

TRACKING COVID-19 CASES

Central teams in Bengal: visit off to rocky start, say state govt is not cooperating

Everyone busy, can't leave everything and move around with them, says Chief Secy

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA, ATRI MITRA & RITIKA CHOPRA
KOLKATA, NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

FROSTY TIES between the Centre and West Bengal came to the fore Tuesday as the two Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCTs) that landed in the state to assess its handling of the COVID-19 situation alleged non-cooperation by the state government, after which Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla shot off a letter to the Chief Secretary, asking him to comply with the MHA order.

Citing frequent lockdown violations in certain states, the Union Home Ministry had Sunday said teams would be sent to West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The two teams assigned to West Bengal arrived in the state Monday.

The north Bengal team could not move out Tuesday. The team in Kolkata stepped out in the morning only to be told by police to make a U-turn — they later visited parts of the city.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee hit the streets of Kolkata Tuesday afternoon, using a loudspeaker to ask people not to venture out of their homes.

Sources said the Kolkata team was scheduled to hold a meeting with Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha at 11 am, which was cancelled.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



Finally, around 4.30 pm, Sinha held a 30-minute meeting with the team at the BSF guesthouse at Gurusaday Road, where they have been put up.

The team, led by Apurva Chandra, additional secretary at the Department of Defence, was also provided a liaison officer by the state, following which it visited 5-6 areas in Kolkata, including Ballygunge, Tollygunj, Gariahat, Alipur, Kalighat and Bhawanipur.

The team, however, did not step out from the car for a physical inspection. "This was just a visual tour of how well the lockdown is being implemented in the city," said a team member, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

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Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited several places in Kolkata to create awareness about the coronavirus Tuesday. Express

Our orders are binding on you, even the Supreme Court said so: Home Ministry warns West Bengal

DEEPTIMANTI WARIY & ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

STATING IT had information that West Bengal was not cooperating with the Inter-Ministerial Central Teams sent to the state for assessment of the situation in Covid-hit districts, the Ministry of Home Affairs wrote to the state government Tuesday, reminding it that the Centre's orders were binding on the state.

The MHA recalled that

Supreme Court directions in the matter were on similar lines and asked West Bengal to provide all support to the IMCTs.

The ruling TMC reacted angrily, saying while states were fighting the coronavirus, the Centre was fighting states.

TMC leader Derek O'Brien, taking to Twitter, said: "States, incl Bengal, going all out — fighting Corona. Unfortunately, central govt is going all out — fighting the States! Is this the spirit of federalism? Is this what our Constitution says? Let's make

handling health emergency our priority. Politics can wait till winter."

In his letter to West Bengal, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said the IMCTs comprise public health specialists and officers of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), whose expertise can be leveraged by the state government for management of the pandemic.

"It has been brought to the notice of this Ministry that both the IMCTs, at Kolkata and Jalpaiguri respectively, have not

been provided with the requisite cooperation by the State and local authorities. In fact, they have been specifically restrained from making any visits, interacting with health professionals, and assessing the ground level situation," the letter stated.

"This amounts to obstructing the implementation of the Orders issued by the Central Government under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and equally binding directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Economy headed for contraction, less fiscal space for big stimulus

PVAIDYANATHAN IYER
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

AS THE Centre and states jostle over and grapple with strategies for a staggered exit from the lockdown, the country seems — for the first time in 40 years — headed for an economic contraction in 2020-21.

If that happens, it won't be unique to India — the IMF expects the Covid pandemic to severely impact growth across regions in its latest World Economic Outlook. It expects the US economy to shrink 5.9 per cent and the global economy to decelerate 3 per cent.

It's exactly three weeks since the new financial year commenced in India, and just a day since the Central government extended relaxations for resumption of economic activities in green zones and non-hotspots — regions where there are no positive cases and where cases are limited, respectively.

With tax revenues severely hit and borrowing costs shooting up by almost 200 basis points, some states want a more aggressive opening up, but it will be a while before the Centre is confident to let them do so. In less than a month, the virus has made its way

EXPLAINED Riding the storm

THE INDIAN economy was already slowing for two years when the Covid pandemic hit the world. With the Centre staring at a large revenue shock due to the lockdown and India's sovereign rating just a notch above 'speculative' grade, the government has little fiscal room to give a large stimulus. Unlike other crises, a pandemic results in a deep economic shock, but is normally followed by a strong recovery.

into 408 districts (about 55 per cent of all districts), and the Centre is keen to put its weight behind gains from containment in the trade-off between economic loss and spread of the pandemic.

As far as the direct hit to the economy is concerned, an economist who interacts with senior government officials on policy issues, said, "Basic calculation suggests that loss of 23 full working

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Work on Kharar-Mohali flyover restarted Tuesday. Jasbir Malhi

June, July will test resolve: top official in battle against Covid

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

IN THE first clear indication from a senior government functionary of how long the road ahead is, Dr V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, has said that India's resolve in the battle against the novel coronavirus will be tested in the months of June and July, after lockdown curbs have been eased.

"De-escalation of lockdown is potentially an opportunity for the virus to resurface and spread, and this is bound to happen to an extent," Dr Paul told *The Indian Express* in an interview. "There could be new clusters when life and activities become more normal."

The spread of the virus, he said, would be "inversely proportional

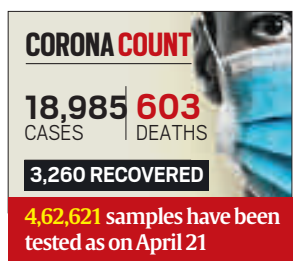
After complaints of faulty results, ICMR tells states not to use rapid tests for 2 days

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

FOLLOWING COMPLAINTS that the rapid antibody test kits are showing varying levels of accuracy, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has asked all states not to use the serological COVID-19 tests for the next two days, pending field validation by its teams.

"We have been getting complaints that when the serological tests are being done on the blood samples of people who have already tested positive in the RT-PCR test, the accuracy ranges from 6% to 71%. This is not a good thing and it needs to be investigated," Dr R R Gangakhedkar, head of epidemiology and infectious diseases at ICMR, said.

"This is a first generation test developed in just three-and-a-half months and needs refinement, yet the variations cannot be ignored. We will send personnel from eight institutes to the



field to validate the kits. Meanwhile, we have advised the states not to use the tests for the next two days till we come out with an advisory," he said.

Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, Lav Agarwal reiterated that the RT-PCR is the gold standard for COVID-19 diagnosis.

Ahead of the gradual lifting of the lockdown, the serological tests were to be used in hotspots, to test the population level exposure. On April 4, the ICMR had issued an advisory to start rapid tests in high density settings.

The rapid test, which uses blood samples instead of swabs,

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Energy major Schlumberger withdraws job offers to fresh IIT graduates

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

HAMMERED BY the global drop in oil demand due to Covid shutdowns and an oil price war, a premium recruiter working in oilfield services has withdrawn its job offers to graduating students across the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

Schlumberger, the world's largest oil-field-services com-

pany, wrote to the IITs on April 6 that it had decided to "reduce and withdraw some internship and graduate job opportunities in a bid to adjust to the "sudden reduction" in "customers spend".

"We will personally communicate our decision to each student who is affected by this decision," said the letter by Gautam Reddy, Managing Director, India and Bangladesh, Schlumberger.

Schlumberger is the second multinational company to re-

voke its IIT job offers. As first reported by *The Indian Express* on April 4, Gartner Inc, US-based research and advisory firm, was the first to rescind its offer to 11 students across IIT-Delhi, IIT-Kanpur and IIT-Madras.

Gartner's withdrawal, communicated on March 30, was seen as an early warning sign across campuses, with IITs fearing many more companies would rethink their placement offers.

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Putting all immigration on hold, tweets Trump; India waits for order, fine print

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

IN A move that has potential repercussions for Indians living and working in the US, President Donald Trump said he will "temporarily suspend" immigration into the country. With the COVID-19 pandemic set to trigger economic recession, Trump said the step would protect jobs for American nationals.

South Block sources told *The Indian Express* that it remains to be seen what category of visas will be suspended, and what will be the cut-off date. India is monitoring the developments in Washington related to this decision, sources said.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens. I will be signing an Executive

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WORLD



CORONAVIRUS VERY LIKELY OF ANIMAL ORIGIN, WHO SAYS

PAK HAS REMOVED LAKHVI FROM TERROR WATCHLIST, SAYS REPORT

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Industry says facing Covid penalty threat, seeks clarification

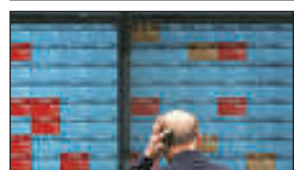
PRANAV MUKUL, AANCHAL MAGAZINE & PRABHA RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

A DAY after some industries were allowed to start functioning with conditions, both small and large companies in pockets across the country have said that the interpretation of punitive measures for violation of safety procedures is proving a big deterrent in resumption of operations.

While punitive norms are fine for units not following safety and sanitisation procedures, industry representatives say, they have raised red flags over action being prescribed by state and local authorities against companies and their owners in case any of their workers test positive for COVID-19.

In a set of suggestions sent to the government Tuesday, the CII asked it to clarify this, saying units were being threatened with up to three months of shutdown. The Gems and Jewellery

EXPLAINED



SIMPLY PUT WHY U.S. OIL BENCHMARK FELL BELOW ZERO

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Export Promotion Council called the guidelines too "harsh" in a representation to the Commerce Ministry.

Similar apprehensions were expressed by a number of small units at the Manesar auto hub, on the outskirts of the national capital, which too partially resumed operations on Monday. They said that even as the district administration was encouraging them to restart, authorities

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PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Delhi to Madhubani on a cart: 'Would not have survived lockdown'

SOMYA LAKHANI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

"BURE WAQT mein insaan ghar hi toh jaata hai, issme itni chaukaane wali kya baat hai (One heads home during tough times, what's so surprising about that?)" asks Mohd Samirul, speaking over the phone from Umgaon village in Bihar's Madhubani district. The 38-year-old father of four, a porter in Delhi's Sadar Bazaar, can't understand the fuss around his journey back home from the national capital to his village — 1,180 km away — in a thela

(wooden cart) that he cycled for nine days.

Around 3 pm on March 23, the day Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced the lockdown in Delhi, around 50 porters from Sadar Bazaar, Azad Market and Bhagirath Palace decided to cycle back to their villages in Bihar. Samirul was one of them. On March 25, when the nationwide lockdown began, the group was still on their way back home, unaware for several hours as they pedalled their way across towns.

"I packed two blankets, my Nokia phone and charger, a jug to fill water and Rs 700, and left

in the evening. There was no other option. We were okay with the one-day lockdown on March 22, but when it extended it, I knew I wouldn't survive it. If we don't earn, how will we eat? On March 26, we found out that the lockdown had been implemented in the whole country and that even back home there will be no work. That was sad, but we know it's needed to stop this disease," he says.

On March 30, he reached his village, Umgaon in Madhubani district, and was put in quarantine for 14 days at a medical college nearby. "The children visited me daily with chai and breakfast,



Mohd Samirul, 38, rode his thela home in nine days. Express

which they would keep on the floor outside. On April 13, I finally entered my house," he says.

Samirul moved to Delhi in search of work 19 years ago. Having never been to school, he felt being a wage labourer was his only option, and big markets in the capital looked for young men like him who could toil for long hours. By 2002, Samirul had found a footing in Azad Market as a porter. "I earn Rs 200 a day, sometimes Rs 500, sometimes nothing at all. I carry stacks of geometry boxes from godowns to shops, from shops to other shops in Sadar Bazaar and Azad Market. If I don't get work for two

days in a row, I have to sleep hungry... This lockdown was for weeks, how would I have survived?" he says.

On March 23, Samirul left from Sadar Bazaar with other thelawalas and reached Kashmere Gate ISBT. From there, the men cycled to UP's Ghaziabad, then Etawah, Kanpur, Lucknow and Gorakhpur. From there, they entered Bihar's Gopalganj, then Muzaffarpur, and Darbhanga before parting ways.

Four days after Samirul stepped into his home, former Congress leader Shakeel Ahmad visited the family and gave them

25-kg ration. "For now, it's enough, but we want to work. I have no agricultural land, I am just a daily wage. When this is over, I will go back to Delhi with my cart," he says.

It was three months ago that Samirul had bought the thela for Rs 4,500, and this was his means of earning a livelihood as well as a home in Delhi. With no roof over his head, he is one of the hundreds who sleep on the footpath or their carts outside shops in Sadar Bazaar and Azad Market.

"I slept in it, I kept all my belongings on it, and cooked on the

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THE BEST OF RR VS SRH OVER THE YEARS

Winners of inaugural season Rajasthan have won 5 out of 11 matches against SunRisers Hyderabad so far in the IPL

VIDEO OF THE DAY



AUTO DRIVER GIVES FREE RIDES TO NEEDY

Doing it for free amid lockdown conditions, says Sheetal

PHOTO GALLERY



J&K TULIP GARDEN IS IN FULL BLOOM

A deserted Tulip Garden in Srinagar amid the lockdown

EXPRESS AUDIO

How the US oil prices crashed

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode of the 3 Things podcast, we take a look at what led to the US oil prices crashing and whether this will impact India

UAPA against Umar Khalid and Jamia activists over riots in Northeast Delhi

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL & PRITAM PAL SINGH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

DAYS AFTER arresting Jamia student and Chhatra Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) member Meeran Haider and media coordinator of the Jamia Coordination Committee Safoora Zargar on charges of conspiracy in connection with the February Northeast Delhi riots, the Delhi Police's Special Cell has booked them under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Former Jawaharlal Nehru University student leader Umar Khalid and a local resident of Northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura, Danish, have also been booked under the same Act.

Haider's counsel Akram Khan confirmed that police have added the UAPA against his client and others named in the FIR. He said the accused were initially booked under Sections 147, 148, 149 and 120B of the IPC. Later, police had added Sections 124A (sedition), 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), and 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, etc.).

Zargar had been arrested on April 13, with police claiming she was among those who organised an anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protest and road blockade under the Jafrabad Metro Station in Delhi on February 22-23. The protest had led to a pro-CAA rally by Kapil Mishra and his supporters, following which riots broke out in the district.

Akram said he had filed a bail application for Haider, which was listed for hearing on Monday. "But after we were informed that UAPA charges have been slapped against Haider, we withdrew the bail application and will file it at a later stage, once written communication is received from police," he said, adding that Haider is currently in judicial custody. Zargar, too, is in judicial custody.

Sources told The Indian Express that one of the reasons police invoked the UAPA against the two is "alleged links with the Popular Front of India (PFI)". "More arrests are likely in the coming days," an officer said. Sections 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the UAPA (dealing with terrorist acts or funding) have been invoked against them.

According to police, the initial FIR was registered on March 6 based on information provided by an informer to sub-inspector Arvind Kumar of the narcotics unit of the Crime Branch. As per the FIR, Kumar said the informer told him that the February 23-25 communal violence in Northeast Delhi was a "premeditated conspiracy", allegedly hatched by Khalid, Danish and two others associated with different organisations.

"Khalid allegedly gave provocative speeches at two different places and appealed to the citizens to come out on streets and block the roads during the visit of US President Donald Trump to spread propaganda at the international level about how minorities in India are being persecuted," the FIR states.

Kumar has alleged in the FIR that as part of the conspiracy, firearms, petrol bombs, acid bottles and stones were stored at homes in Kardampuri, Jafrabad, Chand Bagh, Gokulpuri, Shiv Vihar and nearby areas. After the Special Investigation Team of the Special Cell took over the probe to look into the alleged conspiracy, Zargar and Haider too were booked.

FROM PAGE ONE

V K Paul

to our collective compliance with the best practices. We cannot afford to fritter away the lockdown gains made at a phenomenal economic cost and hardship. We have to keep the virus transmission under check and ensure that no new peaks appear. June and July will test our resolve."

The lifting of the lockdown after May 3 would be a "phased and nuanced affair", he said.

Dr Paul, a former professor of paediatrics at AIIMS, is one of the most important people in the planning and execution of the government's COVID management plan. Apart from his position in the NITI Aayog, he chairs the Empowered Group constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the medical emergency management plan, and is a member of the Empowered Group on strategic issues related to the lockdown, which is headed by Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla — the only person who is a part of the two Empowered Groups.

Dr Paul is also co-chair — along with Principal Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister K VijayRaghavan — of a task force that coordinating among science agencies, scientists, industries, and regulatory bodies to take speedy decisions on research and development related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 disease.

"An empowered task force is making sure that all efforts are made to develop an indigenous vaccine in the near future. India will not miss any opportunity to be the global hub for vaccine development and manufacturing," Dr Paul said.

"ICMR has created a clinical research network and a registry to serve as a platform for trials on various therapeutic modalities. These include studying the use of convalescent plasma, plasma exchange, and drugs such as remdesivir etc., when available. ICMR laboratories are also examining the potential of novel drug molecules for their effect on the virus," he added.

Rapid tests

checks for the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) by ascertaining whether the person has developed antibodies against it. It takes less than 30 minutes. The swab test, on the other hand, comprises two steps — a screening test and a confirmatory test — and takes 8-9 hours. However, there have been concerns about the accuracy of rapid tests.

While most of the rapid test kits are part of the batch received by the Centre from China last week, some states also procured these kits on their own.

Gangakhedkar said that if most of the kits were faulty, the ICMR would ask for replacements.

Meanwhile, with 1,329 new cases and 44 deaths being reported in the last 24 hours, the tally is now 18,985 cases (3,259 recovered) and 603 deaths. So far, 4,49,810 samples have been tested, including 35,852 in the last 24 hours.

In its advisory earlier this month, the ICMR had said: "As a matter of abundant precaution, all symptomatic influenza like illness (ILI) persons should be advised home quarantine for 14 days. At facility level, symptomatic ILI individuals to be tested using rapid antibody tests."

It said that if the test is positive, "after clinical assessment, treatment in hospital or isolation as per protocol. Action as per protocol to be initiated for contact tracing. If symptoms worsen, refer to designated COVID-19 hospitals. When home quarantine is not feasible, consider facility-based quarantine".

The World Health Organisation (WHO), however, has said that the tests should be used only in research settings and

not for the purpose of controlling the epidemic in the field.

The Health Ministry has issued guidelines for non-COVID hospitals in case a COVID patient turns up. The ministry also tried to allay fears over the high number of asymptomatic cases by quoting WHO, which says that there is no documented case of asymptomatic transmission so far.

Dr Gangakhedkar said that 69% of COVID-19 patients in India have been asymptomatic so far, tested because of contact history or other criteria.

IIT job offers

HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and IIT-Delhi Director Ramgopal Rao had even publicly appealed to companies in the first week of April not to withdraw offers.

Schlumberger's decision has affected at least one student at IIT-Delhi, who was offered a junior field engineer role, and one at IIT-Bombay. The IIT-Kanpur student, who had secured a job at Schlumberger Pune Technology Centre (PUTC), has been offered a similar profile at Schlumberger Pune Indian Technology Centre (PITC) at a lower pay package. A similar offer is learned to have been made to a student at IIT-Madras.

Parag Deshpande, vice-chairperson of the Career Development Centre at IIT-Kharagpur, said, "We were made some offers (by Schlumberger). As on date, none of the offers were revoked." When asked if IIT-Kharagpur had received the April 6 letter, he added, "That was a generic email. We haven't heard back from them."

Speaking to The Indian Express Tuesday, Reddy confirmed that offers made to students at IITs stand cancelled. "Last Friday, our global CEO (while announcing the first quarter 2020 results) had clearly said in North America we expect our customer spend to go down by 40% and globally by 15%. It's unprecedented."

"We have a longstanding relationship with the IITs. I am from IIT-Bombay. Recruiting from IITs is a continuous process for us. At this point in time, when we are doing business restructuring, it's just not fair for our current employees (to hire more people). We have to take care of them first. It's as simple as this. Everyone starting from the top management has taken a pay cut within the company," he added.

Asked what this means for job offers made to IIT students this year, he said, "As of now we have withdrawn them. If the business climate changes, we will be the first to reach out to (students) who have been filtered through the whole (recruitment) process."

Schlumberger cut its shareholder dividend 75 per cent and is restructuring businesses to cope with the steepest drop in demand in the energy sector in decades. The Covid pandemic has resulted in a historic energy rout. On Monday, US oil prices tumbled negative for the first time — crashing from \$18 a barrel to -\$38.

Madhubani

footpath. Due to the disease, there was very little work anyway, and I was running out of food supplies and money. I only had enough to survive two days. I didn't know who would feed me," he says.

As Samirul and the other men traversed across towns and villages, empty highways and roads, they were only stopped by police for temperature checks, and sometimes even offered food. "No one stopped us, they knew we had nowhere to go except home. The policemen have homes and families, after all. Some would use a machine to check for fever, others would tell us where to get food — sometimes outside a school nearby. Police and volunteers would tell us to sit far away from each other and eat. Police told us

Central teams' visit off to rocky start

Asked about the team's first impression of the lockdown implementation, the member said, "It seemed 90% effective."

The team did not give any feedback to the state government after the visual tour. According to sources, the team has specifically requested the Chief Secretary to arrange for a visit to COVID hospitals, quarantine centres and containment zones. "No assurances have been made on that request," the member said.

The teams have been asked to monitor the outbreak in four districts — namely Kolkata, Howrah, 24 Parganans North and Medinipur.

Asked how long are the ICMTs expected to stay in West Bengal, a team member said, "It depends on how the state government starts cooperating. We have wasted almost two days without doing any meaningful work."

The two ICMTs have been tasked to monitor the implementation of the MHA guidelines during the lockdown period in the seven identified districts, testing, contact tracing of suspected cases and availability of hospital supplies, and preparedness of the health infrastructure, among other things.

On Monday, the day the team landed, the members had visited the office of the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases in the city's Belegata area and held a meeting with the Chief Secretary at Nabanna, the state secretariat.

In Siiliguri, the five-member team led by Vineet Joshi, Additional Secretary at the HRD Ministry, remained stationed at the guesthouse of the frontier headquarters of the Shashastra Sena Bal. Till reports last came in, they were unable to move out.

During his evening press briefing, Chief Secretary Sinha said the administration was "cooperating" with the teams, but also reminded that the Central teams should have informed the state of their arrival in a "proper manner".

"Yesterday, Chandra and his team member held a meeting with me. Today, I went and spoke with them at the BSF guesthouse. We said we will give them a nodal officer. They went out for a survey today. However, our stand is that the Centre should have contacted us first and then sent the teams. They wanted to go around Kolkata. One officer from Kolkata Police also accompanied them. We have asked them to take all precautions while visiting areas. We advised them to stay in the car and if they wanted to move about on foot, they must alert the police first. We provided

them with all the information. We believe in cooperation between the Central and state government. However, it is not wise to blame only the state. Both sides should show discipline," said Sinha.

On the team at North Bengal, Sinha said, "I spoke with the team a number of times. Our stand is that there is a protocol. If a Central team comes, they will have to meet the Chief Secretary. We hoped they would first meet us and then move to North Bengal. The protocol has been breached. However, we have provided all information they sought."

When asked about Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla's letter to Sinha, asking him to comply with the MHA order, Sinha said, "Everyone is busy now. We are cooperating. But we cannot leave everything and move around with the Central teams."

Our orders binding: MHA warns Bengal

"You are, therefore, directed to comply with the MHA Order dated April 19, 2020 and make all necessary arrangements for the ICMTs to carry out such responsibilities as have been entrusted to them vide the aforesaid Order," the letter stated.

On Monday, the MHA sent

letters to West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan — all ruled by the Opposition — and Madhya Pradesh, saying that lockdown measures were being routinely flouted in their districts, and it was sending six newly constituted ICMTs for on-the-spot assessment of the situation there.

The ICMTs, headed by Additional Secretary rank officers, will submit a report to the Centre. They have been authorised to issue necessary directions to state authorities for redressal.

Referring to lockdown violations, the MHA, in identical letters to the four states,

said: "These incidents, if they are allowed to occur without any restraining measures in hotspot districts or emerging hotspots, with large outbreaks or clusters, pose a serious health hazard, both for the population of these districts and for that living in other areas of the country."

that we shouldn't go home straight away. They told us to call the village pradhan and tell him we were en route, so we could be kept away from everyone for 14 days. There were so many of us that we found support in each other — we were neither sad nor bored. Haste-gaate pahuch gaye Darbhanga tak (We laughed and sang our way to Darbhanga)," says Samirul. For three-four hours, at a stretch, the group would ride the cart, and then stop for water and food or to rest.

After Darbhanga, many of them went towards Samastipur, while Samirul cycled alone till his village. "My work in Delhi is such that the sun doesn't sting, sweat doesn't bother me and I don't tire easily. We are the thelwalas of Sadar Bazaar; we have endured far harsher challenges, this was easy in comparison," he says.

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green cards and work visas could come as early as the next few days, The New York Times reported.

According to the report, the Trump administration would no longer approve any applications from foreigners to live and work in the US for an undetermined period of time — effectively shutting down the legal immigration system in the same way that the US President has advocated closing the borders to illegal immigration.

"Workers who have for years received visas to perform specialized jobs in the United States would also be denied permission to arrive, though workers in some industries deemed critical could be exempted from the ban..." The New York Times reported.

The number of visas issued to foreigners looking to immigrate to the US has declined by about 25 per cent in the past three years, from 617,752 in 2016 to 462,422 in the 2019 fiscal year, it said.

Of the H1B visa holders, Indians are one of the biggest beneficiaries. In 2019 fiscal year, 2,78,491 Indians were granted H1B visas out of 3,88,403 — 71.7 per cent. China was a distant second with 13 per cent, followed by Canada at 1.2 per cent.

Economy

days (excluding weekends) due to lockdown in this financial year beginning April 1 will knock off that much, approximately 6.5 per cent, from total output." In other words, he said, the Indian economy will almost certainly shrink.

But even that's only on paper. "It is quite difficult to assess how the economy will react when the lights, which were turned off March 24 midnight, and remain so for 40 days (almost six weeks), are switched on again," a senior official said. There are many variables: consumer behaviour post lockdown, fear of infection, persistence of social distancing, risk aversion at firm and individual level, the pandemic curve itself, and finally the depth and breadth of government intervention through fiscal measures, and RBI support on the monetary and credit front.

While the fine print of the US executive order is still awaited, it is being widely seen as Trump flagging in what could potentially be a global trend as countries deal with a job losses and a battered economy.

A formal order temporarily barring the provision of new

will play out), which render the exercise of making projections irrelevant. "In the middle of a storm, it is hard to make any assessment, because the task at hand is to ride the storm. Any kind of accuracy will be misleading," the official told The Indian Express, without wishing to be named.

For instance, Goldman Sachs Economics Research revised its India projections thrice since February 2019 when it believed India's real GDP would grow 6 per cent in 2020-21. Mid-March, this was revised to 5.2 per cent, on April 7 to 1.6 per cent and, within 10 days, on April 16, it presented a recessionary outlook: India will contract 0.4 per cent in the current financial year. Global financial services firm, Nomura, said the direct economic loss due to the lockdown is likely to be around 7.5 per cent of GDP, estimating the economy to contract 0.4 per cent this year.

And certainly, this will not be their last projection, with more than 11 months to go. But Goldman Sachs expects a sharp recovery in the second half of the current financial year itself. It expects the lockdown — which is among the most restrictive in the region — to reduce the rate of new infections over the next four-six weeks.

A flattening of the infection curve, its adaptation by consumers and businesses, combined with continuation of easier fiscal, monetary, and credit policies, should set the stage for a recovery starting the third quarter, it says.

IMF, on the other hand, estimates a sharp V-shaped recovery in 2021-22 to 7.4 per cent compared with 1.9 per cent in 2020-21. "Unlike a financial crisis or natural disaster, a pandemic causes a deep shock, and is followed by a strong recovery, but there may be some permanent loss of output," an economist said.

The impact of an almost six-week lockdown until May 3, with the persistence of social distancing thereafter, and the knock-on effect of these two, will most likely see the Indian economy decelerate in 2020-21, said another analyst with a leading global financial services group. "After the lockdown is lifted, it will definitely not

stimulus developed economies have pledged. "Many SMEs may just go out of business... Only the government can spend, and leaning on the side of fiscal prudence, especially when lockdown is crucial to prevent the spread of infection, may do irreparable damage," said one of the analysts.

But a government official said that India, unfortunately, cannot spend like developed economies. "With a BBB- sovereign rating, we still are investment grade. And unlike 2008 when the government's fisc was in order and it could manage to give a massive stimulus, it doesn't have the cushion now. One notch below BBB-, and India will slip into 'speculative' grade rating," he said.

As the government prepares a second fiscal package, officials said, it is also acutely aware that its own revenues will take a hit of about 2-3 per cent of GDP. "This itself will require the Centre to borrow more. The idea will be to try to protect the vulnerable groups, minimise job losses, keep the financial system stable, and prevent firm closures. It will be sharply focused," the official said, suggesting it may not be the sprawling safety net many have asked for.

Industry hinted at punitive action if any worker tested positive for coronavirus. In its letter to the government, the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) said, "Local administrations are insisting that there will be criminal charge on the establishments with order for three months shutdown if anyone in the establishment is found to be testing positive. Establishments can be held responsible for violating spatial or sanitary norms, but not if someone in the company gets COVID. This needs to be clearly directed from the Central to all state governments."

The Engineering Export Promotion Council of India, which has 13,000 members across India, said only 10-15% of them were in the process of opening up operations, while 40-50% are awaiting permits from states. "But, even if these companies get permission, they are hesitant to start and might hold back until they get clarity on whether this clause (for punitive action) is explained, deleted or enforced," Chairman Ravi Sehgal said.

Such a clause could make efforts to restart operations in export-oriented sectors a "non starter", especially for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), he added. "We can follow all the guidelines set forth by the Home Ministry, but penalties or punishment for owners in the event a case is found should be removed. Instead, the government should cooperate with such owners further to take corrective action."

Owners of small businesses are also concerned over the instruction to offer residential facilities to workers, so as to ensure they are not exposed to the virus, saying this might not be possible for them unlike larger units. KE Raghunathan, a Chennai-based SME owner and former national president of the All India Manufacturers' Organisation, said, "In reality, the relaxations have not helped the MSMEs. With six main industrial states — Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka and Delhi — not allowing resumption of work, raw material supply and finding labour are issues. Almost 80% of MSMEs situated in non-confinement areas have been able to open. In the rest, only about 20-23% workers turned up and carried out just preparatory work."

Raghunathan also asked how the factory owners were supposed to make arrangements for workers to stay on the premises with no shop open for supply of even bedding.

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3 THE OUTBREAK WEST BENGAL

29 FRESH CASES

7 DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

713 TESTS IN 24 HRS

1 killed as thunderstorm hits state

3 more deaths, toll climbs to 15

Will ramp up rapid testing soon: Chief Secy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 21

THREE MORE deaths due to the novel coronavirus were reported in the state, taking the toll to 15, Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said on Tuesday.

With 29 more positive cases, the number of active cases rose from 245 to 274, said the official. However, according to data on the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website, 392 people in the state have contracted the disease till date, and 73 have been discharged from hospitals after being cured, putting the number of active cases at 319.

At a press conference, Sinha said: "The state government today focussed on hotspots in seven districts—Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, North and South 24 Parganas, Nadia, and West Bardhaman."

The Chief Secretary told reporters that health officials started rapid testing from Tuesday, and collected 220 samples from different containment areas. "We are expecting that the number will increase soon," Sinha added.

He pointed out that since Monday "the quantum of sample tested had jumped to 713 and cumulative total sample tested went up to 6,182".

From Wednesday, the number of samples tested is expected to increase since one laboratory each at Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute (CNCI) in Rajarhat, and RG Kar Medical College and Hospital would also start examining specimens.

The Chief Secretary said many students from the state were stuck in the city of Kota in Rajasthan, but added it was not possible to bring them back at the moment.

"The guardians are repeatedly asking us to get back those students," Sinha told reporters. "We think this is not desirable in this situation. I will talk to the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan, and also our nodal officer PB Salim will talk to their nodal officer Shreya Guha. The logistic support needed to get them back is not possible in this situation. We have requested them to stay there some more days."

The Chief Secretary said the government was doing everything possible to maintain the lockdown. "We are monitoring the situation round the clock," he added. "We booked 28,000 people for violating the lockdown. We also seized 3,000 vehicles, and filed cases against 3,100 people."

At the moment, 5,016 people are in government quarantine, and 33,205 people are in home quarantine, according to the government.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited some containment areas here such as Rajarhat, Park Circus, and Metiabruz, and urged people to maintain the lockdown.

Work with Centre to avoid conflict, Governor tells CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 21

GOVERNOR JAGDEEP Dhankar on Tuesday requested Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to cooperate with the Centre and avoid confrontation amid the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Governor's statement came a day after Banerjee lashed out at the Centre for sending its teams to the state to assess the implementation of the ongoing lockdown without prior confirmation.

"My appeal to all: Support government @MamataOfficial to contain and combat corona curse," Dhankar tweeted. "My request to CM Mamata Banerjee to synergistically cooperate with the Central Team @PMOIndia to wean away the miseries of people. Cooperation and not confrontation between Centre and State must."

Six inter-ministerial central teams (IMCTs) have been constituted to assess if lockdown and



A municipal worker delivers vegetables to a family in a containment zone in Dum Dum on Tuesday. Partha Paul

Central team at its door, state cranks up stay-home vigil in Kolkata's red zones

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, APRIL 21

"ALL THE people are advised to stay inside their homes. If you need any essential items, let us know. We will send them to your doorstep. Don't violate the lockdown or else legal action will be taken against you," blared a public announcement system held by a policeman at Raja Bazar junction in north Kolkata on Tuesday.

One of the red zones in Kolkata, Raza Bazar area was barricaded and was teeming with a large posse of policemen. Streets were deserted.

However, Saturday was different as people were seen violating the lockdown. Residents in the area told The Indian Express that police presence had intensified since Monday - the day an inter-ministerial central teams (IMCT),

Most of Hooghly classified as containment zone

Kolkata: Most parts of Hooghly district have been designated as containment zones by the state government to curb the spread of coronavirus, a senior official said on Tuesday.

All wards of the municipalities of Uttarpara Kotrung, Dankuni, Serampore, Rishra, Konnagar, Baidyabati, Champadani, Chandannagar, Bhadreshwar have been identified as COVID-19 containment zones, he said.

The gram panchayats of Raghunathpur in Serampore

sent by the Central government, arrived here to review the state's handling of novel coronavirus. The city police has adopted a proactive approach to enforce the lockdown. Around 12.30 pm, Joint CP (crime) Murlidhar Sharma visited Raja Bazar Junction and gave directions to on-duty policemen.

"Since yesterday, we have been seeing a lot of activities by police. This was missing since red zones were identified. Today, police are not allowing anyone to venture out of their homes without a valid reason," said Imran Hafeez, a resident of the area.

Doctors with rapid test kits also visited the area for tests.

In other red zones too, police presence has been scaled up and lockdown compliance strictly monitored.

At Beckbagan Row in central Kolkata, a large number of po-

licemen were seen manning the barricades to seal the area. No one without emergency was allowed to exit the area while outsiders were barred from entering it. "We have been asked to strictly enforce the lockdown," said an on-duty police officer.

At Belgachia in north Kolkata, policemen were deployed on both sides of RG Kar Road. The slum at the foot of Belgachia flyover has been sealed following a number of COVID-19 positive cases and rapid test samples were taken on Monday.

"The surveillance has increased since Monday. More policemen arrived early morning. People are willingly taking part in the rapid test which was done yesterday. This will continue. The entire area has been cordoned off and people have stopped violating the lockdown," said Shahid Akhtar, a resident who runs a medicine shop in Belgachia.

Uttarpara block, Kumirmora, Bhagwatiapur, Haripur of Chanditala block, Garalgacha and Barjhati of Chanditala II, Mundalika, Kotalpur and Dilakhas under the Hooghly (Rural) Police District have also been identified as containment areas, according to an order issued by the office of the district magistrate.

Areas under the gram panchayats of Rashidpur, Rajbalhat I, Rajbalhat II of Jangipara block are also containment zones, the order stated.

A senior district administration official said the restrictions were imposed as a precaution even though not too many cases had been reported from Hooghly. "Nobody will be allowed to go out, and nobody will be allowed to come in," the official added.

No government or private office will be allowed to open in these areas. Only a few private and commercial establishments such as IT and ITES, e-commerce of essential goods, banks can function with 25% manpower. PTI

Howrah-Jabalpur-Howrah Parcel Express Train					
Eastern Railway will run Howrah-Jabalpur-Howrah Parcel Express train for COVID-19 pandemic. Timing and other details are as under:					
Howrah-Jabalpur		Station	Jabalpur-Howrah		
Arrival (hrs.)	Departure (hrs.)		Arrival (hrs.)	Departure (hrs.)	
-	21.00	Howrah	02.30	-	-
21.30	21.35	Srirampore	01.00	01.05	-
22.00	22.05	Bardhaman	00.30	00.35	-
23.05	23.10	Bardhaman	23.25	23.30	-
23.50	23.55	Durgapur	22.25	22.30	-
00.45	00.55	Asansol	21.45	21.55	-
01.50	01.55	Medinipur	20.15	20.20	-
02.25	02.30	Jasidih	19.40	19.45	-
06.40	06.50	Patna Jn.	15.50	16.00	-
11.15	11.30	Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn.	11.15	11.30	-
12.40	12.45	Varanasi	09.55	10.00	-
15.20	15.40	Prayagraj	05.50	06.10	-
20.27	20.32	Kairi	00.25	00.30	-
21.50	-	Jabalpur	-	23.10	-

Days and Dates of run : From Howrah 27.04.2020 (Monday). From Jabalpur 29.04.2020 (Wednesday). Composition : 5 VP and 2 SLR. Parcel has to be loaded/unloaded within allowed halt. All commercial rules to be followed as per latest extant policy. No passenger shall be allowed to enter these trains.

Chief Passenger Transportation Manager
EASTERN RAILWAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, APRIL 21

THUNDERSQUALL AND heavy rain lashed Kolkata and some other districts as the Met department on Tuesday forecast enhanced thunderstorm activity across the state till April 24 owing to the formation of low pressure.

A 50-year-old man, identified as Haru Bagdi of Mann village in Bankura's Barjora area, was killed in a lightning strike while returning from the field amid the heavy rainfall Monday evening, district officials said.

Strong winds uprooted trees and lampposts in several areas across the state, besides hail af-



Sinfectant being sprayed in Nadia, Tuesday. PTI

fecting fruits and vegetables in fields. Farmers said they fear huge losses as the hailstorm will affect crops such as mango, blackberry and watermelon.

Dum Dum airport area in Kolkata recorded 44.4 mm rainfall till 8.30 am on Tuesday over

a 24-hour period, while the highest precipitation in the state was at Barrackpore at 57 mm, the Met said.

Owing to the presence of a trough of low pressure over eastern UP and Bihar and strong moisture incursion from the Bay of Bengal, enhanced thunderstorms along with lightning, moderate rainfall and gusty wind will occur over the districts of West Bengal from Tuesday to Friday, the weatherman said in its forecast.

The other places that recorded moderate to heavy rainfall during the 24-hour period were Burdwan (48.8 mm), Bankura (42.4 mm), Panagarh (28.4 mm), Jalpaiguri (21.8 mm) and Salt Lake (15.4 mm), the Met said.

GOVT. OF BIHAR
BIHAR COMBINED ENTRANCE COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION BOARD
I.A.S. Association Building, Near Patna Airport, Patna-14.

POST GRADUATE MEDICAL ADMISSION COUNSELLING (PGMAC)-2020 for MD / MS & MDS in Government / Private Medical / Dental colleges of Bihar

Advt. No. - BCECEB(PGMAC)-2020/03 Dated : 21.04.2020
Important Notice regarding Preponement of Schedules of PGMAC-2020

In continuation to Advertisement No. BCECEB(PGMAC)-2020/01 & 2020/02 Dated : 17.04.2020 it is informed to PGMAC-2020 candidates, NEET(PG)-2020 candidates and all concerned that the schedules published for filling Online Application for PGMAC-2020 is hereby preponed in the light of Notice Ref. No. F.No.U-12021/44/2020-21 MEC dt. 17.04.2020 of office of ADG(ME), Directorate General of Health Services, Medical Counselling Committee, Government of India and rescheduled accordingly as given below:

Important Rescheduled dates for PGMAC-2020 :

Sl.	Particulars	Earlier published Schedule Date	Re-scheduled Date
(i)	Online Registration Closing Date	28.04.2020 (11:59 P.M.)	25.04.2020 (11:00 P.M.)
(ii)	Last date of payment through Challan after submission of Online Application form of Registered candidate	29.04.2020 (Upto Banking hour)	24.04.2020 (Upto Banking hour)
(iii)	Last date of payment through Net Banking/ Debit Card/ Credit Card after submission of the Online Application Form of Registered Candidate	30.04.2020 (11:59 P.M.)	25.04.2020 (11:59 P.M.)
(iv)	Online Editing of Application Form	01.05.2020 to 02.05.2020 (11.59 P.M.)	26.04.2020 (11:59 P.M.)
(v)	Publication of Rank Card/ Merit List	04.05.2020 (8:00 P.M.)	28.04.2020
(vi)	Proposed date of Online Choice filling	To be notified later on	30.04.2020 to 01.05.2020
(vii)	Publication of Seat Allotment Result	-	02.05.2020
(viii)	Reporting through web portal	-	03.05.2020 to 04.05.2020

2. Others informations and conditions of earlier published Advertisement shall remain same.
3. This advertisement is also available on BCECEB Board website : bceceboard.bihar.gov.in
Controller of Examination

जयपुर विकास प्राधिकरण, जयपुर
ई-नीलामी कार्यक्रम मई-2020 (प्रथम)

क्र.सं.	सम्पत्ति का विवरण	क्षेत्रफल (वर्गमीटर)	अमानत राशि (रु.)	बोली प्रारम्भ करने की दर (रु.प्र.व.मी.)	अमानत राशि जमा करने एवं बोली प्रारम्भ करने की दिनांक	अमानत राशि जमा करने की अन्तिम दिनांक	बोली समाप्ति की दिनांक
1	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. डी-274, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	162	110160	34000	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
2	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. ए-395, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	264	179520	34000	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
3	मिश्रित उपयोग भूखण्ड सं. ए-253, चित्रकूट योजना, सैक्टर-4, जयपुर	48	72000	75000	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
4	दुकान भूखण्ड सं. सी-131-बी, लालकोठी योजना, जयपुर	13.93	153230	550000	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
5	मिश्रित उपयोग भूखण्ड सं. 10/ओबीजी/130 (कॉर्नर), रिंग रोड परियोजना, ग्राम : वगराना	137.11	49360	18000	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
6	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. ए-43, सालिगरामपुरा, जयपुर	273	83000	15200	22/04/2020	05/05/2020	06/05/2020
7	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. बी-202, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	264	179520	34000	22/04/2020	06/05/2020	07/05/2020
8	दुकान भूखण्ड सं. सी-131-सी, लालकोठी योजना, जयपुर	13.93	153230	550000	22/04/2020	06/05/2020	07/05/2020
9	मिश्रित उपयोग भूखण्ड सं. 10/ओबीजी/196 (कॉर्नर) रिंग रोड परियोजना, ग्राम: लखेसरा	125.45	41400	16500	22/04/2020	06/05/2020	07/05/2020
10	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. ए-220, सालिगरामपुरा योजना, जयपुर	252	76610	15200	22/04/2020	06/05/2020	07/05/2020
11	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. डी-308, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	162	110160	34000	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
12	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. डी-324, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	264	179520	34000	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
13	मिश्रित उपयोग भूखण्ड सं. ए-257, चित्रकूट योजना, सैक्टर-4, जयपुर	48	72000	75000	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
14	दुकान भूखण्ड सं. सी-131-डी(एससी), लालकोठी योजना, जयपुर	13.93	153230	550000	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
15	मिश्रित उपयोग भूखण्ड सं. 10/ओबीजी/222 (कॉर्नर) रिंग रोड परियोजना, ग्राम लखेसरा	124.17	40980	16500	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
16	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. बी-157, सालिगरामपुरा योजना, जयपुर	128	38920	15200	22/04/2020	12/05/2020	13/05/2020
17	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. डी-333, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	264	179520	34000	22/04/2020	13/05/2020	14/05/2020
18	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. ई-237, गोविन्दपुरा, करधनी योजना, जयपुर	324	220320	34000	22/04/2020	13/05/2020	14/05/2020
19	दुकान भूखण्ड सं. 6, विद्याधर नगर, सैक्टर-6, ब्लॉक-2, जयपुर	40.50	101250	125000	22/04/2020	13/05/2020	14/05/2020
20	आवासीय भूखण्ड सं. बी-23, सालिगरामपुरा योजना, जयपुर	252	76610	15200	22/04/2020	13/05/2020	14/05/2020

नीलामी की मुख्य शर्तों के लिए जयपुर विकास प्राधिकरण की वेबसाइट www.jda.urban.rajasthan.gov.in पर देखें।
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THE OUTBREAK NATION

India moves to procure more test kits from Korean firms

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

WITH CHINESE testing kits having come under the scanner, India is stepping up procurement and production of testing kits from South Korean companies.

Officials on Tuesday said that a South Korean company has agreed to make and supply 5 lakh rapid antibody testing kits at its facility in Manesar, Haryana.

India's ambassador to South Korea Sripriya Ranganathan visited the firm's — SD Biosensor — facility in north Chungcheong province in South Korea and has tied up the arrangements. The company has decided to manufacture these kits in a week, and will make more in the next few weeks.

This comes as the ICMR on Tuesday advised states not to use the testing kits for the next two days, stating that it will issue an advisory after medical teams carry out field validation of the kits. Besides, India is procuring another 5 lakh coronavirus testing kits from South Korea to meet their growing demand in view of rising cases of the infection. The Indian embassy in Seoul inked a deal with South Korean pharma giant Humasis Ltd to procure the kits, sources said. The company is sourcing raw materials for production of the testing kits from India, officials said.

Nalanda new hotspot in Bihar

Patna: While Bihar seems to have been able to contain coronavirus cases in hotspots of Siwan, Begusarai, Munger and Nawada districts, Nalanda has emerged as a new challenge for the state government, with the maximum number of active cases in the state reported from the district.

Of 28 cases reported from Nalanda, 26 are active ones, 16 of them reported from Biharsharif on Monday itself. Siwan has so far reported 29 cases, and 17 patients have been discharged. Officials said the Nalanda district administration, which has sealed almost the entire Biharsharif town, has taken 1,327 samples for testing. Of this, results of 493 samples are awaited. **ENS**

'Consider pandemic extinguished only when it subsides worldwide'

NITI Aayog member Dr V K PAUL tells ABANTIKA GHOSH what's next in India's fight against COVID-19

Have the results of the first three weeks of lockdown been along expected lines?

The effect of the first three weeks of lockdown is now clearly visible. India has succeeded in flattening the curve. If we look back, we started with a case doubling rate of about every three days in mid-March when the government took several measures to contain the outbreak... The doubling rate of cases by the end of March slowed to every five days. Since the 5th/6th April, the effect of lockdown on flattening the outbreak curve has become consistently evident. The doubling time now is close to every 8 days, and there is more to come. We can expect it to drop to every 10 days in the next few days. Because the lockdown continues up to 3rd May, we also expect further dampening of the curve well into mid-May. The trajectory after May will depend on the pace of lockdown de-escalation. Since opening of the lockdown will be a phased and nuanced affair, we should not expect an abrupt increase in cases. Thus, in terms of outbreak control, lockdown has yielded the desired results... Compare it with any other country and you would notice how well we have done as a nation.

How do you see this panning out? What will happen in the next two weeks and beyond?

In the next two weeks, I visualise consistent and deep adherence to lockdown norms. Areas where phased relaxations would kick in would also respect the limits of activities allowed. We presently have a limited number of hotspots and clusters, and the situation is under control. The next two weeks should see our effective containment of these hotspots just as it was achieved earlier in Agra, Bhubaneswar and in Kerala. It is also notable that large and highly populated states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have succeeded in ensuring that the outbreak remains well-contained. Containment efforts should go hand-in-hand with efforts to strengthen the health system. De-escalation of lockdown is potentially an opportunity for the virus to resurface and spread, and this is bound to happen to an extent. There could be new clusters when life and activities become more normal. The magnitude of such spread is inversely proportional to our collective compliance with the best practices. We cannot afford to fritter away the lockdown gains made at a phenomenal economic cost and hardship. We have to keep the virus transmission un-



THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW
WITH
DR V K PAUL
NITI AAYOG MEMBER

der check and ensure that no new peaks appear. June and July months will test our resolve.

Are we testing enough? Many experts seem to think we are missing the undercurrents of a much larger epidemic

India's strategy of testing has been calibrated and pragmatic, making best use of the available resources. ICMR has scaled up our testing capability through a large

laboratory network very rapidly, and engaged the private sector as well. Today, there are 201 government and 86 designated private laboratories in the country. In addition, 23 national science laboratory hubs are networked with 63 facilities in 16 cities for COVID-19 diagnostic services. There are some geographical areas that do need more access to testing systems. To address that, recently, all medical colleges have been requested to establish such laboratories. Our initial conservative testing guidelines were aligned to the then prevalent stage(s) of the disease. The guidelines have now been broadened, and we have tested as many as 3.6 lakh individuals so far. Even when our daily testing number has now reached 35,000, the proportion of those positive remains consistently around 4 per cent, indicating absence of any significant undercurrent of symptomatic cases. We will further refine and liberalise the testing strategy as the situation demands, and we will ensure adequate capacity to do so...

What is the "new normal" after lockdown?

Life as we know has changed for now and the immediate future. The pandemic would be considered extinguished only

when it subsides worldwide. Meanwhile, social distancing, wearing a mask and hand washing are the new normal. Protecting our elderly is the new normal. Likewise, the new normal would dictate us to avoid gatherings. We should get used to less crowded markets and shops. Virtual meetings will be the way forward in place of face to face meetings. We must be responsible enough to self-quarantine ourselves in case of flu-like symptoms. We must not attach stigma to a person who wants to be tested for COVID-19 or has been advised hospitalisation being positive.

In the rural areas, health facilities are fewer and far between. How will tracking and tracing happen there?

By and large, rural areas have been free of the disease so far. The outbreak is largely urban and peri-urban. However, this cannot be taken for granted. Fortunately, rural communities are taking proactive measures. These include wearing masks, washing hands, maintaining social distance and conforming to containment norms... Access to healthcare and referral linkages are being strengthened...

FULL INTERVIEW ON
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MORADABAD

73 policemen, 11 jail staff quarantined as six prisoners positive

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, APRIL 21

A TOTAL of 73 policemen and 11 jail staff have been sent to quarantine and their samples are being collected after six prisoners in Moradabad district jail tested positive for coronavirus on Tuesday.

Five of these prisoners are among 17 who were arrested on April 15 for allegedly attacking health workers and a police team who had gone to Nagphani area to bring family members of a patient, who died of Covid for test and put under quarantine. Another prisoner who tested positive was sent to jail on April 12 in connection with a case of robbery lodged at the Mainather police station.

All 18 persons were sent to in separate enclosures inside the Moradabad jail and their blood samples were collected for coronavirus test.

Dr M C Garg, Chief Medical Officer, Moradabad, confirmed that six prisoners had tested positive. District Magistrate, Moradabad, Rakesh Kumar Singh said, the six prisoners were sent to hospital for treatment while other 12 are now shifted to temporary jail. He added that family members of these five

prisoners would also be sent to quarantine.

The 73 policemen being tested are from Nagphani, Civil Lines, Kotwali and Mainather police stations of Moradabad and they had made the arrest of the accused and had visited the area. Some policemen came in contact with these 18 prisoners while completing legal formalities. The total 73 policemen also include a sub-inspector and 11 constables of Moradabad police's Special Operation Group (SOG) involved in the arrest.

Moradabad Senior Superintendent of Police Amit Pathak said they had identified the 73 policemen who had come in contact with the six prisoners who tested positive. The prison department also identified 11 jail staff who came in contact with these and they were also quarantined, said DIG (Jails) V P Tripathi.

He added that four other prisoners were also in quarantine inside the jail.

The police are now trying to trace people, who came in contact with 73 policemen and 17 jail staff recently. Nagphani and Mainather police stations were accused were brought after their arrest have also been sanitised. The jail premises, were these prisoners were kept has also been sanitised.

Another Kashmir journalist faces case

BASHARAT MASOOD & ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, APRIL 21

TWO DAYS after slapping the UAPA against a photographer and lodging an open FIR over a report in a national daily, the J&K Police on Tuesday filed a case against journalist and author Gowhar Geelani for his "posts and writings" on social media, calling them "prejudicial to the national integrity, sovereignty and security of India".

While silent on the charges against him, police accused the Srinagar-based Geelani, whom it did not identify as a journalist, of "unlawful activities" and "glorifying terrorism in Kashmir" that could lead to offences against the

"security of (the) State".

Geelani said, "It is sad that an ugly pattern of hounding and silencing journalists in Kashmir has intensified since last August. As a journalist for over 15 years, I have reported various facets of the Kashmir conflict, American and German elections and economic recession of 2007. Also as a published author my body of work is there for everyone to see."

Author of *Kashmir — Rage and Reason*, Geelani is a free-lancer, who previously worked with German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*. Masrat Zahra, the photographer facing charges under the stringent UAPA over her social media posts, appeared before police on Tuesday and was later allowed to leave.

In an indication that she had

received some sort of assurance, she later told her lawyer not to pursue the petition she had filed in the Supreme Court on the matter. On Tuesday evening, the Editors Guild of India issued a statement calling for dropping of the UAPA charge against Zahra and the action against *The Hindu's* Srinagar correspondent Peerzada Ashiq.

"Any recourse to such laws for merely publishing something in the mainstream or social media is a gross misuse of power. Its only purpose can be to strike terror into journalists. The Guild also believes that this is an indirect way of intimidating journalists in the rest of the country... Mere social media posts of factual pictures can't attract toughest anti-terror laws," read the statement.



VENDOR SAFETY

A vendor in protective gear sells vegetables in a sealed colony in Chandigarh. Kamleshwar Singh

TAMIL NADU

58 hospital staff in isolation as boy tests positive

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, APRIL 21

A TOTAL of 58 hospital staff members of the Tiruvavur Medical College in Thanjavur district have been sent into isolation after it was found that a 13-year-old boy with appendicitis, who was brought into the facility's emergency ward on April 11, tested positive for a COVID-19 infection.

The boy's samples were collected on April 12 and he was operated upon the same day.

"The boy had severe stomach pain and mild fever. Both were normal symptoms of appendicitis," said one of the doctors who saw him. Over the next 24 hours, the patient was given regular treatment.

According to sources, the dean of the facility suggested to the anaesthetist that the boy be tested for COVID-19 before the surgery.

"It was positive. There were other patients in the post-operative ward. We immediately shifted him to the isolation ward. After a week, his condition is stable now," he said. "We did contact tracing internally. We identified everyone... A total of four doctors, 15 house surgeons, 30 staff nurses, nine hospital staff and three relatives of the patients have been isolated," said the doctor.

J&K DOCTOR AMONG 12 FRESH CASES

Srinagar: A doctor at the Government Medical College in Baramulla is among 12 fresh COVID-19 cases reported in J&K Tuesday. He is the first doctor in Kashmir to have tested positive for the coronavirus. **ENS**

CSIR scientists name new test after fictional sleuth, may cost Rs 500

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

SCIENTISTS AT the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research - Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) have developed a low-cost, paper-strip test which can detect the new coronavirus within an hour. The test, named Feluda after a fictional detective character created by Satyajit Ray, is expected to cost around Rs 500 against the RT-PCR test that costs Rs 4,500 in private labs.

Developed by a team led by two scientists, Dr Souvik Maiti and Dr Debojyoti Chakraborty, the test is based on a bacterial immune system protein called Cas9. It uses cutting-edge gene-editing tool Crispr-Cas9 system. The team has repurposed it for

diagnosis of COVID-19 genetic material.

"We have been working on this for the last two years. This technology is not limited to COVID-19 and can work on any DNA-RNA or single mutations, disease mutations etc. Based on our initial estimates, we think the strip might cost somewhere around Rs 500-600 but the companies will decide the cost. We are waiting for approval from ICMR and then we will move ahead with the companies we are in talks with," said Chakraborty. Feluda is also an acronym for the scientific name of the test — Fncas9 Editor Linked Uniform Detection Assay.

There are two other technologies developed by MIT and the University of California, Berkeley which also use Crispr systems, but different technol-

ogy and proteins.

"Their technologies are named Detector and Sherlock. These all are names of fictional detectives, so when we wanted to make something completely Indian, we thought we can keep the acronym as an Indian Detective," Chakraborty said.

The researchers said there is an urgent need for extensive testing in the country and the paper-based strip will help fill the gap. "Since it is a visual test, there is no need for complicated training, unlike the current RT-PCR test. It can be done rapidly and can be used at any basic community health centre. This is our major goal to make it as simple as possible so that it can be widely and easily used. Once you put it in the strip, the result will come out in one minute," Chakraborty said.

2,900-KM JOURNEY FROM GUJARAT

Home at last: 'Will never step out of Assam again'

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, APRIL 21

IT IS probably the first time in a month that Jadav Gogoi has smiled. And with good reason.

On Monday, Gogoi, a migrant worker from Assam, completed a journey of around 2,900 km, partly on foot, partly on a truck, battling storms, hunger and thieves to reach his hometown in Nagaon district.

"All I wanted to do was get home," said a smiling Gogoi, on a video call from Nagaon's BP Civil Hospital, where he is currently quarantined. Last month, when PM Narendra Modi announced the lockdown, Gogoi said the "company" he worked at for six months in Gujarat

"chucked him out". "There was no food, nor money, markets were closed," he said. "If I had stayed, I would have starved and died." It was then that Gogoi, along with a group of other migrants — none of whom was from Assam — decided to make the long journey home. "Yes he is in Nagaon, but we are trying to ascertain the exact route and where he came from," said Abhijit Gurav, Nagaon SP.

"We have sent our officers to verify the facts," said Nagaon DC Jadav Saikia. "Officially we cannot comment on where he came from and how. We will know once he speaks to him properly. He probably took a lift. It is unlikely he walked 3,000 km."

But the blisters on his feet tell another story. "I walked, there was a truck

but they did not carry me the whole way," Gogoi said.

One of his co-travellers, Rakesh Kumar Yadav, a migrant worker from Varanasi, said that the group left Chandola (near Ahmedabad) on March 25. "We took a bus on March 25, then a truck and when we reached Varanasi, he said to us 'chale jaonga' and left. That is when I last saw him."

Before that, Gogoi used Yadav's phone to call home. Rajen Phukan, Gogoi's brother-in-law who lives in Gadharia, the same village as Gogoi, said, "He told me he had reached UP and he was going to catch a bus to Bihar, and then walk to Nagaon — to his wife and two children."

Phukan said they were worried, "It was a journey of 1,000 km. I told him it was a lockdown and that it was very dangerous to move around but he seemed to insist."

Cauvery Neeravari Nigama (L)
Hemavathy Dam Division, Gorur- 573120
postponed Tender Notification on 16.04.2020
The Calendar events of the short term Tender notification No. 19/19-20 D:28.02.2020, called by the undersigned through E-portal has been postponed on 16.04.2020 is rescheduled due to e-portal technical reasons. Downloading the tender documents through E-portal website (www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in) up to 11.05.2020, pre bid meeting D:05.05.2020, Opening of Technical bid 12.05.2020, 4.30PM. Remaining conditions etc., are holds good. For further details contact in the undersigned office between 10.30 AM to 5.30 PM on every working days.
Sd/- Executive Engineer, CNNL, Hemavathy Dam Division, Gorur, Hassan District.

STATE INDUSTRIES PROMOTION CORPORATION OF TAMILNADU LIMITED
19-A, RUKMANI LAKSHMIPTHY ROAD, EGMORE, CHENNAI - 600 008.
CIN U49999TN19715G005967
Tender Notice NIT.No.02/CW/DO/T.No.02/2020-21 Dt.17.04.2020
For and on behalf of State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited, sealed tenders are invited under "Two Cover System" for the following work from Class-I State level Contractors registered in State/Central or Quasi Government Organisations having experience in similar nature of works. Tenders will be received upto 3.00 PM on 27.05.2020 and the same will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.
Sl. No. Name of Work Approx. value of work EMD
1. Providing barbed wire fencing and compound wall by using solid block at OSR area in SIPCOT Industrial Complexes/Parks/ Growth Centres Irungattukottai, Sripurumbudur, Pillalappakkam, Oragadam, Vallam Vadugai, Sivasei, Cuddalore and Cheygar.
a. Rs. 604.20 lakhs b. Rs. 3,12,100/-
2. a. Providing barbed wire fencing in OSR area at SIPCOT Industrial Complexes/Growth Centres Ranipet, Hosur, Bangur, Perundurai, Nilakottai, Gangaikondan and Thoottukudi. b. Providing barbed wire fencing in OSR area at SIPCOT Industrial Complexes Gummidiipoondi, Pudukottai and Manamadurai. c. Providing barbed wire fencing in OSR area at SIPCOT Industrial Complex Ranipet SEZ.
a. Rs. 329.30 lakhs b. Rs. 121.50 lakhs c. Rs. 13.22 lakhs
a. Rs. 1,74,650/- b. Rs. 71,000/- c. Rs. 13,250/-
The tender Schedule can be Downloaded at free of cost from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.sipcot.in
DIPR/1662/TENDER/2020 SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, SIPCOT, Chennai-8

VISVESVARAYA JALA NIGAM LIMITED
(Government of Karnataka Enterprise)
Office of The Executive Engineer, VJNL, Upper Bhadra Project Division No.9 Sira-572137
Phone: 08135-276101E-Mail: ubp09@gmail.com
No. EE/V.JNL/UBP/Div-9/Sira/Tank/Inv/Com/2019-20/ Date: 20.04.2020
CORRIGENDUM - 4 (Through e-Procurement only)
Reference: This Office Tender notification No. EE/VJNL/UBP/Div-9/Sira/Tank/tender-noti/11/2019-20 Dt: 19.02.2020
Following corrections are made in the Calendar of Events of tender notification are published in e-portal.
(1) As appeared in the corrigendum-3 of above tender notification, the Calendar of Events Sl. No. (D) The last date for submission of completed tender documents (Cover-1 & cover-2) through e-portal. Date: 20.04.2020 To be read as Date: 05.05.2020 & (E) Date & time of opening of Technical Bid (Cover -1) by Executive Engineer, V.J.N.L, UBP, Division No.9, Sira Date: 22.04.2020 after 4.30pm To be read as Date: 07.05.2020 after 4.30 pm
Sd/- Executive Engineer, VJNL, UBP, Division No.9 Sira

महिला आर्थिक विकास महामंडळ
(महाराष्ट्र शासन अंगीकृत)
सुचं - 022-26592264
Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM), A Government of Maharashtra Undertaking, invites Expression of Interest from legally-constituted consulting firms (not individual consultants) to conduct "Feasibility Study to validate the commodity clusters and related enterprise development opportunities for the implementation of Nav Tejaswini". For detailed EOI document, interested bidders should visit, Careers on website: www.mavimindia.org Last Date & Time for submission of EOI: till 5 pm of 6th May 2020
Sd- (MD, MAVIM)

STATE INDUSTRIES PROMOTION CORPORATION OF TAMILNADU LIMITED
19-A, RUKMANI LAKSHMIPTHY ROAD, EGMORE, CHENNAI - 600 008.
CIN U49999TN19715G005967
Tender Notice NIT.No.02/CW/DO/T.No.02/2020-21 Dt.17.04.2020
For and on behalf of State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited, sealed tenders are invited under "Two Cover System" for the following work from Class-I State level Contractors registered in State/Central or Quasi Government Organisations having experience in similar nature of works. Tenders will be received upto 3.00 PM on 27.05.2020 and the same will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.
Name of Work Approx. value of work EMD
Establishment of Export Trade Facilitation Centre at SIPCOT IT Park, Strusteri in Kancheepuram District.
Rs.2640.00 lakhs Rs.13,30,000/- in the form of Demand Draft drawn in favour of SIPCOT Ltd., payable at Chennai.
The tender Schedule can be Downloaded at free of cost from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.sipcot.in
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SIPCOT, Chennai-8
DIPR/1660/TENDER/2020

TAMIL NADU WATER SUPPLY AND DRAINAGE BOARD
INVITATION OF BIDS - TWO COVER - ITEMWAW TENDER SYSTEM
IFB No. 02 / F. CWSS to 893 /2020/ SDO/ CE-TNJ/ dt: 17.04.2020.
Name of Work Creation of an additional source with pump house to Combined Water Supply Scheme to 893 habitations in Nagapattinam District. (Period of completion : 12 months, Trial run: 6 months and Paid maintenance:12 months)
Fund NABARD Loan Assistance under RIDF-XXV-2019-20 and MNP state share
Approximate value of work Rs. 32.73 Crore
Bid Security Rs. 25,00,000/-
Eligible class Class-I
Tender Invitee The Chief Engineer, TWAD Board, No 37, 1st Floor, Easwari Nagar, Medical College Road, Thanjavur - 613 004, Tamil Nadu.
Sale of Bid & Place of sale From 24.04.2020 to 22.05.2020 upto 17.45 hours at O/o the Executive Engineer, TWAD Board, Maintenance Division, Nagapattinam by cash or Demand Draft on any Scheduled/Nationalized bank payable at Nagapattinam for Rs.1120/- (Rs.1000+GST @ 12%) each, by post Rs. 500/-additional (each).
Downloading www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.twadboard.tn.gov.in (free of cost)
Pre Bid meeting 13.05.2020 at 11.00 Hours at the office of the Tender Invitee
Bid Submission 26.05.2020 before 15.00 Hours at the office of the Tender Invitee in person of through post. This office will not be held responsible for postal delay, if any
Bid Opening 26.05.2020 at 15.30 Hours at the office of the Tender Invitee
DIPR/1656/TENDER/2020 Chief Engineer (I/c), TWAD Board, Thanjavur
SAVE WATER, CONSERVE WATER, EVERY DROP COUNTS



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why oil prices fell below zero

On Monday, WTI crude price hit minus \$40, which means the seller should pay the buyer. Is that as illogical as it seems? A look at what led to the crash, and what it means for India and the world

UDIT MISRA & NUSHAIBA IQBAL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

THE UNITED States oil markets created history on Monday when prices of West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the best quality of crude oil in the world, fell to "minus" \$40.32 a barrel in interday trade in New York. Not only was this the lowest crude oil price ever recorded — according to *Bloomberg*, the previous lowest was immediately after World War II — but it was also well below the zero mark.

At this price, the seller of crude oil would be paying the buyer \$40 for each barrel that is bought.

But how can that be? How did prices fall below zero in the first place? Why would they fall from \$0 to -\$5 to -\$10 and then all the way to -\$40 a barrel?

Crude oil is not like daily household waste that one wants to pay to get rid of; it is indeed an essential component for modern life and economic growth. So at one level, the negative pricing of oil is misplaced.

Yet, even though it may look so, this is not an illogical result. In fact, there have been instances of commodities being sold at negative prices. For instance, natural gas hit negative prices in May 2019 in the US. Moreover, the banking industry has seen negative interest rates — where one pays the bank to keep one's money — and bonds have been known to have negative yield, in which a bondholder makes a loss by lending money.

How is oil priced?

The first thing to understand is that, even before the COVID-19 outbreak induced lockdowns across the world, crude oil prices had been falling over the past few months. They were close to \$60 a barrel at the start of 2020 and, by March-end, they were closer to \$20 a barrel.

The reason was straightforward: Too much supply and too little demand (see *Chart 1*). To a great extent, oil markets, globally and more so in the US, are facing an enormous glut.

Historically, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, which is the largest exporter of crude oil in the world (single-handedly exporting 10% of the global demand), used to work as a cartel and fix prices in a favourable band. It could bring down prices by increasing production and raise prices by cutting production.

In the recent past, the OPEC has been working with Russia, as OPEC+, to fix the global prices and supply.

It must be understood that cutting production or completely shutting down an oil well is a difficult decision, because restarting it is both immensely costly and cumbersome. Moreover, if one country cuts production, it risks losing market share if others do not follow suit.

The global oil pricing is by no stretch an example of a well-functioning competitive market. In fact, its seamless operations crucially depend on oil exporters acting in consort.

Where did the trouble start?

In early March, this happy accord came to an end as Saudi Arabia and Russia disagreed over the production cuts required to keep prices stable. As a result, oil-exporting countries, led by Saudi Arabia, started undercutting each other on price while continuing to produce the same quantities of oil.

This was an unsustainable strategy under normal circumstances but what made it even more calamitous was the growing spread of novel coronavirus disease, which, in turn, was sharply reducing economic activity and the demand for oil. With each passing day, the developed countries were falling prey to COVID-19 and with each lockdown, there were fewer flights, cars and industries etc. using oil.

What was the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on oil prices?

By the time the discord between Saudi Arabia and Russia was sorted out last week, under pressure from US President Donald



Crude oil storage tanks at the Cushing oil hub, in Oklahoma. Reuters

oil as they realised, quite late in hindsight, that there was no space to store the oil if they were to take the delivery.

They figured that it would be more costly for them to accept the oil delivery, pay for its transportation and then pay for storing it (possibly for a longish period, given the circumstances) especially when there was no storage available, than to simply take a hit on the contract price.

This desperation from both sides — buyers and sellers — to get rid of oil meant the WTI oil contract prices not only plummeted to zero but also went deep into the negative territory. In the short term, for both the holders of the delivery contract and the oil producers, it was less costly to pay \$40 a barrel and get rid of the oil instead of storing it (buyers) or stopping production (producers).

What is the future of oil prices?

It is important to note that it was the WTI price for May in the US markets that went so low. Crude oil prices elsewhere fell, too, but by not so much. Moreover, at least for now, oil prices for June and the coming months are pegged between \$20 and \$35 a barrel.

It is possible that this was a one-off event where prices dropped below zero because of an existing glut in WTI oil, which is found inland, and there was no space to store or transport it in a hurry.

Investment budgets of exploration and production companies are expected to drop in the face of financial turmoil due to low shale oil prices. Normally, this should force oil exporting countries to cut back production and negate the excess supply, restoring some balance in the oil markets.

But one cannot rule out a repeat of Monday's trend because, with COVID-19 continuing to spread, global oil demand is falling every day. In the coming quarter, some estimates claim that total demand will fall by 30%.

In the end, it would be the demand-supply mismatch (adjusted for how much can be stored away) that will decide the fate of oil prices.

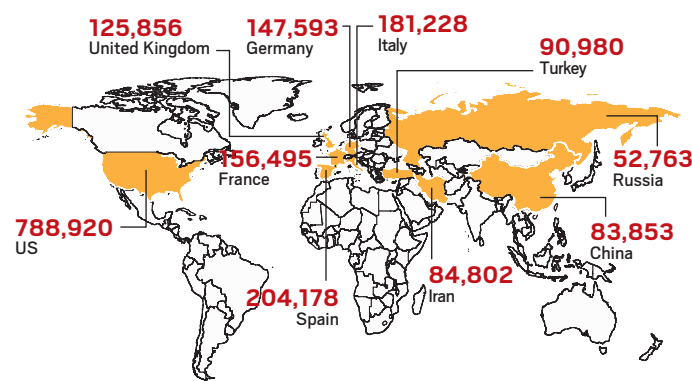
How will this impact India?

The Indian crude oil basket does not comprise WTI — it only has Brent and oil from some of the Gulf countries — so there is no direct impact. But oil is traded globally and weakness in WTI is mirrored in the falling prices of the Indian basket as well (see *Chart 3*).

There are two ways in which this lower price can help India. If the government passes on the lower prices to consumers, then, whenever the economic recovery starts in India, individual consumption will be boosted. If, on the other hand, governments (both at the Centre and the states) decide to levy higher taxes on oil, it can boost government revenues.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED DAILY



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 2,501,156

DEATH COUNT: 171,810

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11 pm on April 21

Can COVID-19 spread from the faeces of an infected person?

IF SOMEONE going outdoors during the lockdown needs to use a public toilet, or if someone shares a toilet at home with someone who might have contracted COVID-19, is there a risk of being infected through the faeces of the infected person? The short answer: it is possible in theory, but very unlikely to happen.

Emerging information on the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2, which causes COVID-19 disease, suggests that the virus can be present in some cases. But as the Health Ministry notes in its FAQs, spread of the novel coronavirus through the faecal route is not the main feature of the outbreak. The primary route remains droplets from an infected person coughing or sneezing. Spread through this route is far more common than spread through touching infected objects and then touching one's face, mouth or nose.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that the virus has been detected in the faeces of some COVID-19 patients, but what is unknown is the amount of virus in the stool, or whether the virus in stool is infectious at all. As such, the risk of transmission is also unknown. "However, the risk is expected to be low based on data from previous outbreaks of related coronaviruses (SARS and MERS)... There has been no confirmed fecal-oral transmission of COVID-19 to date."

It may seem that flushing a toilet

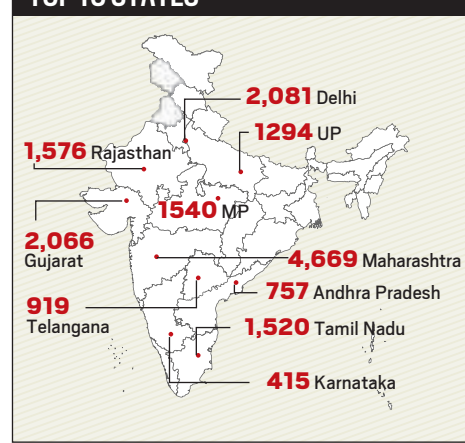
will have got rid of the virus, even if it was present in the faeces. But flushing creates "toilet plumes", which are a subject of ongoing research. Toilet plumes refer to the dispersal of microscopic particles as a result of flushing. Over the last several years, researchers have been studying the risk of toilet plume aerosols sent into the air, then settling on the toilet seat and infecting someone. In a study published in the *American Journal of Infection Control* in 2013, which itself was based on an analysis of several peer-reviewed studies, researchers found that potentially infectious aerosols may be produced in substantial quantities during flushing, which can expose subsequent toilet users. Yet, they added, no studies have yet clearly demonstrated or refuted toilet plume-related disease transmission. The paper stressed the need for additional research.

It is considered good hygiene if you flush the toilet with the lid down. A widespread view is that doing so prevents some of the toilet plume from escaping into the air. It also makes sense to wait a few minutes before using a toilet that has just been used by someone else.

While noting that the risk of catching COVID-19 from faeces appears to be low, the Health Ministry adds: "Because this is a risk, however, it is another reason to clean hands regularly, after using the bathroom and before eating."

INDIA COUNT: 18,985 (603 DEATHS)

TOP TO STATES



REST OF INDIA

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	16
Andhra Pradesh	35
Assam	35
Bihar	114
Chandigarh	26
Chhattisgarh	36
Goa	7
Haryana	254
Himachal Pradesh	39
Jammu and Kashmir	368
Jharkhand	46
Kerala	408
Ladakh	18
Manipur	2
Meghalaya	11
Mizoram	0
Nagaland	0
Odisha	74
Puducherry	7
Punjab	245
Tripura	2
Uttarakhand	46
West Bengal	392

Union Health Ministry update as of 11 pm, April 21. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states with the most cases are listed above. 3,260 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 29 STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Have a question on the COVID-19 outbreak and what you should/should not do? Write to explained@indianexpress.com

Why Kerala govt has been taken to court over deal with a US tech company

VISHNU VARMA
KOCHI, APRIL 21

ON TUESDAY, the Kerala High Court directed the state government to file by April 24 a report on the details of its deal with the US-based tech firm Sprinklr. This came on a public interest litigation seeking quashing of the deal, under which the government has engaged Sprinklr to collate and handle the health data of thousands of people placed under quarantine as a containment measure against COVID-19. The High Court Bench expressed concerns regarding 'confidentiality' of the data.

What is the deal about?

The government used a tool developed by Sprinklr to collate data on symptoms and

underlying health conditions of people placed under quarantine. The data were collected by workers at the grassroots level, and collating them was aimed at helping doctors and medical officials make informed decisions about possible hospitalisation.

How did this become controversial?

Earlier this month, Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala held a press conference in which he accused the Left Democratic Front government of allowing Sprinklr to collate and handle the data without taking individual consent of the people under quarantine. The Opposition, who claimed that data of 1.75 lakh people were collected, alleged that the government did not follow due procedure in engaging Sprinklr and thereby ran the risk of crucial health data of these individuals being trans-

ferred to pharmaceutical companies.

It questioned why the administration took the assistance of a foreign firm when there were institutions within the state, such as the Centre for Development of Imaging technology and the Kerala State IT Mission, which could do the same job. Chennithala said the decision to appoint Sprinklr, owned by a Keralaite, Ragy Thomas, was taken unilaterally with the knowledge of the Chief Minister and without obtaining clearance from departments such as Law, Local Self-government and Finance.

How has the state government defended the decision?

The state government has stated that the company's tool was offered free, in the form of a software-as-a-service (SaaS), and that the firm was owned by a Keralaite. The IT de-

partment said the data were being collected on a massive scale and therefore needed the intervention of an application that could collate it fast and help analyse them. Sprinklr's SaaS tool was already ready and only had to be customised for the state's needs.

The government also released documents in connection with the contract it signed with Sprinklr on April 2. The documents include the purchase order form, service agreement, privacy policy of the company and a non-disclosure agreement. The documents state that the data belong to the Kerala government.

The agreement order signed with the company stated, "Every employee participates in mandatory data protection and information security trainings and is formally obliged to data secrecy. Sprinklr established a data protection steering committee of key

functional leaders throughout the company and Sprinklr also appointed an experienced Data Protection Officer."

Following the allegations, the government changed the domain name for the entry of data from citizencenter.sprinklr.com to citizencenter.kerala.gov.in.

At a press conference on Monday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan refused to answer questions about the deal, saying he did not wish to waste time on "baseless" allegations.

What will the government need to explain in the court?

The High Court Bench has sought to know why the Law Department was not consulted before the deal was finalised, and the government's rationale behind taking the help of a foreign firm when there were indigenous firms that could do data analy-

sis. The court made it clear that it was concerned about the possibility of breach of data, and held the government responsible if that happens.

What context does the controversy have in Kerala politics?

It comes at a time when the CPM-led state government has been getting praise for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the Opposition, it is an opening through which it can target the Chief Minister, who heads the IT Department (which signed the deal with Sprinklr). The controversy also comes with Assembly elections just a year away.

The nature of the controversy can be potentially troubling for the CPM as it had aggressively taken on the BJP-led Centre over data privacy concerns surrounding the Aadhaar project.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CRUDE SHOCK

Collapse of oil price signals demand decline, lack of storage capacity. India must build its strategic reserves

REVERBERATIONS FROM THE economic dislocation caused by the coronavirus are being felt across the world. On Monday, the price of the May futures contract for West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI) in the US that is due to expire on Tuesday fell into negative territory — settling at - \$37.63 a barrel. This extreme price movement is indicative of how deeply oversupplied the US market is owing to the collapse in demand as economic activity has come to a standstill and the fact that there isn't storage capacity to absorb this excess supply. The "negative" price indicates that investors holding these May contracts essentially did not want to take delivery of the oil, unable to find storage facilities. And while the June contract is currently hovering around \$20 a barrel, the price crash in the May contracts suggests that storage will continue to be a problem. This implies that unless supply in the US is cut back further to readjust to the collapse in demand, more pain is likely.

This isn't a US-specific problem. Earlier, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, along with Russia, agreed to cut crude oil output by 9.7 million barrels per day to bring down supply. This cut is effective from May and is supposed to last till June. But this cut is unlikely to be enough to readjust supply given the extent of the collapse in global demand. While according to some estimates demand is likely to be 30 per cent lower, it is difficult at this stage to accurately gauge the extent of the fall. Thus, it is likely that these cuts will need to be followed up by further cuts to readjust supply. In this situation of low crude oil prices, while oil producing countries will suffer, oil consuming countries like India will benefit. Lower prices should not only help in reducing the current account deficit, but could also ease inflationary pressures if governments do pass on the benefit, even partially, to end consumers. However, it is also likely that as the lockdown restrictions are eased, and as economic activity gradually picks up, the Centre and the states raise taxes on crude oil to shore up their struggling revenues. Further, as lower oil prices will impact the economies of oil producing countries in the middle east, they could also affect remittance flows to India.

India must seize this opportunity to build on its oil reserves. The government has said that it will take advantage of the low crude oil prices to fill its strategic petroleum reserves. The country's strategic petroleum reserve facilities have a capacity of 5.3 million metric tonnes — amounting to 9.5 days of its crude oil requirements (as per consumption pattern of 2017-18). Additionally, the government has approved the setting up two additional SPR facilities which will add another 6.5 MMT or about 11.57 days of the country's crude requirements. In comparison, each IEA country has to hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to at least 90 days of imports. India should be working on similar lines.

UNFREEDOM OF PRESS

Booking of photographer under UAPA, FIR on a newspaper report, send out a chilling message on free speech

IN JANUARY, RULING on the blocking of the internet in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370, the Supreme Court laid down that access to the internet, and the speech therein, are fundamental rights protected under Article 19 of the Constitution. Yet, this week, the J&K police booked a young photographer in Kashmir, Masrat Zahra, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for allegedly "anti-national" posts on social media. An FIR has also been registered against a report from Kashmir in The Hindu, alleging that it was "fake news". Both the invoking of a draconian law, under which an individual can be designated a terrorist, for Facebook posts, and the FIR against a newspaper report, send out a chilling message on free speech to journalists across the country. They go against principles and protections guaranteed by the Constitution, and upheld by the apex court.

It is not unrelated that in recent years, the law of sedition has been used in blunt and indiscriminate ways, inviting charges of intimidating dissenters and restricting freedoms — despite specific court rulings on what constitutes sedition. For instance, in *Kedarnath Singh v State of Bihar* (1962), the Supreme Court ruled that criticisms of the government, even the state itself, do not constitute sedition or an act seen as detrimental to the security and integrity of the Union. In *Balwant Singh v State of Punjab* (1995) it found that even sloganeering that seemingly supports separatism — in this case, "Khalistan Zindabad" — as long as it does not directly incite people to commit violence against the Indian state, falls within the bounds of free speech. According to data from the National Crimes Research Bureau, there has been a steady rise in the number of sedition cases from 2014 (47 cases) to 2018 (70 cases) — and there have been only four convictions in that time, giving credence to the perception that the law is being misused to curb fundamental freedoms.

The use of a law framed to deal with terrorism and violent militancy in Zahra's case, or the FIR against The Hindu, do not constitute the "reasonable restriction" on free speech that the law and the constitution permit. These must be revoked. Journalists in Jammu and Kashmir have always faced more curbs than their counterparts elsewhere — security is the perfect alibi for all governments to clamp down on dissent. But the latest decision is a new low even by that worrisome yardstick. When there are growing concerns over the shrinking space for other institutions and individual freedoms, this decision only confirms that curbs on Internet access may have been eased since August 5 but little has changed when it comes to securing the rights of the press.

CAT AND MOUSE

Animation loses an unusual talent with the death of Gene Deitch, who gave life to Tom, Jerry and Popeye on TV

GENE DEITCH, THE Czech-American illustrator and animator who brought some memorable seasons of *Tom and Jerry* and *Popeye* to television, has died in Prague at the age of 95. From revelling in the thrill of the chase to promoting spinach, he was a broad-spectrum artist. His work did not earn critical acclaim at the time, but with the benefit of perspective, it was a significant departure from the smooth, Hollywood-ready work of William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, who had launched the features. From around the Sixties, the American comic industry diversified out of the superheroes era in search of new leading characters like Hanna-Barbera's Huckleberry Hound, Scooby-Doo, Yogi Bear, the Flintstones and the Jetsons. In print and on TV, Hanna-Barbera had taken an early lead with Tom and Jerry, who were conceived in 1940.

They are still on TV, and the universal theme of the chase may have assured them their longevity. The chase, a particular form of the quest, has powered storytelling for ever, from the tale of Aeneas to that of Luke Skywalker. Tom and Jerry is a chase that's been running for 80 years, and Deitch illuminated part of the journey. He himself thought it was an echo of the David and Goliath tale, though. The feline Goliath always loses, and the mighty mouse lives to run again.

Deitch worked in the era when, long before manga, comics were perceived to be violent. A cat planning to eat a mouse does indeed offer violence, but he believed that like all other forms of art, comics held up a mirror to reality. He also produced mainstream art: His short *Munro*, which ran as a curtain-raiser to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, won an Academy Award. It may not be remembered well now, but the cat and mouse game lives on, ever after.

Nation after lockdown

Minimise democracy, maximise interfaith distance, maintain aloofness from poor — may be the new normal



SUH PALSHIKAR

AS THE COUNTRY reels under the second instalment of an unprecedented lockdown, it may be worthwhile to look at the critical areas where the lockdown has been successful — and what that success means. Let us leave aside the claim that the lockdown has kept the spread of the coronavirus under control. Partly because that "success" would not have called for an extension of the lockdown and also because experts may tell us that the virus may not be so easily tamed — it will stay with us for quite some time and raise its head again and again. But victory in the "war" against the virus notwithstanding, whenever India resumes a semblance of normalcy, it would be a new normal. The normal of the future would be based on three successful narratives of the past four weeks.

The first is an unspoken but pervasive narrative. It is about what we do with democracy. A future historian would surely report that it was an extraordinary exercise to more or less bring to a standstill a continental country, putting a mammoth population into home-captivity. What does this success signify? In the urgent enthusiasm to ensure a national fight against the pandemic, smaller voices about cross-party consultation, federal principles, judicial oversight, are all consigned to outdated textbooks of politics and governance. Even as the second phase of the lockdown unfolds, the MHA is fuming that Kerala is not following the Centre's plan but adopting its own. Clearly, there is only one fount of wisdom, one source of policy, one centre of power.

There are no questions asked as to what gave which government the authority to clamp the lockdown. No discussion on whether the disaster management act should be covering epidemic situations. Nobody seems worried that we do not have a democratically legislated epidemic diseases act and rely on a colonial era act. Political parties are oblivious to these issues. Public discussions bypass these procedural matters. We have installed a hierarchy of principles: Results count, procedures don't matter. It has been somewhat mildly described by one scholar as an "executive emergency".

Not many would realise today, much less agree, that the lockdown will prove to be a most dangerous experiment in our democracy. This is not about just the central government, or the ruling party. The frightening

success of the lockdown is the willingness of the entire ruling class and the articulate public in the gigantic suspension of democracy. The swift ability with which the civil and police bureaucracy could be mobilised in the efforts to push the entire population into home lock-up should be a model lesson for any future autocrat. It would be a tough task for India to come out of the mental-intellectual lockdown that it has willingly accepted. Not surprisingly, a petition in the Supreme Court has asked for an order to deploy the military to implement the lockdown.

This is not to argue that the COVID threat should not have invoked a firm policy of physical distancing; the argument is about the fallout. We now have a template for undermining democracy: Talk about a public cause, about public well-being and obtain approval for abandoning core principles of democracy. Today, it might appear to be a justifiable move — indeed, both the media and Opposition have said so and the public has acquiesced. What guarantee do we have that our future democracy will not be governed by this narrative of nationally necessary democratic curtailment?

Two other narratives stem from our very own social distancing project. One pertains to the long existing distance between Hindus and Muslims. Everything possible is being done to ensure that this social distance would increase in a manner that it would be difficult for the two communities to peacefully co-exist. The irresponsible gathering of the Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi only added to the vicious distancing. Seizing that moment, but unrelated to it, was the Muslim-bashing that ensued in the backdrop of the Delhi riots just before the corona outbreak. If you recall that the anti-CAA protests were continuously branded as Muslim protests, and worse, a conspiracy against India, the pattern becomes clear. Not just social media but the electronic and print media, too, enthusiastically latched on to the Hindu-Muslim divide in presenting the spread of corona and the violations of the lockdown. Over the past four weeks a narrative has made a deep impact: That everything must be seen through the prism of religious communities; that Muslims are conspiring against Indian interest — so much so that terms like "corona jihad" came into circulation and no government made any effort to stem this ugly communal virus. The

narrative is not new, but its traction should be noted as a direct contribution of the current moment. We are now perhaps just a step away from the socio-economic boycott of Muslims in many parts of the country. Once that has happened, we shall have achieved complete success in the century-long project of social distancing.

Equally disturbingly, the lockdown has ensured that the class-chasm would become more real, more sharp and yet politically infertile. The overwhelming support that the lockdown has received among India's middle classes is noteworthy not just because of the gullibility of that class but also because of its complete lack of social connection to anything beyond itself. Over the last four weeks, many stories of dislocation, destitution and starvation have emerged; information about stranded labourers is flowing in. But middle class conscience has not found it necessary to take this into account. We stop at personal acts of kindness, celebration of philanthropy and a quick lapse into amnesia. Politics of and for the poor has become inadmissible. Politics does not demand that any measure against COVID must, as its first priority, include a decent policy space to address the difficulties of the vulnerable sections. This is not to say that Indian politics was ever really sensitive about the poor; but now, even the cynical possibility of electoral gains does not push parties to fight for the rights of the poor.

This double social distancing — of the majority community from the minority and of the vocal and influential classes from the mass of the poor — sits well with the narrative of cutting democracy to size. In a majoritarian and middle-class driven social universe, the place of democracy is bound to be marginal, if not nominal. We began this "war" with the convenient platitude of "jaan hai to jahaan hai" (we can think of wellbeing only if we live). In turning this platitude into "jaan aur jahaan" later, we admitted that we might be losing both lives and livelihoods. In the midst of that very real possibility, we are on the verge of being haunted by the three narratives: Minimise democracy, maximise interfaith distance and maintain aloofness from the poor. Will that be the shape of life after lockdown?

The writer taught political science at Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, and is chief editor of Studies in Indian Politics



D RAJA

APRIL 22, 2020, marks the 150th birth anniversary of VI Lenin. He was one of the greatest theoreticians of Left politics after Karl Marx. He was an excellent strategist and tactician, who led the first socialist revolution in 1917, in Russia. He was the head of the first socialist country and founder of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). While it is appropriate that the working people of the world pay their tributes to the leader who changed the course of history by establishing a government of the working classes and laid the foundation for a new social order, there is a need to look at socialism in the context of the ongoing debate on the world post-Covid.

The lockdown forced by the corona epidemic has triggered agitations by the hungry, homeless and jobless poor and migrant workers in many countries, including the US. Many scholars are recalling the Great Depression while debating the impact of the pandemic is likely to have on the global economy. The Great Depression is conventionally dated from October 28, 1929, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 20 per cent in a single day. However, the depression began in the first decades of the 20th century. The crisis of overproduction and over-accumulation led to the collapse of purchasing

LEARNING FROM LENIN

At 150, the leader of the October Revolution has lessons for a post-Covid world

power and investment, creating massive unemployment and other related problems. The economic depression during 1929-32 shook all of Europe and the US. During this period the economy of the US was in competition and conflict with Europe, generating homelessness, migration, hunger and unimaginable miseries. The crisis of capitalism and the conflict among the capitalist countries led to World War I. Half a century earlier, Marx had published the first volume of *Capital*, in which he established that capitalism is a crisis-ridden economic system.

At the beginning of the Great Depression, Lenin was leading the revolution in Russia. He argued that capitalism reached its highest stage in monopoly capitalism and thereafter, became parasitic and moribund. His work, *Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism*, was a response to the crisis. The October Revolution was waged in the backdrop of the Great Depression and World War I. The USSR was projected as an alternative to the capitalist order that ensured equality and justice to all. It's now 90 years since the Great Depression. Those experiences and lessons are relevant even today. The current stage of capitalist development has created unprecedented income and wealth inequality within the country and among the nations. Capitalism is in deep crisis. The world, after corona recedes, is not going to be the same; the economic crisis may worsen.

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the country and among the nations. Capitalism is in deep crisis. The world, after corona recedes, is not going to be the same. The economic crisis may worsen.

It is imperative to reflect on the economic ramifications of this evolving scenario in India. Even in the name of the coronavirus, attempts are on to spread fear and terror among the people in the name of religion. From Buddha to Ravidas and further to Ambedkar, there has been the enduring dream of Begumpura. In our times, Begumpura is the New India where people reside without fear and dread, worries and sufferings. Marx and Lenin would not hesitate to align with these leaders and thinkers of our country. But corporate capitalism will not allow any alternative outside the capitalist structure. Right-wing forces have already captured power in many countries, including India. These forces will dismantle democracy by encouraging fascist forces who claim to act in the name of radical national renewal.

When we pay tributes to Lenin, we should not fail to think about ways to liberate people from all kinds of exploitations and enslavement.

The writer is general secretary, CPI

APRIL 22, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM VIOLENCE THE POLICE USED lathis and teargas to disperse several thousand people as they squatted in the Chandmari area after having been prevented from proceeding to the pipeline headquarters of Oil India Limited at Narengi. At the end of the day of heavy lathi-charges, teargassing and arrests in and around Narengi, 15 km from Assam, the Assam government was no nearer to making crude oil flow again to the refineries. More than 100 persons, including women, were injured in the lathicharge. A spokesman for the Gauhati Medical College Hospital, where the injured were taken, said four of them were in a critical condition.

GROWTH IS 5 PER CENT THE PLANNING COMMISSION expects to achieve 5 per cent annual growth rate during the Sixth Five-Year Plan which will have a new time-frame from 1980-81 to 1984-85. It may even be possible to achieve the growth rate of 5.5 per cent during the last years of the Plan. The time-frame and targets were fixed at the first meeting of the reconstituted Planning Commission in Delhi under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The rolling plan concept has been given a go-by on the ground that it will mean the very end of the planning exercise as Mrs Gandhi put it in her opening remarks at the commission's meeting. At the same time, she recognised

the need for continuous monitoring and preparation of contingency plans whenever the original projections go awry.

YEMEN PRESIDENT PRESIDENT ABDUL FATTAH Ismail (41), of South Yemen, the Soviet Union's closest ally in the Arab world, resigned for "health reasons". Sources in Cairo said Ismail's resignation was the culmination of a power struggle with Prime Minister Ali Nasser Mohammed. Mohammed was elected by the central committee of the ruling Socialist Party to replace Ismail as chairman of the presidium of the Supreme People's Council (President) and secretary-general of the party.



7 THE IDEAS PAGE

India can come out ahead

Super-power rivalries exacerbated by coronavirus pandemic offer India an opportunity. Government must act at three levels — health, geopolitics and economics



JANMEJAYA SINHA

IMAGINE IN THE midst of the Cuban missile crisis (that almost pushed the US and Soviet Union into a nuclear confrontation) there was an outbreak of the Spanish flu and the US was still on the gold standard. The current crisis needs to be appreciated by India similarly. It requires a medical cure to kill the fear, effective economic actions and sophisticated geopolitical navigation. We all recognise that until an anti-viral is found, there will be fear, and life will return to normal only after a vaccine is available at scale.

The virus currently has many more unknowns than knowns. We don't know for sure how it spreads, whether people can get re-infected, whether it is mutating, whether the hot weather kills it, and what the real fatality rate is. We don't know for sure how far we are from an anti-viral. We know, however, that we are at least 18 months away from having a vaccine that works and is available at scale. Till an anti-viral is found, economic activity will be constrained, and this will affect people, industries and countries in disparate ways.

The global economy is set to lose close to ten trillion dollars because of the "self-induced coma" it has been put into — to use Paul Krugman's evocative phrase. The preceding global financial crisis (GFC) has exhausted the efficacy of monetary tools. In addition, corporates globally are leveraged to the tune of \$12 trillion. The accompanying oil price collapse (beginning due to a spat between producers Saudi Arabia and Russia) has been compounded by a precipitous slump in demand. The Chinese economy can't help as it did during the GFC, as it is hemmed in itself. Even if it could, there is too much global suspicion of China to allow it to do so. So, countries will largely be on their own.

The tensions between the US and China have escalated into a full-scale superpower crisis after the virus spread. Since 2010, there has been great concern in the US about China's rise. China's muscular foreign policy together with its aggressive stance on multiple issues, most importantly on technology and technology standards, has created conflict. The rhetoric, now, is likely to be a polarising one with the coronavirus spreading in the US in an election year, smashing its economy, infecting over three-quarter of a million people in the country and killing more than 40,000 — China could be seen as enemy number one in the US.

No wonder then that at a time when the world yearns for global coordination, there is almost none — in healthcare responses (lockdown to guided restrictions) and economic coordination (from 1 to 18 per cent of GDP responses). Multilateral agencies, especially the WHO and UN, suffer a complete loss of credibility. India needs to chart its own course in these turbulent times. My belief is that if India takes the requisite actions it may come out well, belying the predictions of the Cassandra.

We need to act at three levels — health, economic and geopolitical. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has done well to stem the spread of the infection. It has used



C R Sasikumar

India judiciously in deploying the country's modest healthcare resources efficiently to deal with the pandemic. It has sensitised the public, introduced the concept of social distancing and isolation in the most challenging situations. Now it must test at scale and isolate. But Indians cannot afford to stay locked much longer. We are too poor and too many of us live on a day-to-day basis — not even on a paycheck to paycheck basis. We are hardy, young and understand self-preservation, and will learn to cope. Economic activity will be subdued in the near-term, but it must be "unlocked".

The current IMF projections suggest that India will have the highest growth rate in the world this year. I believe they are right if we act. Oil prices have collapsed, really helping our balance of payments. Our food stocks are plentiful, the rabi crop has been good, and the prognosis for the monsoon is positive. This, together with the fact that aggregate demand is down, will dampen inflationary impulses. The "new RBI" has acted boldly and strongly. It has taken prompt actions to reduce rates, increase liquidity, adjust prudential norms, allow moratoriums, and protect financial entities. The weakened rupee will help our exports and with a debt to GDP ratio of about 73 per cent, along with better growth prospects, India is relatively better placed than several other countries. We should, therefore, not unduly worry about our credit rating. This both allows and actually requires the government to act on the fiscal front.

The government needs to implement the following four steps to spur the economy. It should do so by "printing money" given the moderated inflation impulses. It needs to provide additional direct benefit transfers of Rs 2,000 every month for three months to

The current IMF projections suggest that India will have the highest growth rate in the world this year. I believe they are right if we act. Oil prices have collapsed, really helping our balance of payments. Our food stocks are plentiful, the rabi crop has been good, and the prognosis for the monsoon is positive. This, together with the fact that aggregate demand is down, will dampen inflationary impulses. The "new RBI" has acted boldly and strongly. It has taken prompt actions to reduce rates, increase liquidity, adjust prudential norms, allow moratoriums, and protect financial entities. The weakened rupee will help our exports and with a debt to GDP ratio of about 73 per cent, along with better growth prospects, India is relatively better placed than several other countries.

Jan Dhan accounts, together with foodgrains release from the FCI, to the tune of around Rs 65,000 crore, to alleviate people's miseries. It needs to protect MSMEs directly by providing them working capital (with an RBI backstop) and, like in the UK, provide 80 per cent of the salary to employees of the "GST-paying MSMEs" for six months (if the employees were on their rolls in February). It needs to launch a massive public works programme (in the nature of the New Deal of FDR) outside the Budget as suggested by the chairman of CII's National Committee of Infrastructure and PPP, Vinayak Chatterjee. This fund should be earmarked for infrastructure and a quarter of its budget should be set aside for strengthening and upgrading primary health centres. The allocation should not be less than Rs 200,000 crore.

The government should take advantage of the crisis to push through much needed pending reforms in agriculture (especially those pertaining to APMC), power (pricing and discoms), banks (government ownership at 30 per cent and bad banks). Given the paucity of tax revenues, the government should be willing to print money but it could also consider having the PM making an appeal for private gold from people and temples (no questions asked) — it could target 1,000 tonnes of gold worth \$30 billion and offer a five per cent tax-free return repayable (\$1.5 billion a year) after 10 years, in rupees or gold.

We can come out ahead if we act now. Super-power rivalries will create opportunities to replace China as a major supplier to the US and Japan. But first, we must survive. We can then re-imagine and thrive.

The writer is chairman, BCG India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Given that Pakistan is still in the initial stages of grappling with the virus, the government currently has very little information about infection rates, confirmed cases and future projections that supports the easing of restrictions."

—DAWN

An agenda for a fightback

What make COVID-19 deadly are co-morbidities, lack of hygiene and distancing. Key to its defeat lies in protecting the vulnerable, early detection



SHASHANK JOSHI

AS WE remain under lockdown, it is vital that all Indians display cooperation to show the world that we can defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, just as we eradicated smallpox and polio. Every citizen must follow physical distancing for at least the next year and maintain hygiene, especially in terms of handwashing and/or using hand sanitiser. Indians may have the BCG vaccine and in-built/innate immunity as an advantage, but we are allowing these gains to be frittered away because of our poor hygiene.

Indians have robust inbuilt immunity thanks to the country's adverse environment but that needs to now be built upon through lifestyle-related measures. Indian cuisine is rich in spices and condiments. Protein-rich and traditional diets, which every community possesses, are the best option in the current circumstances. There are exercises that can be performed while being locked in — yoga, pranayama, surya namaskars and even simple sit-ups can help build our muscles to fight the virus. Studies have repeatedly shown that adequate sleep — for eight hours — helps fight respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.

This is also the ideal time to give up addictions to tobacco and alcohol. Hot-water gargles multiple times a day, avoiding refrigerated food as well as opening windows for fresh air is vital for health.

We are learning something new about COVID-19 each day. It spreads through airborne microdroplets, which are released via speaking, spitting, coughing and sneezing. So, covering our faces, noses and mouths with a cloth or mask and wearing glasses is the key to breaking the chain of transmission. We now also know that the gut is the second site of virus transmission and, therefore, clean toilets are the order of the day. Surfaces which we touch may be a source of transmission for the virus but this can be addressed by sanitiser and soap.

The greatest need is to protect those belonging to vulnerable groups from the virus. These include senior citizens, those with hypertension or other heart conditions, those with lung or kidney disease and others whose immunity may be low due to disease or medication like steroids. Such people need to remain home-bound and should be treated like VIPs — served and cared for like never before, while maintaining hygiene and distancing. At any sign of poor health, they must be rushed to the nearest healthcare facility. Ensure you connect with your healthcare providers digitally, avoid crowding at hospitals for routine care as the lockdown ends and emergency medical care continues.

COVID-19 has many experimental treatments from simple and cheap ones like chloroquine and dexamethasone to expensive medications. Let's leave that to the experts. It's time we scale up our testing in all red zones and hot spots. Our research bodies like the ICMR should rapidly publish everything they know about the virus so that we can develop strategies to handle it better.

Coronavirus does not kill by itself. The co-morbidities, delays in test and a lack of access to care are what will lead to deaths, especially when it comes to people from the vulnerable groups. India is the world capital for the manufacture of generic medicines and we must allow Indian innovators to rapidly make antiviral medicines and vaccines. In an emergency, like the current pandemic, patent rules can be tweaked temporarily to save lives.

The key to successfully conquering the coronavirus is early detection, isolation and prompt treatment to delay the "lung storm" (called cytokines storms). Treatment can also be done with simple medicines like hydroxychloroquine as well as through simple strategies like oxygenation and transfusions in later stages. India may not have sufficient ventilators but we have one of the best-trained medical forces. We have a large supply of oxygen, blood and clinical doctors and nurses to fight complications.

Digital India must be incorporated rapidly into Indian medical care so that we can use telemedicine to give home-based-care for mild cases as well as monitor recovered, asymptomatic patients. This way, hospitals can be rapidly freed up for more deserving cases.

Hospital staff are at risk and it's essential to provide them with the best personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as food and rest. All healthcare workers must have COVID testing done and rapid tests must be done in all hospital environments. The workforce should be rotated.

This is an ideal time to have private-public partnerships in healthcare and it's only matter of time before we sail out of this pandemic. Food and shelter for all is a need for all Indians and governments must ensure rations reach everyone. Crowded clusters like slums urgently need mass prophylaxis with hydroxychloroquine on an experimental basis, as distancing is impossible in such areas. Through this, the virus load will be reduced in the community and lives will be saved.

Rumour mongering and cybercrime is on the rise and we will need new laws to be enacted soon to address these. We need a positive attitude to avoid corona anxiety, predominantly generated by electronic gadgets. We must have at least two hours a day free of screens. For better health, there's always a smile, music and meditation.

The writer is the dean of Indian College of Physicians and a well-known endocrinologist, Mumbai. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2014



VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

A new India, a new world

A more confident India is partnering with world community in a global struggle

SPEED HAD become the most distinguishing feature of the globalised world in the 21st century. But now, COVID-19 has hit humanity like a huge speed breaker. It has compelled us to turn the spotlight inwards. With an unimaginably serious threat of vulnerability to the virus, the fear of coronavirus will, quite understandably, haunt us for a long time. This disease is going to alter not just our ways of thinking, but also the ways of conducting ourselves as individuals.

The changes that the global community may well be staring at, are multi-dimensional. Prior to COVID-19, our public and private lives were, increasingly, becoming more contrived, "event" centric: Post-pandemic, we will be compelled to control our itch for turning everything into a spectacle. And when such "events" are reduced, perhaps, the level of our Facebook activism will also be proportionately lowered. The way we celebrate, worship and engage socially will undergo some change.

The ultra-individualist West is going to feel this sense of isolationism more. People in countries like India, where the culture of collectivism is more established, are more likely to withstand the tensions of this transformation. Because in India, there is near-perfect balance between individualism and privacy on the one hand, and collectivism and exposure on the other hand. Reconciling individualistic identities with their larger context is inherent to Indian philosophy. The essence of our great epics — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata

— holds a mirror to this constant interplay between individualism and collectivism, which finally leads to a beautiful convergence.

In this context one has to see India's remarkable role as the global community faces the COVID-19 challenge. India's partnership with the global community has three main dimensions: It starts with the doctrinal and emotional, before moving on to the technical and knowledge-based dimension. Finally, it becomes about resource mobilisation and, in that sense, acquires a material dimension.

Devastated by the onslaught of COVID-19, the global community needed leadership that possess a firm resolve to face the challenge and a sensitive, healing touch. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives, like the special SAARC meeting on COVID-19, creation of a special SAARC fund and the virtual G-20 summit added to the huge expectations of the world from India. A series of tele-conversations happened between PM Modi and the heads of governments from other countries — this is testimony to how the global community is looking forward to a proactive role from India.

Since April 3, 2020, PM Modi has had telephonic discussions with a number of world leaders including the US president Donald Trump, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Australian PM Scott Morrison, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez, Perez-Castejon, Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, Japanese PM Shinzo

Abe and the prime minister of Nepal, K P Sharma Oli. Issues like the status of COVID-19 pandemic, mutual support and facilitation as well as India's steps to counter the pandemic figured in these dialogues.

India has helped many developing and underdeveloped countries with medicines and medical equipment, and has also tried to strengthen bilateral knowledge-relationship. It started with SAARC, and a major deliverable that's underway is an information exchange platform (IEP) for SAARC countries. It is a platform to bring health professionals of SAARC countries closer and facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge, expertise, online training and best practices for combating the pandemic, in real time.

Besides helping developing countries, India is also engaging with countries like the US through collaboration in the areas of diagnostics and therapeutics of the disease. Under the existing bilateral collaboration in the healthcare sector, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the US shared important reagents with the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute in Gurugram. Such co-operation is expected to play a big role in developing new therapeutics and testing reagents for COVID-19. Countries worst-hit by the COVID-19 crisis in the European Union and other parts of the world have been investing in multiple research projects. Currently, the MEA is in the process of identifying the scope of collaboration with

countries on vaccines, diagnostics etc.

India's resources and material help, extended to several countries majorly in the form of medicines, is also remarkable. Under India's commitment of \$10 million, medical supplies/equipment have been provided to Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. They will shortly be provided to Afghanistan and Nepal too. Medical aid, in the form of select supplies from India, has also been sent to countries like Seychelles, Mauritius, Myanmar, and some African countries too, without compromising with the domestic need. When the US requested India, we supplied medicines to them too. The government has also cleared the export of COVID-19 drugs to countries such as Spain, Brazil, Bahrain, Germany and the UK, in line with the commercial contracts signed with Indian pharmaceutical companies.

Historically, India's global role was never limited to Track-One or Track-Two diplomacies, to use established parlance. A remarkably confident, composed and, truly, "New India" is today partnering with the world community in this global struggle — and this partnership goes beyond established norms of diplomacy. What we are engaging in is, in fact, our endeavour to implement what we have always believed in: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, the world is one family.

The writer is national vice president, BJP, and a Rajya Sabha MP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ONLY TOGETHER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fighting together' (IE, April 21). Sending teams to assess the ground situation in some states need not mean that the Centre and states are at loggerheads regarding evolving strategies to deal with the pandemic. Disease mapping and resource mobilisation vary from state to state and so do the responses to the threat. So far, India has done a creditable job in dealing with the Covid crisis and the same couldn't have been possible without the Centre and states working in tandem with the common goal to minimise the damage.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fighting together', (IE, April 21). Indeed, the Centre and states must work together. The Centre can formulate broad guidelines and leave their implementation to the states — and the latter should have some elbow room to modify them for local conditions. On the other hand, the Centre has the right to insist that the states stay true to the spirit of the guidelines it lays down.

Ravi Kant, Gurgaon

LEFT INEVITABLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The drift to the left' (IE, April 21). The coronavirus pandemic has shown the failure of the Western, capitalist countries. The people there, including the working-class, are suffering from income security and inequalities. In our country, we see the suffering of stranded migratory workers. The state ignores their existence.

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

With such inhumane policies on display, people could well want a more just future.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Katwa

DOUBLE FAILURE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Lawless in Palghar' (IE, April 21). The brutal lynching of three men in Mumbai is a matter of deep concern for the Maharashtra government because two of the victims were religious figures. The murders took place in the presence of police and this was the second major incident of lockdown violation in three days in which mobs gathered on the street. This shows that government not only failed in maintaining law and order but also failed in implementing lockdown effectively.

Adish Bohra, Ujjain

PANDEMIC WATCH



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. AP File

BRITAIN
Queen marks low-key 94th birthday

London: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II on Tuesday marked her 94th birthday privately at Windsor Castle after she had cancelled all forms of public celebration amid the coronavirus lockdown. Buckingham Palace released special images and videos on social media to reflect the milestones of the monarch's reign. The Queen is with her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, at Windsor Castle in Berkshire with a reduced household staff for their protection. The rest of the royal family are in lockdown in different parts of the UK, including grandson Prince Harry who is in the US. PTI

BRITAIN
UK's first Sikh emergency medic dies

London: Tributes have been pouring in for Manjeet Singh Riyat, an Emergency Medicine Consultant who died of coronavirus at the Royal Derby Hospital in the East Midlands region of England on Monday. Riyat, 52, from the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton, was the first Accident and Emergency (A&E) consultant from the Sikh community in the UK and was well-loved by his colleagues. "Mr Riyat, known to his colleagues as Manjeet, was a widely respected consultant in emergency medicine nationally," Gavin Boyle, Chief Executive of the hospital, said in his tribute. PTI

MYANMAR
WHO car with swab samples attacked

Yangon: A car used by WHO to transport swab samples to be tested for the COVID-19 virus was attacked in Myanmar, killing the driver and wounding a passenger. The *Global New Light of Myanmar* newspaper reported Tuesday that the vehicle bearing a UN license plate was attacked in Rakhine on Monday. Rakhine has been the scene of bitter fighting between the government and the Arakan Army, an ethnic guerrilla group fighting for autonomy in Rakhine State. Each side blamed the other for the Monday attack. AP

Trump says will suspend immigration to US

THE NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON, APRIL 21

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump said Monday evening that he intended to close the United States to people trying to immigrate into the country to live and work, a drastic move that he said would protect American workers from foreign competition once the nation's economy began to recover from the shutdown caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens," Trump wrote on Twitter, "I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!"

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has used health concerns to justify aggressively restricting immigration. Even before the tweet, it had expanded travel restrictions, slowed visa processing and

moved to swiftly bar asylum-seekers and unauthorized immigrants from entering the country, alarming immigration advocates who have said that Trump and his advisers are using a global pandemic to further hard-line immigration policies.

But the president's late-night announcement Monday signals his most wide-ranging attempt yet to seal the country off from the rest of the world. A formal order temporarily barring the provision of new green cards and work visas could come as early as the next few days, according to several people familiar with the plan.

Under such an executive order, the Trump administration would no longer approve any applications from foreigners to live and work in the United States for an undetermined period of time, effectively shutting down the legal immigration system in the same way the president has long advocated closing the borders to illegal immigration. It was not immediately clear what legal basis Trump



US President Donald Trump with Vice President Mike Pence and Assistant Secretary for Health Adm Brett Giroir. Reuters

would claim to justify shutting down most immigration.

Workers who have for years received visas to perform specialized jobs in the United States would also be denied permission to arrive, though some workers in some industries deemed critical could be ex-

empted from the ban, the people familiar with the president's discussion said.

The number of visas issued to foreigners abroad looking to immigrate to the United States has declined by about 25 percent, to 462,422 in the 2019 fiscal year from 617,752 in 2016.

Several people familiar with the president's plans said the Department of Homeland Security was separately weighing a large expansion of travel restrictions that already prohibited travelers from Europe and China. The restrictions would significantly shrink the number of people able to come to the United States for short-term visits.

Trump and his advisers have argued inside the White House that doing more to bar people from other countries from coming into the United States, either for short-term visits or to live and work in the country for longer periods, could help limit the number of infected people who arrive from potential coronavirus hot spots around the world. And they argue that it could relieve pressure on the American health care system.

But Trump's primary focus appears to be on protecting American workers as the virus ravages what had been a rapidly growing job market.

US Congress, Trump in tentative deal on \$500bn coronavirus relief bill

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, APRIL 21

THE US Congress reached a tentative agreement Tuesday with President Donald Trump on a nearly \$500 billion coronavirus relief bill that would replenish a small business rescue program, provide hospitals with another \$75 billion, and implement a nationwide virus testing program to facilitate reopening the economy.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer announced the agreement Tuesday morning and Trump tweeted his support hours later, saying he'll sign the bill if it passes both chambers.

It wasn't clear if the Senate could pass the legislation during an afternoon session, which

would take unanimous agreement to bypass Senate rules.

"We have a deal and I think we'll pass it today," Schumer said. He said post-midnight talks among leaders of both parties and top Trump administration officials produced a breakthrough agreement on the package.

Trump said he supports the measure, tweeting: "I urge the Senate and House to pass the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act with additional funding." The president said he was open to including in a subsequent virus aid package fiscal relief for state and local government — which Democrats had wanted for the current bill — along with infrastructure projects.

Pak PM to be tested for COVID-19: aide

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 21

IMRAN KHAN has agreed to get tested for the novel coronavirus after a well-known philanthropist was tested positive for the COVID-19, days after meeting the Pakistan prime minister, his doctor said on Tuesday.

Faisal Edhi, the son of late philanthropist Abdul Sattar Edhi and chairman of the Edhi Foundation, met Khan last week. Khan's personal physician and CEO of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital, Faisal Sultan, told the media that Khan would undergo COVID-19 test.

"Prime Minister Khan will undergo test of the coronavirus to show that he is a responsible citizen of this country," Sultan said. "We will follow all protocols in place and make recommendations accordingly."

It is not clear how Khan will run the government if he was asked to go into quarantine. Khan is currently working as per routine and also chaired a meeting of Cabinet.

Earlier, Saad, the son of Faisal Edhi, told the *Dawn* newspaper that his father started showing symptoms last week, soon after meeting Khan in Islamabad on April 15.

Warns mosques will be shut if directives not followed

Khan on Tuesday warned that mosques will be forced to shut down during the upcoming month of Ramadan if people did

not follow the official directives issued to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Khan's warning came days after the government allowed congregational prayers in mosques during the month of Ramadan after the clerics agreed to follow the government guidelines on social distancing while praying in mosques.

According to the agreement, people above the age of 50, minors and those suffering from flu will not be allowed to enter the mosques.

The worshippers must maintain a distance of six feet when praying and people should wear face masks and avoid shaking hands or embracing others.

Khan said that Pakistan decided to keep mosques open in Ramadan because "we are an independent nation and take decisions according to our own situation".

He made the comments while addressing the media along with his key team of advisers about the country's fight against the pandemic.

He, however, urged people to pray at home and those attending mosques should follow official guidelines.

He warned that the government would be forced to shut down mosques if it was found that official directives on the matter were not followed. "I don't want that police arrest people who want to pray in mosques," he said. "Our challenge is very big, including how to tackle poverty in the wake of coronavirus lockdown. But we will come out of it," he said. PTI

Nepal to import equipment worth \$18m to fight corona

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, APRIL 21

NEPAL IS set to import \$18 million worth of equipment from China to fight the spread of coronavirus in the country, officials said.

They said 67 different items, including corona testing kits, is being bought by the Nepal Army as authorised by the govern-

ment, Brigadier Bigyan Dev Panday, spokesperson of the Nepal Army, said.

The Army was assigned the job as earlier purchase by private firm following a deal with the Ministry of Health had to be abandoned mid way through after it was found inflating rates and buying substandard goods.

Nepal has also been negotiating with India for purchase of 53 items.



REMEMBERING HOLOCAUST AMID LOCKDOWN

Flares burn at the empty Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Centre, Jerusalem to mark Israel's annual Holocaust Remembrance Day amid coronavirus restrictions around the country. Reuters

G20 vows 'sufficient' global food supplies amid coronavirus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH, APRIL 21

G20 AGRICULTURE ministers on Tuesday pledged to ensure "sufficient" global food supplies amid the coronavirus pandemic as the UN warned the number of people facing acute hunger globally could nearly double.

"We will work together to help ensure that sufficient, safe, affordable, and nutritious food continues to be available and accessible to all people, including the

poorest, the most vulnerable, and displaced people," said the ministers from the 20 most advanced economies. "Under the current challenging circumstances, we stress the importance of avoiding food losses and waste caused by disruptions throughout food supply chains, which could exacerbate food insecurity and nutrition risks and economic loss," they said after a virtual meeting hosted by the group's current president Saudi Arabia.

As COVID-19 lockdowns disrupt the global economy, the G20

ministers also said they were working to prevent "excessive food price volatility" in international markets.

The ministers stressed it was important that coronavirus restrictions do not create "unnecessary barriers" to trade and food supply chains.

The number of people facing acute food insecurity could increase to 265 million in 2020, from 135 million in 2019, as a result of the economic impact of COVID-19, the UN's World Food Programme warned on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka postpones parliamentary polls by 2 months



Families of victims killed in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, on the first anniversary of the attacks, in Negombo on Tuesday. Reuters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, APRIL 21

SRI LANKA'S Election Commission has postponed its parliamentary elections for nearly two months in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak that has killed seven people and infected 295 others in the country.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on March 2 dissolved the Parliament, six months ahead of schedule and called a snap election on April 25.

A gazette notice signed by the three members of the National Election Commission

announcing June 20 date of the election was issued on Monday.

The EC has written to President Rajapaksa asking him to seek the highest court's opinion on a possible constitutional standoff arising from the postponement of the election.

It said that the postponement meant that Parliament would not be able to meet on June 2, which is three months from the dismissal of last parliament on March 2.

However, Rajapaksa asserted that it was the election commission's job to fix the polls date and as such no need for the Supreme Court's intervention.

Earlier, the election commission met with the government officials and reviewed the pandemic situation affecting the election machinery.

The parliamentary polls were announced 6 months ahead of the schedule as Rajapaksa, who was elected as president in November, wanted a new Parliament to implement his mandate.

Rajapaksa is also under pressure to re-summon the dissolved Parliament in order to approve finances for government business from May.

The previous Parliament had approved funds till April 30.

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

S Korea, China cast doubt on reports of Kim Jong Un being gravely ill post surgery

REUTERS
SEOUL, APRIL 21

SOUTH KOREAN and Chinese officials on Tuesday cast doubt on reports North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was ill after media outlets said he had undergone a cardiovascular procedure and was in "grave danger".

Daily NK, a Seoul-based speciality website, reported late on Monday, citing one unnamed source in North Korea, that Kim was recovering after undergoing the procedure on April 12. The North Korean leader is believed to be about 36.

CNN cited a US official with direct knowledge of the matter as saying Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in grave danger after surgery. Bloomberg quoted an unnamed US official as saying the White House was told that Kim took a turn for the worse after the surgery.

However, two South Korean government officials rejected the CNN report without elaborating on whether Kim had undergone surgery. The presidential Blue House said there were no unusual signs coming from the reclusive, nuclear-capable state. Kim is the unquestioned

leader of North Korea and the sole commander of its nuclear arsenal. He has no clear successor and any instability in the country could be a major international risk.

The state KCNA news agency gave no indication of the whereabouts of Kim in routine dispatches on Tuesday, but said he had sent birthday gifts to prominent citizens.

An official at the Chinese Communist Party's International Liaison Department, which deals with North Korea, told Reuters the source did not believe Kim was critically ill. China is North Korea's only major ally.

Pak removes 1,800 names from terrorist watch list: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW YORK, APRIL 21

PAKISTAN HAS removed around 1,800 terrorists from its watch list, including that of 2008 Mumbai attacks mastermind and LeT operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, ahead of a new round of assessments by the global anti-money-laundering watchdog The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), according to a US-based start-up that automates watchlist compliance.

The so-called proscribed persons list, which is maintained by Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority or NACTA, is



LeT operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi is among those off the list. AP File

intended in part to help financial institutions avoid doing business with or processing transactions

of suspected terrorists.

The list in 2018 contained about 7,600 names. It has been

reduced to under 3,800 in the past 18 months, according to Castellum.AI, a New York-based regulatory technology company.

About 1,800 of the names have been removed since the beginning of March, according to data collected by Castellum.

Pakistan is working to implement an action plan that has been mutually agreed to with the Paris-based FATF, part of which involves "demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions."

It is possible that these removals are part of Pakistan's action plan to implement the FATF recommendations, it said.

While Pakistan received a rating of "low" effectiveness

from the FATF regarding terrorist financing preventive measures and financial sanctions, the FATF did note in February that Pakistan has largely addressed 14 of 27 action items, with varying levels of progress made on the rest of the action, it said.

The FATF will again evaluate Pakistan's progress in June 2020.

Currently placed on the FATF's 'grey list', Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations, a measure that officials here fear could hurt its economy, which is already under severe strain.

COVID-19 EFFECT BANKING

Lockdown impact: Banks unable to send renewed debit, credit cards to customers

SANDEEP SINGH & SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

THE ONGOING lockdown is posing a new challenge for banking customers, whose debit and credit cards have crossed their expiry date this month or are set to expire over the next couple of months. With the lockdown in place and courier service not being allowed to function by local authorities despite the Centre mandating a restart post April 20, bankers say they are unable to replace the expired cards.

As per a senior official of a leading payment network companies, on an average around 50 lakh cards come up for renewal every month. However, it is expected the number of cards that would have come for renewal in April may be more than this average.

RBI data shows that in the month of April 2015, the banking industry added 1.13 crore debit cards and over 1.7 lakh credit cards making it a total addition of nearly 1.15 crore cards. Even if 80 per cent of these accounts are active and had a validity period of five years, it would mean that nearly 90 lakh cards were due for renewal in April 2020. In the month of May 2015, over 60 lakh new cards were added and they would ideally come for renewal next month.

There has been a sharp rise in number of cards issued over the last five years. While in March 2015, there were 55.24 crore debit cards and 2.11 crore credit cards, RBI data shows that as of January 2020 there were 81.6 crore outstanding number of debit cards and 5.6 crore credit cards.

"On an average, about 4-5 million cards across banks come up for renewal every month keeping 5 year validity in mind. If you extrapolate that for three months the number would be close to 1.5 crore cards and thus it will impact a large number of customers," said a senior official with a

leading payment network company. Bankers are demanding that while banking is an essential service, this aspect of physical delivery of cards should also be made an essential service. "While some businesses like courier have been allowed post April 20, the situation on the ground is not exactly conducive for courier companies to deliver the cards to customers," said a senior official with a private sector bank. He added while banks reached out to India Post for delivery related help, "India Post declined to do so."

What are the options with customers?

While banks can technically enhance the expiry period of the card issued by them, bankers say it is a tedious process. "We will have to do segregation according to customers and then process it both at our end and also get the merchant systems updated," said an official with a bank.

Among other options are cashless withdrawal and virtual cards. Sources say only handful of banks offer cashless withdrawal facility. Another option is the virtual card, but bankers say while virtual cards are used for e-transactions, there is a constraint on cash withdrawal which is the prime necessity in current times.

"By far, debit cards are the most convenient for a large number of people and if the renewed cards don't reach the customer, it will cause inconvenience to millions," said a banker. An option for customers in such a case would be to visit a branch and withdraw cash as per their needs. "Unavailability of courier services has affected not only delivery of cards but also many other banking operations. We are trying to ensure that customer inconvenience is minimised. The impact right now is limited since customers need cash only for essentials as other economic activities are shutdown," a senior official with a public sector bank said.

INDIAN BASKET COMPRISES OMAN-DUBAI AVERAGE & BRENT

US oil hits freak negative, but Indian fuel prices may not fall

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

THE WTI (West Texas Intermediate) oil price crash might not translate into a sharp lowering of prices at retail pumps for consumers in India, given that the cost of the Indian basket of crude — the average of Oman, Dubai and Brent crude — was at around \$24.44 a barrel as on April 20, according to a government official.

Besides, a senior executive with an OMC said, given the high tax component in India and the government's tendency to hike levies when input prices drop, the consumers may not get the desired relief. The government raised excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 3 per litre last month, the largest single hike in duty since 2012, in order to improve revenue position.

Another factor that could hamper transmission of price reduction is the sharp surge in shipment costs, which account for nearly one-third of the landed cost of crude oil in India and have risen almost five-fold in April compared to last year.

While determining petrol and diesel retail prices, OMCs in India consider trade parity pricing, which is determined on prevailing



Crude oil storage tanks at the Cushing oil hub in the US. Reuters file

prices of these products in the international market. The pricing formula incorporates 80 per cent of the import price and 20 per cent export price of the fuel. After that, other inputs such as dealer commission, excise and state levies are added to the trade parity price.

The Indian basket comprises Sour grade (Oman and Dubai average) and Sweet grade (Brent dated) crude oil in a 76:24 ratio.

Rising shipping costs are another factor that increases the landed cost in India. Spot charter rates for crude tankers in early April topped \$200,000 a day, according to Morgan Stanley, as against about \$40,000 a day last year. The surge in rates indicates

that traders are betting that they can wait out the price slide at sea.

Petrol and diesel prices have remained unchanged for over a month at Rs 69.69 per litre and Rs 62.29 per litre, respectively, in the national capital, even as crude oil prices have fallen internationally from around \$30 per barrel to \$21 per barrel, as government raised taxes and OMCs tried to balance their finances.

Experts say OMCs are making up for inventory losses and reductions in refining margins due to a drop in demand by as much as 70 per cent due to the lockdown and are unlikely to lower prices in response to the fall in crude prices until demand for fuel recovers.

'Policy measures to provide only temporary relief to state finances'

India Ratings has said in a report that policy measures to boost liquidity would provide only temporary relief to state finances, but the onus is on the Centre to extend support

OUTLOOK

Most states may be able to make payments in April 2020 using reserve funds, increased WMA limits, and other revenues. However, if the revenue sources of the states remain weak even in May, it will be difficult to make committed payments, it said

14 of 18 state governments analysed based on monthly

expenditure (of FY21 state budgets) and liquidity positions show they will be able to make payments for April

4 states — Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — may find it difficult to make payments if the lockdown continues beyond May 3 despite the supportive measures for liquidity

Several states have already deferred a part of the salary of state government employees. "In such a situation, Ind-Ra believes the central government will have to do the heavy lifting of raising money and pass it on to the state governments for expenditure," the report said

Source: India Ratings

OMCs use crude price drops to make up for fall in demand

KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

PETROL AND diesel prices have remained unchanged for over a month at Rs 69.59 per litre and Rs 62.29 per litre, respectively, in the Capital, even as Indian crude basket has fallen from around \$33.36 per barrel on average in March to \$24 per barrel on April 20.

Experts say oil marketing companies (OMCs) are making up for inventory losses and reductions in refining margins due to a drop off in demand by as much as 70 per cent due to the lockdown and are unlikely to lower prices in response to the fall in crude prices until demand for fuel recovers.

The price of WTI, the benchmark for prices in North America, fell below zero on Monday closing at -\$37.63. India's basket of crude is not directly affected by the fall as the Indian basket comprises Sour grade (Oman and Dubai average) and Sweet grade (Brent dated) crude oil in a 76:24 ratio.

"OMCs are unlikely to cut prices until demand recovers," said Abhijeet Bora, senior analyst at Sharekhani by BNP Paribas, noting OMCs such as Indian Oil Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and Bharat Petroleum Corporation would

Experts say OMCs are making up for inventory losses and reductions in refining margins

use lower prices to make up for inventory losses and lower gross refining margins.

Sunilkumar Katke, head of commodities at Axis Securities, said the retail price of petrol in Delhi would be lower by around Rs 12 per litre at around Rs 57, even after increase in taxes and levies by the government if OMCs had maintained the same level of margins in the price of petrol as they were in January before the beginning of a price war between Russia and OPEC pushed up supply and the lockdowns due to the coronavirus outbreak crashed demand.

Katke said despite increased margins, OMCs would not be able to make up for the impact of the fall in demand. "It will compensate for the loss to an extent but not enough given that demand has gone far down. Most of the oil making companies will report poor numbers," said Katke, adding OMCs will be able to benefit from improved margins only after demand picked up to normal levels.

US crude rout fallout: Sensex falls 1,011 points amid global sell-off

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 21

DOMESTIC STOCK markets on Tuesday plunged 3 per cent as the pain in oil markets led to a global sell-off. The Sensex plunged by 1,011 points to 30,636.71 and the NSE Nifty Index lost 280 points (3.03 per cent) to 8,981.45 amid heavy selling pressure.

The rupee also ended 29 paise lower at 76.83 per dollar against Monday's close of 76.54.

After opening gap down, Indian markets tracked weak global cues and remained under pressure throughout the session. The weak oil demand due to COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in countries continued to drag oil prices into the negative territory, impacting the outlook on the global economy, analysts

EXPLAINED Eye on earnings

CORPORATE EARNINGS have been impacted by the pandemic-related shutdowns. Post earnings management guidance has also not given clear indication about the recovery path. Earnings results will be in focus for the future course of the company business.

Oil prices were still crashing after a stunning collapse on Monday that saw US crude futures plunge below zero for the first time in history.

S Ranganathan, Head of

Research at LKP Securities, said, "Manifestation of multiple events took a heavy toll on crude oil. Financials pounded the markets since morning with no respite whatsoever. Advance-decline ratio was skewed towards the latter. Barring some pharma names, nothing whatsoever was spared among the heavy weights."

After the US crude crash, markets, in sync with global markets traded negatively, as the extent of the impact of lockdowns and the global slowdown is becoming evident. "Corporate earnings have been impacted by the pandemic related shutdowns. Post earnings management guidance has not given clear indication about the recovery path. Earnings results will be in focus for the future course of the company business," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services.

'Health cover premium can be paid monthly, quarterly or half yearly'

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, APRIL 21

HEALTH INSURANCE customers, who are facing the onslaught of coronavirus pandemic, will now be able to pay the premium on a monthly or quarterly basis with immediate effect instead of the current practice of lump sum payment for the full year in one instalment.

The directive of the Insurance and Regulatory Development Authority of India (Irdai) on the monthly payment option is expected to ease the pressure on customers at a time when the country is facing salary cuts and job losses, insurers said. "In view of prevailing conditions owing to COVID-19 outbreak and considering the need for easing the payment of health insurance premiums, all the insurers are allowed to collect health insurance premiums

EASING PRESSURE ON CUSTOMERS

■ The directive of the Insurance and Regulatory Development Authority of India (Irdai) on the monthly payment option is expected to ease the pressure on customers at a time when the country is facing salary cuts and job losses, insurers said

in installments," Irdai said.

The premium mode proposed to be added may be monthly, quarterly or half yearly and the resulting premium amounts under each frequency are consistent with premium amounts under other premium modes of the underlying product, it said in a circular.

The Rs 50,000 crore health insurance segment is the fastest growing segment in the insurance sector. As of February 2020,

■ According to Irdai, there should be no change in basic premium table and charging structure under the approved individual product to which new premium payment mode is being added

insurance companies had collected Rs 46,777 crore as premium from customers in 11 months, according to data collected by the General Insurance Council.

However, according to Irdai, there should be no change in basic premium table and charging structure under the approved individual product to which new premium payment mode is being added. This will be applicable for health insurance policies that

are due for renewal up to March, 2021, insurers said.

Amit Chhabra, Health business head, Policybazaar.com, said, "Remember, earlier in 2019, insurance companies were asked to refile products by October 1, 2020 and thereby have the option of monthly payment active. Now post this guideline, the option of monthly payment mode will be followed with immediate effect. Not only will this help consumers in the current scenario of COVID-19 but also increase health insurance penetration in India from a long-term perspective."

The facility of payment of premiums in installments should be offered in respect of any product or products and the same should be offered to all policyholders without any discrimination and policyholders shall be also notified of the applicable conditions, Irdai said. "Customers can buy covers with adequate

sum insured and leverage the monthly payment mode in this case. However, we should keep in mind that the tenure of installment, be it 1 year or forever, will depend on the insurance company and the monthly mode payment would also be subject to the IT preparedness at the insurer's end," Chhabra said.

The premium installment facility may be offered either as a permanent feature by duly complying with the norms specified in the guidelines or may be offered as a temporary relief for a period of twelve months (one policy year) in respect of all the health insurance policies that are due for renewal up to March 2021, Irdai said.

Earlier this week, Irdai had said health insurers will have to convey their decision on requests raised for cashless treatment as well as on the final discharge or the amount that will be paid to the hospital within two hours.

part of the faceless communication. "These emails are auto-generated u/s 245 of the I-T Act in refund cases where there is any outstanding demand payable by the assessee. In case the outstanding demand has already been paid by the taxpayer or it has been stayed by the higher tax authorities, the taxpayers are requested through these mails to provide the status update so that while issuing the refund, these amounts are not held back and their refunds are released forthwith," it said.

Mohandas Pai, co-founder of Aarin Capital, on Monday tweeted about the issues being faced from the tax department, tagging the

ICICI Bank confirms exposure to troubled oil trader Hin Leong

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

INDIA'S SECOND largest private lender ICICI Bank on Tuesday confirmed its exposure to the Singapore-based troubled oil trader Hin Leong Trading Pte Ltd (HLT) and said it is taking steps to protect its interest.

"We confirm that the Bank, in the normal course of its business, has exposure to the borrower group in question, is taking due steps to protect its interests, and will appropriately reflect the same in its financial statements, as it would do in respect of all its banking exposures," ICICI said in a stock

Singapore police launch investigation

Singapore: Singapore police said they have launched an investigation following news that the founder of Hin Leong Trading had told the firm not to disclose hundreds of millions of dollars in losses over several years. REUTERS

exchange filing. Reuters on Monday reported the ICICI Bank has \$100 million exposure to the trader.

CBDT: E-mails to 1.72 lakh assesses seek only updates, not notices or 'arm twisting'

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

AFTER THE income tax department sent e-mails to 1.72 lakh assesses including start-ups, companies and individuals who have outstanding tax demands and tax refunds, it said Tuesday that the computer generated e-mails are just seeking an update from the assessee for the proposed adjustment of refund with the outstanding demand and "cannot be misconstrued as a notice of recovery or be perceived as so-called arm twisting".

The CBDT said these emails are

part of the faceless communication. "These emails are auto-generated u/s 245 of the I-T Act in refund cases where there is any outstanding demand payable by the assessee. In case the outstanding demand has already been paid by the taxpayer or it has been stayed by the higher tax authorities, the taxpayers are requested through these mails to provide the status update so that while issuing the refund, these amounts are not held back and their refunds are released forthwith," it said.

Mohandas Pai, co-founder of Aarin Capital, on Monday tweeted about the issues being faced from the tax department, tagging the

PMO and the Finance Minister.

Since April 8, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has been fast-tracking refund payments to help taxpayers in the pandemic situation and has to date issued nearly 14 lakh refunds worth over Rs 9,000 crore to various taxpayers including individuals, HUFs, proprietors, firms, corporate, start-ups, and micro, and SMEs.

The CBDT said the assessee have to furnish details of the pending demand, whether it has been paid or has been stayed by any appellate/competent authority so it can keep the same in abeyance and do not deduct this amount from refund.

'87% feel household earnings will reduce in next 12 months'

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

AMID THE lockdown to counter the COVID-19 outbreak, 87 per cent of respondents of a LocalCircles survey are of the view that their household earnings will reduce in the next 12 months as against last year, as per the results conducted by the community social media platform.

The survey was conducted online across over 150 districts and received around 17,000 votes.

Listing the reasons for stress during the ongoing lockdown, 31 per cent of the respondents listed job, business or finances, while 11

per cent said procuring essential supplies for households.

On the question regarding impact of COVID-19 on income in the next 12 months, 26 per cent of the respondents said it will reduce by 50 per cent or more, while 25 per cent said it will reduce by 25-50 per cent. 12 per cent said it will reduce by up to 25 per cent and 24 per cent did not quantify the reduction. "Only 2 per cent respondents believe their income will rise in the next 12 months while 11 per cent said coronavirus will have no impact on their income," it said.

In a poll in March, 28 per cent of the respondents said they expected their household income to reduce in the next 12 months.

BRIEFLY

HDFC cuts home loan rate

New Delhi: HDFC on Tuesday slashed its lending rate by 15 basis points amid a gradual decline in cost of borrowing.

Banks get 45 day breather

Mumbai: The RBI said banks will have 45 days to invest cheaper funds raised via the second version of TLTROs.

Tullow Oil names Dhir CEO

New Delhi: Tullow Oil said Rahul Dhir, a former Cairn India chief executive, will take over as CEO and ED of the group from July 1. PTI

Karnataka Bank reappointments

New Delhi: Following RBI's approval, Karnataka Bank's board has reappointed P Jayarama Bhat part-time (non-executive) chairman to hold office up to November 13, 2021, and Mahabaleshwara M S as managing director & CEO for three more years, said a statement.

Kalyan Jewellers' gold certificate

New Delhi: Kalyan Jewellers has launched a Gold Ownership Certificate, which can be purchased on the website or before Akshaya Tritiya, as per a release. ENS

CA wants 5 Tests, BCCI non-committal

Cricket Australia wants an extra match in the four-Test series against India; latter reckons the proposal is premature

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 21

THE BCCI is yet to give any thought to Cricket Australia's (CA) five-Test series overture, as it feels the whole idea is a little premature. According to a Board official, much will depend on the future of the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in Australia in October-November.

On Tuesday, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts addressed the media via video conference and said hosting an additional Test against India could be an option. Asked about this, a BCCI official told *The Indian Express*: "We haven't given it a thought as yet. We have a World Cup and Australia is in lockdown (the country has closed its borders to all foreigners for six months) until the end of September. We have to see how they go for that (T20 World Cup). Depending on that, the bilateral series will be worked out."

The economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic is massive and cricket, like all other sectors, is already feeling the pinch. There's a big question mark over the T20 World Cup taking place as per schedule and a cancellation will see CA suffer a huge revenue loss. Every board might stand to lose \$7-8 million if the ICC event is cancelled, but Australia being the tournament host, will take a bigger hit. With India being the game's moneybags, CA is banking on the home series against Virat Kohli and company to somewhat make up for the loss. If by the end of the year, the Covid-19 problem doesn't run its course and the tour is cancelled, the monetary loss could be irreparable.

As Roberts mentioned, hosting the Test series at one venue, without spectators, is an option as well. "Whether or not there are people at the venue or not; we will explore all viable options. Fortunately, we have a little bit of time to work through the different scenarios with the India series. But we are not ruling out any possibility for that at this point in time," Roberts said.

As per the current itinerary, Australia are slated to host India for a four-Test series. However, back in January, when a CA delegation led by chairman Earl Eddings met BCCI office-bearers, the possibility of incorporating an additional Test was discussed. The Indian board, though, remained non-



Australia and India have regularly met in four-Test series--the last one coming as recently as 2018-19. File

committal. At the moment, India play five-Test series only against England. But CA, too, is keen to have five matches in all India-Australia Test series, for India's participation guarantees massive revenue.

"We won't rule anything out in terms of the Indian series. Along with the BCCI and Indian players, we want to stage a series that inspires the cricket world, whether or not there are people in the stands," Roberts said, adding that the relationship between Australian officials and their Indian counterparts is "strong".

With the coronavirus pandemic wreaking havoc globally, sport has come to a standstill. Roberts said CA is seriously examining the possibility of hosting the T20 World Cup as per schedule. Playing the matches behind closed doors is not ruled out either. "If you contemplate the prospect of the international season

in particular being affected, we have an issue of (losing revenue of) hundreds of millions of dollars on our hands," Roberts said at the media conference.

He added: "We will be doing everything possible to launch and stage a season in 2020-21. What we do know is that the bigger returns from the broadcast rights around the event that are generated by the ICC are very important to all of our counterparts around the cricket world. So, it's incumbent on us to do everything possible to stage and host the T20 World Cup."

Pay cuts likely

With CA estimating a revenue loss of \$20 million as of now, contracted players reportedly could be asked to take pay cuts. This is despite the fact that the Australian board has

Along with the BCCI and Indian players, we want to stage a series that inspires the cricket world, whether or not there are people in the stands."

KEVIN ROBERTS, CRICKET AUSTRALIA CEO

a broadcast rights deal worth \$1.2 billion with Fox Sports and Channel Seven for a six-year cycle from 2018.

"We were completely on track with our plan for the year until coronavirus hit. The unfortunate reality of that is we are estimating that we have taken a \$20m impact thus far. And we have to anticipate, given the unknown and fast-moving nature of this situation, that there will be more risks than that \$20m," Roberts said.

DDCA's deal under scanner; ombudsman orders forensic audit

NIHAL KOSHIE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

THE DELHI and District Cricket Association (DDCA) ombudsman has ordered a forensic audit of an agreement between the state unit and a contractor for modernisation of the restaurant, bar, members' lounge and cricket library. Ombudsman Justice (retired) Deepak Verma took the decision when he got no response from Apex Council members after he asked them to submit all documents related to MSL Jangid JV, the contractor. The value of the work awarded was Rs 6.25 crore.

He has also issued instructions to stop the payment of Rs 34 lakh to the contractor as relevant documents were not produced, including a copy of the original agreement signed on December 10, 2019. Two members of the Apex Council, one of whom is part of the infrastructure committee of the DDCA, had written to the ombudsman alleging fraud in the agreement with the contractor. Last month, Justice Verma ordered a forensic audit of the DDCA for the past five years, including balance sheets and all memorandum of understanding documents that have been signed but stated that the agreement with MSL Jangid JV had to be scrutinised first.

"I would like to point out that since the complaints were primarily made against the agreement (between DDCA and MSL Jangid JV), it would be proper to conduct the forensic audit in relation to the said agreement first, followed by a comprehensive audit of the entire DDCA. Forensic audit with respect to agreement with MSL Jangid JV shall be completed expeditiously and preferably within two to four weeks from the date of this order," Justice Verma wrote in an order issued last month.

Sanjay Bhardwaj, a member of the finance and infrastructure committee, was one of the complainants. Bhardwaj was surprised when he visited the registered address submitted by the contractor.

"The address mentioned in the agreement is 540, Street 10, Sardarpur Colony, Sector 45, Noida. I went myself to check if any company operated from this address. There was no such company. The building number mentioned is

At the address mentioned of a marketing company, an IT firm and a trading company - all of whom received payments from the DDCA - were a ghee shop, a dispensary and a garment shop.

540 but there is no building number beyond 480. The DDCA has got into an agreement with a company whose address is false. It is a slum area and no company address of Jangid JV was found. I wrote to the ombudsman because there seemed to be something fraudulent," Bhardwaj, who is also a director (cricket), said.

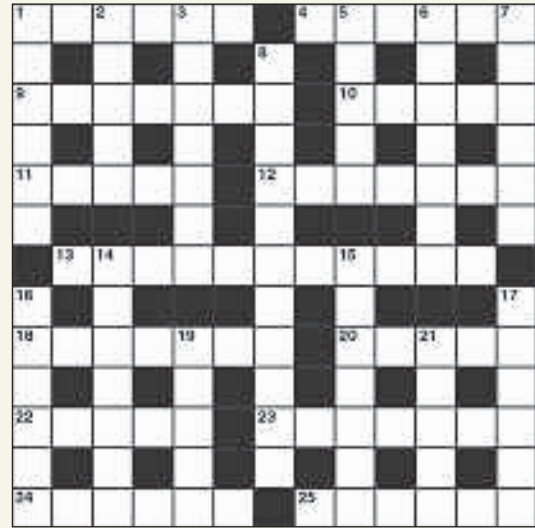
He also claimed to have video recordings of his visit to Sardarpur Colony and conversations with people in the area. DDCA standing counsel Gautam Dutta was appointed by the ombudsman as the person-in-charge to assist the auditor and to 'ensure all compliance'.

"There is a complaint by two directors of the company, one is the joint secretary and one is the cricket director, who himself is part of the infrastructure committee. If these people are saying that there is something fishy in the agreement then the entire Apex Council, the entire administrative staff of the DDCA must dig out all documents and unearth whatever is there in the infrastructure fiasco. Every time corruption charges are levelled, they are swept under the carpet in the DDCA," Dutta said.

This is not the first time that DDCA has been under the scanner for connections with alleged shell companies. An internal fact-finding report in 2015 found at least three companies that had received payments from the DDCA for work at the Kotla having the same registered office, same individual directors and shared email IDs.

Visits to the registered addresses of these companies by *The Indian Express* shortly after the fact-finding report was released showed that they did not function from the location mentioned. At the address mentioned of a marketing company, an IT company and a trading company - all of whom received payments from the DDCA - were a ghee shop, a dispensary and a garment shop.

CROSSWORD 4098



- ACROSS**
- 1 A number sail out East, in case (6)
 - 4 Holiday break for Teresa (6)
 - 9 He cuts inside the fold (7)
 - 10 Place for landing and take-off (5)
 - 11 Transplanted trees (5)
 - 12 Watches Nordic money - not a pretty sight (7)
 - 13 It means your appetite was good all right (7,4)
 - 18 Conspicuous lack of essential furniture (7)
 - 20 Boasting without publicity is well done (5)
 - 22 A capital atmosphere in a small business house (5)
 - 23 A diner's ordered fish (7)
 - 24 Firm stayed disorganised (6)
 - 25 Speaking easily, trouble unfelt (6)
- DOWN**
- 1 Very good man in church (6)
 - 2 Unusually sleek items of food (5)
 - 3 Retire from the contest - not up to it? (7)
 - 5 Beer is taken in by the gangway (5)
 - 6 Change course when the vessel's caught in the swell (4,3)
 - 7 Produced the rent (6)
 - 8 Safe deanery constructed without ceremony (4-3-4)
 - 14 One must do it to survive (7)
 - 15 Free translation of braille (7)
 - 16 Tries to gain an admission? (6)
 - 17 Not lying about one's height (6)
 - 19 Think anxiously about the children (5)
 - 21 I'd be in Lincoln to stay (5)

Solutions Crossword 4097: Across: 1 Support, 5 Sepia, 8 Once and for all, 9 Troll, 10 Lettuce, 11 Attest, 12 Import, 15 Thinner, 17 Towed, 19 Cavalry charge, 20 Essen, 21 Desists. Down: 1 Short, 2 Pack of thieves, 3 Oracles, 4 Toddle, 5 Scout, 6 Play upon words, 7 Allment, 11 Article, 13 Matches, 14 Frayed, 16 Nylon, 18 Dress.

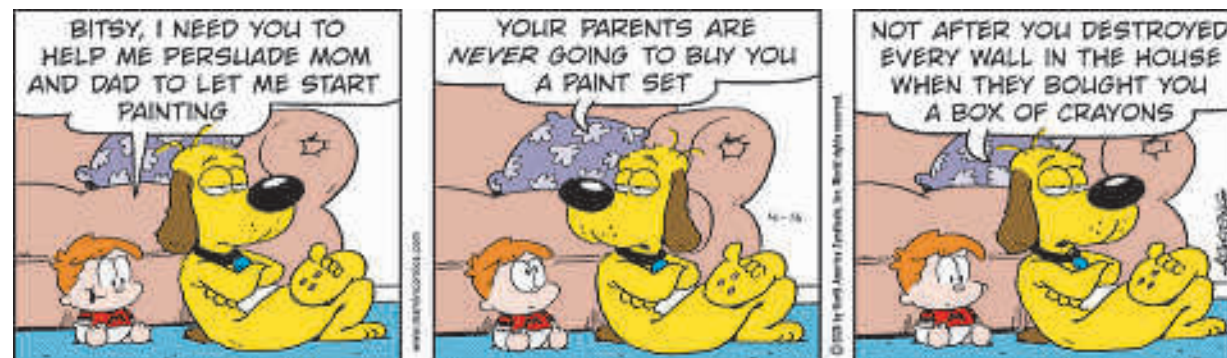
OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



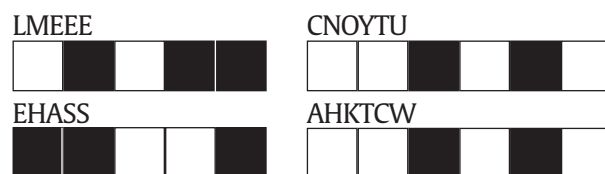
MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLD WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Rest is the _____ of labour - Plutarch (5,5)



SOLUTION: Rest is the SWEET SASS of labour - Plutarch

SUDOKU 4187

Difficulty Level 2s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4186

