debated earlier too, but the vehement approach in which Nepal is taking it up now, including releasing maps with this territory included, is new. We should not be surprised. If the analysts in Indian government have been monitoring situation effectively, this was coming all along. And at perfect timing, with China flexing its muscles in Taiwan, South China Sea, Hong Kong, and recently Leh and Doklam. Why would China not throw Nepal in mix with Lipulekh pass? With world struggling against Covid-19 crisis, it is expected that flustered nations and governments would take rash decisions. China is banking on it. It would want that there is some border clash at Lipulekh road, where border posts are coming up. The road was built to shorten the long route to Mansarovar Lake in Tibet, which was via Sikkim till now. Plus, the road will be an excellent strategic asset during any Indo-China conflict. And that is what is bothering the Chinese.



Suddenly, you see them getting aggressive at multiple places and this show of strength by Nepal is definitely happening on China's behest. Otherwise Nepal has no reason to start these issues at this juncture where India is extending its help to fight Covid-19. But China hopes to turn the relationships between two nations sour and ready to bet anything to make it happen. It will not be just any border dispute because we have around 30,000 soldiers in active duty in Gurkha regiments. Imagine them going rogue! Wouldn't that be a dream situation for China? We definitely need to secure Nepal because time and again it has been proven that the ISI has been using it as an active covert route for anti-India activities. India needs to handle this immediately and diplomatically. We tend to not pay attention to smaller issues especially with Covid-19 crisis on, but slowly it will snowball into a major issue if not attended to. In such a case, it will take a lot of effort to put

down these fires. A Bureaucratic-Military Delegation is the best bet to have a dialogue with Nepal and resolve this and focus towards dealing with bigger concerns at this stage. Indian COAS General Narwane drew lot of flak for his comments, which in fact are quite precise. One should not forget that the people who are instigating and supporting these disputes, on both India and Nepalese side, are the same who would call his observations slander. The Chief is responsible for India's border security and its integration. If he cannot speak on its issues, who else can? Nepalese pride is as high as the Everest and India should not mistake size for competence. We need to sit on table like equals and banking on age-old traditional friendship, get things in order. Because if India would not be India without the Indian Army, India Army would not be this Army without Gurkha regiment. We should never forget that.

## Ladakh Flare-up Symptomatic Of Chinese Ambitions On India

Three years back, a prolonged stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops on Bhutan's Doklam plateau had sparked off alarming speculations about the proximity of armed conflict between the two Asian giants, and how such a frightening possibility would destabilise the sub-continent and the region beyond. That crisis, however, was resolved in 73 days without a shot being fired. But similar worries have started clouding minds of policy planners as Indian and Chinese soldiers have over the past week begun to pitch tents and enforce their respective positions along strategic points in Ladakh, in the western sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The build-up at the border—triggered by aggressive posturing and 'transgressions' by soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the Indian side of the LAC—coincides with a marked rise in anti-China feelings in India as it makes common cause with the growing anger against the Chinese across the world in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The question arises if the two developments are linked. "This seems to be a coincidence, as there is no connection between the two," says historian Srinath Raghavan, though he

feels both sides have gone further than usual. Raghavan referred to incidents that started from May 5-6, when Indian and Chinese soldiers were injured while trading punches and throwing stones at each other in a departure from past norms underlining the avoidance of physical violence.

Barring 1962, when the neighbours went to war over their disputed boundary, not a single bullet has been fired across the Sino-Indian border since 1975. In the intervening period, there have been skirmishes and face-offs. But they were all peacefully resolved.

The 3448-km Line of Actual Control, behind which soldiers of the two countries stand, remains disputed and un-demarcated, yet is not considered a 'hot border' like the one between India and Pakistan. Moreover, despite their simultaneous rise within the same geographical space, Indian and Chinese leadership have so far skilfully managed to avoid situations that could lead to another armed confrontation. But heightened tension in the past weeks, following hectic activities of patrolling soldiers of India and China in key points along the LAC, has increased unease. Indian officials have recorded

'transgressions' along the LAC in Pangong Tso Lake, Trig Heights, Burtse, the Doletango area and the Galwan river valley in Ladakh and also at strategic points in Sikkim.

"Better infrastructure, enhanced transportation and communication facilities have increased the probability of Indian and Chinese patrols coming face-to-face," explains Gautam Bambawale, former ambassador to China. Coupled with aggressive patrolling, this could lead to the kind of situation we now witness, he explains. Bambawale reminds that there are standard operation procedures that the two sides have agreed to and if their soldiers adhere to them the border could be relatively peaceful. On the other hand, if there are attempts to change the 'status quo ante', it could lead to trouble, he warns.

Experts say the stand-off in strategic points at Ladakh, like Galwan, is connected to India's upgradation of the advance landing ground that would allow C-130J aircraft to land and boost strategic airlift capabilities. In addition, a series of roads are being built in the area to enhance India's access to the Karakoram highway—an area of immense strategic importance for both Pakistan and China.

It is the building of this access road that is being vehemently opposed by China but India seem determined not to abandon its plans of building the required infrastructure—as the Chinese have already done on their side—to facilitate and enhance better access to the armed forces.

But away from the border, the mood in political circles in New Delhi and elsewhere has undergone a significant change. Political leaders, including those from the ruling BJP, like its national general secretary Ram Madhav and cabinet minister Nitin Gadkari, made critical remarks about China in public. "I really don't see any special change in India's approach towards China," says C. Raja Mohan, director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. "The worldwide concern is about China getting assertive in its responses to questions on its handling of the COVID-19 crisis," he adds. Raja Mohan points out that in India the public debate, especially from the political class, has always been free-flowing; there have been voices that have always been critical of China and those who resolutely supported Beijing irrespective of the merits involved.



# India's Migrant Workers Crisis Not Just About Economic Inequality, But Social Too

**The vital reason behind the plight of the migrant workers is deeply entrenched in the structure of India's economic system itself.**

One of the conspicuous illustrations of economic inequality in post-independent India is the contrasting images of Antilia, India's billionaire Mukesh Ambani's luxurious 27-floor residential property, and the surrounding urban slums located within his wealthy neighbourhood. The enduring economic disparities have surfaced once again under the public gaze during the nationwide lockdown in India following the global pandemic. The economic divide was discernible in the images of India's rich and middle class clapping hands on the terraces and balconies of their homes and the gloomy images of millions of poor walking on the roads with their kids, bereft of food, water and public transport, to reach home. When this defining image of India has shaken the public conscience, the political apathy and the governmental inefficiency to tackle the migrant issues have become the banality in the discussions and debates around the issue.

The perennial problems of migrant workers entail lack of proper accommodation, low standard of living, low wages, inaccessibility to state given services due to lack of identity proof and other documents. The global pandemic has become the immediate reason for the abrupt palpability of the migrant workers' deplorable condition on the national scene. However, the vital reason behind their plight is deeply entrenched in the structure of India's economic system itself. Their precarious condition is the culmination of a prolonged existence of the capitalist mode of production coterminous with the neo-liberal policies. Neo-liberal measures seek economic growth by promoting consumerism and competition. By limiting the intervention of the government, it debilitates the mechanisms and mediums of economic and social justice. The deregulation of social welfare policies further deprives the marginalised of their economic and social capital. It may be argued that the present-day migrant problem in India is the repercussion of neo-liberal economic reforms implemented in 1991 by then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh and pursued by the successive governments under P V Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, and now the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The camaraderie between the corporate and the government machinery is still on and continues unabated. The disproportionate share of benefits at the

expense of the poor and the absence of government intervention in the welfare realm left the needy more vulnerable. A structural paradigm shift of mutating the Indian state into a more welfare state and a fair redistribution of public goods under state control are inevitable to tackle the increasing disparities between the poor workers and the rich.

However, the reductionist approach to comprehend the migrant problem in a single framework of economic disparity will lead to a myopic understanding of the larger issues involved. India's migrant problem is not just a mere class problem. Dr. B R Ambedkar, in his 'Annihilation of Caste', indicated the interplay between caste and class in India and stated that "caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers". Migrant worker problem, especially in the context of India, thus entails the issues of social injustice and moral apathy of the individuals towards the downtrodden which unfortunately never themed in the mainstream discussions.

The social aspect of the migrant workers pinpoints the fact that most of them belong to the marginalised communities such as dalits, tribals, and minorities. Their plight is not only the reverberation of the neoliberal nature of the state but also the prolonged historical social oppression and exploitation by those at the top of the social ladder. The social abhorrence against the affirmative policies such as reservation and the hegemonic attitude of the social elite hindered the upward mobility of the migrant workers belonging to a particular caste and community. As a result of these external inhibitions, the young generations of these migrant workers are systematically alienated from their capabilities and creative skills and pushed into the margin for the rest of their life. Thus, the interplay between social and economic alienation expounds the issues of migrant workers in India.

The question of social goods such as self-respect and dignity shall be reckoned with to understand the migrant problem in its fuller extent. While the announcements of government's relief package remained hyperbolic, the temporary help and relief of civil society organisations and charity of some individuals, though appreciable, rather debilitated the dignity and self-respect of these migrant workers. The discriminatory and prejudiced attitude of people towards migrant workers is also a compelling problem. The poor workers are often treated with humiliation that is deeply

entrenched in India's hierarchical social system. The Brahmanical social attitude encrypted in the Indian minds often reflected in their treatment of migrant workers' body as the 'other' and the 'polluted' in the public domain. The incident of spraying of disinfectant on migrant workers in UP and other places is coterminous with this common perception that the poor migrant workers' body as unclean and impure. The indifference towards them in the public domain is a common sight, especially in the urban spaces of metropolitan cities. Their presence in public spaces such as metros, buses, hospitals, shops often viewed as unclean and polluted by the self-claimed 'pure' bodies. The Humiliation and disrespect unleashed on their bodies under the cognitive influences of purity-pollution binaries often decimate their self-respect and self-dignity. The migrant conundrum is thus a culmination of prolonged structural

denial of basic economic rights by neo-liberal state machinery in concurrent with the social and moral apathy towards the marginalised sections who constitute the majority of the migrant workers in India. They are dispossessed by both the state and society. The mere transportation facilities to their homes or mere labour reforms are not an all-time panacea for their problems. The change in the discriminatory social behaviour and public attitude towards workers, the inclusion of affirmative policies and a transformation in the nature of state from a neoliberal establishment to a more welfare entity can advance an egalitarian social and economic realm in which rights, dignity and respect of the workers from socially marginalised sections are assured and protected.

**Rehnamol Raveendran, Courtesy Outlook India**

## The end of autonomy for Hong Kong

China seems to have begun consolidating its territorial claims on its periphery and the first victim will be an autonomous Hong Kong. The mainland's National People's Congress has passed a new sweeping security law that will criminalise most forms of political dissent, undermine other individual freedoms and put a tight lid on foreigner activity in the city-state. The rubber-stamp Hong Kong authority has signalled its intention to pass the law, effectively ending the "one country, two systems" principle that was the basis of the handover of the British colony. The United States (US) Secretary of State Mike Pompeo quickly warned these actions meant Hong Kong no longer enjoyed autonomy from China, clearing the path

for Washington to revoke the special economic status the city-state enjoys with the US. The US is likely to roll back elements of this status, encompassing visas, tariffs and financial regulations, lock step with the regression of Hong Kong's rights. With reports of capital flight and financial firms already seeking alternative homes, the future of Hong Kong as an international financial centre looks bleak. This will make US-China relations, already fragile, even worse. Beijing has also accompanied this by officially dropping the first word in its traditional espousal of "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan. India should watch China's aggression closely, for it could directly impinge on its own security interests.



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# A wake-up call for Mumbai

## Its underlying weaknesses have got exposed with Covid-19

India's financial capital, Mumbai, now has over 30,000 cases of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19); more than 1,000 people have died due to the infection. On May 24 and 25, the city reported the second highest number of cases among cities anywhere in the world, right after Moscow. One in every five cases in India can be traced back to the city, while one in every four people who has died nationally has been a Mumbai resident. It has singularly made Maharashtra the most

severely affected state in the country, with cases going beyond 50,000, and rising every day. There are, of course, immediate triggers for the surge in cases. To its credit, Maharashtra has also tested more people than the national average. But the systemic weaknesses are clear — the delay in screening passengers in the earlier part of the year (which was not unique to Maharashtra but appears to have had a greater impact in terms of spread), the failure to use the lockdown to ramp up health

infrastructure, the absence of proper coordination which has resulted in patients having to rush from hospital to hospital in search of critical care services, and the high number of health care workers who have got infected. But these are symptoms of a wider crisis. Mumbai is a symbol of India's flawed urbanisation and poor planning. It has a high density of population, with the least proportion of open spaces per 1,000 people. Slums occupy 7% of the city's land area, but,

according to the 2011 census, four out of 10 residents lived in slums — a proportion that may have grown. A corrupt nexus between political authorities, private businesses and real estate developers has meant that precious public land, which could have been used for public housing, has been taken over by private operators. Sixty per cent of the slum households don't have toilets and there is a substantial shortage of public toilets. But instead of eradicating the squalor, the city has taken pride in



it — to the extent of romanticising it. The disparity in health systems is stark, with super specialised private hospitals coexisting with an abysmal public health care system. While the overcrowded local train may be an iconic symbol of the city, it actually represents the weakness of public transport systems. Despite having

the richest local government body in the country, municipal governance is weak. All of this — the absence of adequate public housing, public health, public transport, sanitation — has today come back to haunt the city. Mumbai must, for its sake and for the sake of India, use this crisis as a wake-up call.

# A fellowship of countries to fight Covid-19

Find a way to incentivise innovators developing medicines and vaccines, yet ensure access to the innovation is for all.



"One ring to rule them all, One ring to find them, One ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them". In JRR Tolkien's story Lord of the Rings, a "Fellowship of the Ring" was formed to destroy the one ring and its evil powers. The fellowship comprised of representatives of different races of Tolkien's middle earth: Hobbits, wizards, elves, dwarves and men, who were united in their quest, despite their differences. Tolkien's remarkable story is about how they succeed by acting together.

The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is clearly the ring binding humanity in its darkness. Sadly, however, there is no fellowship in sight. On the contrary, the dark powers of the ring appear to be dividing countries more than ever before, with increasing protectionism and the decline of globalisation. The 73rd World Health Assembly of the World

Health Organization (WHO), at its virtual meeting on May 18-19, adopted a resolution that recognised the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, and called for "equitable access to and fair distribution of" all essential health technologies and products to combat the virus. It also recognised that extensive immunisation against Covid-19 is a "global public good". Ahead of the World Health Assembly, more than 140 world leaders and experts made an unprecedented call that all vaccines, treatments and tests be patent-free, mass-produced, distributed fairly and made available to all people, in all countries, free of charge. The WHO assembly, however, failed to achieve consensus on ensuring how this "global public good" of extensive immunisation will be achieved. The WHO Assembly was preceded by a United Nations General

Assembly resolution emphasising on the need for "equitable, efficient and timely" access to any future vaccines developed to fight the coronavirus, as well as a virtual meeting of G20 countries which emphasised that people's health and well-being are at the heart of all decisions taken to protect lives, tackle illness and strengthen global health security. None of these initiatives, however, addressed how equitable access to medicines or vaccines for addressing Covid-19 can be achieved. India and the United States (US) were nowhere to be seen in the May 4 virtual summit, co-organised by the European Union (EU), Britain, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Canada, South Africa and several other countries and non-governmental organisations which collectively pledged \$8 billion to research, manufacture and distribute possible vaccines and treatments for Covid-19. The geopolitical tensions between the US and China are threatening any coordinated multilateral response, as well as the continued existence of multilateral institutions which are central to a

global effort to find a vaccine. President Donald Trump has announced a freeze on funding to WHO, on the allegations of mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic and bias towards China. There are also calls in the US to abolish the World Trade Organization (WTO) whose role in enforcing trade rules have in any event been rendered ineffective by US actions to scuttle the WTO's appellate body. The US government's Operation Warp Speed (a partnership between private pharmaceutical companies, government agencies and the military) is focused on the availability of a vaccine, but only for the US while Chinese biotech companies are engaged in similar efforts with their government and the Peoples' Liberation Army. Utrage from the French government and the EU has reportedly resulted in the French pharmaceutical company Sanofi withdrawing its plan to give the US priority access to its potential Covid-19 vaccine. Reports on the EU-supported May 4 virtual initiative quote EU officials as stating that while pharmaceutical companies that receive the funding will

not be asked to forgo Intellectual Property Rights on the new vaccine and treatments, they should commit to making them available worldwide at affordable prices. This hortatory statement, however, falls flat in the absence of a definitive plan of action necessary to address equitable access. Who will own, who will have access and on what terms, to the medicines and vaccines that are being developed — this lies at the heart of any real and effective solution to tackle Covid-19. Patents, rights over test data, and know-how, are important economic mechanisms for incentivising innovation and development of new technologies. While dealing with a pandemic of such large dimensions, however, there is a crucial need to balance private profit and the larger public good. In the mid-20th century, both inventors of the polio vaccines — Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin — declined to patent their inventions, an act which ensured widespread access and near-eradication of polio worldwide. This stood in stark contrast with one of the largest lawsuits in 1998, when 39

pharmaceutical companies sued South Africa, alleging patent violations resulting from it importing cheaper anti-AIDS drugs and other medicines. While public pressure led to the lawsuit being dropped after three years, it exemplified the complexities and significant litigation risks that can accompany any effort to implement affordable access to patented medicines. Covid-19 needs an innovative solution, and this is necessary at the stage of research and development and clinical trials, rather than something which can be addressed after a cure is found. The virus has bound our globally interconnected world like no other, and the utility of any vaccine to fight it can succeed only if there is rapid universal access to the cure. That can happen only if governments across the world develop a pragmatic approach that recognises and rewards innovators, while ensuring that access to the innovation is held in trust for the benefit of humankind. We urgently need a fellowship of countries that can fight off, arguably, the 21st century's greatest challenge.





# Decoding the Centre's plan for migrant workers

## It extended monetary support through various routes. Now, states must step in, end the political blame game

Eight decades after he formulated his General Theory, John Maynard Keynes remains a demigod to many liberal economists. Keynes' "trickle-up" theory is seen by them as a panacea for the migrant working class affected by the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). Keynes suggested that to kickstart a stagnant economy, the government must boost demand by cutting taxes, increasing government spending and putting money in the pockets of the middle-class. Keynes' disciples in the Opposition are criticising the finance minister (FM)'s package for not making direct money transfers into the accounts of the poor. The government has already extended substantial support to the rural poor, including migrant workers. The rabi crop has been purchased by the government at the cost of Rs 75,000 crore which has benefitted over 90 million farmers. Additionally, Rs 19,000 crore has been deposited into the bank accounts of eligible farmers under PM Kisan. A crop insurance bill of Rs 6,000 crore has been paid. Women from over 300 million poor families have been receiving Rs 1,500 over three months in their Jan Dhan accounts. To top this, the FM

announced the allocation of a little over Rs 1,00,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) taking the total man-days available for the rural poor to 300 crore. Estimates by economists suggest that around Rs 12,000 have gone directly into the accounts of every single poor family through these measures. All this came from the Centre, with the states doing their bit.

Yet, there is distress manifested in the large-scale flight of migrant workers from destination states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana to the home states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and the Northeast. There has been a lot of politics over this. The migrant issue in such circumstances is complicated. And it isn't unique to India. Many countries in Europe such as Spain, Germany, Italy and France are struggling with issues of farm workers who migrate in the harvest season from Eastern European countries. "Host countries are torn between fear of losing harvests, fear of

importing infection and a fear that predates the pandemic — that of foreigners taking jobs. Populists sense opportunity as the economic fallout solidifies political battle lines", according to a piece in The Guardian.

India's migrant population is over 130 million. Their movement en masse back to their home-states would have been an unmitigated disaster. To prevent this, the Centre turned its attention to agriculture and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Over 44% of India's workforce is dependent on agriculture. The government's decision to allocate Rs 1 lakh crore for farm-gate infrastructure development is to ensure that the workforce is engaged in productive agricultural activity. Of the rest, 70% of jobs are provided by the MSME sector. The government gave the sector high priority by arranging additional easy lending options to the tune of over Rs 400,000 crore.

Compared to the fiscal measures taken by other G20 countries, India has done better than most. According to an International Monetary Fund report, the aggregate fiscal measures as a percent of GDP are in two dimensions — spending and revenue

measures; and loan, equity and guarantee measures. Germany, which topped the fiscal relief chart had announced 1% of GDP in additional spending and 6% in loan guarantees. India, with a stimulus package of 10% of GDP, is well ahead of its G20 peers.

It must be remembered that while a section of the migrants undertook their homebound journey, a large number stayed back. There are two important reasons for it. One, the appeal to employers by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi to continue paying wages; and two, the government's stimulus to MSMEs and agriculture.

Migrants have been supported by states and non-governmental organisations during the lockdown. Yet, their anxiety to get back to their families and villages has pushed many to defy the lockdown and set off home. To manage this migration, a coordinated approach was needed between the Centre and the states, and between destination and origin states. Uttar Pradesh has set an example by arranging to ferry not only its own migrants, but also those bound for neighbouring Bihar, in over 1,200 buses. It alone received and transported over two million workers to their

destinations.

Gujarat has quickly arranged trains for these migrants while Maharashtra has been found wanting. The role played by the Indian Railways is exemplary. It has so far transported over two million migrants to their home states. Bihar and West Bengal are two states that did not show enough interest in receiving its own migrants, leading to huge numbers being stranded in Mumbai and Delhi. Madhya Pradesh, though neither a destination nor a home, has come forward with 1,000 buses to help the migrants reach their destinations. Leo Varadkar, former PM of Ireland, joined European Union leaders a few weeks ago supporting the movement of cross-border agriculture workers. Back home, he was critical of a Dublin fruit company for bringing in Bulgarian workers to pick strawberries. Similarly, the Opposition criticises the Centre for the migrant crisis, while the origin or destination of the migrants is in the states under its control. What we need today is collective federal action to address the migrant issue, not the political blame game we are witnessing.

## WHO: Don't make it a victim of the US-China rift

**When international organisations falter, peace is undermined. Harsh Vardhan must provide leadership**

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan has taken over as chairman of the World Health Organization (WHO) executive board, a position that is held on a rotational basis among regional groups in the 34-member board for a year. This has happened at a difficult time for both the world and WHO. The world has been turned upside down by the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). It is not that humanity has never been confronted by pandemics and natural disasters in the past. But Covid-19 ranks as being unprecedented in living memory for most people. The minister will only have limited powers since this is not a full-time position, and his ability to guide WHO during

this trying time will be challenging. Vardhan's task has been made more complicated by the fact that at least 100 members of the 194 World Health Assembly, which are signatories to the nomination of board members, are arraigned against China. They feel that the Chinese authorities did not share information on the coronavirus with the world on time. WHO has also been subject to criticism from the United States (US), which feels that it favoured China despite evidence that Beijing was less-than-transparent in its supply of information on the virus. The US recently announced that it will suspend WHO funding. The spat between China and the

US, as well as China and many other countries who share suspicions about Beijing's handling of the pandemic, has had an impact on the global effort to combat the pandemic. This will have a huge impact on our collective future. If the US and its allies retreat from WHO, it will make the working of the organisation difficult both in terms of funding and global acceptance of its guidelines. Since its inception, WHO has faced several diplomatic obstacles. But this is the first time it has been caught in the middle of an emerging cold war between two mighty powers, the US and China. WHO played a vital role in the eradication of

polio and smallpox, and it can play an important role in the battle against Covid-19 if its role is seen as objective, and guided by medical and scientific expertise. Whatever the merits of the arguments against WHO, the world needs such an organisation in these fraught times. If we go back in history, we will see the need for such an overarching organisations to settle disputes and bring about a rule-based order in a fractious world. The League of Nations was constituted after World War I, with the objective of dealing with international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. The League played an important role in resolving

smaller inter-state disputes. But the fact that the US was not a member of the League — President Woodrow Wilson encouraged its formation, but the legislative wing did not support US participation — weakened the League right at the outset. Many had hoped that the world would never see a war of such magnitude again. But then came World War II. The world once again recognised that an international body, with clear principles and more widespread participation, including of the bigger powers, was essential to maintain peace and resolve disputes. The charter of the United Nations (UN) came into force on October 24, 1945.



# The five Ps of disaster management

**Amphan has wreaked destruction. India needs a focused approach to cyclical natural disasters.**

Representing West Bengal (WB), as I do in Parliament, I recall it seeing the deadliest cyclones in the world, especially the oxymoronically named Bhola (1970) which claimed 500,000 lives. Amphan was the first super-cyclone in the Bay of Bengal after 1999 (ie, wind speeds beyond 220 kph). Though the temporal stretch of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) seems bigger, chief minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee may be accurate, at least in temporal proportionality, when she calls Amphan "a bigger disaster than Covid-19". A constitutional authority cannot be ignored if she says that 70% of the state's population has been severely affected and when she underlines the quadruple whammy of Covid-19, the lockdown, migrants' resettlement and the cyclone. In less than two days, Bengal lost around Rs 1 lakh crore. The cyclone left 80 dead, hundreds of thousands homeless, uprooted trees, ravaged houses, marooned dwellings, knocked out electricity and phone lines, flooded cities and villages, plundered embankments, fencings and boundaries. It wreaked ecological destruction and devastation, especially in the eco-sensitive Sundarbans. Not least was the ruination of Kolkata's iconic Great Banyan Tree, among the world's largest. Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's aerial tour yielded a relief package of Rs 1,000 crore (\$132 million) for WB and Rs 500 crore (\$66 million) for Odisha. These figures underestimate both the size of the disaster and, consequently, the size of the palliative. The Gujarat earthquake led to the central government releasing Rs 500 crore (at 2001 value, 20 years ago) plus ad hoc release of share in central taxes. The Centre is yet to release to Bengal the pending Goods and Services Tax refunds of approx Rs 2,400 crore for last quarter of FY 2019-20

(To be sure, Bengal is not alone in this regard). The CM has rightly reminded the PM about Rs 53,000 crore on account of social security refunds from central government schemes (such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Food Security Act and so on) owed to the state. Elementary but elemental steps are needed to be taken on an emergency basis to ensure efficient rehabilitation and effective growth of the affected areas. First, there is a need for a genuinely non-discriminatory and equal approach qua all states. The Gujarat episode led many international agencies to come up with financial assistance including the European Union, United States (US) Agency for International Development, Canadian International Development Agency and World Bank (\$300 m) and Asian Development Bank (\$500 m). Irrespective of Bengal's eligibility, capacity or

political orientation, the Centre owes it to such states to specially reach out to international institutions.

Second, there is a need to exponentially increase government allocation to fight natural disasters. We should not be afflicted by the same "fiscal stimulus inflexibility" syndrome, reflected in the PM's supposed Rs 20 lakh crore Covid-19 package. Third, we cannot, on the one hand, rightly project India as a global leader and, on the other, pale when it comes to justifiable proportionate global comparisons. In the 2011 tsunami-earthquake, Japan allocated \$167 billion for rehabilitation and recovery. It made a five-year plan to do so comprehensively. Similarly, the US Congress allocated \$121.7 billion in hurricane relief in 2005 and 2008. Earthquake-prone Iran allocated 2% its national annual budget towards disaster risk reduction, including \$4 billion in 2012. Though precise figures for

allocation "per head of vulnerable group" are not available, it is clear that comparisons with India on per-affected-population basis yield a dismal picture. Fourth, random allocation is far less useful than targeted and focused relief measures. Japan's targeted five-year plan focussed on each stakeholder — from fisheries to housing and power. Knee-jerk reactions in grand mega-announcements after cyclones, without specific sub-allocations, lose their limited vigour and vitality by the time they reach the ground target. Fifth, planned and targeted measures need to be coupled with a robust institutional framework. After 2011, the Japanese government enacted the "Act on the Development of Tsunami-resilient Communities", to efficiently combine structural and non-structural measures to minimise damage. All municipalities had to draft their reconstruction plans based on modelling and the



plans were based entirely on urban planning, land management, structural mitigation and relocation. Such innovations have barely been conceptualised in India, much less implemented and even medium-term thinking, much less long-term planning, is conspicuously overwhelmed by short-term ad hocism. Finally, and ironically given our cyclical annual natural disasters, we have very little policy focus on pre-disaster countermeasures. Prevention is always better than cure, and such countermeasures will be highly effective as well as cost-effective. Many countries in their disaster-prone coastal regions have constructed high seawalls to protect vulnerable communities. Odisha's cyclone shelters are a praiseworthy-but-partial

achievement, deserving emulation. We need five "Ps" to cope up with recurring disasters — prominence, as in the role of governments; a pool of funds; planning, especially long-term, of rehabilitation and development; policy qua institutional support; and preparedness qua countermeasures. There is light after the longest tunnels and only with these five "Ps" can we dream with French impressionist Paul Gauguin, who said, "The cyclone ends. The sun returns; the lofty coconut trees lift up their plumes again; man does likewise. The great anguish is over; joy has returned; the sea smiles like a child."

**Abhishek Singhvi,**  
Courtesy Hindustan Times.com

## BJP's Operation Lotus Expands To Bring Down Thackeray

As Mumbai heads to become the world's Number One Covid hotspot, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the main opposition party in Maharashtra, has relaunched "Operation Lotus" to bring down the government of Uddhav Thackeray. Senior sources confirmed to me that Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, has now accelerated attempts to force an end to the Thackeray-Pawar-Congress government which is struggling to contain the coronavirus pandemic in India's financial capital.

Shah, known for great focus in settling political scores, holds a particularly big grudge against Thackeray for ending the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance and managing then to outwit Shah and Devendra Fadnavis to come to power.

This morning, Pawar met with Uddhav Thackeray - allegedly a stock-taking session. Sources say that Pawar proffered administrative advice on tackling the public health emergency,

expressed particular concern at the spread of the infectious pandemic in Mumbai and warned that the BJP is trying to "destabilise" the alliance government. Pawar, a capricious ally, did not expand on his own intentions. Pawar has been sending mixed signals for a while about how invested he remains in the ruling coalition. His close aide and senior party leader Praful Patel has publicly praised union Railways Minister Piyush Goyal for his handling of trains for migrant workers in Bombay. This thumbs up was given even as Piyush Goyal publicly slugged it out with Uddhav Thackeray and son, Aaditya Thackeray, over how trains are being organized for the lakhs of stranded workers.

Sanjay Raut, senior Sena leader, immediately took to Twitter post the Pawar-Thackeray meet to say all is well with the government. The repeated reiterations of the good health of the Thackeray-led government by Sena leaders has created a huge

buzz to the contrary. In politics, the moment a rumour is officially denied, it gains real momentum. The BJP, both at the centre and in Maharashtra, is unabashedly playing power politics in the time of a pandemic. The concerted effort is visible. Goyal has publicly attacked Thackeray for alleging that Mumbai is not being given enough trains to take migrants home. Thackeray Junior in an interview to NDTV castigated the opposition for spreading disinformation and "hate" on social media.

The infamous IT cell of the BJP is running a well-organised systematic campaign against the Thackeray government, attacking it daily on the spread of the coronavirus. Before this, a communal campaign complete with hashtags was launched after two sadhus (holy men) were murdered in Palghar last month on April 16. The Thackeray government went to great lengths to establish that the killings were not communal. The BJP's

mouthpieces in the media, the Panna Pramukhs, also obediently launched a campaign on the Palghar murders, attacking Thackeray and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi. Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP who has not reconciled to his status as former Chief Minister is attacking the Thackeray government on a daily basis, rushing with memorandums against it to Governor B S Koshiyari, a former BJP member who unfailingly lends a sympathetic ear to Fadnavis.

The Modi government has made it plain that it is dissatisfied with the handling of the Covid crisis by opposition-ruled states. So Maharashtra and West Bengal are routinely singled out for alleged mishandling while the centre offers no comment on Gujarat and Bihar which are also unable to tackle the health emergency with any efficacy. It is quite clear that the centre has a different yardstick for BJP-ruled or BJP-allied states.

**Swati Chaturvedi,**  
Courtesy NDTV.com



# Modi 2.0's Bold Structural Reforms

There is no doubt that this has been a challenging year (perhaps even its annus horribilis) for the Republic and our government (starting out a year into its second term), one which requires the government at all levels to be organised on a war footing. Fortunately, India is in a much stronger position to deal with this crisis (along with a supercyclone, border tensions and global uncertainty) - this position is a hallmark of the progress our nation has made in the last six years. Unlike many developed countries, India was able to quickly enforce a lockdown ahead of the curve while scaling up production of testing kits and PPEs. All this is down to strong leadership at the centre, and the consistent application of key structural reforms over the past six years. Amidst this seminal moment, we must pause to understand the implications of such reforms.

To start with, the government has sought to reduce input costs for the poor, both in rural and urban India, with a particular focus on healthcare. The roll-out of the AYUSH scheme is a hallmark of this effort - of course, this will now have to be supplemented by a large push at the block-level for building up primary healthcare including diagnostics. India, as with many developing countries, has for decades invested sub-optimally in healthcare. The Ayushman Bharat PM-Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY) was launched in September 2018, aiming to provide comprehensive inpatient healthcare insurance to ~500 million people across rural and urban India.

Each family included gained a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalisations across public and private empaneled hospitals. By May 2020, ~21,500 empaneled hospitals had seen ~1 crore hospital admissions (PMJAY, 2020). More than just reducing input costs, it also provided an avenue for creating jobs - it was estimated that approximately 11 lakh jobs may be created over a 5-7 year period, making it the second-largest employer in the country after the Indian Railways. The centre's push for reducing open defecation via a programme of building toilets and changing sanitation behaviour has meant that

attitudes towards hygiene and healthcare are also changing - since the inception of Swachh Bharat Mission in October 2014, the government has constructed 102,867,271 toilets, approximately 2,137 toilets each hour. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PM-UY) has improved access to LPG cooking fuel. With an initial target to provide approximately 80 million connections by March 2020, the scheme achieved the target by September 2019, covering approximately 715 districts (PMUY, July 2019).

There has also been a strategic push for expanding rural banking: in a post COVID-19 age, where currency itself can be infectious, a country that embraces banking and seeks to shift away from cash can provide a stimulus when required quickly. The government has focused on ensuring financial inclusion, laying the infrastructure for transferring direct benefit. The PM Jan Dhan Yojana was a significant step-up in improving access to finance for the majority of India's rural and poor population, with the centre mobilising a recalcitrant state to target ~75 million people with access to bank accounts, with aggregate deposits reaching ~1 lakh Cr and financial services (e.g. debit cards, insurance coverage, overdraft facilities, etc), all within a short time-span of ~3 months (Saraswathy, M, November 2014). By August 2017, the scheme had expanded to ~294 million accounts (Khosla, Saksham, August 2017), with 384.1 million beneficiaries now banking through it and maintaining ~131.8 thousand Cr (PMJDY, 2020). Having a population with access to banking accounts enables the government to provide income support, with potential to even launch a basic income program in the long term if required.

This was also combined with a push for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to farmers: while MGNREGA created a capability for the government to create jobs at a local level, DBT enables the government to fix leakage in payments, cutting out intermediaries and benefiting the poor. This government helped push the Overton window towards Universal Basic Income, instituting the PM-Kisan Yojana which provides for an annual transfer of Rs 6,000

(payable in three instalments of Rs 2,000 each) directly into the farmers' bank accounts. While this was initially restricted to small and marginal farmers, this has since been expanded significantly as of June 2019 to include all farmers (irrespective of their land holding status, with some exclusions). The impact has been significant, with ~54,000 Cr distributed to benefit 87.1 million farmers (Tiwari, Rituraj, March 2020), with the government potentially ramping up to ~100 million farmers in the near-term. The launch of the PM-Kisan Maan-Dhan Yojana (PM-KMY), a voluntary pension scheme for small and marginal farmers, has ensured retirement security (Rs 3,000 per month for each farmer) with farmers developing a habit of a monthly contribution of Rs 55 - Rs 200 (depending on their age, and matched by the government). This has also seen significant expansion, with ~18.3 lakh farmers registered (Press Information Bureau, November 2019). In an age of economic uncertainty, the government now has the capability to create targeted interventions at the ground level without significant leakage - very few countries are able to do this.

With the infrastructure laid down for providing subsidies to farmers in a relatively more efficient manner (though implementation across the value chain will take time), the government has also decided to radically restructure agriculture by pursuing APMC reforms: to survive in a post COVID-19 age, India's farmers had to be provided marketing freedom. The proposed reforms, as announced by the Finance Minister, will end the compulsion of farmers to sell only in local APMC markets, allowing them to sell to anybody. It will improve farm-gate realisations, enable barrier-free, inter-state trade of agri-produce, and provide framework for e-trading of agricultural produce. Currently, producers only get ~20-25% (as per anecdotal reports) of total consumer price, mainly due to lack of marketing freedom, which further gets eroded due to high transaction costs to the farmer in taking their produce to mandi whose density remains less (~1 mandi per 487 sq. km) than stipulated (~1 mandi per 80 sq. km) (Verma Sanju, May 2020). his reform may also encourage continuing

investment in warehouses and cold chains by the private sector, while limiting government intervention (at the state level) on stock limits and inter-state sales.

On the larger economy, the government took note of the fact that the real estate (and its ancillary, construction), a primary driver of economic growth in the last decade, has been in the doldrums for a range of reasons. The government sought to cut this Gordian knot with a push for restructuring real estate. Consumers are increasingly utilising the law to raise complaints on Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) registered projects in states as varied as Karnataka and Haryana. Conciliation forums associated with RERA are bringing consumers and developers to the same table to resolve issues. On the whole, the real estate market has consolidated, with ~200,000 primary units sold annually, while ~350,000 - 400,000 units are sold in the secondary market (Nandy, Madhurima, Apr 2018). Signs of consolidation are also being observed on the supply side, with a number of fly-by-night developers quitting the market due to RERA's stringent provisions. Eventually, India's estimated 45,000 developers may shrink by over half (Ministry of Urban Housing and Development, 2018). The real estate industry took time in adapting to RERA-related compliance requirements, particularly during 2017; while this led to a general slowdown in the industry, it also raised consumer confidence (Halan, Monika, Apr 2018). It may sound simple, but the success of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) did not come through easily. Behind it is a litany of failed insolvency laws, such as the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act (1985); Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Act (SARFESI) (2002); all this meant that bankruptcy was a messy process, one typically avoided by lenders. Defaulting promoters now have a credible way out. Section 29A was included in IBC, preventing any defaulting promoters from seeking to buy any assets on the cheap. The Supreme Court also helped over-rule the National Company Law Tribunal,

ensuring a differential treatment of secured creditors compared to unsecured ones. IBC itself has been announced as a transparent and credible resolution framework for India's NPA problem - the IBC process helped recover ~70,000 Cr in FY19, compared to ~35,000 Cr that was recovered via the debt recovery tribunal, Lok Adalat and other mechanisms in FY18 (Ministry of Finance, 2019).

In the larger economy, all this has a limited impact unless unproductive assets in the economy are unlocked. Privatisation has always moved in fits and starts in India, with the government reluctant to let go of the commanding heights of the economy. Letting no crisis go to waste, this government has pushed for full liberalisation, enabling weaker PSUs (barring a few in strategic sectors) to be sold off or privatised or wound down. This will unlock productivity in a long dead part of the economy, while creating scale to compete at a global level (for e.g. India's PSU banks are likely to be consolidated into 4 mega-banks as a consequence). This is structural reform at its boldest. Finally, the push for reviving self-sufficiency or Atmanirbharta, with a focus on exports, is timely. To enable self-sufficiency, India's demographic dividend needs to be realised. The government, via the Skill India Program, has achieved significant progress - more than 1.17 crore people skilled under MSDE program with ~5 lakh trained under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), ~162 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKK) established while the ITI ecosystem has been re-energised with a focus on modernisation of Industrial Institutes; 9 lakh youth engaged in apprenticeship through NAPS. In addition, the government has made a massive push for assembling and manufacturing in India via Make in India. The consequence of this has been a significant boost in local assembling and manufacturing. For example, FDI grew 4.4 times in Electronics & IT sector: from USD 2.77 billion (2011-14) to USD 12.24 billion (2014-17) (Singh, Gurdip, Dec 2017), and 113 new mobile manufacturing units setup. These units are providing employment to about 4 lakh persons (direct and indirect) as of 2018.

**Feroze Varun Gandhi,**  
courtesy NDTV.com





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# India won't allow change of status quo on Line of Actual Control: Officials

Army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane made a low-key visit to Ladakh last week for a security review as tensions grew between India and China.



(News Agencies) India won't allow any alteration of the status quo on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the build-up of Chinese troops will be faced with "strength and restraint", people familiar with developments said on Tuesday against the backdrop of a high-level security meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat to assess the situation along the LAC amid a tense standoff between thousands of Indian and Chinese troops, especially Galwan Valley and Pangong Lake in

eastern Ladakh. "The bottomline is that we will not allow any change in the status quo on the LAC. That we will not permit," said one of the people cited above, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We have faced similar situations in the past, and we will face this situation with strength and restraint," the person added.

In many ways, India's position is a reiteration of the stance it adopted during the 73-day standoff at Doklam in 2017, when Indian troops dug in and stood their ground in the face of a rapid mobilisation by the Chinese side. The people

reiterated the external affairs ministry's contention of May 22 that all activities by Indian troops were on the Indian side of the LAC in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. They also repeated the ministry's accusation that it was Chinese troops that were hindering normal patrolling by Indian forces on the Indian side of the LAC. "The Indian troops are fully familiar with the alignment of the LAC. The Chinese have raised similar objections and made similar attempts [to hinder the activity of Indian troops] in the past too. Their motives and intentions in

the current circumstances are not clear," the person said. "But we are very firm and very clear – there have been no violations by us," the person added. A second person, who too spoke on condition of anonymity, said India's construction activities in forward areas will not stop because of the standoff. The people said the Indian side is facing the current stand-off with firmness and has deployed appropriate resources, even as it works on peaceful resolutions. Responding to speculation about the efficacy of strategic guidance issued after the informal summits at Wuhan in 2018 and Mammallapuram in 2019 for maintaining peace and tranquillity on the border, the people said established mechanisms for dealing with such issues continued to be in place and both sides were in touch at diplomatic and other levels to address the situation.

## 'Targeted and tough control measures helped Sri Lanka arrest virus spread'

(News Agencies) At a time when big and mighty countries struggle to cope with soaring numbers of coronavirus cases and consequent deaths, the official figures from

21-million strong Sri Lanka stand out — 1,070 cases, 660 recoveries and nine deaths as of Saturday evening. Behind those promising numbers are early thinking and swift action, according to Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Director General of Health Services in Sri Lanka. The senior public health official, helming Sri Lanka's pandemic



response, along with the Army Commander who heads a task force on COVID-19, says it is "targeted and tough" control measures, rather than a generic template "based on literature", that helped the island nation arrest the pandemic's spread. Data published by the World Health Organization shows that Sri Lanka remains among the least affected countries in South Asia, along with Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar that have recorded under 1,000 positive cases so far. "We have managed this because we planned in advance," Dr. Jasinghe notes, in an interview to The Hindu at the Ministry of Health. In late January, Sri Lanka reported the first case of coronavirus, when a visiting Chinese tourist tested positive. Luckily, the patient had not infected anyone else. She received treatment and returned to China after recovering. Sri Lanka put in place broad screening measures at the Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo, to identify passengers arriving with possible COVID-19 symptoms.

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- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



### STAY HOME IF SICK

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



### PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



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# In the Afghan theatre, India and its balancing act

**India must continue to support the people. But there is no reason for Delhi to openly talk with the Taliban**

Prospects for peace in Afghanistan are uncertain. The February Doha Agreement was not about peace. For the Donald Trump Administration, it was meant to get the remaining United States (US) troops out of the country before the next presidential election. For the Taliban, it was to rid Afghanistan of foreign forces and bring it a step closer to take control over the Afghan government. The head of the Taliban, Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada, described the Doha Agreement as the "Termination of Occupation Agreement", while it is actually titled the "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan." All Afghans yearn for peace. They are bound to, after four decades of incessant violence. That is why the restarting of hostilities by the Taliban has been so disheartening. On May 12, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced the resumption of offensive operations against the Taliban, in the wake of several terrorist attacks, including one targeting a maternity hospital in Kabul that killed dozens, including mothers and newborns. The increase in Taliban violence has led to some discordance in Washington,

DC. The Pentagon maintains that Taliban attacks have increased following the Doha Agreement. The State Department has been silent for the most part. Secretary of State, Mark Pompeo, noted that the Taliban denied any responsibility and condemned the recent attacks as heinous. After a gap of two years, the Taliban has announced an Eid ceasefire, again without any guarantee of it being irreversible. This is an effort to establish Taliban bonafides and take forward the intra-Afghan process, supposed to have started on March 7. The Doha Peace Deal, which blindsided the Afghan government, is not a capitulation to the Taliban. Rather, it is a capitulation to Pakistan. Pakistan's objective is to have a pliant, Taliban-led government in Kabul, which would limit India's presence in Afghanistan and provide a base for jihadi groups targeting India. Afghanistan has two important neighbours. While Pakistan may be fully on board with the Doha Agreement, Iran is not. Notwithstanding their new-found equation with the Taliban, Iranians have denounced as "destructive"

the US role in Afghanistan, and the sacrificing of the interests of the Afghan people. Most international actors wish to engage with the Taliban. That the Taliban has friends is no reason for India to join the bandwagon. India was not consulted on the Doha Agreement. India has no responsibility for its implementation; it is for the protagonists to take it forward. India has been kept out by Pakistan on any material discussion about Afghanistan's future, as the US accepted the Pakistan redline. That said, even if the US has decided to call it quits in Afghanistan, India cannot. Recently, there was news that in Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar, most of those killed in a supposed Taliban camp are members of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Aslam Farooqi, head of the Islamic State of Khorasan Province, arrested in Afghanistan for his complicity in the Kabul gurudwara attack last month, was formerly with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Both JeM and LeT have close ties with the Haqqani Network, whose leader, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is the deputy leader of the Taliban. The Taliban's ties with the Inter-Services Intelligence

(ISI) are well-documented. Steve Coll writes in Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan that the Haqqani Network has been the lynchpin of ISI's covert policy since the 1970s. The group, the Taliban's most important armed component, has targeted American forces in Afghanistan. It has also been the executioner targeting Indians in Afghanistan, including diplomats, military officers, and cooperation workers. The argument that India must discuss its concerns with the Taliban is specious, as if the Taliban is unaware of these. True, the Taliban has not made statements against India, but the hand of the Haqqani Network is well-established in almost all the attacks on the Indian mission and posts in Afghanistan and the recent attack on the Kart-e-Parwan gurudwara in Kabul. India has been supportive of efforts to bring genuine peace to Afghanistan. It has advised leaders of different ethnicities to work in cohesion with others for the common purposes of peace and nation-building. India favours the reintegration of insurgents and groups that give up their links with terrorist groups and

networks, resile from violence, are inclusive, and embrace the Afghan Constitution. India opposes only the political accommodation of individuals, groups or organisations associated with known terrorist entities, since this will subvert the nascent Afghan democracy, undermine human rights, particularly women's rights, and destroy emerging Afghan institutions. A further concern is that restoration of status-quo-ante in Afghanistan could lead to the unravelling of the state system in neighbouring Pakistan, with imponderable consequences. India must, as it has been, remain supportive of the Afghan people and their government, which needs to continue standing on its feet and taking its own decisions. India has to be far more proactive in doing so and openly engage with all actors across the political spectrum, including the moderate Taliban leaders through covert contacts. India has a decent track record in dealing with Islam-oriented regimes. Were the Taliban to change its behaviour, which given its present composition seems unlikely, India would have no problem interacting with it.

**Jayant Prasad, Courtesy Hindustan Times.com**





(News Agencies) The border on Monday, officials said. The event was given a miss as the relations between the two countries are strained at present, they added. Incidents of cross-border terrorism are continuing as usual on the Western front and hence, the exchange of sweets did not take place at any location along the India-Pakistan international border from Jammu to Gujarat, the officials said. The BSF guards this border. The

## No Eid sweets exchanged by BSF with Pakistan; done with Bangladesh

force, the officials said, had attempted to undertake the customary gesture during Diwali last year, on its raising day (December 1) and Republic Day (January 26), but the move was not reciprocated by the Pakistani side. However, the force exchanged sweets with its Bangladeshi counterpart, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), all along the eastern front. India and Bangladesh share a 4,096-km-long international bor-

der. "BSF and BGB share a very cordial relationship. Both the countries share a similar culture, traditions and festivals. "The warmth and bonding between the countries and border-guarding forces reflect during several occasions, when they share the joy of festivals, including during Eid," a statement issued by the south Bengal frontier of the BSF said. This frontier guards 903 kms of the India-Bangladesh border and

is headquartered in Kolkata. "BSF troops up to the border post level conveyed their best wishes to their companions of Bangladesh. The pleasant-ries for BGB headquarters were shared at Petrapole (land-border crossing in West Bengal)," the statement said. The BSF, during these events, convey its best wishes and good health to its partner, the BGB, with a hope of a better future ahead, it added.

## 176 Pakistan citizens, stranded in India due to lockdown, to return home

**More than 400 Pakistani nationals stranded in India have been repatriated via Attari-Wagah land border since March 20.**



(News Agencies) A batch of 176 Pakistanis stranded in India due to the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown will return home via the Attari-Wagah land border crossing on May 27. More than 400 Pakistani nationals stranded in India have been repatriated via Attari-Wagah land border since March 20. The Pakistanis who will return on Wednesday were stranded in different states, including Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and Delhi due to the extended lockdown and the closure of the Attari-Wagah border crossing following the coronavirus outbreak. "In line with the Prime

Minister's directions, for safe and smooth repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, the high commission for Pakistan in New Delhi remained in close contact with the Indian side and the Foreign Office has been coordinating with other national authorities in Pakistan," the high commission said in a statement issued on Tuesday. The high commission also facilitated and coordinated logistics for transporting the Pakistani nationals to Attari from more than 20 Indian cities amid the lockdown. The ongoing efforts of Pakistan's foreign ministry will continue till the repatriation of all remaining stranded Pakistanis, the statement said.

## Twitter flags China spokesman's tweet on Covid-19

(News Agencies) Twitter has flagged a tweet written in March by a Chinese government spokesman that suggested the U.S. military brought the novel coronavirus to China, as the social media platform ramps up fact-checking of posts. Twitter posted a blue exclamation mark under a tweet by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, with a comment urging readers to check the facts about Covid-19. "When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!" Zhao wrote on March 12. Clicking on the link directed readers to a page with the headline, "WHO says evidence suggests Covid-19 originated in animals and was not produced in a lab". Twitter fact-checked US President Donald Trump for the first time on Tuesday over his claims about mail-in ballots, under what it says was an extension of a "misleading information policy" aimed at combating misinformation about Covid-19. Trump lashed out at Twitter in response and has said he would introduce legislation that may scrap or weaken a law that shields social media companies from liability for content posted by their users./

## China bans import of pigs, wild boar from India because of African swine fever

(News Agencies) China, the biggest consumer of pork in the world, has banned the import of pigs and wild boars from India to prevent the spread of the African swine fever (ASF), Chinese customs and agricultural ministry have announced. According to a state media report, the General Administration of Customs of China and the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs took the decision following cases of ASF being discovered among domestic pigs and wild boar in Assam earlier in May. Details of the ban's impact could not be immediately ascertained. The ban has taken effect China strives

to restore pig production after the deadly disease ravaged its massive herd last year, a Reuters report said. "A sharp 29% plunge in first-quarter output underlines the extent of the impact from the disease and the huge task the sector faces in trying to rebuild after African swine fever killed millions of pigs since August 2018," the agency reported in April. The ASF outbreak and culling of hogs slashed China's pork output to a 16-year low of 42.6 million tonnes in 2019, while some experts estimate the sow herd shrank by at least 60% last year after the disease spread throughout the country. In

December, tighter border controls put in place by China because of the ASF had impacted the export of buffalo meat from India. A report in the nationalistic tabloid Global Times linked China's decision to ban pig imports from India was linked to the recent Sino-India tension at the border.

It pointed out that the ban comes "...after tensions between the two countries flared up in Galwan Valley region due to India's recent, illegal construction of defence facilities on the border to Chinese territory". The charge has been categorically denied by India, which says its Chinese troops who



are trying to change the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).



[illegible]



# Lockdown parties in Hollywood Hills are 'out of control'



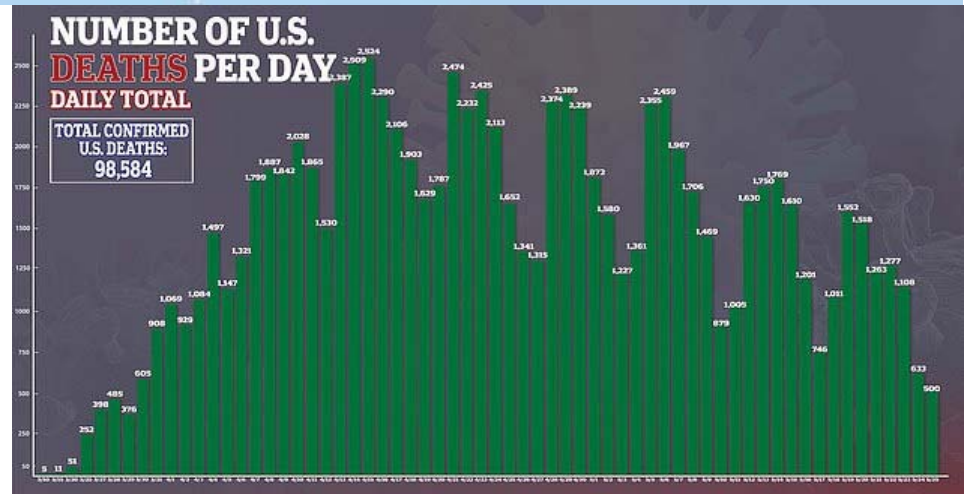
(News Agencies) Lockdown house parties in the Hollywood Hills are 'out of control', police in Los Angeles warned Tuesday. In a video posted to Twitter LAPD say rental homes in the area are being turned into makeshift clubs during restrictions on gatherings in the state.

They say the house owners face arrest for loud music, screams at 3am and public urination under nuisance party laws, writing: 'With bars & clubs

closed due to COVID 19, we have seen an increase in calls for loud house parties in the Hollywood Hills.' Gatherings are prohibited during the pandemic under stay-at-home orders issued by both Los Angeles County and the state. But despite those rules, LAPD say they have been receiving complaints about parties that violate the orders. In a joint statement with the city attorney's office, police called the parties

'completely unacceptable'. One officer says: 'A major concern for the Los Angeles Police Department is when a party creates a disturbance for the neighborhood.'

Los Angeles County accounts for around 60 per cent of California's roughly 3,800 deaths. The officer notes public intoxication, screams at 3am and public urination are 'problems we are seeing in the Hills'.



Prosecutor Ethan Weaver notes: 'If police are called to a location of a party, there will be consequences.' Those consequences do just apply to the person throwing the party, but they can also apply to you, the homeowner. 'If your house has been cited for party-house violations in the past, you as a property owner can be held responsible, even if you are not present.' Prosecution could mean six-month prison sentence. Earlier

this month a large house party in the Hollywood Hills ended when a man accidentally shot himself in the groin, police said. Officers responding to noise complaints May 16 found more than 100 people gathered at a short-term rental property that appeared to have been reserved for the occasion, said police Lt. Mark Chong. The officers heard a single gunshot and called for backup, Chong said. An investigation

revealed that a man had been shot in his groin area. The wound is believed to have been accidentally self-inflicted and not life-threatening, Chong said. The man was taken to a hospital and the party was broken up, the Los Angeles Times reported. The incident is under investigation. The state on Monday cleared the way for in-store shopping to resume statewide with social distancing restrictions, although counties get to decide whether to permit it.

## Jimmy Fallon APOLOGIZES for 'unquestionably offensive' blackface skit



(News Agencies) Talk show host Jimmy Fallon has released an apology after a clip of him in blackface started trending on Twitter. The SNL skit from 2000, which shows the comedian doing an impression of Chris Rock, resurfaced again on the internet on Tuesday triggering the hashtag #jimmyfallonisoverparty to trend. Admitting his regrets over the sketch the 45-year-old Tonight Show host took to social media to apologize to those he may have offended. 'In 2000, while on SNL, I made a terrible decision to do an impersonation of Chris Rock while in blackface. There is no excuse for this.

I am very sorry for making this unquestionably offensive decision and thank all of you for holding me accountable,' he wrote. Twitter users were calling for Fallon to be 'cancelled' this week after the blackface skit resurfaced. It's the second time the clip has emerged in recent years and it reignited the debate on celebrities doing blackface for entertainment, as well as the current 'cancel culture'. The Fallon SNL video surfaced back in 2018 after Megyn Kelly was let go from The Today Show for defending blackface Halloween costumes. This week the 20-year-old video was again shared among

Twitter users with the caption: 'NBC fired Megan Kelly for mentioning blackface. Jimmy Fallon performed on NBC in blackface.' A similar tweet read, 'Megyn Kelly was dismissed for being insensitive in merely DISCUSSING kids wearing blackface on Halloween. Jimmy Fallon actually WORE blackface while impersonating Chris Rock. He's still working for NBC' Soon after the hashtag #jimmyfallonisoverparty started trending as people discussed the issue. Some lashed out at cancel culture, pointing out that 20 years is a long time to hold someone responsible for actions that were more accepted at the time. 'I wish, they do realize they have a 0% chance of even canceling him right? This was 20 years ago and nowhere close to career ending,' a user wrote in response to someone who tweeted the hashtag #cancelcultureisoverparty.

## The man without a plan

NYC lockdown drags on DESPITE hospitalizations falling to just 63

(News Agencies) Only 63 people were hospitalized with suspected COVID-19 in New York City on Monday - a tenth of how many went into hospitals on March 20, the day the city shut down - but Mayor Bill de Blasio is adamant about keeping the lockdown going until June at least. New York City is the last region in the state of New York to reopen and de Blasio has been vague about when the first phase will begin. It has met five of the seven



reopening requirements set out by Gov. Cuomo but is still two percent short on hospital capacity and doesn't have enough contact tracers. Long Island, by contrast, has not had a steady decrease in cases for 14 days, nor does it have enough contact tracers, but it will begin reopening tomorrow. Mid-Hudson also does not have enough contact tracers but it reopens on Monday. Neither the Mayor's office nor the Governor's office have explained why other regions are able to reopen before requirements are met but New York City can't. In the meantime, business owners are bleeding money. 'The mayor's policies are crushing our businesses, but even

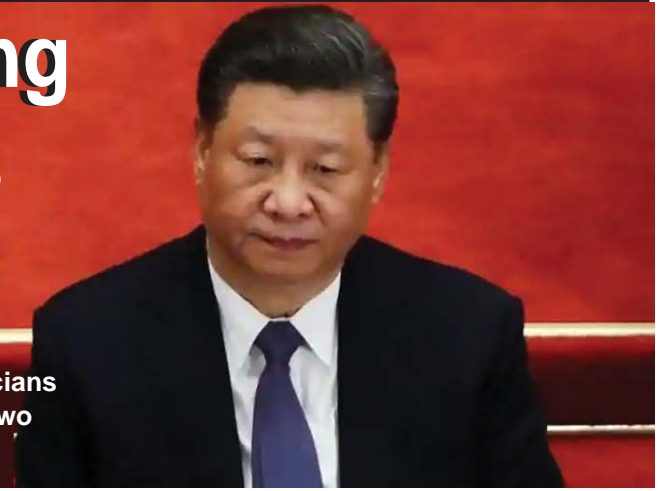
worse they are destroying New York. 'We the small business owners and worker, who are the lifeblood of the city's economy and its dreams for the future are pleading with him to trust us to open our businesses safely, before it is too late. 'These policies are counterproductive, cruel and they are indiscriminately targeting our working and middle classes. 'They are exacerbating the gap between rich and poor,' Bruce

Backman, of Reopen NY, a coalition of 300 small businesses, told DailyMail.com on Tuesday. The number of hospital beds required to reopen is only 420 - less than half what was on the USNS Comfort, a Navy ship supplied by the federal government to the city but which was waved off at the end of April. Why the extra beds have not been added again remains a mystery. Only 63 people were hospitalized with suspected COVID-19 cases on Monday. On March 20, the day the city fully shut down, 661 were hospitalized. There were 73 deaths across the entire state of New York on Monday which is the lowest number since March 25.



# 'Prepare for war': China's Xi Jinping tells army to thwart coronavirus impact on national security

Xi Jinping's speech comes amid rising tension with the US, frequent references by local politicians and diplomats of reunifying Taiwan. Tension is also escalating with India with troops from the two countries clashing along different areas along the 3,488 kilometre-long disputed border.



(News Agencies) Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday directed China's armed forces to strengthen training of troops and to be ready for war amid coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic's visible impact on the world's most populous country's national security. State media reports quoted the Chinese premier as saying that it was important to "comprehensively strengthen the training of troops and prepare for war", "resolutely safeguard national sovereignty" and "safeguard the overall strategic stability of the country". Xi's speech comes amid rising tension with the US, frequent refer-

ences by local politicians and diplomats of reunifying Taiwan, if necessary by force, and the likely implementation of a new – and controversial – security law meant to crack down on pro-democracy dissidents in the special administrative region of Hong Kong. Two days back, China's top diplomat Wang Yi, heavily criticised the efforts of some US politicians to fabricate rumours and stigmatise China to blame it for the pandemic.

The US, Wang said, is pushing relations with China to "the brink of a new Cold War". Chinese state councillor and foreign minister also rejected US "lies"

over the coronavirus.

Tension is also escalating with India with troops from the two countries clashing along different areas along the 3,488 kilometre-long disputed border especially, in Ladakh, in May. Both armies are said to have deployed additional troops in sensitive areas along the boundary with experts predicting a lengthy standoff. Xi said that China's performance in fighting Covid-19 has shown the success of military reforms and the armed forces should explore new ways of training, despite the pandemic.

Xi, who chairs China's powerful Central Military

Commission (CMC), made the comments at a meeting of the delegation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) on the sidelines of the annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC), the country's parliament.

Xi added that it was necessary to make preparations for military struggle, "...to flexibly carry out actual combat military training, and to comprehensively improve our military's ability to carry out military missions". Xi, according to the state media, pointed out "...this epidemic prevention and control struggle is a practical test for national

defence and military reform, fully embodies the effectiveness of the reform, and also puts forward new requirements for reform".

Xi's strongly-worded speech coincided with a series of "unverified" photographs and videos being uploaded on Chinese social media platforms showing Beijing's second aircraft carrier -- the country's first indigenously built one -- leaving its shipyard for a sail on Monday. "The move, if verified, will mark the aircraft carrier, the Shandong's first known voyage in five months since being commissioned in December and later returning to the shipyard for maintenance," a state

media report said. Separately, a military spokesperson said on Tuesday that a moderate and steady increase in the nation's defence expenditure is right, proper, and necessary. It was announced last week that China has set its annual defence budget growth target at 6.6%, as compared to 7.5% last year. China has both economic and military development in mind and national defence should be developed in coordination with economic development, said Wu Qian, PLA spokesperson. Beijing's homeland security and overseas interests are also facing some real threats, Wu added.



**MURDERED**  
BY MINNEAPOLIS POLICE FOR A  
NON-VIOLENT FORGERY CHARGE

(News Agencies) Four officers have been terminated following Monday's incident. 'We know there are inherent dangers in the profession of policing but the vast majority of the work we do never requires the use of force,' Arradondo said. The names of the four cops have not been released, but the two seen in the video have been identified by Floyd's family's lawyer as officers Derek Chauvin and Tou Thao. The pair were filmed in a video taken by a bystander on Monday which showed Floyd struggling to breathe on the ground as a white cop knelt on his neck for over six minutes. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey also announced the firings on Twitter, saying, 'This is the right call.'

## Four Minneapolis cops are fired over the death of a handcuffed black man

The Minneapolis Police Department and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension did not respond to DailyMail.com's calls for comment. It comes as the FBI and state law enforcement authorities announced they have launched an investigation into the Floyd's death. The incident has drawn comparisons to the case of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man who died in 2014 after he was placed in a chokehold by New York City police and pleaded for

his life, saying he could not breathe. Floyd, who was being arrested on suspicion of forgery on Monday night, was heard repeatedly telling officers that he cannot breathe as he lay on the ground next to the tire of a squad car. 'Please, please, please, I can't breathe. Please, man,' Floyd, begs the cop. After several minutes, one of the officers tells the man to 'relax.' 'Man, I can't breathe,' Floyd responds, before eventually passing out. The video was widely shared on social media sparking national outcry from politicians and members of the public who have called for the police officers involved to be held accountable. Floyd was later identified as the victim by Ben Crump, a prominent civil rights and personal injury attorney who said he had been hired by Floyd's family. Crump is also repre-

senting the family of 25-year-old black man Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed by two white men in Georgia earlier this month. 'This abusive, excessive and inhumane use of force cost the life of a man who was being detained by the police for questioning about a non-violent charge,' Crump said in a statement.

'We will seek justice for the family of George Floyd, as we demand answers from the Minnesota Police Department. How many "while black" deaths will it take until the racial profiling and undervaluing of black lives by police finally ends?' A woman who replied to Crump's tweet shared a photo of the scene taken from a different angle that showed four officers were present at the time of Floyd's arrest. When asked by reporters about the use of the

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When asked by reporters about the use of the



knee on the man's neck, Chief Arradondo said the department has 'policies in place regarding placing someone under control' that 'will be part of the full investigation we'll do internally.' Minneapolis Police released a statement earlier this morning confirming Floyd died in the hospital after officers had responded to a 'forgery in progress.' Further details on Floyd's alleged forgery offense or what he had been doing in the lead up to his attempted arrest, were not released.



## NSA's phone-tracking program is FAR more extensive than anyone knew

(News Agencies) An investigative journalist who helped expose the National Security Agency's notorious phone-tracking surveillance program has described how it is significantly more extensive than previously thought. Barton Gellman was one of three journalists with whom former NSA contractor Edward Snowden shared thousands of classified documents about US surveillance programs in 2013. One of those documents revealed that the NSA was tracking phone calls made by Americans inside the US. In an excerpt from his new book, *Dark Mirror*, Gellman lays out how the tool at the heart of the program works in unprecedented detail. That tool, dubbed Mainway, secretly scoured billions of phone records a day for years, cultivating a database that was 'preconfigured to map anyone's life at the touch of a button', Gellman writes. The program was scaled back significantly in the wake of the Snowden leak, but a more restrained version is still in effect today. Though the NSA insists that the database is only used to investigate terrorists, Gellman raises concerns about how easily it could be abused. The surveillance program was first brought to light in June 2013, in an article Gellman published in *The Washington Post*.

'The first accounts revealed only bare bones,' he writes in his book. 'If you placed a call, whether local or international, the NSA stored the number you dialed, as well as the date, time and duration of the call. It was domestic surveillance, plain and simple. When the story broke, the NSA discounted the intrusion on privacy. The agency collected "only metadata," it said, not the content of telephone calls. Only on rare occasions, it said, did it search the records for links among terrorists. I decided to delve more deeply.

## Donald Trump doubles down on claiming Joe Scarborough was involved in staffer's 'murder'

(News Agencies) President Trump doubled down on his insinuation that 'Morning Joe' host and former congressman Joe Scarborough murdered a woman who worked for him in 2001 telling reporters 'there's no statute of limitations' and calling her death 'very suspicious.' The president was asked about a series of tweets that shared a conspiracy theory about Scarborough being responsible for the death of Lori Klausutis, who worked in a Florida district office for Scarborough when he was in Congress. Klausutis had an undiagnosed heart problem and fell. The president has floated that Klausutis was murdered by Scarborough, insinuating they carried on an affair. 'A lot of people suggest that,' Trump said late Tuesday afternoon in the White House Rose Garden. 'And hopefully someday people are going to find out,' he continued, calling it a 'very suspicious situation.' 'Very sad and very suspicious,' Trump said. A reporter then asked Trump if he had seen the letter written by Lori Klausutis' widower Timothy, which begged Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to remove the president's tweets because they were hurtful to the late aide's

family members. 'Yeah, I have,' Trump said of the letter. 'But I'm sure ultimately they want to get to the bottom of it and it's a very serious situation.' Trump then echoed his press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany, who had tried to point a finger at Scarborough when asked why Trump kept repeating the conspiracy theory. 'I also saw a clip with Joe and Imus where they were having a lot of fun at her expense and I thought it was totally inappropriate,' Trump told reporters in the Rose Garden.

Earlier, McEnany had referenced a clip Scarborough talking with morning radio show host Don Imus. 'In 2003, on Don Imus' show, it was Don Imus and Joe Scarborough that joked about killing an intern, joked and laughed about it,' McEnany said. 'That, I'm pretty sure was pretty hurtful to Lori's family and Joe Scarborough himself brought this up with Don Imus and Joe Scarborough himself can answer it.' McEnany wasn't

sure if Trump had seen Timothy Klausutis' letter to the Twitter CEO. 'But I do know our hearts are with Lori's family at this time,' the press secretary said. When Brzezinski. 'That's incredibly irresponsible. They've dragged his family through the mud. They should be held account for their falsehoods.' 'Joe Scarborough should be held to account for saying people will die for taking controversy back on Scarborough, as reporters protested, with ABC News' Jonathan Karl muttering 'this is pretty nuts' at one point. The reporter tried pointing out that Timothy Klausutis had been upset by what Trump had been tweeting, not anything Scarborough did.

'Please delete those tweets,' Timothy Klausutis pleaded in the letter to Dorsey. 'My wife deserves better.' But McEnany continued to focus on

Scarborough, lashing out at him for making 'false accusations.' 'This morning or yesterday Mika accused the president of being responsible for 100,000 deaths in this country,' the press secretary said, referencing Scarborough's wife and co-host Mika Brzezinski. 'That's incredibly irresponsible. They've dragged his family through the mud. They should be held account for their falsehoods.' 'Joe Scarborough should be held to account for saying people will die for taking controversy back on Scarborough, as reporters protested, with ABC News' Jonathan Karl muttering 'this is pretty nuts' at one point. The reporter tried pointing out that Timothy Klausutis had been upset by what Trump had been tweeting, not anything Scarborough did.



The opening of a Cold Case against Psycho Joe Scarborough was not a Donald Trump original thought, this has been going on for years, long before I joined the chorus. In 2016 when Joe & his wacky future ex-wife, Mika, would endlessly interview me, I would always be thinking....

9:19 AM · May 26, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

## White investment banker Amy Cooper, 41, is FIRED

(News Agencies) A white woman dubbed 'Central Park Karen' has been fired from her senior position at a New York investment firm after a video showed her calling the cops on an African-American man who asked her to put a leash on her dog. Amy Cooper, 41, was terminated from her job as head of insurance investment solutions at Franklin Templeton on Tuesday, having been placed on administrative leave a day earlier.

Earning up to an estimated \$170,000 per-year, the company came to the decision following an internal investigation into footage of Cooper hysterically dialing 911 on former Marvel Comics editor Christian Cooper, 57, on Monday, claiming 'an African

American man is threatening my life'. 'Following our internal review of the incident in Central Park yesterday, we have made the decision to terminate the employee involved, effective immediately,' the company said in a tweeted statement. 'We do not tolerate racism of any kind at Franklin Templeton.' Hours earlier, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio had blasted the Canadian-native as a racist in response to coverage of the incident, which took place in the wooded area of the park known as The Ramble. 'The video out of Central Park is racism, plain and simple,' de Blasio tweeted Tuesday. 'She called the police BECAUSE he was a Black man. Even though she was the one

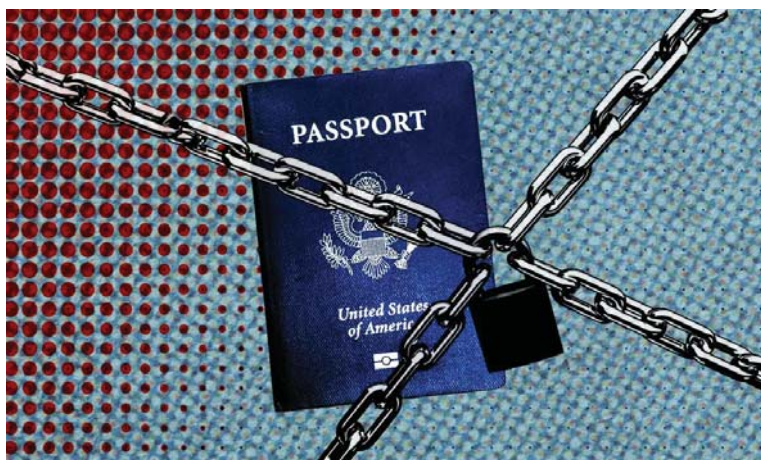
breaking the rules. She decided he was the criminal and we know why. 'This kind of hatred has no place in our city,' the mayor continued. Following the backlash against Cooper's actions, New York State Lawmakers Assemblyman Felix Ortiz and Senator Brian Benjamin introduced new legislation Tuesday that would make falsely reporting an incident as a hate crime illegal, should it pass. While the NYPD say they'll not be pursuing charges against Cooper, the New York City Commission on Human Rights has announced that it's launching its own investigation into the matter, calling the incident 'unacceptable'. Before her termination was announced, Cooper told CNN she wanted to

'publicly apologize to everyone', and insisted she isn't a racist and didn't intend to inflict any harm on the African-American community. 'I'm not a racist. I did not mean to harm that man in any way,' she told the network. 'I think I was just scared. When you're alone in the Ramble, you don't know what's happening. It's not excusable, it's not defensible.' Cooper says that now the video has sparked widespread outrage online, her 'entire life is being destroyed right now'. The incident has since been cited as yet another example of white people calling the police on African-Americans for unnecessary reasons, in acts many interpret to be fueled by racial prejudice. 'I

videotaped it because I thought it was important to document things,' Cooper, a Harvard graduate, later explained to NBC New York. 'We live in an age of Ahmaud Arbery where black men are gunned down because of assumptions people make about black men, black people, and I'm just not going to participate in that,' he continued. 'I'm not going to participate in my own dehumanization. When asked if he would accept Cooper's apology, Christian, a senior biomedical editor at Health Science Communications, said 'if it's genuine and if she plans on keeping her dog on a leash in the Ramble going forward, then we have no issues with each other.'



# A US passport used to be an asset. Under Trump it has become a liability



coronavirus cases are coming from the American side of the border. Which brings to mind a joke that is going around: what borders on stupidity? Canada and Mexico.

An American passport used to be an asset, now it's looking rather more like a liability. "Italy plans to reopen to travellers on June 3 –but not to Americans" ran a recent headline in the travel magazine *Afar*. This is somewhat misleading: Italy is opening its borders and removing quarantine restrictions only for people from other countries in Europe, it is not singling out Americans. However, Americans aren't used to being told they can't do things and a screenshot of the article quickly went viral. While Italy might not have explicitly implemented an American ban (yet), it seems increasingly likely that – as the *Daily Beast* put it – "American travellers are about to be pariahs in this new world." The travel

industry is still figuring out how to keep tourists safe, but it makes sense that countries doing a good job of managing the pandemic will heavily restrict entry to travellers from those doing a poor job. And the US is doing an extremely poor job.

Most worryingly, it feels as if Trump has given up trying to pretend to do any sort of job at all. The US neared the morbid milestone of 100,000 dead at the weekend; Trump marked the occasion by going to play golf (without a mask) and shaking people's hands. When he wasn't teeing off he was mouthing off: calling Hillary Clinton a "skank" and ordering that states reopen places of worship. It seems inevitable that Trump is going to do his best to open up the country way before it is safe, just because he is worried about the economy and his chances of re-election. Plus, Covid-19 is not exactly killing his base: it is

disproportionately killing African Americans. To paraphrase Kanye West's comments about George W Bush, I don't really think Trump cares about black people. "The coronavirus scenario I can't stop thinking about is the one where we simply get used to all the dying," the New York Times columnist Charlie Warzel wrote earlier this month. Just as America has grown resigned to school shootings and preventable gun violence, he suggests, it looks as if it is becoming numb to Covid-19 deaths. Just as the US has prioritised the rallying call of "freedom" over common sense gun control, it looks set to prioritise "freedom" over public health. Looking at images from the crowded pool parties in Missouri over the weekend, looking at Trump's calls for schools to reopen "ASAP", it seems as if that is exactly what's happening. But here's the thing the US might soon find out about its highly individualistic freedom fetish: it doesn't travel well.

(News Agencies) Donald Trump's favourite hobbies seem to consist of golf, Twitter and banning people from the US. Alas, he may no longer have the opportunity to do as much of the latter, because who would now want to come to the US anyway? The country is doing such a bad job of containing coronavirus that you are better off almost anywhere else. Indeed, last month, a number of American citizens in Lebanon declined a repatriation offer, saying they were safer in Beirut. It's not just a trip to the US that looks unappealing right

now; it seems many countries aren't exactly salivating at the prospect of hosting American visitors in the near future. The Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, for example, called the border with the US a clear "vulnerability" for Canada in terms of infections; the US-Canada border has been closed since March, and will remain closed to nonessential travel until at least 21 June.

Meanwhile, officials in Mexican border cities are reportedly tightening checks on visitors from Texas, because they're worried new

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# Dominic Cummings: What is the scandal about?

The UK prime minister's most senior adviser has come under fire for travelling across the country during the coronavirus lockdown. Dominic Cummings drove 260 miles (418km) from London to Durham, and took a 60-mile round trip from Durham to a nearby town on his wife's birthday - a trip he says he made to test whether his eyesight was good enough to drive. Mr Cummings is facing calls to resign, both from opposition politicians and members of the governing Conservative Party, whose leader, Boris Johnson, he advises. In a highly unusual move for an adviser, Mr Cummings gave a press conference on Monday. He said he believed he acted "reasonably" and within the law. He has so far been backed by Mr Johnson and other senior government ministers. But his actions have raised the question - did one of the government's most senior employees ignore the rules he had helped set for millions of people across the nation?

## Who is Dominic Cummings?

Mr Cummings is Boris Johnson's chief adviser. He is not a member of parliament and is not elected. Before the current lockdown scandal, he was best known for masterminding the successful Vote Leave campaign in the 2016 Brexit referendum, which saw the UK vote by a narrow majority to leave the European Union. Mr Cummings was played by actor Benedict Cumberbatch in *Brexit: The Uncivil War* - a 2019 drama about the referendum. Last year, he advised Mr Johnson to call an early election and to fight it on a

"Get Brexit Done" ticket. The vote gave the Conservatives their biggest election win since 1987. Mr Cummings has never been a member of the Conservatives and he is seen as a divisive figure within the party. Former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron once described him as a "career psychopath". But he is more than just a run-of-the-mill adviser to Mr Johnson - in many ways, his ideas have forged the government's agenda. He has played a key role in advising the government on its coronavirus strategy. What did he do during lockdown? In late March, Mr Cummings drove about 260 miles from his London home with his wife and child to a farm in north-east England owned by his parents. He says that his wife was unwell at the time and that he got sick soon after, with what they believe was coronavirus. Then in mid-April Mr Cummings was spotted with his wife and son in a town a 30-minute drive away from his parents' home. He has said he made the trip in order to test his eyesight, which he was concerned had been impaired by coronavirus. The two newspapers that broke the story, the *Mirror* and the *Guardian*, also reported that the adviser returned to northern England a second time - a claim Mr Cummings has denied. The reports about Mr Cummings have prompted widespread outrage. The government's message at the time - a message that Mr Cummings reportedly helped to draft - was "Stay Home". The British public had been expressly instructed to self-isolate for two weeks after experiencing coronavirus symptoms.

Many avoided travel even at the cost of missing the passing and funerals of loved ones. One of the British government's scientific advisers and Scotland's chief medical officer have both been forced to step down in recent weeks for breaking UK lockdown rules.

## How have Cummings and the government responded?

Both Mr Cummings and Mr Johnson insist that the adviser did not break the rules. In the daily coronavirus briefing on Sunday, Mr Johnson said his chief aide had "followed the instincts of every father" and acted responsibly in making the journey. But his remarks only led to more criticism, with members of the public saying they had ignored their own instincts to be with family members in need because they felt they had to follow the rules. Others questioned whether the prime minister was implying they were not acting as responsible parents in following the rules. Others questioned whether the prime minister was implying they were not acting as responsible parents in following the rules. On Monday, Mr Cummings made the highly unusual decision to hold a press conference - normally only elected government officials, not the people behind the scenes, publicly speak to the media.

Addressing reporters in the garden of the prime minister's house, 10 Downing Street, he gave an account of his movements and said he did not regret his actions.

Mr Cummings said he made the trip to his family farm mainly because he needed back-up care for his four-year-old son in case he and his wife were ill. He said it was an "exceptional situation" he believed was covered by the coronavirus regulations.

He said he stayed in a separate property with his wife and child and followed rules on social distancing.

The rules instructed



those with coronavirus symptoms and others in their household to stay at home, but they also made this caveat: "If you have children, keep following this advice to the best of your ability, however, we are aware that not all these measures will be possible."

Mr Cummings did not apologise and said he had not considered resigning.

## What has happened since?

The government had hoped Monday's press conference would draw a line under the scandal, but it shows no sign of going away. Some have accused

Mr Cummings of breaking the "spirit" of the lockdown guidance, even if his actions could be defended legally. There are also worries his actions will undermine the government's coronavirus guidance, encouraging the 66 million people living in the UK to follow their own interpretations of the rules.

"It really is one rule for him [Boris Johnson] and his elite friends and another for the rest of us," one member of parliament with the opposition Labour Party wrote on Twitter.

The number of Conser-

vative Party politicians publicly criticising Mr Cummings is growing.

On Tuesday, Junior Minister Douglas Ross became the first person to resign from the government in protest. He said Mr Cummings' interpretation of the government guidance was "not shared by the vast majority of people". Mr Ross said he could not tell people in the community he represents they were wrong to miss funerals and other family events, and that Mr Cummings was right to drive to his parents' home.



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# All-out combat' feared as India, China engage in border standoff

Indian media says thousands of Chinese troops are believed to be inside the Indian territory along the de facto border.

On May 5, a scuffle broke out between Indian and Chinese troops at the Pangong Tso lake, located 14,000 feet (4,270 metres) above the sea level in the Himalayan region of Ladakh. A video shot by an Indian soldier and shared on social media showed soldiers from both nations engaged in fistfights and stone-pelting at the de facto border, known as Line of Actual Control (LAC). The incident, which continued until the next day, resulted in 11 soldiers being injured on both sides. Three days later and nearly 1,200km (745 miles) away to the east along the LAC, another fight erupted at Nathu La Pass in the Indian state of Sikkim after Indian soldiers stopped a patrol party from China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Both countries downplayed the incidents and the issues were resolved at the local commander level, as has generally been done in the past. But in the weeks since then, the India-China border has seen soldiers from both sides camping along several disputed areas, with each side accusing the other of trespassing. "China is committed to safeguarding the security of its national territorial sovereignty, as well as safeguarding peace and stability in the China-India border areas," the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said in a statement on Tuesday. On Thursday, India's foreign ministry said it is in talks with China to deal with the standoff as New Delhi sidestepped US President Donald Trump's offer to mediate on the matter. On Wednesday, Trump on Twitter said he was ready to "arbitrate their raging border dispute". It was the first time the US president had made such an offer. "We are engaged with the Chinese side to peacefully resolve this issue," foreign ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava said. "Our troops have taken a responsible approach towards border management and are following protocols." China is yet to make an official comment on the border dispute.

## Reason behind latest tension

There was no immediate comment from India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), but last week it accused the Chinese troops of hindering regular Indian patrols along the LAC. "All Indian activities are



entirely on the Indian side of the LAC. In fact, it is the Chinese side that has recently undertaken activity hindering India's normal patrolling patterns," MEA spokesman Anurag Srivastava said.

About 80 to 100 tents have sprung up on the Chinese side, and nearly 60 on the Indian side, the Reuters news agency reported based on information from the Indian officials.

At least 10,000 PLA soldiers are now believed to be camping on what India claims to be its territory - Pangong Tso Lake, Galwan Valley and Demchok in Ladakh, and Nathu La in Sikkim, according to the Indian media reports.

On May 22, India's army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane dashed off to Leh, the capital of Ladakh territory which was carved out of Indian-administered Kashmir last August, to take stock of the situation.

With little information shared by the two countries, media reports have speculated on the reasons behind the latest border standoff. The tension might have been triggered by infrastructure activities carried out by India along the LAC, analysts say.

In the past 10 years, India has been boosting its border infrastructure, with new roads and airbases inaugurated in remote Himalayan areas.

The border skirmishes are not new to the 3,488km (2,167-mile) frontier between India and China, most of which remains disputed and undemarcated. But the de facto border has largely remained calm despite hundreds of skirmishes that occur every year.

In this May 5, 2013 file photo, Chinese troops in Ladakh, India hold a banner that reads: 'You've crossed the border,

please go back' [AP Photo]

## 'All-out combat'

China wants the border problem to linger; it keeps India off balance and prevents India from focusing its attention on Tibet, where China is in deep problems.

Ajai Shukla, a defence analyst based in New Delhi, fears that any further escalation would mean "all-out combat".

Analysts fear the latest standoff may escalate, as Chinese trucks have allegedly moved equipment inside the Indian side of LAC. Thousands of Chinese troops are on Indian soil. The only thing that remains for them is to engage in combat," he said. "China could be using the excuse of construction activity to put pressure on India for completely different political or economic objective[s], and that we do not know. We do not know what the Chinese objectives are in this particular case." Writing in the pro-Beijing Global Times newspaper, Long Xingchun from Beijing Foreign Studies University said the latest border friction was "a planned move" by New Delhi. "India in recent days has illegally constructed defence facilities across the border into Chinese territory in the Galwan Valley region, leaving Chinese border defence troops no other options but making necessary moves in response, and mounting the risk of escalating standoffs and conflicts between the two sides," he wrote. On Tuesday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with the three services chiefs and the National Security Adviser amid the worst India-China border tensions since the 2017 Doklam standoff that continued for 73 days.

The Doklam face-off was triggered after Indian soldiers

stopped the PLA from building a road in Doklam, which is claimed by Bhutan, a close ally of India.

Some analysts have suggested that the Chinese border assertion was a way to divert global attention from its handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

## 'China doesn't need another confrontation'

But Adam Ni, director of the China Policy Centre based in Canberra, Australia, said both the countries have an interest in maintaining peace since they are facing domestic challenges. Ni said Beijing has plenty of issues to deal with, such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and economic recovery - as well as its relationship with the US, which has taken a confrontational turn - to just a name a few.

"So it does not need another confrontation at this point in time," he said while appearing on Al Jazeera's Inside Story programme.

India and China fought a war in 1962, but the border issues have lingered on, with Beijing claiming the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and New Delhi considering China-controlled Aksai Chin as its territory.

In the late 1980s, then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi held talks with his Chinese counterpart Deng Xiaoping in Beijing to reset the ties. Since then, the border had largely remained calm, with the two countries agreeing to formulate guidelines to manage the frontier.

In 1993, an agreement to maintain peace at the border was signed. Important confidence-building measures on boundary issues were further signed in 1996 and 2006.

Post-1990s, the two countries

have focused on economic cooperation with bilateral trade going up to \$92bn, but a large trade deficit has kept India concerned.

Last month, the Modi government put curbs on Chinese investments, a step Beijing called "discriminatory". India's support for Tibet and its growing defence and security ties with the US, Japan and Australia have resulted in further suspicion from Beijing. Meanwhile, China's increasingly closer ties with Pakistan - which has long-running disputes with India - and Nepal have not pleased New Delhi, either.

Moreover, China's ambitious Belt and Road Project and its massive defence budget pose a major geostrategic challenge to India. At \$261bn, China's defence budget is more than three times of India's total of \$71bn.

## Modi-Xi summits

After Indian Prime Minister Modi came to power in 2014, he has engaged with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But analysts say the two Modi-Xi summits held so far, which called for moving beyond Doklam and "maintaining peace and tranquility" along LAC, seem to have come undone.

"China wants the border problem to linger; it keeps India off balance and prevents India from focusing its attention on Tibet, where China is in deep problem[s]," defence analyst Shukla said.

The last major border tension occurred in 2014, when Chinese troops reportedly entered Indian territory in Ladakh. The standoff was resolved after three weeks.

Will the current standoff be resolved at the local level - or will it escalate?

Manoj Kewalramani, a fellow in China Studies at The Takshashila Institution based in India's Bengaluru city, believes the present situation germinated from local-level frictions over patrolling and infrastructure development, which rapidly escalated.

"What's happening today does seem to have central guidance in China, with the leadership not wanting to appear weak on territorial issues. In that sense, this situation fits a pattern of the escalation in the South China Sea and Hong Kong," he told Al Jazeera.

(By Saif Khalid, Courtesy Al Jazeera.com)



# Amid a Pandemic, China Picks a Border Fight With India

A war may be unlikely, but by throwing its weight around, Beijing is making enemies needlessly.

Are China and India about to start a war in the Himalayas? If historical precedent holds, the continuing standoff involving thousands of troops in multiple places along the contested 2,200-mile boundary likely won't escalate to armed combat. But one thing is clear: Ties between the world's two most populous nations are fraying rapidly.

Today's tensions are the most serious since the Doklam crisis, a 10-week confrontation in 2017 that involved Indian troops intervening to prevent the People's Liberation Army from building a road on land claimed by both Bhutan and China. Though the precise details of the current face-off remain unknown—experts must parse the tea leaves from official statements, leaks and commercial satellite imagery—media reports from India suggest that thousands of Chinese troops have pitched around 100 tents in territory that India regards as its own. Chinese and Indian soldiers have also reportedly fought using iron rods, an escalation from the pushing and shoving that more commonly marks their encounters.

Should the Chinese stay put, they could cut off a road India built for access to a strategic airfield that boosts India's ability to move troops to the area. It would also embarrass Prime Minister Narendra Modi while his government struggles to contain the coronavirus. Somewhat ironically, two years ago Mr. Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Wuhan for an informal summit designed to ease tensions. On Wednesday, President Trump tweeted that "the United States is ready, willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their now raging border dispute."

That may not be necessary. Gautam Bambawale, India's ambassador to China from 2017-18, views the current standoff as more limited than the Doklam crisis. It doesn't involve a third country, he points out in a phone interview, and



Chinese rhetoric, both official and in state-controlled media, has been more measured than it was three years ago. The Chinese ambassador to India said in a webinar on Wednesday that the "dragon and elephant dancing together is the only right choice for China and India."

For now, the odds of escalation appear slim. India and China fought a brief and bitter border war in 1962 and have failed to agree to a mutually recognized border despite more than 20 rounds of talks. But they have also prevented localized clashes

from spinning out of control while deepening trade and investment links. M. Taylor Fravel, a political scientist and China expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says "putting the border dispute in a box" has been "the great success of the India-China relationship." No soldier has died on the boundary since 1975. Nonetheless, the current face-off is only the most recent example of deepening differences between the two Asian countries during the pandemic. On the economic front, New Delhi has moved to woo companies to relocate their

factories from China, and now requires an additional layer of government approval for investments from neighboring countries, including China. Last month a cabinet minister, Nitin Gadkari, said India should work to turn the world's "hatred" toward China into economic opportunity. At the same time, public opinion in India has turned sharply anti-Chinese. On social media and in WhatsApp groups many Indians blame China for the coronavirus, which has battered India's economy and strained hospitals in major cities like Mumbai. That Chinese state-owned

media such as the Global Times have at times gleefully contrasted China's high-tech effort to curb the virus with India's chaotic national lockdown, has only added insult to Indian injury. Earlier this month, the number of Covid-19 cases in India surpassed China's official total. At publication time, India had reported 160,310 infections and 4,560 deaths, compared with 82,995 infections and 4,634 deaths reported in China. In terms of global politics, India has joined an informal U.S.-led grouping to combat the pandemic that includes Japan, Australia, Vietnam, South

Korea and New Zealand. Some analysts refer to this as the "quad plus," an expansion of the so-called quad of democracies—the U.S., Japan, Australia and India—that Beijing views with suspicion as an attempt to check its rising power. What does this mean for India-China relations? Nitin Pai, co-founder of the Takshashila Institution, a Bangalore-based think tank, says Beijing's aggressive stance toward India, as reflected in its current provocation on the border, is part of the country's "sharper and more confrontational" foreign policy in the Covid era. Since the start of the pandemic, China has found itself embroiled in spats with, among others, the U.S., Australia and Taiwan. It has also stepped up naval patrols in the disputed South China Sea.

Mr. Pai says Beijing is being foolish by choosing confrontation with India, a nation of 1.3 billion people with a median age of 27. "They are going to live for a long time, and they are going to remember you as an enemy," he says. "You may win a mountain peak or a valley, but you are going to make enemies for life."

(By Sadanand Dhume, Courtesy WSJ.com)

## All You Need To Know About India-China Stand-off In Ladakh

Indian and Chinese troops appear to be heading towards a face-off in several disputed areas along the Line of Actual Control. Here is what you need to know about the issue.

Even as the world struggles to contain the crisis caused by the novel coronavirus, India is facing another challenge -- Indian and Chinese troops appear to be heading towards a face-off in several disputed areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh. The Indian army has increased its strength in Pangong Tso and Galwan Valley -- the two contentious areas where the Chinese army is learnt to have been deploying around troops besides gradually enhancing temporary infrastructure. Indian troops are resorting to "aggressive patrolling" in several sensitive areas including Demchok and Daulat Beg Oldi.

**Here are a few basic issues**

**you need to know:**

Over the past 10 days, China has built a stranglehold on a large part of the Galwan valley which includes a portion of Ladakh region. Chinese troops have entered 3-4 kms into Indian territory. The Galwan valley was an area of stiff standoff during the 1962 war with China. This is China's first attempt to make alterations on this part of the Line of Actual Control since the sixties. India has moved a large number of its troops to the disturbed area to counter Chinese movement in an area which is above 14,000 feet. Not a single bullet has been fired as per the agreement between India and China. Border altercations are usually limited to fist and

elbow fights. But this time, there are reports of sticks and iron rods being used. Observers feel China is preparing the ground to lay claim on a portion of Ladakh and make it a difficult international issue for India. By most accounts, 5,000 to 10,000 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army have dug in the ravine area with the military building makeshift arrangements for settling the troops and use of heavy military equipment. Most estimates suggest that China is making preparations to settle the troops inside Indian territory to claim ownership of the entire Galwan valley including a portion of Ladakh. The Galwan river flows from the disputed Aksai Chin region, which India's

claims as its own, to Xinjiang region in China before entering Ladakh. The new Chinese occupation is a big challenge as it will make it extremely difficult for the Indian army to service and support its troops deployed in Sub Sector North area close to the crucial Karakorum Pass. The Chinese action is seen as a reaction to India's decision to split Jammu & Kashmir state to create Ladakh as an independent Union Territory. China has earlier taken up the issue at the United Nations saying the decision is interference in its own territory. India and China are involved in a dispute over Aksai Chin, a largely barren area extending from Ladakh to the Xinjiang region of China.



# Globally, a ripe moment for India

**As the world gets wary of China, India is set to emulate its economic success, without the hubris**

Twenty years ago, as a new Member of Parliament participating in international Track-II events, two themes made a big impression on me. The first was how much influence China had managed to acquire globally. At dozens of gatherings, I saw influential personalities from politics, diplomacy, think-tanks, and Fortune 500 corporations speak emphatically in favour of China. The second theme was many commentators saying they wished India would step up and play a larger role in geopolitics, but also bemoaning that we had a long way to go.

Indeed, we did. For in the preceding two decades, from 1980 until the turn of the century, China had transformed itself in comparison to India. From an economy with per capita income similar to ours, its GDP had already become nearly thrice India's size, eventually to become five times larger. That growth in wealth afforded it much more military and economic clout

around the world.

But over the years, there have been big changes in both these themes, in opposite directions. These have only intensified in recent months. On the one hand, during the coronavirus pandemic, the number of nations that are unhappy with China and suspicious of its motives has grown exponentially. On the other hand, the goodwill for India and its actions, and respect for its capabilities, have grown equally sharply. Our path forward requires understanding both these trends.

It was a dozen or so years ago that I first ran into western companies complaining about doing business in China. After years of praising the ease of doing business there, and contrasting it with India, they had begun sounding off about Chinese partners appropriating their intellectual property rights and unexpectedly turning into competitors.

China used its growing wallet

to push its strategic aims around the world, using "aid" funding in a uniquely new manner. While traditional aid by developed nations consisted of subsidised, long-term, low-interest funding, Chinese projects, like those under the One Belt One Road (OBOR) came with high commercial rates of interest. At least one such project, the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, has been directly taken over by China after it defaulted on those usurious repayments.

China also became increasingly assertive in geopolitics, such as in its South China Sea disputes with neighbours and others. Some commentators sensed hubris in this, and a shift away from the path of Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's economic prowess, who had advised his successors to "maintain our position, meet challenges calmly, hide our capacities, and bide our time, remain free of ambition, never claim



leadership."

Gradually, diplomats and Track-II delegates began using different terminology in reference to China. From the turn-of-the-century phraseology that the rise of China was inherently beneficial to the world, within a decade, the tenor shifted to an insistence that it must play by the rules of global engagement from which it had itself benefited. With the growing tensions over trade in recent years, and the pandemic this year, the wheel has turned further. Last week, a White House report titled The US Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China did away with all previous diplomatic euphemisms and asserted it "is responding to the Chinese Communist Party's direct challenge by acknowledging that

the two powers are in 'strategic competition'."

The US is not alone, as many nations around the world have taken a stand demanding China come clean about the origins of the coronavirus and the beginnings of its spread in Wuhan. After initially rebutting such demands, China has acceded to an inquiry by the World Health Organization. But at the same time, it has lashed out against Australia, one of the lead signatories, with punitive economic measures.

China has also taken steps in its own immediate neighbourhood that are raising eyebrows. India, too, is experiencing yet another face-off across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), in Ladakh. To be sure, the border dispute has not seen a shot fired in anger in decades. Yet, recent years have seen a series of such incidents, the last one being at Doklam in 2017. India has demonstrated that, while remaining peaceful and reasonable at all times, it is capable of being resolute in defending its territory. All these developments present opportunities for India, which has been gaining respect in the world's eyes since the Atal Bihari Vajpayee era, and more rapidly in recent years. This has defence aspects, of course, including the acquisition of equipment, technology, production, and joint exercises.

However, the economic aspect will be crucial. And whatever your views on India's ~20 lakh crore economic stimulus, the policy reforms built into it are the key. Making available large chunks of land, rejigs in labour and other laws, and especially opening up all sectors to private investment are what India has long needed. As China was the latest to demonstrate, it is far, far easier to win friends and influence nations with a bigger wallet. India is set to follow the same path, without the hubris.

## India is right to be firm on China

**Tell Beijing its escalation will impact the overall relationship**

India has signalled it will not back down at any of the border confrontations it has with China. Presumably, this means that the Narendra Modi government will settle for nothing less than Chinese troops moving back to their original positions and the status quo ante being restored along the Line of Actual Control. There can be no question of this being the correct stance: The experience of all China's neighbours has been that concessions are treated as weakness, not friendship. Beijing may have hoped that its surprise mobilisation at three points in Ladakh and Sikkim will result in a quick round of the misnamed Chinese

checkers. Instead, both sides are settling for something more akin to the ancient Middle Kingdom game of go, a grinding battle of manoeuvre that will go on through the summer.

The Galwan Valley confrontation is the latest in a series of confrontations triggered by Chinese attempts to hinder, if not block,

India's infrastructure construction along the border. India has fast-tracked road construction to the Daulat Beg Oldie area of northern Ladakh since repeated standoffs in that region. The construction of a



connecting road into the Galwan Valley was seemingly the trigger for China to send in thousands of soldiers. While China has sought to hinder construction before, the size of its intervention is unusual and indicates there may be greater ambitions involved. China's description of the situation as "stable and controllable" is mildly

reassuring. But the motives hardly matter. The Indian stance must be the same regardless. The difficult part will be calibrating India's response to apply pressure on China and establish the credibility of India's

response. New Delhi must be prepared to show that if events along the border get out of hand, they will have a serious impact on other parts of the bilateral ties. China has long sought stability on its southern border as well as the dominance of the terrain. As India has ramped up its infrastructure, a process that has also included the deployment of fighters, new artillery, cruise missiles and, most recently, American helicopters and airlift, its dominance is coming under threat. India's bold moves regarding Kashmir and China's deteriorating geopolitical environment may be leading Beijing to up the ante. If so, it is all the more reason for India to stand firm.



# China Continuing Its 'Provocative And Disturbing Behaviour': US Diplomat Backs India

Alice G Wells, the senior US diplomat for South and Central Asia, said China's border tensions with India and Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea have some correlation.



The US has backed India amid a flare-up of border tensions with China with a top diplomat describing Beijing's aggression as "not always rhetorical" and accusing it of continuing with its "provocative and disturbing behaviour" to try to shift the status quo.

Alice G Wells, the senior US diplomat for South and Central Asia, said China's border tensions with India and Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea have some correlation.

"The flare-ups on the border, I think, are a reminder that Chinese aggression is not always just rhetorical. And so whether it's on the South China Sea or whether it's along the border with India we continue to see provocations and disturbing behaviour by China that raises questions about how China seeks to use its growing power," Wells, the outgoing head of the South and Central Asia bureau in the US State Department, told reporters in a conference call on Wednesday. "There's a method

here to Chinese operations, and it is that constant aggression, the constant attempt to shift the norms, to shift what is the status quo. It has to be resisted," the senior US diplomat told the Atlantic Council think tank at a separate event held on Wednesday. She was responding to a question on the recent flare-up on the India-China border.

Wells retires from the State Department on May 22 after a 31-year-long career during which she headed the important South and Central Asia Bureau of the State Department for three years in the Trump administration. She also talked about China's aggressive behaviour in the strategic South China Sea. China claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims. China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Beijing has

built up and militarised many of the islands and reefs it controls in the region. Both areas are stated to be rich in minerals, oil and other natural resources and are also vital to global trade.

"And that is why you have seen a rallying of like-minded nations or whether it's .. through ASEAN or through other diplomatic groupings, the trilateral that the United States has with Japan and India, the quadrilateral with Australia, the conversations that are taking place globally as to how we can reinforce the principles of the post-World War II economic order that has supported free and open trade that help lift all boats, including the Chinese boat," Wells said. "What we want to see is an international system that provides benefit to everyone and not a system in which there is a suzerainty to China. I think in this instance, the border disputes are a reminder of the threat posed by China," the top American diplomat said.

On May 5, around 250 Indian and Chinese army personnel clashed with iron rods, sticks, and even resorted to stone-pelting in the Pangong Tso lake area in which soldiers on both sides sustained injuries. In a separate incident, nearly 150 Indian and Chinese military personnel were engaged in a face-off near Naku La Pass in the Sikkim sector on May 9. At least 10 soldiers from both sides sustained injuries in the incident, according to sources. The troops of India and China were engaged in a 73-day stand-off in Doklam tri-junction in 2017. The India-China border dispute covers the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control, the de-facto border between the two countries. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet while India contests it. Both sides have emphasised that pending the final resolution of the boundary issue, it is necessary to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

## It's No Ordinary India-China Standoff This Time. Tensions At LAC Won't Dissipate That Easily

Tensions at LAC this time are unlikely to move pass like other issues such as Depsang in 2013, Chumur in 2014, and Doklam in 2017 that momentarily impacted India-China ties, writes P. Stobdan.

China started making a subtle move to question India's sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh somewhere in the late 1990s. After Dalai Lama's 2009 Tawang visit, China began to issue stapled visas on a separate leaf to the people from Arunachal Pradesh and J&K, implying they didn't belong to India.

Being a resident of Ladakh, the author faced a number of difficulties during his visits to China.

Other symbolic steps included the practice of a Chinese diplomat in Delhi to avoid visits to J&K. Similarly, People Liberation Army's (PLA) China Lanzhou Military Region's Commander refused to travel to Leh for Confidence Building Measures (CBM), ostensibly to avoid upsetting the Pakistani Army.

Also Read: All You Need To Know About India-China Stand-off In Ladakh

Chinese academics suggested China has no dispute in the "so-called Western Sector" (meaning Ladakh is not Indian Territory) and that for China, J&K only means the Kashmir Valley.

Cartographic Changes

While India made some internal cartographic modifications on November 2,

2019, China had sought to question the former's territorial limits some 10 years ago. In 2010, China started preparing ground for claiming around 1,600 kms of Indian Territory by shortening the length of India-China border when it purged the line separating J&K from Aksai Chin.

In December 2010, on the eve of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to India, the Chinese state-owned media Xinhua and Global Times for the first time carried reports describing the Sino-Indian border as nearly 2,000 km long.

This, for the first time, contradicted Indian official figure of 3,488 km as operational border between India and China. Indian map covered the entire Aksai Chin (37,000 sq km) and 5,400 sq km of Shaksgam that was illegally ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963.

In May 2015, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China, the state-owned television CCTV showed India's map without J&K and Arunachal Pradesh.

In 2017, weeks after the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs made strategic renaming move. It unilaterally renamed at least six places in Arunachal to reaffirm its territorial sovereignty.

In March 2019, Chinese customs

officials destroyed 30,000 world maps printed in the country for not showing Arunachal Pradesh and Taiwan as part of its territory. In April this year, China's latest Sky Map or digital maps showed parts of Arunachal Pradesh within its international borders. Sky Map is operated by Beijing's National Surveying and Mapping Geographic Information Bureau.

China's earlier Sky Map was based on the 1989 edition. Since then China's external boundaries changed following the border settlements with Russia and Central Asian countries. The last border settlement was with Tajikistan in 2011 when China got 1,158 square kilometers east of the Sarekole Mountains. The area was added into Tashkurgan County in the Kashgar Prefecture of Xinjiang Province. (Tashkurgan was formally an Indian territory – a part of Shaksgam Valley).

Strategic focus on Aksai Chin Plateau

The current intrusion in Ladakh appears to reaffirm China's claim over the entire Aksai Chin Plateau (37,000 sq km).

This came against the backdrop of India's cartographic changes made on November 2, 2019, following the

bifurcation of J&K into two separate administrative units of Union Territories, J&K and Ladakh. New Focus on Ladakh

Beijing had made a sudden outburst over Ladakh's changed status—a move China described as 'unacceptable' undermining its 'sovereignty'—even raised the issue at the UNSC. While India termed Ladakh's new status an "internal matter" having "no impact" for the LAC status, China's response was strategic.

Since then, China is using Article 370 abrogation as a Trojan horse to forward its own stakes in Ladakh for the following reasons: a) it would impact the CPEC project, b) Home Minister Amit Shah referred to Aksai Chin as part of India in the Parliament, c) Ladakh will go the Arunachal way in terms of integrating fully into the Indian Union, d) it stymied the use of Ladakh's vast territory room for negotiating with India on the boundary question, d) prolonged resentment amongst people against Delhi for keeping them under the Kashmiri rule was seen benefiting China in the longer term, and e) any move to change the demography of Ladakh after the Article 370 removal is probably seen as problematic for China.



# India set to become non-permanent member of UNSC: Tirumurti

During my eventful stint, I was also able to reach out to a wide cross-section of opinion makers, stake holders and, most importantly, the Indian-American community. I travelled to many parts of the U.S. with Ambassador Lalit Mansingh to engage with the vibrant Indian American community and galvanize their support for India-US related issues. I am truly impressed by their achievements and continued adherence to our values.

## **How did your family take to living in the United States, especially with a tennis background?**

I am an arm-chair tennis critic since I am only married into tennis! My only claim to sports is that I played under the cricket veteran and former Indian Captain Kris Srikkanth when he captained my school Vidya Mandir Cricket team! My father-in-law is the tennis legend Ramanathan Krishnan and brother-in-law Ramesh Krishnan, both of whom represented India at the highest levels, including

in the Davis Cup. My wife Gowri was a formidable tennis player herself having been India's national champion. They have always had strong links with the United States. Ramanathan Krishnan rose to World No. 3 after several exploits, especially in the US. An interesting memory was when Krishnan was hosted by President George Bush Sr. during one of the tournaments in Texas. Since then, the Bush family has remained in touch. Ramesh was probably the first foreign national to win the U.S. Junior National in Kalamazoo, after which they decided not to let foreign players play their junior nationals! My two children took up tennis in the United States during my stint in Washington and did very well in ITFs. Consequently, our family has extraordinarily pleasant memories of U.S.

**Your family has strong roots in Chennai with Tirumurti Nagar in the heart of Chennai named after your grandfather. How has your upbringing in Chennai**

## **made a difference to your life?**

I come from a rather traditional background and family. My schooling and higher education were in Chennai – Vidya Mandir and Vivekananda College-institutions committed to excellence. I was fortunate to study Tamil right through in school, which gave me a grounding in Tamil culture and way of life. However, unlike today, there was no pressure to perform – no do or die pressures. That helped one's personality to blossom. Since I was also an alumnus of Vivekananda College run by Ramakrishna Mission Chennai, I was influenced deeply by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and won the Religion Prize in College. So Chennai has indeed played a huge role in my life.

## **You have also had some very challenging assignments. How has that experience been?**

Even some of the most difficult postings have their own charm. There are

opportunities in all challenges. One memorable posting was my appointment as India's first Representative of India to the Palestinian Authority. I opened the Indian Mission in Gaza and lived there for more than two years amidst very warm and hospitable Palestinians. That was the time of President Yasser Arafat. That was an experience which I can't forget. The fact that I speak Arabic made it that much meaningful.

## **How did you take up writing as a hobby and who are your favorite authors?**

While I had many hobbies like playing the Veena, sketching, photography etc. in my younger years, I realized that when one has a full-fledged career and travels from country to country, writing is probably the easiest one to pursue. I was influenced by two prominent writer uncles' of mine – one in English the world renowned author R.K. Narayan and the other in Tamil -Bharanidaran alias Marina- a celebrated writer, cartoonist, playwright and

former editor in Ananda Vikatan magazine. While I have been writing only sporadically since 1996, given the pressures of work, I was lucky to find well-known publishers for the three books I have written. Apart from my two uncles, my favorite author is Ernest Hemingway.

## **The image of India has skyrocketed abroad since the last few years. How do you see this?**

There is no doubt that the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has had a huge impact at the international level. Apart from our relations with most countries being at their highest levels, his initiatives have been widely welcomed abroad, especially among the Indian Diaspora. We just had an extraordinarily successful visit of President Trump to India. Recently, Prime Minister Modi ji has taken the initiative to bring together SAARC countries and also the G-20 to address the crisis caused by the pandemic. We are poised to do even more in the post-COVID world.

# 'This shouldn't be 'normal' in 2020 America'

## Obama on death of George Floyd

"It will fall mainly on the officials of Minnesota to ensure that the circumstances surrounding George Floyd's death are investigated thoroughly and that justice is ultimately done," Obama writes.

"But it falls on all of us, regardless of our race or station -- including the majority of men and women in law enforcement who take pride in doing their tough job the right way, every day -- to work together to create a 'new normal' in which the legacy of bigotry and unequal treatment no longer infects our institutions or our hearts," he writes.

## **Here's everything we know about the death of George Floyd**

It was a routine police call for a run-of-the-mill crime—someone passing a bogus \$20 bill at a deli. But the ensuing death of unnamed black man George Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis cops, and the resulting riots, have once again forced a divided nation into a bitter self-reckoning. The cops

involved were axed and President Trump himself has pledged an expedient investigation by federal law enforcement—but that has done little to quell searing outrage that's lit up social media, left



buildings at ground zero in Minneapolis torched and necessitated the Minnesota National Guard. It all started when restaurant bouncer and aspiring commercial driver Floyd, 46, tried to buy groceries. Floyd — a Houston native who had previous scrapes with the law and moved

to the Twin Cities to start fresh about six years ago — went to the Cup Foods on Chicago Avenue South around 8 p.m. for the food run.

That's around the time cops got



a call from a store clerk that there was a "forgery in progress" — someone was trying to pay for groceries with a counterfeit \$20 bill, a non-violent offense. Surveillance footage from a nearby restaurant shows police arriving shortly after 8 p.m. and approaching a black minivan

where Floyd is sitting with two other people. Two officers walk up to the vehicle, its passenger door already open, and one shines a flashlight inside.

The second officer approaches Floyd and tells him to get out of the vehicle, prompting a brief struggle before Floyd exits the vehicle. Meanwhile, the passenger and a woman sitting in the back seat are seen getting out of the minivan. Moments later, Floyd is seen, hands cuffed behind his back, being led to the side of a building by the two cops. Floyd appears to be speaking to the officers but does not appear to resist. A second police vehicle arrives as Floyd is escorted across the street to a waiting patrol car. One surveillance video from across the street shows him stumbling and falling as the two officers lead him to the waiting squad car, according to footage obtained by KMSP-TV.

## Make the OCI regime more liberal

**This is a good moment to overhaul the OCI regime. Giving them more rights will help**

The OCI regime needs to be reformed so that it fulfils the promise of its name. Many of the economic restrictions on an OCI holder make little sense in an age when India is chasing foreign capital and investment. Holders should have the same financial and commercial freedoms enjoyed by an Indian citizen. More ambitiously, a pathway should be laid out with the idea of making OCI the basis for genuine dual citizenship. Given the size of the Indian diaspora, their economic and technological contribution, and the government's embrace of ethnic nationalism, this should be a natural policy progression. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act has normalised the principle of prioritised immigration. Dual citizenship can be initially negotiated with certain countries and weighted in favour of those with educational or economic qualifications. Over time, as India becomes more comfortable with the idea, it should be expanded and treated as a natural component. The OCI system is at the crossroads. It needs to either change its name to fit its present status as a glorified visa or become a precursor to a passport bridge between India and its friends.



# Monsoon knocking: 5 reasons why India's fight against coronavirus is set to get nastier



But even if we go by the government data, nearly 33,000 of the 1.45 lakh cases were reported in the last five days. The highest was on May 25 when India reported 6,977 cases. In the past few weeks, many districts that were classified 'green' have turned into 'orange', and many that were marked 'orange' are now 'red'. States like Goa, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh that had once attained the status of being 'corona-free', have started reporting fresh cases. Maharashtra alone accounts for over 37 per cent of India's Covid-19 cases, while Lakshadweep is the only state/UT that is yet to report any case so far.

The loopholes in our containment, testing and quarantine strategy aside, this situation may deteriorate manifolds in 10-15 days if timely actions aren't taken. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast that by June 5, monsoon will hit the Kerala coast. The IMD generally gets this prediction right. Its own data show that over the past 15 years, it was spot on in predicting monsoon onset on 14 occasions. Don't get me wrong. Monsoon in itself is not bad. It is in fact the harbinger of life, livelihood and joy to the parched lands of the Indian sub-continent. Without it, this vast swathe of landmass would be a desert. But, it is our ill-preparedness that makes this season particularly prone to disasters in the form of floods, landslides, cloudburst, waterlogging, among others. India's fight against the coronavirus pandemic has already become complicated with the disease spreading ever more

rapidly in this country inhabited by over 1.3 billion people. If the word 'complicated' defines the fight so far, the term 'back-breaking' would do justice to the challenge we are set to face in the next 10-15 days once monsoon is here.

## 1) MONSOON AND THE VULNERABLE WEST COAST

The past two years have been particularly devastating for India's west coast during monsoon. Starting from the Malabar Coast in Kerala, all the way up to Gujarat through the Konkan Coast covering states like Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra, the entire stretch was battered by monsoon rains.

In 2018, Kerala saw the heaviest rainfall in over 140 years. The state was devastated with towns and cities inundated and villages swept away. Millions had to be evacuated and relief and rescue operations continued for weeks, involving the army, air force, navy and other agencies.

The next year wasn't much different as Kerala, Karnataka, parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat suffered badly during monsoon. At a time when the country's resources are already drained battling the coronavirus pandemic and setting up quarantine facility for suspected Covid-19 cases is proving to be an upward task, monsoon downpours will bring more misery. If adequate precautions and planning for monsoon isn't carried out in the next 10-15 days, the state governments will not be in a position to help themselves handle the situation when the clouds start to bear down.

Collectively, the states/UTs on India's west coast (Kerala, Karnataka, Goa,

Maharashtra, Gujarat and Dadar and Nagar Haveli) have 70,274 cases as on May 26. This is 48 per cent of the national figure.

## 2) MUMBAI AWAITING ANOTHER MAYHEM

If Maharashtra is the centre of India's Covid-19 explosion, Mumbai is its eye. The city has reported 31,972 Covid-19 cases so far and accounts for 1,026 deaths. In the national picture, this is 22 per cent of the overall cases and 25 per cent of the deaths. The local administration is drowned in the battle against coronavirus with its resources depleted, and yet there are no signs that the viral infection is slowing down. In a couple of weeks from today, Mumbai will receive its first monsoon rain. The city has a notorious past of turning into a stinking waterlogged concrete jungle during monsoon. One good rain, and Mumbai's civic infrastructure crumbles on its knees and the city comes to a literal halt. When this happens this year, and it will happen soon, the challenge will be insurmountable. How does the state government and the local administration plan to fight a two-front battle with coronavirus on one hand and monsoon downpour on the other? With its congested and thickly populated slums, the challenge only increases. The city deserves some answers. The administration still has 10-15 days to clear the clogged drains and prepare for the deluge. After June 10-15, it will no longer be a matter of 'if Mumbai will be flooded', but will rather be a matter of 'when will Mumbai be flooded'.

## 3) SHEETS OF WATER IN THE EAST

Challenges for states in the east are slightly different. The annual flood season has already started in Assam. In

Bengal, Cyclone Amphan has plundered the state and devastated life in the twin districts of South and North 24 Parganas and East Medinapore. By mid-June, other parts of Assam, Bengal, and Bihar will start getting flooded as the Himalayan rivers gush down the mountains. This has been the case in past years. During monsoon, when it rains in the Northeast, it literally pours. The sky opens up and buckets of water flow down inundating the terrain. The entire landscape in the Brahmaputra and Barrack Valley and the Gangetic Delta looks like a vast sheet of water. Roads become non-existent and boats the only reliable mode of travel. In West Bengal, prior to Cyclone Amphan, the returning migrant workers were being quarantined in cyclone shelter homes. But as Amphan raced towards south Bengal, lakhs had to be evacuated. The government had no option other than to house the locals with the returning migrants in cyclone shelter homes. Social distancing norms went for a toss because saving life from the cyclone was more immediate a challenge. Now, with the cyclone gone, these shelters are akin to time bombs that may explode anytime with Covid-19 cases. Experiences of other states show that a significant number of returning migrant workers have tested positive for coronavirus. The West Bengal government today faces the daunting task of providing shelter to over 10 lakh families whose homes were destroyed by Amphan. The monsoon rains won't wait, neither will the wretched coronavirus. In Assam, Bihar and other states that will have to evacuate lakhs during the floods, which will come soon, the challenge is to find space so that social distancing can be maintained. In its absence, whatever little gains were made during the two-month lockdown, will be lost. The other challenge would be to ensure timely testing of suspected cases in areas that will be cut-off due to flood. For example, how will PPE kits and other essentials be supplied to health workers posted in these areas? Last

year, when clouds poured in Patna, the city was in a mayhem and Bihar government's helplessness stood exposed as hospitals and residential areas got flooded severely. The respective state governments still have some 10-15 days to gear up. They also owe explanations on the arrangements that are being made to ensure all this is in place in time.

## 4) UPHILL IN THE MOUNTAINS

Memories of the year 2013 have not yet faded in our collective conscience. But just to refresh, it was the year when the Kedarnath tragedy struck Uttarakhand. The rest is history. The scale of the devastation needs no mentioning. A recollection of the visuals of that calamity alone will suffice. The Kedarnath tragedy struck Uttarakhand in June during monsoon. Whether it is the Himalayan states in the north, or the hills in the Northeast, one thing that binds them together is the devastation during monsoon every year. Landslides, flashfloods, cloudburst, shooting stones and roadblocks are common. Villages and towns in the hills are cut off for weeks at stretch. Food, health and communication services go for a toss. This happens every year. And there are no reasons to believe this year will be any different, if not worse. With Covid-19 cases rising steadily in these states over the past few weeks (over 2,500 cases as on May 26), the state governments need to devise local strategies to tackle the double whammy of monsoon destruction and the coronavirus pandemic. For example, the closest testing centre from my village in the hinterlands of Kumaon Himalayas is about 170 km. Given the road conditions in the mountains, it takes around six-eight hours to cover this distance. But during monsoon, roadblocks due to landslides and shooting stones are common. The local PHCs and CHCs aren't equipped to handle Covid-19 cases. This isn't unique to just our region but is a reality for all hilly

districts. If adequate and timely plans aren't devised to address such problems, Covid-19 cases in the hills are bound to rise manifolds, especially with the return of thousands of migrants in the past few weeks. These Covid-19 cases and deaths (if any) will remain outside government books simply because they or their bodies weren't tested.

## 5) SEASON OF JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS, DENGUE & MALARIA

Apart from the hardships posed by geographical conditions, another aspect that may burden the already burdened public health system in the coming months is the rise in cases of Japanese Encephalitis, dengue and malaria. It is a known fact that these disease thrive in India with the onset of monsoon. Just last year, more than 100 infants were killed due to Japanese Encephalitis in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, triggering a nationwide outrage. Earlier, such outbreaks have been routine in UP's Gorakhpur and adjoining districts, and also in Assam. In the past five years, at least 1,393 infants have died due to Japanese Encephalitis in India. Besides Japanese Encephalitis, cases of dengue and malaria also rise significantly in Delhi and other areas during monsoon. Thus, if the past holds any lesson for the present, with the arrival of monsoon, our government hospitals are set to be burdened further. To avoid a complete breakdown of the health infrastructure, planning must start at the central, state and district level to tackle the multi-front battle that the monsoon is likely to bring in its wake. The purpose of this article is not to pronounce a doomsday, but to caution. So far, our hospitals and administration have been burdened by the coronavirus pandemic, but soon the situation may get far more complicated. We still have two-three weeks in hand. Proper planning may help us minimise the damage. Else, it may be too late to count the loss.



# How Countries Around The World Acted During 2008 Global Financial Crisis

As the world stares at the possibility of slipping into a recession due to the economic devastation caused by Coronavirus pandemic, here is a look at how countries around the world fought the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.



Almost every country is scrambling to save their economies and livelihood as the world stares at the possibility of slipping into a recession, which is being dubbed by many as much worse and more severe than the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. But that was the kind of recession that countries fought head on. What was the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and how was it caused? It was on September 15, 2008 when America's fourth largest investment bank, Lehman Brothers' giant Investment Bank went bust and filed for

bankruptcy. The bank had total debt of \$613 billion against total assets of \$639 billion and 25,000 employees worldwide. The bankruptcy of Lehman is said to be the largest in the history surpassing the Worldcom's and Enron's. This crisis led to the erosion of almost \$10 trillion in market capitalization from global equity markets in October 2008. In a podcast, Susan Lund of McKinsey says that the epicenter of the global financial crisis was really the housing market. It started in the USA but it turned out that similar

housing bubbles were building in other countries as well. The problem, according to him, started when housing prices stopped growing after some time and instead started declining. Then the economy fell into a recession and people lost their jobs. This crisis pulled down the confidence in the banks across the world that included India's then largest private lender ICICI Bank too. However, the USA was at the epicenter of this global economic crisis but impact of the crisis on India's economy was minimal when compared to other countries. The US government turned down the request of Lehman Brothers to bail out them as they were finding it little hard to roll over its borrowings in the markets. The Wall Street bank allowed it to go bust. The failure of a systemically important financial institution with some \$700

billion of liabilities sent shockwaves across the entire global financial system. At that time, The Federal Reserve subsequently called it the worst financial crisis in global history. Let us have a look at how countries across the world handled Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

## USA

U.S Federal Reserve began taking action and started slashing the interest rate. The interest rates were brought down to zero in 2008 from 5.25 per cent in 2007. However, this was not the only way to minimize the impact of recession. In February 2008, President George W Bush signed the Economic Stimulus into Law. The US President also approved the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in October 2008. TARP provided \$700 billion in funds to purchase the assets of struggling company.

## Germany

Germany in October 2008 promised to guarantee all private bank a/cs worth 568 billion euro and the government approved a plan to inject 500 billion Euros into credit market. The government also injected 10 billion euros taking a 25 per cent stake in country's second largest lender.

## France

French President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged 360 billion euros to banks and also hosted an emergency global financial crisis summit in Paris. Also the government announced it would inject 10.5 billion euros into the France's six largest banks.

**Italy** Italy also went on the same path and provided 40 billion euros in T-bills to banks to refinance inferior assets. Foreign trade institute offered 100 million euros to make businessmen more competitive. Country hosted a meeting of G8 countries to discuss

economic recovery.

## Japan

The Asian economic power brought down the interest rates to nominal level to increase the liquidity in the market and the government also announced a slew of packages worth \$16.7 billion and also injected \$1.2 billion into regional banks and many more.

## India

Finance Ministers P Chidambaram and planning commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia adopted three pronged strategy that ensured enough liquidity in market, no run on banks and no bank collapse resulting from asset liability mismatch. The day when Lehman collapsed, Indian government tried to insulate its Indian subsidiaries. The RBI almost halved the repo rate within six months of Lehman's collapse. The government announced Rs 40000 crore stimulus packages and cut excise duties on products.

## Decisive Leadership But Lack Of Clarity On Economic Policy: Modi Govt's Hits And Misses After 6 Years

Last week, BJP's official Twitter handle released a laudatory nine-minute video as a report card of the government -- **Modi sarkaar ke 6 saal... bemisaal -- but gave a complete miss to the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus.**



India may be struggling to contain the COVID-19 crisis but it has not dampened the celebratory spirit of the BJP-led government that has completed six years in office. Party's official Twitter handle released a laudatory nine-minute video as a report card of the government -- **Modi sarkaar ke 6 saal... bemisaal -- but gave a complete miss to the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus.** Narendra Modi took oath as the Prime Minister of India for the first time six years ago on May 26, 2014. He

had led the saffron party to a huge victory winning 282 out of 543 seats. Having established himself as the tallest leader in the country, Modi powered the BJP to a bigger victory in 2019, with the party winning 303 seats. He also kept pushing for India to have a greater role globally. Six years under PM Modi have been eventful, with focus on national security and welfare programmes. The government has adopted a proactive masculine approach towards national security with surgical strikes across the LoC in 2016 and the

Balakot airstrikes, just weeks before 2019 Lok Sabha elections, to avenge the killing of 46 CRPF personnel in the Pulwama terror attack.

In Modi 2.0, the focus has shifted to internal issues and those core to RSS-BJP ideology. Just as the government's response to COVID-19 has been that of hits and misses, so has its been six-year report card.

## Hits

Welfare schemes -- Modi government managed to counter the charge of 'suit-boot ki sarkaar' by a slew of welfare schemes like Ujjwala Yojana, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Jan Dhan accounts and Aawas (housing) yojana.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan - The government brought the focus on cleanliness and sanitation. Even though the country is still not open defecation free,

big strides have been made in access to toilets.

Decisive leadership -- Surgical strikes in 2016 to avenge Uri terror attack on the army and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes in retaliation to Pulwama attack on CRPF personnel enhanced Modi's image as a strong, decisive leader.

**Hindutva** -- BJP-led government stuck to its core ideology and managed to consolidate the majority by fulfilling its promises on various issues, including revocation of Article 370, Citizenship Amendment Act and Ram temple in Ayodhya.

**Ayushman Bharat** -- Though it has not rolled out the way government expected, the scheme has made healthcare accessible to lakhs of poor and under-privileged people.

## Misses

**Economic policy** -- The government has not shown clarity in economic policy. While it wants to propagate Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat and swadeshi, it also wants to make a big push for FDI. The unemployment will also become worse as businesses suffer losses and many close down due to Covid-19 lockdown.

Demonetization and GST - The professed aim of demonetization, that is, curbing black money and corruption, failed completely.

The government then tried to change the goal post to increased tax compliance. Complicated GST added to the woes of small and medium businesses, already hit by demonetization. Crumbling healthcare system -- While the

government may have the biggest healthcare scheme in Ayushman Bharat, the healthcare infrastructure in the country is in much need of a major upgrade, as exposed by the Covid-19 crisis.

**Smart India** -- Digital India has failed as connectivity remains poor and access to wifi is limited. While the world has moved to 5G connectivity, India is still struggling with the lower level 4G connectivity. Even the Smart Cities mission is lagging. Polarisation -- While BJP-led government has stuck to its ideology by implementing CAA and pursuing National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Opposition parties believe that these measures have led to a polarized atmosphere in the country.



# Living a Covid nightmare

**Overcrowding and lack of facilities in Mumbai's hospitals have resulted in an overwhelmed health system in the city.**

A gloom has set in upon the staff of King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital, the biggest municipality-run hospital in central Mumbai's Parel area. Everyone associated with the hospital looks dejected. Around 1,000 resident doctors work without adequate food, nurses fear for their safety as they file in, all norms of social distancing ignored, into packed buses meant to ferry them to their homes. Relatives of the COVID-19 patients admitted in the 3,000-bed hospital are terrified, some of them clueless about how to cremate the infected bodies of their loved ones.

KEM is just the tip of iceberg that is Mumbai's overburdened health system. A video that went viral in the first week of May exposed the ill-preparedness of another large civic facility in the city, the Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital, popularly referred to as Sion Hospital. The viral video showed patients in a Covid ward lying close to dead bodies wrapped in black plastic. A worrying situation as around 80 per cent of the symptomatic and critical patients are admitted in civic or government hospitals.

The conditions at KEM Hospital, says a senior doctor, who did not wish to be named, are worse than at Sion Hospital. According to him, the sweepers and class-four staff at the hospital have refused to pack the dead bodies saying it is not their job. "I have seen patients' relatives carrying infected bodies without any protection," he adds. "This is not only inhuman, but it also makes them highly vulnerable to infection." The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been paying a daily allowance of Rs 300 to class-four employees working in Covid wards. They are expected to maintain cleanliness, take the patients' blood samples for testing and pack the dead bodies. But due to lack of cooperation and volunteers, the BMC has started offering Rs 1,300 per body to anyone willing to pack it. It does not matter whether

they can do it properly or not. The patients' relatives are forced to carry the blood samples to the doctors. Many have been seen entering the Covid wards wearing only a mask whereas a personal protection equipment (PPE) kit is a must.

EM has divided its patients into its two wings. The biggest wing in the hospital's old building, is now a dedicated Covid ward. The non-Covid patients are being treated in the new building. However, KEM is likely to run out of beds by May 31. The senior doctor says with restaurants not an option and the hospital cafeteria shut, resident doctors were skipping meals because of lack of proper food arrangements. "The Tata Group has been providing them with snacks and juice since day one, but it is a supplement, not a meal." The resident doctors were having to stand in long queues to get the food packets. "It has happened many times that several doctors did not get any food because they were busy treating patients." The situation has improved since May 15 after some NGOs stepped in to ensure proper meals reach doctors.

On May 18, a delegation of resident doctors called on state medical education director Dr T.P. Lahane and apprised him of some of the issues they were facing. He assured them that their issues will be resolved soon. India Today reached out to Dr Lahane, but he declined to comment, as did Amey Ghole, chairman of the BMC health committee.

The sorry conditions at Sion Hospital were again highlighted after assistant inspector of police Amol Kulkarni died of COVID-19 on May 15. Kulkarni, who was posted at the police station in Dharavi, a Covid hotspot, complained of difficulty in breathing on May 13. Sion Hospital advised him to home quarantine instead of admitting him. Two days later, he was found lying unconscious in his bathroom and since his family could not get an ambulance in time, he

died on the way to the hospital. The report for his Covid test came after his death.

Like KEM, Sion Hospital, too, is taking non-Covid patients. Dr Avinash Saknure, president of the Sion unit of the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD), admits overcrowding of patients has resulted in chaos. "No doctor will want two patients on one bed, but you need to understand the situation," Saknure told India Today TV. "Sometimes we have been admitting patients two and a half times over our capacity. Treating everyone is important." The doctors, too, feel bad about the situation, but are helpless beyond a point.

"We are on the brink of an emotional breakdown watching patients die. It's difficult," says Dr Rishabh Chheda, a resident at Sion Hospital. "We are facing a pandemic at a time when hospitals are not ready for it. There is a severe crunch of resources."

Mumbai has been recording an average 1,200 Covid cases every day. On May 17, it recorded 1,595 cases, the largest one-day number so far. The Maharashtra government has maintained that 70 per cent cases are asymptomatic, 27 per cent symptomatic, and three per cent are critical. The state government has divided the health facilities into three categories, Covid care centres (CCC), dedicated Covid health centres (DCHC) and dedicated Covid hospitals (DCH), depending on the severity of cases. The CCC is further divided into CCC1, to quarantine high-risk suspects, including those who cannot maintain physical distancing at home; and CCC2, for asymptomatic positive patients, or those with mild symptoms. Patients with moderate symptoms like continuous cough, cold and fever are admitted in DCHCs. The government has decided to admit co-morbid



patients, those with pre-existing conditions like hypertension, heart ailments and diabetes, in DCHs. It is also where critical patients who require ventilator support or need to be monitored in the ICU are admitted. Those who have difficulty breathing or whose oxygen levels are below 94, or whose health condition can turn critical are also admitted in DCHs.

At present, there is no dearth of beds in CCCs and DCHCs, which have 57,000 and 10,000 respectively. The problem arises in DCHs which have only 4,800 beds. Manisha Mhaikar, an IAS official on special duty in BMC, says they plan to increase the number of beds to 8,000 by the end of May. "We are constantly augmenting beds, from 1,900 beds on April 15 to 2,900 on May 1, to 5,200 on May 17," she says. "However, as about 1,000 patients are testing positive daily, we need to be adding 100 to 200 beds every day. BMC is adding 100 beds daily, and with discharges, hospitals are being able to accommodate another 100. But it is a constant race to be ahead of the virus."

Mumbai's growth in Covid cases has slowed down from doubling every three days in the first week of April, to every 13 days by May 17. It needs to reach a point where cases double every 17 days to reduce the load on hospitals. Health minister Rajesh Tope admits availability of facilities in DCHC and DCH

categories is a problem. "The problem in DCHC is that oxygen is required, and in DCH more beds are needed. The work of augmenting the number of beds is going on," he says.

If the whole of KEM Hospital were to be designated as a COVID-19 hospital by the end of May, its current capacity of 3,000 beds will be cut down by half considering the ideal distance that needs to be maintained between two beds. Mumbai's KEM and B.Y.L. Nair hospitals have already started reducing the gap from eight feet to four to accommodate more beds. Mhaikar, though, does not see any problem with this. "Even if the distance between two beds is reduced, the doctors and health workers are wearing PPE kits. No one is allowed there without a PPE kit. The BMC is trying to optimise the space by giving equal importance to safety safeguards and to bed augmentation." While Dr Mohan Joshi, dean of Nair Hospital, says a space of eight feet is ideal, he realises hospitals have to be pragmatic to accommodate the growing number of patients. "Idealism cannot work when there is such an influx of patients. No government hospital can turn away a patient. We have to be accommodating," he says.

The BMC officials are facing a problem in updating the availability of beds in private

hospitals. The protocol states that if a patient is discharged from DCH, the hospital has to inform BMC's disaster cell. Since this will be real-time data on vacant and occupied beds, the BMC can direct patients to a hospital accordingly. However, Dr Daksha Shah, BMC's executive health officer, says, "The hospitals are not keeping the BMC updated about discharge of patients."

The government believes the decision by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to discharge asymptomatic patients in 10 days will improve availability of beds. A state-level task force led by Dr Sanjay Oak, former dean of KEM Hospital, has recommended that 70 per cent beds in around 30,000 private hospitals, including nursing homes, should be acquired for DCHCs and DCHs. Tope mooted an idea to reserve 30 per cent beds in private hospitals for five kinds of treatments, deliveries, brain stroke, heart disease, cancer and accidents, and the rest for Covid. "We can pay private hospitals to recover their losses," he says. Private hospitals are negotiating with state authorities over the rate of treatment. The government has assured them it will bear the cost of treatment of Covid patients, hoping it encourages them to treat more patients.

Looking at the trend of growing number of cases, the state is expecting a surge in June and July. If the virus races ahead of the health preparations, the nightmare will only get worse for the Maximum City.

**Kiran Tare, Courtesy India Today.com**



# The hidden toll of lockdown on rainforests

With fewer planes in the sky and cars on the road, lockdown has brought many benefits to the environment. So why is it harming tropical rainforests?

Inside the world's tropical forests, there are the agents of disease that have the power to bring our way of life to a halt. How we learn to live with these forests will determine our fate, hastening or slowing the onset of future pandemics and the climate crisis. BBC Travel and Future Planet explore two sides of our relationship with forests in two stories; this story is the second, and you can read the first here. You might be forgiven for thinking that the global lockdown measures keeping us all at home can only have been good for the environment. Pollution in cities has decreased, wild animals have increasingly been spotted entering urban areas, and many new cycle lanes have opened up worldwide. But in the world's tropical forest regions, it's another story. Environmental agencies have reported an uptick in deforestation during lockdowns, as well as increases in poaching, animal trafficking and illegal mining worldwide. The trends are alarming, environmental experts say, and could be hard to reverse. "This



narrative of nature having been given a break during Covid, it's not entirely accurate. It's accurate in cities and peri-urban areas," says Sebastian Troeng, executive vice-president of Conservation International. "But unfortunately in the rural areas, the situation is almost the inverse." Troeng says it's too soon for detailed data on the scale of the problem since lockdowns began, but their offices have been receiving almost daily reports of increased deforestation from around the world. Brazil and Colombia have seen an uptick in illegal logging

and mining; the Philippines has also reported illegal logging and wildlife trafficking; Kenya has reported increased bushmeat and ivory poaching, as well as increases in charcoal production, which has been illegal since 2018; Cambodia has seen an increase in poaching, illegal logging and mining; and similar reports have come from Venezuela and Madagascar. Concerns have also been raised in Malaysia and Indonesia, which have the highest deforestation rates in South-east Asia, while in Ecuador, indigenous and afro-descendent communities have

reported increased illegal mining in the Choco and Amazon rainforests. There are two main factors that could be driving these trends, says Troeng. The first is criminal groups and opportunists expanding their activities, taking advantage of lockdown and diminished forest monitoring and government presence. The second is that people living in these rural areas are facing increased economic pressures and are forced to rely more heavily on nature for food and income. In some cases, such as Madagascar and Cambodia, there has been a

large urban-rural migration as people lose their jobs in the cities or return home to be with their families during quarantine, which has put extra pressure on local environments. "What worries me is that we're seeing these emerging trends, and they're not going to be reversed when Covid measures are lifted because they're related to economic factors. So my anticipation is that we're going to have to deal with this for potentially months and years," says Troeng. Destruction of the rainforest will have severe ramifications. For indigenous and other communities who live there, it means a destruction of their way of life and may lead to conflict with the criminals who encroach on their territory. Studies have also shown that destroying rainforest ecosystems raises the odds of new pathogens making the jump from animals to humans. It also harms our ability to deal with climate change, as tropical forests are a key component in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

## 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.



### 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.



### Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



### Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



### Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



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

CS 116120-A 03/26/2020

## 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.



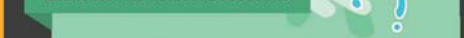
Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



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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# The divers rescuing a drowning island



**Vaan Island in India's Gulf of Mannar has been rapidly disappearing into the Laccadive Sea. But a team of marine biologists is working to save it.**

Hundreds of fishing boats bob on the bright blue waters surrounding Vaan Island, a tiny strip of land between India and Sri Lanka. The island marks the beginning of a fiercely protected fragile zone, the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. These waters are home to India's most varied and biodiverse coastlines. Teeming with marine life, it is home to 23% of India's 2,200 fin fish species, 106 species of crab and more than 400 species of molluscs, as well as the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin, the finless porpoise and the humpback whale.

Nearly 150,000 fishermen depend on the marine reserve for their livelihoods. And Vaan Island is the gateway to this world. Half an hour by boat from the mainland and easily accessible to the 47 villages that are the backbone of this heavily populated coastline, Vaan has always been a refuge from storms for fishermen and a hotspot for researchers. But for the past 50 years it has been rapidly shrinking. In 1986, 21 such islands in this region were protected when the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, the first of its kind in Asia, was established in the Laccadive Sea. Now there are only 19. Two have been submerged and Vaan Island is the next at risk of vanishing. In 1973, Vaan was 26.5 hectares (65 acres), shrinking to just 4.1 hectares (10 acres) in 2016. At that point the erosion was so extreme that researchers estimated that it would be entirely underwater by 2022. The reason that small, ecologically rich islands like Vaan are vanishing is a combination of unsustainable fishing practices, rising sea levels due to climate change and historic coral mining, which has now been banned in the area. Artificial reefs were deployed to help buffer waves reaching the islands, and they were effective. But to give Vaan and its neighbours a longer-term future, the ecosystem as a whole needed replenishing.

Gilbert Mathews, a marine biologist at the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI) in the nearby coastal town of Thuthukudi in southern

India, turned to seagrass, a plain and innocuous-looking type of marine plant, as a way to save the island ecosystem. Often mistaken for seaweed, seagrasses are plants that grow underwater and have well-defined roots, stems and leaves. They produce flowers, fruits and seeds, and play a vital role in maintaining a marine ecosystem. "Like corals, these tufts of grass provide a habitat to many splendourous sea-creatures, such as seahorses and lizard fish, which can be found in seagrass throughout the year," says Mathews. Seagrass provides the right environment for young fish and invertebrates to conceal themselves, while absorbing dissolved carbon dioxide and creating an oxygen and nutrient-rich environment. With its ability to trap sediments, seagrass also acts as a natural filter, clearing the waters and slowing erosion.

Mathews first surveyed the seagrass around Vaan Island in 2008, diving into the shallow waters twice a month, for up to eight hours a day. With a sense of dismay, he saw many tufts of seagrass floating in the water around him. These islands were home to the most luxuriant seagrass meadows of the Indian sub-continent, but they were coming loose. The sprigs had been pulled out by fisherman operating trawler boats, who rig two or more nets to scour the shallow waters. Fishing along shallow waters and the disruption of seagrass beds is illegal in India, but

because of poor monitoring, the law is not strictly enforced. Along with trawlers' haul of crustaceans and fish, they would pull out hundreds of green sprigs of seagrass that were later discarded in heaps along the shore. By destroying the seagrass, the trawlers were inadvertently destabilising the ecosystem on which they relied – without seagrass as the base of the ecosystem, fish stocks dwindled. In studies between 2011 and 2016, Mathews found that 45 sq km (17 sq miles) of seagrass cover had been degraded in the Palk Bay, where the waters of the Indian Ocean meet the Bay of Bengal. In the Gulf of Mannar, 24 sq km (9 sq miles) had died. "We believed that by restoring the seagrass meadows along these waters, we could strengthen the island and possibly save this and prevent others from submerging into the sea," he says.

Mathews knew that restoring seagrass would be a challenge. A global assessment of 215 studies, led by marine biologist Michelle Waycott of the University of Adelaide, Australia, found that seagrass had been rapidly disappearing all over the globe. Meadows spread over an area of 110 sq km (42 sq miles) – equivalent to an area the size of the Indian city of Chandigarh – have been vanishing every year since 1980. Overall, 29% of seagrass has been lost since records began in 1879. But if the seagrass meadows could be reinvigorated around Vaan Island, they

could also act as a carbon sink. "Plantation and restoration provide a growing solution towards mitigating climate change and affording some protection in this very fragile part of the world, which is often shaken by hurricanes and strong winds," says Edward J.K. Patterson, director of the SDMRI. At first, the researchers tried pulling up tufts directly from the sandy bottom of the seabed, and moving them to sites that had been badly depleted. But it didn't work – the trawlers still pulled them out, undoing their painstaking work. It became evident that the team needed to find another way, but most of the usual rehabilitation techniques used in other parts of the world were expensive, even more labour-intensive and therefore not viable. For instance, one well-known method was the dispersal and sowing of seagrass seeds. But this wasn't practical: the beds had to be dug out underwater and each seed planted by hand. Mathews and his colleagues spent the next eight years trying to work out a better way to save the seagrass. Meanwhile, the erosion continued and in 2013 Vaan Island split in two as the sea encroached. In 2016, the Gulf of Mannar experienced its worst ever coral bleaching episode, losing 16% of its coral cover. Restoring corals and seagrass were twin projects, as both corals and seagrass act as natural barriers, affording some protection from strong waves and reducing erosion. Scientists from the SDMRI had by then perfected a better transplantation technique for restoring seagrass. Mahalakshmi Bupathy, a researcher specialising in soft corals, joined the team in 2016 along with her "diving buddy", coral sponge scholar Arathy Ashok, to try out this new method. Several times a month, Bupathy and Ashok's day began at 5am with a dive down to the seabed. First, they surveyed the sites along the 19 remaining islands of the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait and noted which underwater areas needed more seagrass and which harboured luxuriant growth.





# The remarkable power of the prickly pear

**A stalwart of the Mexican landscape is finding a second life powering up buildings in the desert, and it is proving to be an unusually sustainable biofuel.**

The landscape could be one straight from a postcard of a Mexican desert. With strong sun almost directly overhead, a green field of cacti cover the dusty surroundings of Camébaro, a farming community in the state of Michoacan. Nopal, as this type of oval-leaved plant is known all over the country, does not only grow in these lands. Also known as the prickly pear, it can be found all over the Mesoamerican region and it is so emblematic that it has a prime spot on Mexico's national flag. It is regularly consumed as salad or in healthy shakes, or in less virtuous tortillas and nacho chips. The inedible waste

products are normally discarded but in this town, after the cactus had given all it can as a food, people saw the potential of turning this waste into a new fuel source. In 2009, local businessman Rogelio Sosa Lopez had already succeeded in the corn-made tortilla industry and partnered with Miguel Angel Ake to found Nopalimex, a company that grows cacti as a cheaper alternative to corn. They found that nopal crops produce between 300 and 400 tonnes of biomass per hectare in less fertile lands, and up to 800-1,000 tonnes in richer soils. Nopal also requires minimum water

consumption and its waste, if properly processed, can be turned into biofuel. "We are sowing nopal for three reasons. The first one is social – it creates jobs and prevents emigration. Secondly, from an economic perspective, it reduces the cost of industrial processing of nopal-based products. Lastly and most importantly, there is an environmental reason," says Ake. The hope is that biofuel from nopal can be a viable alternative to fossil fuels in the region. Ake started to explore biofuels more than 40 years ago, but he began to experiment with cacti in 2007. Now, his company is producing

enough fuel for the buildings that process all parts of the nopal plant in a sustainable way. But he plans to go further. He has already signed a commitment with the local government of Zitacuaro, in the state of Michoacan, to provide official vehicles, from police cars to ambulances, with cactus-based fuel. "With the amount of nopal we have in Mexico, and a productivity of over 100 tonnes of gas per acre, we believe that this could eventually replace the traditional use of gas and fuel of non-renewable sources," he says. The process is relatively simple. First, the cacti are cut and



processed to extract flour, which is used to make tortilla chips. The remaining inedible scraps of the plant are mixed with cow dung in a bio-processor, a fermentation tank that heats the wasted cactus pulp. Then the fuel is distilled from the remaining liquid and collected via tubes and into a tank. Making use of agricultural waste is likely to play an increasing role in the production of fuels, says Teresa Domenech Aparisi, researcher and lecturer in industrial ecology and the circular economy for UCL's Institute for Sustainable Resources. "We have to increase biofuels without increasing water consumption," she says. "The future should look especially at agricultural and industrial waste." This cactus-based method of fuel production is a very good example, she says, because any type of agricultural product often generates a huge amount of waste after harvest.

## No known animal host and 'almost perfect' human adaption

Coronavirus is so 'perfectly adapted' to infect humans that the possibility it was made in a Chinese lab can't be ignored, Australian vaccine researchers conclude.

Professor Nikolai Petrovsky said the virus was better at attaching itself to human cells than to any other animal, explaining why it has infected five million people. The vaccine expert warned the investigation into where COVID-19 started, as proposed by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, was as a result urgently needed and should have begun months ago.

The startling results of his research were first revealed by the Mail on Sunday on the weekend - and on

Wednesday his team gave Daily Mail Australia fresh details about why it must be considered a possibility the virus escaped from a lab in Wuhan. The team at Flinders University in Adelaide and Latrobe University in Melbourne studied how well SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, infected different animals. Coronavirus binds itself to the ACE2 receptor molecule in lung cells using a spike protein - the tighter it can attach itself, the less likely it is to be washed away and the sicker it makes its host. Professor Petrovsky expected to find an animal that was most susceptible to this, such as bats, and was likely the original source of the virus - but was shocked when humans

came out on top.

Furthermore, viruses tend to get better at infecting new species as they adapt over time, but COVID-19 started 'completely optimised from day one without the need to evolve'. 'This is a new virus that has never been in humans before, but it has an extraordinarily high binding to human receptors, which is very surprising,' he told Daily Mail Australia.

'It is almost perfectly human adapted, it couldn't do any better. We have to ask how that happened. Was it a complete fluke? It can be as nature has many shots at goal and you only see the ones that land.

'Another possibility which still cannot be excluded is that SARS-CoV-2 was created by a recombination event that

### TOP AUSTRALIAN VACCINE DOCTOR RAISES VIRUS DOUBTS

**ADAPTED TO INFECT HUMANS**

SARS-CoV-2 is uniquely adapted to infect humans

**PROTEIN BINDS TO HUMAN RECEPTOR**

SARS-CoV-2 spike protein has higher overall binding energy for humans ACE2 than other species

**DR NIKOLAI PETROVSKY**

'This is a new virus that has never been in humans before, but it has an extraordinarily high binding to human receptors, which is very surprising'

**LAB COINCIDENCE?**

The most closely-related known viruses were studied in Wuhan lab 'Lab leak remains a possibility'

**NO ANIMAL HOST**

'We haven't found an intermediate host, or even the virus in any animal yet'

**ENTERED HUMAN BODY FROM DAY ONE**

Dr Petrovsky said the virus was not a normal animal to human virus since it had the 'exceptional' ability to enter the human body from day one

occurred inadvertently or consciously in a laboratory handling coronaviruses, with the new virus then accidentally released into the local human population.'

The Wuhan Institute of Virology, a short trip from

the city's wet markets, is the lab known to study several bat coronaviruses and is theorised to be where it was actually created. Most scientists believe COVID-19 started naturally in an exotic animal market in Wuhan and was not man-made, and the WIV has rubbished claims it caused the outbreak.

However, Professor Petrovsky said no one had properly disproved the lab theory and his research showed it was plausible and there was just as little evidence for it to have naturally occurred.

The closest disease to COVID-19 is BatCoV RaTG1, found in bats, that is 96 per cent similar to the strain rampaging around

the world in humans. However, its spike protein is considerably less effective than COVID-19's and would need significant adaptation to become something that would easily infect humans.

The next most susceptible animal to humans were pangolins, a small scaly animal found in many Chinese wet markets, but a coronavirus that affects its species is only 90 per cent similar to SARS-CoV-2. Professor Petrovsky said while it was possible the wrong bat met the wrong pangolin 'thereby conferring the bat CoV with high binding for both pangolin and human ACE2' - this was statistically improbable.

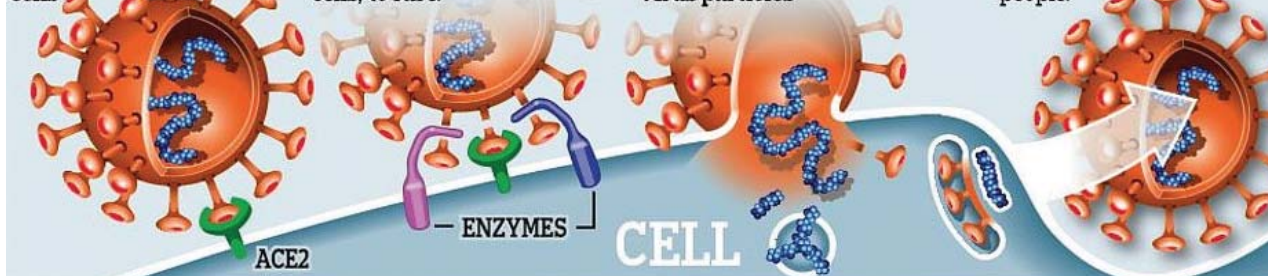
### HOW THE CORONAVIRUS INFECTS OUR CELLS

**1** There are 'spike' proteins on the surface of the virus that attach well to ACE2 receptors that are on some of our cells

**2** It is then thought enzymes on our cells are activated and these break the spike protein, causing the membranes around the virus and our cells, to fuse.

**3** The virus's genetic material enters our cell, where it hijacks the cell machinery to produce more virus genetic material and proteins that assemble into new virus particles

**4** The new virus particles then exit the cell, and can attack other cells in the same way, or leave the body and infect other people.







## Surging Facebook stock pushes Mark Zuckerberg ahead of Warren Buffett to become America's third wealthiest man as his worth hits \$80 billion

(News Agencies) Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has pushed ahead of Warren Buffett to become America's third wealthiest man. CEO Zuckerberg has seen his worth hit \$80 billion - from \$54.7 billion - after stock in the social media giant soared by nearly 48 per cent over a two month period between March and May. That puts him ahead of billionaire and Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett, who has seen his net worth rise by 0.8 per cent, a report released last week says. Buffett also gave charities \$15 billion between 2014 and 2018; Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan gave \$1 billion. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos stays the richest

after his net worth jumped from \$113 billion to \$147.6 billion. Microsoft founder Bill Gates stays in second place.

A devastating jobs report released earlier this month revealed 20.5 million jobs were lost nationwide and the unemployment rate soared to 14.7 percent in April - the highest rate since the Great Depression. But the report on the richest found that the top five U.S. billionaires saw their wealth grow by a total of \$75.5 billion, or 19 per cent. Data taken from mid-March to mid-May shows that the country's wealthiest have profited from the health crisis, becoming \$484 billion

richer. The report, carried out by Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies' Program for Inequality, used Forbes data for over 600 billionaires in America. Elon Musk had among the largest percentage gain of billionaires during the two months, after his net worth jumped by 48 per cent in the two months to \$36 billion. Between March 18 and May 19, the total net worth of the 600-plus U.S. billionaires rose from \$2.948 trillion to \$3.382 trillion. In March, there were 614 billionaires on the Forbes list. There are 630 two months later, including newcomer Kanye West at \$1.3 billion, the report found.

## Warner Music Group eyes \$13.2bn valuation

(News Agencies) Warner Music Group (WMG), the record label of Ed Sheeran and Bruno Mars, estimates it is worth up to \$13.2bn (£10.7bn), as it prepares to list its shares on the Nasdaq stock exchange. That is four times what Sir Leonard Blavatnik paid in 2011 for WMG - the world's third largest record label. At the time, the music industry was in the depths of a multi-year slump, but sales have improved more recently. Warner Music said it is hoping to raise \$1.8bn via the listing. The firm had put its flotation plans on hold as the coronavirus pandemic cast

financial markets into turmoil this spring. But shares have been on the upswing recently, as investors cheer relief efforts by governments and central banks, hoping for a quick economic rebound. Warner Music said existing shareholders would sell 70 million shares priced at \$23-\$26 apiece. The proceeds would go to Mr Blavatnik's company, Access Industries, which will retain majority voting power. The firm represents more than 80,000 songwriters and composers, from Beethoven to Madonna. It reported a profit of \$256m in its most recent financial year, on revenue of \$4.5bn. The

industry's recovery has been helped by the rise of paid streaming services such as Apple and Spotify. In 2019, global music revenues rose 8.2% to \$20.2bn - more than half of which came from streaming services, according to industry group International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI). Ukrainian-born Mr Blavatnik now has joint UK-US citizenship and received a knighthood in 2017 for services to philanthropy. He sold a stake in Russian oil company TNK-BP for \$7bn in 2013 and was an early investor in the Apple-owned Beats music subscription service.



## Google deletes millions of negative TikTok reviews



(News Agencies) Google has deleted millions of negative TikTok reviews from its Play store after the app's rating fell from 4.5 to 1.2 stars overnight. The video-sharing platform was inundated with one-star reviews after an Indian creator posted a spoof video of an acid attack.

Faizal Siddiqui has apologised, and TikTok

had decided to leave him. In the clip, he threw liquid at the woman's face. It was water, but the next scene showed the woman's face covered in make-up that resembled the scars and bruising that acid might cause. "As per the policy, we do not allow content that risks the safety of others, promotes physical harm, or glorifies violence against women," a spokesman for TikTok said. "The behaviour in question violates our guidelines and we have taken down content, suspended the account, and are working with law enforcement agencies as appropriate." Mr Siddiqui later said that: "As a social media influencer, I realise my responsibility and apologise to anyone who was offended by the video."

After TikTok became embroiled in the backlash, Google removed more than 5 million of its recent one-star reviews but left many others active. A spokesman for Google said it had taken "corrective action". "When we learn of

incidents of spam abuse, we review and take corrective action to remove inappropriate ratings and comments," he added. The event coincided with TikTok's monthly revenue from in-app charges

non-gaming app in April, including YouTube and Netflix, according to the analytics firm Sensor Tower. The figure includes sales via the Chinese version of the product, known as Douyin, Bloomberg reported.

## FTC Finalizes Settlement in LendEDU Case Related to Deceptive Rankings and Fake Reviews

(News Agencies) Following a public comment period, the Federal Trade Commission has finalized a settlement with Delaware comparison shopping website LendEDU over allegations that it promoted deceptive rankings of financial products for a fee and posted fake positive reviews of its website. According to the agency's administrative complaint, LendEDU misled consumers to believe its website provided objective product information, when in fact it offered higher rankings and ratings to companies that paid for placement. Specifically, the FTC alleged

that LendEDU falsely claimed that the information on its website was not affected by compensation from advertisers. The FTC also alleged the company touted fake positive reviews of its website. The final order settling the FTC's charges prohibits LendEDU and its operators from misrepresenting: the objectivity of the rankings of any entity offering products; the influence of compensation on any content, including any rate tables; and any material connections or endorsements with companies. LendEDU is also required to pay \$350,000.



## Capone movie review

# Tom Hardy delivers most unsettling performance of his career in surreal gangster biopic

**Tom Hardy delivers a performance so comically exaggerated in Josh Trank's surreal biopic of the gangster Al Capone that it cannot be taken seriously.**



Capone  
Director - Josh Trank  
Cast - Tom Hardy, Linda Cardellini, Jack Lowden, Matt Dillon, Kyle MacLachlan  
Deliberately provocative and downright dirty, Capone is a rancid belch of a movie that must be seen to be believed. But recommending that you watch it would be akin to forcing you to take a flight during the current pandemic; you might not come out of it the same person. The logical move, as with hopping aboard a plane right now, would be to avoid it altogether. But there's Tom Hardy, and everything you've

seen and read about his objectively unhinged performance practically taunts you to have the guts to press play. This is the film that Trank was trying to make, but it isn't the one I saw. The filmmaker, who after delivering a refreshing take on the superhero genre with his debut feature, Chronicle, was instantly tapped to helm a big-budget blockbuster, committed career suicide after tweeting against his sophomore effort, the unwatchable 2015 Fantastic Four reboot. In the run-up to Capone, Trank very candidly recalled his terrible

experience working on Fantastic Four, and seemed to have come to terms with the heartbreak it left him with. In a way, the themes he tackles in Capone — isolation, guilt, arrogance — seem frighteningly personal. And this is no doubt why Tom Hardy must've signed on to do the movie. Having landed his dream star, however, it seems as if Trank simply cleared the runway for him, without so much as a wave of a fluorescent baton to guide him down the right path. In a career filled with upsetting performances — remember, this is the man who did

Bronson — this has to be the farthest Hardy has pushed his audience's patience. "You sound like a dying horse," one character tells Capone in the film. And Hardy unleashes what can only be described as a guttural grunt conceived in the pits of hell. This is how Capone communicates. In fact, he soils himself on more occasions than he actually strings together an intelligible sentence. It's a performance so comically exaggerated that it is absolutely impossible to take it seriously, especially with the tacky makeup they've slathered on Hardy's face. He's

showboating, and he knows it. But what Trank should've realised is that Hardy's growls are drowning out the film's subtext, and essentially erasing the point of its existence. By hiring David Lynch's old cohorts, both in front of and behind the camera — Kyle MacLachlan appears in a supporting role, while Peter Deming serves as cinematographer — Trank was no doubt trying to tap into Lynch's surrealism. But the film feels haphazardly structured, erratically edited, and tonally inconsistent. As an oddity, it's interesting, but as a tale of redemption, Trank still has a long way to go.

## How 'Ertugrul' and its Islamic values hit a sweet spot in Pakistan



When Esra Bilgiç posted a photograph of herself in a bralette and blazer on Instagram, she couldn't have known the storm it would stir up weeks later in another country. The Turkish actor, who plays Halime Hatun on Dirilis: Ertugrul (Resurrection: Ertugrul), found herself the subject of tweets and posts by Pakistani fans of the series, who felt her attire wasn't becoming of the noble character she plays. Engin Altan Düzyatan, who plays the series lead, was also attacked for, as one troll put it, "keeping a dog indoors despite being Muslim". This sort of moral sanctimony on social media isn't new to the subcontinent, but Dirilis: Ertugrul has certainly shaken up Pakistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan has endorsed the series multiple times, lauding it for showcasing proper Islamic values. An opposition leader

referred to this in the Senate, saying, "You cannot build the state of Madina by broadcasting Ertugrul." Khan was also criticized for promoting Turkish serials instead of Pakistani ones. The show's stars said they would love to visit the country; Düzyatan wished fans in broken Urdu on Eid. Even cricket lovers got involved when pacer Mohammad Amir suggested one of the actors looked like Virat Kohli. Aided by the lockdown—as the record-breaking rerun of Ramayan was in India—the show is pulling in incredible numbers. The dubbed Urdu version of the show on PTV, the national broadcaster, began its telecast on 25 April. According to PTV, 133 million people watched the show in the first 20 days. A dedicated YouTube channel, TRT Ertugrul by PTV, had amassed four million subscribers and 344 million

views as of 25 May.

Ertugrul Gazi of the Kayi tribe was an "Oghuz Turk" who left Central Asia for Anatolia in the 13th century. His son Osman I later founded the Ottoman empire. Not a lot is known about Ertugrul, which allows for plenty of room to create the image of a noble warrior fighting for the good of his people. "This is part-history, part-mythmaking," says Rehan Rafay Jamil, who grew up in Karachi and is pursuing a PhD in political science at Brown University in the US. "There's this celebration of Turkey's Central Asian roots. The nomads are shown as very honourable—

values that resonate within Pakistan." The show ran from 2014-19, with 179 episodes, each around 2 hours long, over five seasons. It is vividly realized: The cast was taught archery and horse-riding by Kazakh and Kyrgyz experts, and creator Mehmet Bozdog had a Mongolian illustrator create a visual world based on his script. "What kept me hooked," author Annie Zaidi wrote in the magazine Fountain Ink, "was the embedded social history: the manners of a nomad tent, negotiations for pasture lands, moral codes governing

bloodshed, the headgear, armour, socks, rugs, fabrics, spoons, poetry, dancing and legends". The tussles, big and small, between the Kayis and rival factions—Crusaders, Mongols, Byzantine Christians—as well as Seljuk Turks, local clans and other Oghuz tribes, has evoked comparisons with Game Of Thrones. This is true to an extent, says Islamabad-based actor and writer Osman Khalid Butt, but that isn't the only draw. "There's a Game of Thrones itch it scratches. Then there's the reverence for customs and traditions.

## Zaira Wasim deletes Twitter and Instagram accounts after posting religious verse on locust attack

Former actor Zaira Wasim has deleted her Twitter and Instagram accounts. She was reportedly trolled and received hate online for a recent tweet on Thursday which mentioned locust attacks. She later deleted the tweet. On Thursday, Zaira had shared a verse from Quran, which mentioned the five plagues of Egypt, including the swarm the locusts. "So We sent upon them the flood and locusts and lice and frogs and blood: Signs openly self explained: but they were steeped in arrogance— a people

given to sin" -Qur'an 7:133," she wrote in her tweet. Zaira was then



targeted for her tweet by a few social media users. They seemed to infer from her tweet that she was justifying locust attack as the wrath of god. "I like Zaira Wasim. But this is dumb

and in bad taste. People are suffering becoz of locusts, floods, covid. She's implying that this is 'divine punishment'", a Twitter user wrote. However, another section of social media came to her defence. "Nothing is wrong in this tweet she wrote it right, all things happen only with permission of God whether it's a punishment or etc he can kill or do any miracle, he can do anything he wants cause it's not our world it's his, we are here just for some years not forever," read a tweet.



## Bhagyashree says a photographer once asked Salman Khan to 'catch and smooch her'

***Bhagyashree said that she once overheard a photographer telling Salman Khan to grab and smooch her for a photoshoot but his reply left her impressed.***

Salman Khan and Bhagyashree's innocent romance in *Maine Pyaar Kiya* captured the hearts of the nation and catapulted them to fame. The two stars were approached for several photoshoots together, back in the day. In an interview with *Deccan Chronicle*, Bhagyashree said that a popular photographer wanted to take 'hot' pictures of her and Salman. The photographer asked the *Dabangg* star to take her by surprise and plant a kiss on her lips. "There was a very popular photographer back then, who is no more. He wanted to take some not-so-complimentary photographs of Salman and me, some sort of 'hot'

photographs. So, he took Salman aside and told him, 'Main jab camera set up karunga (When I set up the camera), you just catch her and smooch her,'" she revealed.

Bhagyashree, who overheard the conversation, was blown away by Salman's response. He flatly refused to do any such thing without her consent. "All of us were newcomers and this photographer thought he had the liberty to do something like that. Back then, smooching scenes were not prevalent. I don't think he or Salman knew that I was standing very close by and could hear every word. For a second, I remained shocked, but just then, I heard

Salman say, 'I am not going to do anything of that sort. If you want any pose like that, you need to ask Bhagyashree.' I really respected Salman's response, and that's when I realised I was among safe people," she said. Even though *Maine Pyaar Kiya* became a massive success, Bhagyashree gave up a career in films to focus on her marriage and motherhood. In an interview with *Humans Of Bombay*, she had said, "*Maine Pyaar Kiya* went on to become such a big hit, but I was a woman so in love with my husband and my son Abhimanyu who was born soon after that I said no to every offer I got.



## OTT platforms have given a new lease of life to actors: Athiya Shetty

Athiya Shetty believes that the direct-to-digital releases, a move by producers to release their films on OTT platforms, is a good practice for more reasons than one. "So many big films and big actors have taken to these platforms and hence, it kills the stigma attached to them. It's just another way of taking your films to an audience and it's amazing," she says. She opines that cinema-viewing and content-consuming patterns witnessed a change way before the lockdown. "Cinema viewing experience has been changing and will change in the future as well not only due to the lockdown but also because of the kind of content that OTT platforms are coming up with.

But I also believe that going to the theatres is something that can never be replaced. Once we've a vaccine, everything will go back to normal," she shares.

The actor asserts that digital streaming services have given "a new lease of life" to actors like her. She says, "Now that people have time, they've been watching my film, *Motichoor Chaknachoor* (2019) and I've received so many positive responses from them on my social media. Sometimes a film might not do well in the theatres but you get appreciated once it starts streaming digitally." Does she believe that shoot structures will also change once shooting resumes? "We've had so many

set ways of shooting and functioning during outdoor schedules or even for an eight-to-eight shift. Things will definitely be different henceforth. There will be a lot of security measures and we'll have to be way more cautious," says Shetty. She confides that she misses working and she can't wait to go back to a set. "I miss the hustle, my team and being before the camera. I've watched so many different movies and shows during the lockdown that I miss shooting even more now. I'm so eager to go out there and read scripts that challenge me as actor. I hope that things will get better and I'll be able to go back to a set very soon," she signs off.

## OTT is the future and actors need to warm up to the new normal

Actors are more often than not resistant to the idea of doing projects on OTT platforms, as they prefer the magic of the 70 mm screen. A National School of Drama graduate, Pankaj Tripathi, was always different in his approach towards acting. A source says, "For him, the content's merit and the power of the stories were always the key. He cared little if it was for a play, a short film, a feature movie, a blockbuster venture or an OTT show. And during lockdown, he has realised how being platform agnostic has helped him reach far and wide with the masses.

Right now, with the ongoing lockdown, the only works that are reaching the audience are the shows on OTT and he is grateful that he made the jump to streaming platforms in time." Explaining further, Tripathi says, "Actors need to be fluid. They can't suffer from mental blocks. For them, the only thing that should matter is how good a story is, who the colleagues are and the conviction of the makers. Today, I feel grateful that I have done web shows that are keeping people entertained in these difficult times. So many fans are rediscovering my old works -



*Sacred Games*, *Mirzapur* and *Criminal Justice* - and are messaging their feedback.





# Monsoon knocking

## 5 reasons why India's fight against coronavirus is set to get nastier

The double whammy of disasters and rise in vector-borne disease during monsoon is likely to put extra pressure on India's public health infrastructure that is already burdened with the coronavirus pandemic. If timely plans are not devised before monsoon rains, our fight against Covid-19 will take a severe blow.

(News Agencies) The central and state governments may go on harping the claim that the coronavirus situation is under their control, but the virus clearly seems to think otherwise. Despite the nationwide lockdown (which has been in force since March 25), India's Covid-19 cases have increased rapidly throughout May and have started to balloon in the past one week. As on May 26, figures put out by the Union health ministry show that a total of 1,45,380 people have tested positive for Covid-19, making India the biggest epicentre of the disease in Asia. These are government figures and includes only those cases that have been tested. The actual rate of transmission could be much more.

(Contd on page 31)



## Make the OCI regime more liberal

This is a good moment to overhaul the OCI regime. Giving them more rights will help



(News Agencies) Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) are being slowly allowed to return to their country of origin. Following the pandemic-induced entry ban placed on OCI holders, there should be some introspection on the future of OCIs. "Overseas citizen" was always a misnomer as a holder did not have a status anything close to citizenship. They did not carry Indian passports, had no political rights, and faced restrictions such as being disallowed to buy agricultural land. The fate of OCI holders has made it clear that this is just a long-term visa with minor economic benefits grafted on, a travelling convenience, but not much more.

(Contd on page 30)



## 'This shouldn't be 'normal' in 2020 America' Obama on death of George Floyd

(News Agencies) As Demonstrators across the country protested the death of George Floyd, in some cases violently, Former President Barack Obama weighed in on the death of a black man, George Floyd, in police custody that has sparked protests across the country. "This shouldn't be 'normal' in 2020 America. It can't be 'normal.' If we want our children to grow up in a nation that lives up to its highest ideals, we can and must be better," Obama said in a statement.

(Contd on page 30)

## India set to become non-permanent member of UNSC: Tirumurti

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
BY PRAKASH M SWAMY

"My immediate priority will be to ensure the election of India as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council," says Ambassador T. S. Tirumurti, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi who has been appointed as Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in New York. A seasoned diplomat, Tirumurti succeeds Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin on his retirement. Excerpts from a wide-ranging interview:

**Felicitations on your appointment as Permanent Representative of India to the U.N. in New York I am sure that your U.N. experience will be crucial in this assignment.**

I am grateful to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for considering me worthy of this responsibility. I had served in the Permanent Mission to India to U.N. in Geneva in the 1990s. Later, I was also head of the United Nations Division dealing with economic and social issues in the Foreign Ministry in New Delhi.

**What would be your immediate priority on reaching New York?**

My immediate priority will be to ensure the election of India as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. India has been conducting a strong campaign and it will be my endeavor to take this to its successful conclusion.

**You are also no stranger to the US since you had served as Counselor in the Indian Embassy in Washington DC. Did you interact with the Indian-American community then?**

Yes, I was posted in the Indian Embassy in Washington at an extremely interesting and important period in India-U.S. bilateral relations. Thanks to the leadership of Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President George Bush, our relations took a qualitative jump.

(Contd on page 30)

