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## FOUR DAYS TO END OF LOCKDOWN

# Considerable relaxations May 4 onward, says Centre, clears return home of stranded migrants

Curbs to be eased in many districts; no movement from containment zones, hotspots

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

IN AN indication of its plans after May 3 when the current phase of the lockdown ends, the Centre on Wednesday said there will be "considerable relaxations" in many districts.

The Union Home Ministry also issued guidelines for movement of stranded migrant labourers, students, and tourists who want to return home. Sources, however, said this will not apply to those in hotspots or containment zones.

In a statement, the Ministry said, "New guidelines to fight COVID-19 will come into effect from 4th May, which shall give considerable relaxations to many districts. Details regarding this shall be communicated in coming days."

Curbs are expected to be eased in districts where cases are tapering. The Health Ministry has identified 129 of the country's 736 districts as hotspots. On April 15, at the end of the first lockdown, 177 districts had been notified as hotspots.

The order allowing interstate movement of those stranded comes almost a week after states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh began transporting their migrant labour and students stuck in other states. Wednesday's order said, "Due to lockdown, migrant workers, pilgrims, tourists, students and other persons are stranded at different places. They would be allowed to move."

Incidentally, at a video-conference meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on



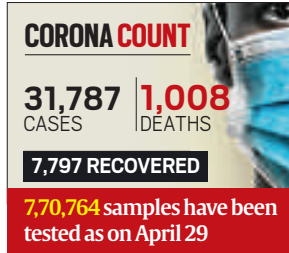
At a cremation ground in Lucknow on Wednesday, ashes await immersion in holy rivers. Vishal Srivastava

## Punjab extends curfew by 2 wks, joins Bengal in lifting some curbs

KANCHAN VASDEV & ATRI MITRA  
CHANDIGARH, KOLKATA, APRIL 29

SETTING A possible post-May 3 template, Punjab on Wednesday became the first state to announce a two-week extension of lockdown (until May 17), but said restrictions will be eased for four hours daily, from 7 am to 11 am, in non-containment zones with effect from Thursday. It also decided to allow opening of shops and industries in these areas.

Similarly, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said experts and doctors are of the opinion that the restrictions should continue till May-end, but announced some relaxations



in non-containment zones from May 4 — including movement of private taxis and buses in green zones, within a district, with a limited number of passengers.

Both state governments underlined that the local administration would take the final call on easing curbs.

Announcing his government's decision in a televised ad-

dress, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said: "The decision on further course of action will be taken after two weeks, depending on the situation. The only solution is social distancing. If it is under control after two weeks, we will take a call."

Singh asked people to maintain discipline and underlined that if they step out, they must wear masks, ensure social distancing and return to their homes by 11 am. "If we have given relaxation, that does not mean you can call your friends home. Social distancing has to be ensured," he said.

Punjab has reported 377 COVID-19 cases and 19 deaths so far. While four districts — Patiala,

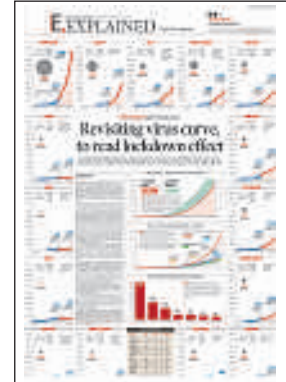
## Warning signs emerge in Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar

AMITABH SINHA & KAUNAIN SHERIFFM  
PUNE, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

WHILE MAHARASHTRA and Gujarat have been attracting attention for the rapid rise in cases of novel coronavirus infection, states in the east have, for the first time now, started to show signs that they could emerge as potential danger zones as well.

The latest analysis of computer modelling results by scientists of the Chennai-based Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc) show that though West Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand still had a combined case load of less than 1,200 on April 29, these three states had the highest rate

### EXPLAINED



REVISITING CURVE TO READ LOCKDOWN  
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## Running out of time to enter House, Uddhav dials PM for help

VISHWAS WAGHMODE & LIZ MATHEW  
MUMBAI, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

WITH THE Maharashtra Governor sitting on the state Cabinet's recommendation that Uddhav Thackeray be nominated to the Legislative Council, the Chief Minister dialled Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday evening.

Thackeray sought the Prime Minister's help to

## Labour shortage is making Punjab and Haryana farmers switch from paddy

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA & HARISH DAMODARAN  
JALANDHAR, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

COVID-19 has opened a window of opportunity to wean away farmers in Punjab and Haryana from growing rice to less water-guzzling crops such as cotton and maize.

The driver: Uncertainty over the availability of an estimated million labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who undertake the bulk of the paddy transplanting that begins from mid-June. That, plus the lack of mechanical transplanting options, in contrast to the ubiquitous combines used for both paddy and wheat harvesting, means fewer farmers are likely to take up rice cultivation in the coming kharif season.

Manjit Singh Sidhu has, for



Sowing cotton in a field in Sirsa, Haryana. Express

over a decade, been farming paddy on his 13 acres at Uddat Bhagat Ram village in Punjab's Mansa district. But this time he has decided to sow cotton on 11 acres, limit paddy to 2 acres, that too, subject to getting enough local labour. "I finished harvesting wheat on April 20, and I am waiting for water from the Kotla Branch of the Sirhind Canal (on the Sutlej River). They would not have anticipated the

## Railways readies movement plan, some states push for special trains

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR, ABHISHEK ANGAD & DEEP MUKHERJEE  
NEW DELHI, RANCHI, JAIPUR, APRIL 29

WHILE THE Centre has allowed movement of migrant workers in buses, several states have demanded special trains, underlining the sheer numbers of those stranded. According to sources, the Ministry of Railways has also drafted a plan to operate 400 special trains per day, which can

be scaled up to 1,000, with a detailed protocol.

While there has been no indication that passenger train services will resume before May 3, the Railways carried out an internal exercise and communicated the plan to top levels in the government.

According to the plan, each non-AC train will carry 1,000 people per trip — about half the usual number — to ensure adequate social distancing.

"Each bus typically carries 25 people after following social dis-

tancing. The Railways' detailed protocol also had a paragraph stating that states falling in the routes should allow the movement, screening, controlled embarking etc," a senior government official said.

According to sources, by deciding on buses instead of trains, the government has strategically restricted the number of people who can be transported.

"It is just to allow an option of relief for the stranded wanting to travel to their home states,

## Russia under lockdown, India's manned space mission trainees confined indoors

SUSHANT SINGH  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

WHILE THE four Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter pilots selected to be trained as astronauts for the country's first manned space flight may have been motivated by the adventure of space travel, they would not have anticipated the

series of events triggered by the spread of the novel coronavirus.

A couple of months after their training began at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center (GCTC) in Star City near Moscow, it has been put on hold — and the pilots remain confined to their rooms while Russia grapples with the pandemic. Russia had reported nearly 1 lakh posi-

tive cases, with 972 deaths until Wednesday evening.

"The four astronauts-elect are in good health. The highly professional medical experts of GCTC are constantly observing them," Director General of Glavkosmos JSC Dmitry Loskutov told *The Indian Express*. Glavkosmos is the



Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital has been sealed. Express

## Covid fight: Govt system in front, private hospitals do the distancing

PRABHA RAGHAVAN, TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA & ABANTIKA GHOSH  
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, APRIL 29

OF THE thousands of COVID-19 patients admitted in hospitals around the country, just around 800 are critical, requiring either oxygen support, ventilators or treatment in ICUs (Intensive Care Units). Private hospitals, which account for two-thirds of hospital beds in India, and almost 80 per cent of available ventilators, are handling less than 10 per cent of this critical load.

This is just one symptom of a larger trend over the last three months: the Rs 2.4-lakh-crore private health care sector has largely been relegated to the sidelines, watching the public health care system — government hospitals, doctors, nurses and paramedics — battle the Covid pandemic.

Behind this are a set of circumstances that range from the nature of government policy on managing the pandemic to decisions taken by the hospitals

themselves.

From being sealed in the early stages after their staff tested positive, like Wockhardt in Mumbai or the private hospital in Bhilwara, to refusing to admit patients, from suspending services to playing safe, private hospitals aren't pulling their substantive weight.

That's not all. Nationwide, private hospitals employ four out of every five

doctors, but the refrain from several cities and towns amid the pandemic is that they are locking themselves down even when it comes to providing non-Covid health care.

From Patna to Mumbai, private hospitals cite many reasons to explain their near absence: lockdown restrictions, lack of internal protocols to handle the pandemic, fear of infection to their own doctors and nursing staff, unwillingness to risk the business from non-Covid

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NEXT: WHAT'S HOLDING BACK PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN THE WAR AGAINST COVID?

## Minority institution rights not above law or absolute: SC rules on CMC-NEET

ANANTHAKRISHNAN  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

STATING THAT rights of religious or linguistic minorities to administer an institution under Article 30 of the Constitution "are not above the law and other Constitutional provisions", the Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to graduate and post-graduate medical and dental courses is "regulatory" in nature and in "national interest" to improve the quality of medical education which, it said, has become a "saleable commodity".

Disposing a bunch of peti-

tions by the Christian Medical College, Vellore, and others, the bench of Justices Arun Mishra, Vineet Saran and M R Shah ordered that NEET will be the only exam for admission to the courses and institutions cannot be allowed to conduct their own separate exams over and above NEET.

"We are of the opinion that rights under Articles 19 (1) (g) and 30 read with Articles 25, 26 and 29 (1) of the Constitution of India do not come in the way of securing transparency and recognition of merits in the matter of admissions. It is open to regulating the course of study, qualifications for ensuring educational standards. It is open to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### THE WORLD



1 MILLION US CASES, TOLL SURPASSES VIETNAM WAR

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# He dissolved into his part, left no residue...and came home with us

SHUBHRA GUPTA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

THERE ARE some obituaries you never, ever want to write. This is one of them. We knew that Irfan Khan, one of the best actors the world has been privileged to watch, was struggling with a debilitating disease. We knew he was gravely ill. But we also believed that he would rise and shine again, because, how could he not? How could he leave us, this enormously talented human, who with his fine

body of work so enriched our inner lives?

Irfan, who passed away on Wednesday morning at the age of 53, was not just a brilliant actor who dissolved into his part, leaving no residue behind. He also managed to walk off the screen, and come home with us. He made space for himself in our hearts, nestled in unexpected corners, and popped up once in a while, for a chat. Which he would begin, with that characteristic hooded-eyed smile: *chaliye baat karte hain*.

From the very first glimpse

we had of him, in Shyam Benegal's teleserial *Bharat Ek Khoj*, we knew we were in the presence of someone truly special. He went on to become an integral part of some of Indian TV's most popular serials (Zee's *Banegi Apni Baat*, Doordarshan's *Chandrakanta*, and Star TV's *Bestsellers*), but his heart was always set on cinema. And, over a period of 30 years and more, as he essayed one unforgettable part after another, from Asif Kapadia's striking *The Warrior* to Shoojit Sircar's *Piku*, he never let us down. If this sounds like a



### BUSINESS AS USUAL



gush, yes, it is. An unapologetic, teary-eyed one, because he made things better, even in his no-account parts.

Of his impressive body of work, four films jostle for the top spot for me: Tigmanshu Dhulia's *Haasil*, in which he plays a local Allahabadi student leader; Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool*, in which he was a mobster-with-many-moods-in-Mumbai; Mira Nair's *The Namesake*, in which his Bengali *bhadralok* immigrant finds his place in faraway New York; and Anoop Singh's *Qissa*, in which he plays a man desirous

of something he could not have. These roles combine not just the 'skills' of a schooled actor, but deep empathy, a generosity of spirit, and an unfettered intelligence, which shone through everything he did, good, indifferent, or flat-out fantastic.

He did everything. Or at least everything that Bollywood brought to his table, after having learnt that this tall, rangy, magnetic-eyed person could transform into anyone, with a particular kind of magic. He could go high, dive low, get intense, do

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**KERALA WORRIED AS NEW CASES POP UP IN GREEN ZONES**

Between April 21 and April 27, the state saw 74 new COVID-19 cases added to its tally, taking by surprise doctors and health officials who had been keeping a watch on the situation.

**VIDEO OF THE DAY**



**CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF IRRFAN KHAN**

**Khan owned every character he portrayed on celluloid**

**CORONAVIRUS**



**11 LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC**

**Every country has discovered that a shutdown is inevitable**

**EXPRESS AUDIO**

**Decoding India's withdrawal of rapid tests**

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode of the 3 Things podcast, we look at why the government introduced and then withdrew rapid testing for the novel coronavirus

**Private hospitals**

patients, or even the government's own ambiguity in co-opting the private sector.

But, fallen off the radar, they have.

Bihar, in fact, witnessed an "almost complete withdrawal" of the private health sector, which has nearly twice the bed capacity of public facilities.

"Forget COVID-19, even regular services have become unavailable," complained Bihar Principal Secretary (Health) Sanjay Kumar on April 19. The state, with India's third largest population, had to issue an order asking all hospitals to resume services.

This was particularly significant also because all three hospitals handling Covid cases in Patna are government hospitals. Vikash R Keshri, Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health, said it was also "surprising" since the number of people relying on private healthcare over public for both outpatient and inpatient services in Bihar is "far higher". Private hospitals have 47,000 beds in the state compared with 22,000 of public hospitals.

"The public sector remains the mainstay of the Covid response. The private sector response has been variable. They have expressed interest but to what extent they are actually providing support required needs to be gauged," said K Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India.

Before the outbreak, the private sector accounted for nearly 70 per cent of critical procedures like chemotherapy and dialysis, according to Indu Bhushan, Chief Executive Officer, Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and National Health Authority. Yet, "a lot" of these private establishments treating even non-Covid cases had shut down in certain states citing increased costs and reduced footfalls, he said.

"States like Madhya Pradesh, currently struggling with lack of healthcare personnel, and Bihar could do with more private sector intervention here," said Bhushan. "This is the time that the private sector should be looking at a welfare maximisation model and not a profit-maximisation model. Hopefully, this will happen," he noted.

In Mumbai, the city with the largest number of Covid cases, and also the most deaths, *The Indian Express* has reported how patients were turned away from one hospital to another, and even Covid-positive patients have had to wait for hours before they could be admitted.

Maharashtra did not bar private hospitals from treating Covid patient but many would just not admit patients with Covid symptoms, fearing they would be sealed by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (BMC). "In Mumbai, BMC is managing 80 per cent load of patients; the private hospitals are handling 20 per cent," said Suresh Kakani, Additional Municipal Commissioner. Of the 4,574 active cases on Tuesday, 400 patients were admitted in private hospitals, whereas 1,600 were in public hospitals. The remaining 2,500-odd were asymptomatic, not requiring admission.

In fact, as on date, Maharashtra has 187 critical patients, of which Mumbai alone accounts for about 120-125, most of whom require just oxygen support. A split of patients requiring critical care between private and public hospitals was not immediately available.

In India, there are three levels of COVID facilities. The first level comprises quarantine facilities in stadia, hostels, schools and lodges, called Covid Care Centres. This is where most Covid-positive patients are kept. The second and third levels are hospitals with oxygen support, ventilators and ICU facilities. Some patients who show symptoms, which are not

very severe, but yet require medical attention, may also be admitted in hospitals.

According to Indian Council of Medical Research, 80 per cent cases in the country show either mild symptoms or are asymptomatic — the latter comprising 69 per cent of all cases. These cases generally do not require hospitalisation, and can return home after quarantining themselves for two weeks in Covid Care Centres.

Given the complaints from patients in the city, the municipal corporation had on April 25 issued a circular asking all nursing homes and private clinics to open up. On Monday, the state government held extensive discussions with private hospitals, nursing homes and even clinics in Pune.

Subhash Salunkhe, Technical Advisor to the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra, told *The Indian Express*, "They are afraid for obvious reasons. They are involved but they can participate further. The Health Minister and the Chief Minister have already assured assistance for Personal Protective Equipment to hospitals and nursing homes."

In Delhi, which has over 3,300 cases, government hospitals are handling almost double the number of ICU patients.

Senior officials in the Delhi government's health department said they had received several complaints of private hospitals refusing treatment to patients during the lockdown, and later of compelling patients to get a Covid-negative test report before dialysis.

This prompted the state to issue an order on April 15 warning hospitals and nursing homes in the city of strict action, including cancellation of registration.

While private facilities may seem to have remained conspicuously absent, especially in certain high burden states, it is not without any reason, say senior executives.

In some cases, facilities are ready and waiting, but some states like Uttar Pradesh have kept them on standby. In a few instances, states like Telangana did not "fully support" the role of the sector initially, either in testing or treatment.

"There was even a time when they (Telangana government) said 'send all your positive patients (to government facilities)'. Now, I think they have realised that in treatment, they need private hospital support. But I think this is just one or two governments. With most of the other governments, there's a great partnership role being played," said Sangita Reddy, Joint Managing Director of Apollo Hospitals Enterprises, India's largest hospital chain.

"I think the private sector has been trying to step up. There was the initial fear — some hospitals got shut down... and with smaller nursing homes also, there were some who were worried. But I think everybody is now ramping up," said Reddy, also the President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

The sector's biggest pain point, though, is their struggle to operate facilities at a time when their costs have increased, but their revenues have seen a dip.

"I feel very strongly about people trying to pull private sector hospitals down at this point in time, especially when some of us have been trying to continue operations despite incurring operating losses," said Abhay Soi, CMD, Radiant Life Care and Chairman, Max Healthcare. Said CK Mishra, chairman, of Empowered Group 2, that is in charge of hospital facilities and testing: "The private sector has been assisting the government and it is a very welcome step. Perhaps, we should look forward to more and more private-sector facilities joining the government."

(WITH INPUTS FROM ASTHA SAXENA, ASHISH ARYAN AND SHIVAM PATEL IN NEW DELHI)

**Relaxations May 4 onward: Centre**

Monday, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, which comprise a large chunk of the migrant labour numbers, had expressed their inability to facilitate their return home without guidelines from the Centre in this regard.

Releasing the new guidelines, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said the movement of those stranded should be arranged through mutually agreed terms between states, on sanitised buses, with required social distancing. Only asymptomatic people will be allowed to travel and a second assessment of their health would be done on their arrival in their home states. Based on this, they would be

**Punjab**

Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Mohali — have been declared hotspots, the containment zones are: Jawaharpur in Mohali, Pathlawa village in Nawanshahar, Sunjanpur in Pathankot, New Jain Market in Rajpura and Kacha Patiala, Safabadi Gate in Patiala.

Earlier this week, the Punjab government had set up an expert committee to formulate a lockdown exit strategy. Issuing guidelines for resumption

economic activity in non-containment zones, the government said standalone shops, neighbourhood shops and shops in residential areas will be allowed to open on rotation, from 7 am to 11 am. Shops in market complexes and shopping malls as well as barber shops will remain closed.

All shops in rural areas registered under the Shops & Establishment Act, except those in multi-brand and single-brand malls, will also be allowed to open with 50 per cent staff

finding it increasingly difficult to sustain migrant labour, with work and revenue sources drying up. There have been several instances of migrants desperate to get home resorting to violence in Gujarat and Maharashtra. The Uddhav Thackeray government in Maharashtra had sought arrangements for inter-state transport of labour.

However, the move might end up further impacting plans to open up the economy, which is struggling to do so with the few relaxations announced. Many states have said they would like to open the economy completely in green zones after May 3. The MSME sector, for ex-

ample, is heavily dependent on migrant labour.

In its order Wednesday, the MHA said: "All States/UTs should designate nodal authorities and develop standard protocols for receiving and sending such stranded persons. The nodal authorities shall also register the stranded persons within their States/UTs. In case a group of stranded persons wish to move between one State/UT and another State/UT, the sending and receiving States may consult each other and mutually agree to the movement by road."

It also asked states falling in between to allow the passage of such persons.

But we did not get any clarification. So, we announced our decision today. It will be implemented from Monday," she said.

She said taxis, with not more than three passengers, and private buses, with not more than 20 passengers, will be allowed to ply in green zones. "Nobody can say when this crisis will end. Most countries have already announced lockdown till the end of May and first week of June. Our experts and doctors believe that the restrictions should continue till the end of May."

**Railways plan**

and not a really viable transportation solution over long distances," an official said.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot tweeted on Wednesday: "Long awaited demand of movement of migrant workers has finally been accepted by the GoI. It is a welcome step but until GoI allows Indian railway to operate — practically it will not be possible to facilitate smooth and hassle-free transport to their home."

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren said he had told Railways Minister Piyush Goyal that the state would need special trains to bring back its students and migrant workers. "We are thankful for the MHA order and we are deliberating on our resources. However, I had said earlier that the state is not capable of bringing them back on our own. I had a word with Piyush Goyal on this matter earlier," he said.

The state estimates over 9 lakh people from Jharkhand, including 6.43 lakh migrant workers, are stranded in various parts of the country. In earlier interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had also raised the demand for special trains.

Officials from Odisha and Uttar Pradesh had also informally spoken to Railway officials on the matter. The Punjab government, too, had raised the demand. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar tweeted in support of the move on Wednesday. "This decision is appropriate and worth welcoming. This was our request and the central government has taken a positive decision," he said.

Welcoming the decision, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram sought "sanitised, point-to-point trains" for the purpose as, he said, buses would not be enough.

**Irrfan Khan**

goofy and grumpy, growl and guffaw. He could be dangerous and maniacal. He was also the loveliest, kookiest, most passionate lover you ever saw. It took the film industry many years to find Irrfan, and it isn't as if he was flooded with roles from the big studios immediately after his breakout roles, post 2002, in Haasil and Maqbool. But the filmmakers who did, like his National School of Drama (NSD) mate Dhulia, and

Bhardwaj, made the most of his, and their own, innate knowledge of the Hindi belt, long neglected by Bollywood. Their coming together was a great confluence. It brought a new language, new robustness to Hindi cinema, something that old-school Bollywood filmmakers like Mahesh Bhatt recognised. Bhatt's production house gave Irrfan a chance to go over to the other side, away from the raw, visceral gangland/heartland tales, and explore unfamiliar territories. He lifted brainless comedies (Rohit Shetty's *Sunday*) with the same verve as he did gritty, hard-hitting tales (Dhulia's *Paan Singh Tomar*): it was all grist to his mill, acutely attuned to the world around him.

Irrfan met his wife, Sutapa Sikdar, too at the NSD. Married for 25 years, they have two sons. Of course, there was no confining him to Bollywood. Irrfan's work took him to the world, and he was the only Indian actor who well and truly crossed over. He had already made an early appearance in Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007). But the big-and-small parts in international productions quickened after Danny Boyle's 2008 Oscar-winner *Slumdog Millionaire*, and he showed up in Ang Lee's magical-realistic tale of survival, *Life of Pi*, and in such mega-budget franchises as *The Amazing Spiderman* and *Jurassic World*.

But home was really where his heart was. None of these much-publicised international outings could truly mine what Irrfan was capable of. He did those movies because he could, but saved the razzle dazzle for his desi dil-hai-Hindustani outings. Fully switched on, he came up as close to us as possible, to start that conversation, as only he could: chaliye, baat karte hain.

I hope that those chats will never, ever end.

**Space mission**

Russian government-owned space business company, which signed a contract with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in June 2019 for the training of the Indian astronauts.

"The lockdown has strongly been recommended for the astronauts-elect, as well as for the CCTC personnel. The decision to resume the full-scale training will be taken after a thorough observation of the epidemic situation in the country," Loskutov said. Russia's President Vladimir Putin had initially announced a lockdown until April 30, but extended

it until May 11 on Tuesday, with the warning that the country had not yet reached the peak of infections, and "a hard and difficult path lies ahead".

Having started their year-long training in Russia in early February, the four fighter pilots have completed approximately a fourth of their course so far, Loskutov said. Their schedule of training has been met so far, even though the Russian authorities implemented the lockdown on March 28. "All astronauts-elect continue working according to their training plan," Loskutov said, adding that the four Indians had "successfully passed the exam on the knowledge of the manned spacecraft". They are to take the exam in manned spacecraft flight theory, he said, and are "preparing for the exam independently".

**Labour crisis**

(government) normally release it around April 30, which will enable me to plant cotton," says the 43-year-old.

Shamsher Singh, from the same village, also plans to only grow cotton on his 8-acre holding, which was entirely under paddy until the 2019 kharif season. Jagsir Singh from Jhumbavillage of Bathinda district is going for cotton on four of his nine acres, again previously fully planted to paddy.

"The people who transplant paddy are from Bihar and UP. Nobody knows if they will come. Even if the lockdown is lifted on May 3, train services are unlikely to resume soon and I cannot take a risk. While local labourers can be used, they will demand Rs 4,500-5,000 per acre, whereas the migrant workers charge only Rs 2,500," he points out.

Southwest Punjab — mainly Mansa, Bathinda, Muktsar and Fazilka — was traditionally a cotton belt. Many farmers in recent times switched to paddy, thanks to assured minimum support price-based procurement and free power for groundwater irrigation during the cropping season.

This was further supported by the availability of migrant labour for transplanting paddy seedlings, which are first raised in nursery beds for 25-30 days before being uprooted and replanted in the main field.

**CMC-NEET case**

imposing reasonable restrictions in the national and public interest," the bench said.

Article 19 (1) (g) grants citizens the right to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business while Article 30 relates to the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

"The rights to administer an institution under Article 30 of the Constitution are not above the law and other Constitutional provisions. Reasonable regulatory measures can be provided without violating such rights available under Article 30 of the Constitution to administer an institution," the bench ruled.

Writing for the bench, Justice Mishra said "the rights under Article 19 (1) (g) are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restriction in the interest of the student's community to promote merit, recognition of excellence, and to curb the malpractices. Uniform Entrance Test qualifies the test of proportionality and is reasonable. The same is intended to check several maladies which crept into medical education, to prevent capitation fee, by admitting students which are lower in merit and to prevent exploitation, profiteering and commercialisation of education. The institution has to be a capable vehicle of education".

"The minority institutions are equally bound to comply with the conditions imposed under the relevant Acts and Regulations to enjoy affiliation and recognition, which apply to all institutions. In case they have to impart education, they are bound to comply with the conditions which are equally applicable to all. The regulations are necessary, and they are not divisive or disintegrative. Such regulatory measures enable institutions to administer them efficiently. The quality of medical education is imperative to sub-serve the national interest, and merit cannot be compromised. The Government has the right for providing regulatory measures that are in the national interest," the order stated.

The petitioners had said that unaided minority professional colleges have the fundamental right to choose the method and manner of admitting students, subject to satisfaction of the triple test of a fair, transparent, and non-exploitative process, and that NEET could not be the only parameter to determine the merit of a student.

**States to watch**

of growth — measured by their reproduction numbers — in the

country in the last few days. The reproduction number refers to the number of persons who are infected on average by an already infected person.

As of Wednesday, West Bengal had 696 confirmed cases of infection, while Bihar and Jharkhand had 383 and 107 cases respectively. Together, they accounted for less than 4 per cent of the national case load, which was close to 33,000 on Wednesday evening.

In contrast, Maharashtra had 9,915 confirmed cases; Gujarat, 4,082. Together, they made up over 40 per cent of the cases in the country.

"The absolute numbers in these states (West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand) are still quite low, so they do not seem to be an immediate problem. But I think they need to be taken note of. West Bengal, in particular, stands out even among the three. At the end of March, the growth rate in West Bengal was showing signs of flattening, but now it seems to be on a completely different trajectory. In fact, if we just look at the growth curves in a non-rigorous fashion, it would appear that West Bengal is following the Maharashtra numbers with a lag of three weeks," said Sitabhra Sinha, who, along with his colleagues at IMSc, has been tracking the disease numbers.

Incidentally, West Bengal also has the fastest doubling time among large states in India, as pointed out in a graphical analysis by *The Indian Express* on Wednesday. Doubling time refers to the time taken for the number of cases to double.

Sinha said that while the national reproduction number had fallen from nearly 1.83 before the lockdown began to about 1.29 now (for the April 20-27 period), West Bengal had a reproduction number of 1.52 (for the period April 18-27). That means that every 100 infected persons in the state has been passing on the virus to another 152 people. Bihar had a reproduction number of 2.03, and Jharkhand, 1.87.

Sinha said that thanks to the lockdown, there were only four states — Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh — that were continuing to show a "consistent" rise in growth over time periods longer than a week. Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh also continue to grow, but at slower rates.

"The lockdown has helped in considerably slowing down the growth of the epidemic. Had there been no lockdown, we could have been on a path to reaching a case load of about 1 lakh by the end of this month. Thanks to the lockdown, it seems the number of active cases would remain well within 30,000 by that time," Sinha said. Active cases do not count the number of people who have recovered from the disease. There were a little over 25,000 active cases in the country on Wednesday.

Sinha's calculations show that the current reproduction number in Maharashtra is 1.5, and in Gujarat, 1.38 — both higher than the national number. The reproduction number for Delhi, another fast-growing state, could not be calculated because of the large variations in daily increase in the case load.

**Uddhav**

Minister's cooperation in resolving the crisis, sources in New Delhi said. In Mumbai, sources in the Maharashtra government said the Chief Minister had expressed unhappiness over the "politics being played" over his nomination to the Upper House of the state legislature.

Thackeray, who took oath on November 28 last year, has, under Article 164(4) of the Constitution, six months to become a member of the state legislature. However, with the pandemic raging, a by-election cannot be held, and the only way to fulfill the requirement is for him to be nominated to the

Upper House by the Governor.

"He (Thackeray) called the Prime Minister to talk about his nomination. He asked for help saying if it does not happen he would have to resign," a source in Delhi said. According to this source, the PM told Thackeray that he would look into the matter and get more details.

In Mumbai, a senior Shiv Sena leader told *The Indian Express*: "Uddhavji discussed the current political uncertainty in the state with the PM. He expressed unhappiness over the politics being played over his nomination as MLC at a time when the state is fighting the coronavirus outbreak, and is standing with the Centre in the crisis."

Asked how the PM had responded, the Sena leader said: "The PM agreed with the CM's view. We now hope that his nomination will be cleared soon by the Governor."

On Monday, the Maharashtra Cabinet reiterated the recommendation it had first made on April 9 after a meeting presided over by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. On Tuesday evening, a delegation of the Cabinet met Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari, and urged him to nominate Thackeray to one of the two vacant seats in the Council through the Governor's quota.

Sources said the Governor was "non-committal" during his meeting with the leaders of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi. This, the sources said, may have "forced" Thackeray to speak to the Prime Minister. A senior leader of the ruling coalition said that on Monday night, Thackeray had discussed with NCP leader Sharad Pawar three options going forward.

"The first is to write to the Election Commission requesting that the Legislative Council polls which were deferred by it earlier this month due to the lockdown, should be held. Since the election will be unopposed, we also want the EC to reduce the required 21 days' period for holding the poll. The second option is to approach the Supreme Court to ask to direct the EC to hold polls," the leader said.

The third and last option would be for Thackeray to resign as Chief Minister, then call a legislative party meeting of all three coalition partners to elect him as leader, and form the government once again, the leader said. "But", the leader said, "we don't think it will come to that. We are hopeful that the Governor will soon nominate Thackeray to the Council."

A minister belonging to the Sena said that the chief secretary could write to the EC with a request that the polls be held at the earliest to avoid a constitutional crisis. "The issue is not about one political party, but of the government. The chief secretary is expected to write a letter to the EC soon," the minister said.

In New Delhi, a BJP leader said that Thackeray had approached Modi directly because he knows that "it would be the Prime Minister who would be taking the final call on the party's decision". According to this leader, Thackeray wants the "BJP's leaders in Maharashtra who are not willing to cooperate with the Shiv Sena to be directed by Modiji (to do so)".

The leader said: "Not only did the Shiv Sena and its leadership betray the BJP (by refusing to let it form the government), it has been hostile to the party's leaders since it came into power. Even during the COVID crisis, the government has not cooperated either with the local unit (of the BJP) or with the Centre.

"Why should the BJP help Uddhav Thackeray?" the BJP leader from Maharashtra said. "His party would earlier ask us, 'when will our MLA become Chief Minister?' Now they want us to tell them when their CM will become MLC!"

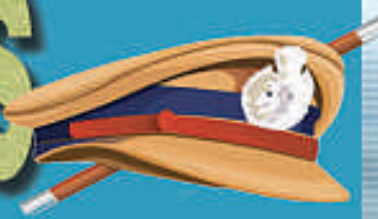
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# A LIFE LIVED FOR OTHERS



"AMAR shantan jeno thake dudhe bhate" is an iconic one-liner that is immensely popular among the Bengalis as it is the eternal craving of the Bengali moms. "May my children always have enough rice and milk for their meals". But what

## Time to introspect



was once the only selfish thought of the passionate Bengali mothers is now reflected in the mind and heart of the rest of the world too, though they are trying hard to mask their anxiety, lest they are branded unpatriotic, less civil or anti-social. Quite a few generations of us in the present century are witnessing this shift in mindset of the global

citizens, for the last few months due to the COVID-19 or coronavirus situation that is taking our planet by storm, affecting and killing multitudes, destroying economies, rendering millions jobless and plunging the overdriven public life into an uncertain chasm of time, just like awaiting a judgement. When the normal humdrum of the public life vanished, just a month ago, taking with it all our familiar rhythms of daily life, and cities after cities were locked down within a matter of days, surreally slowing down life itself, changing city soundscapes and surface rumbling, quietening the oceans even,

only then, we humans, the least sensitive of animals on the planet, took stock of the situation around us and panicked.

We will definitely face a serious recession and economic crunch in the decades to come, and the only way to deal with it is to indulge in a major paradigm shift. With the threats of a ruined healthcare



system, education system, infringement upon financial and personal freedom, looming over our heads, we better change our mindset and train ourselves to co-exist with the so-called lesser mortals and mother nature.

We better remind ourselves that we are the valued guests of nature in this planet and not their masters. In this hour of need we better extend our much appreciated helping hands to the majority of the population on the lower end of the income spectrum; no, not only for their benefit but also for our well being, because in the post coronavirus world no one will be able to live alone and hoard. Together, we will have to survive as a species. With over 30 lakh affected and over 2 lakh dead, the outbreak is yet to reach its peak across the globe. Economies of many powerful nations will drop to a full-scale meltdown, rendering millions across the globe jobless and thus hungry. These changes would be immense and unpredictable. Along with the government, businessmen, professionals, NGOs and even individuals now need to come forward and help in any possible way they can. We need to shun robust capitalism, radical socialism and autocracy, and help build an aware and disciplined society built on mutual aid, taking into consideration not only our own cosy circle of friends and relatives but also our outer circle of domestic helps, support workers, neighbours and vul-

nerable social friends, who are often helpless and look up to us for their survival. We need to learn to be eternally grateful to the relentless frontline workers, the doctors, nurses, medical workers, support staff, policemen, journalists and social workers, who are laying down their lives in the line of fire every day just so that we can all be safe and indoors. Their resources are meagre but their intent Himalayan. So before harassing and ostracising them we must remember that when the doors of all the places of worship, big and small, were closed, when even God chose to be silent, these were the people who toiled round the clock to ensure our good health, security and well being. Not all saints wear cassocks, some of them are even dressed in white, blue & khaki, and we only need such priests now.

**RUPA MUKHOPADHYAY**  
(A devoted teacher with a Government Sponsored School)



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## LINDSAY BLUE PRINT

Lindsay Blue Print is on the move during Lockdown

Lindsay Blue Print has arranged home delivery of medicines for senior citizens & chronic patients. We owe you sincere thanks for allowing us an opportunity to provide service to many of you. We will try our best to serve you more within our limited resources. You can contact us for any medicine related to kidney, cancer, orthopaedic, gynaecology, rheumatology, AIDS/HIV, diabetes or any other emergency medicine. Lindsay Blue-Print, Lindsay Street, Kolkata, Phone: 9007205209 (Whatsapp/Call) Whatsapp preferred.



Let's fight against Covid-19 together

Child in Need Institute (CINI)

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West Bengal, India  
Mobile: 9431707728  
Mail ID : ranjan@ciniindia.org  
Web : https://www.cini-india.org

help the mother help the child...

### Society for People's Awareness (SPAN): Making a difference in this dreaded situation

CAUGHT by a complete shock of the lockdown due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, with its sweeping spread, mounting mortality and removing the guts of the economy, SPAN, a non-profit



Prabir Kumar Basu  
Secretary SPAN

organisation, established and opened more channels of communication with its youth, women and community volunteers and subsequently different stakeholders eg Block Development Officer and Block Programme Manager, local school teachers, community-based organisation and self help group leaders, Gram Panchayat members, ASHA health workers, anganwadi workers, community-based organisation and many others to start listening with ears on the ground. First, on announcements of packages by central and state governments, it actually examined the ground reality and people could benefit, which is an ongoing work to measure hunger and poverty. Secondly, SPAN organises information drive to check informed people and its extent, and how they calibrate

Continued to next page

### AMTRON employees come together to help fight COVID-19



AMTRON employees contributed 20 percent of one month's salary amounting to Rs. 32 lakh to Assam Arogya Nidhi for building up medical infrastructure in the state to fight against COVID-19. The cheque has been handed over to Assam Health Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma by Sri Ranendra Narayan Kalita, Chairman AMTRON, Sri M.K. Yadava, Managing Director and Sri Basanta Kumar Borahakun, Manager on 13 April 2020.

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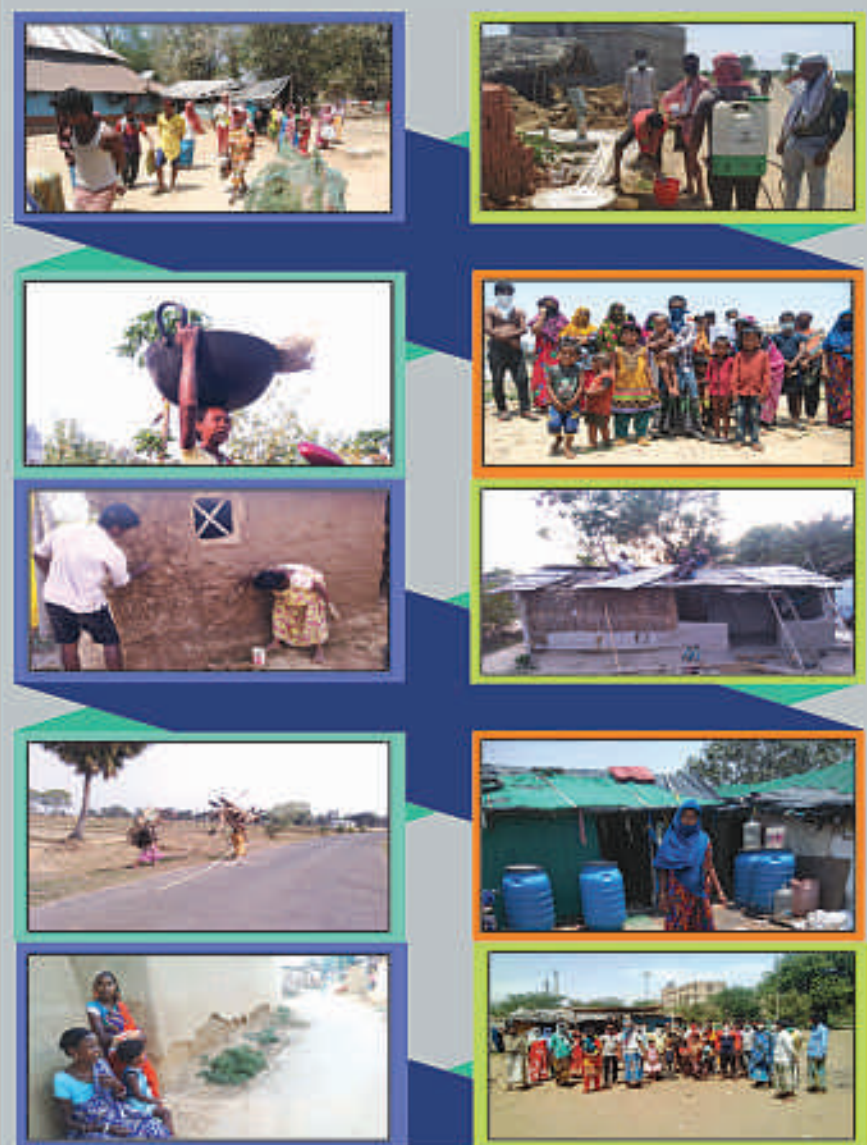
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Stay Home and practice Social Distancing

Let's fight COVID-19 with IT Power!

### Contribution of IT Department/ AMTRON in fight against COVID 19

- State Wide Area Network & Data center teams of AMTRON has been continuously working to cope up with regular emergency services of Internet and connectivity.
  - More than 5000 health professionals have been trained in the State through online system provided by AMTRON thereby deploying Assam State Wide Area Network and Mini Data Centre capabilities.
  - Emergency services being offered on 24x7 basis by professional support team of AMTRON at Guwahati Medical College Hospital and Diphu Medical College.
  - Emergency based LAN/ IT/ Network/ hardware/ Software work of installation etc. is being rapidly carrying out at the Super Speciality Hospital in GMCH. It was established as the first COVID 19 Hospital of Assam recently.
  - Emergency call centre set up and functioning for the Food & Civil Supplies (FCS) Department at AMTRON with dedicated land line having 4-10 extensions for call receipt and reporting.
  - Free Online Education system developed by AMTRON is running at GMCH, Guwahati and the same system is under trial at Kalibier. Training to all users are currently provided free of cost by AMTRON.
  - AMTRON has entered into commercial partnerships to provide COVID19 Rapid Immuno Assay IgM/IgG test kits, Real-Time-PCR test kits in large quantities and other products such as handheld point of care device, AI based Body Temperature Screeners etc.
  - Less Paper Office platform, a platform developed for management and processing of official electronic files are also being provided to many offices and departments to support WFH initiative.
  - AMTRON has also tested 3D printed masks and is expecting to produce the same in large scale in the days to come.
  - AMTRON is currently partnering with local and international players to provide Specialized nano particle coated PPE kits which would have better ability to resist infection of COVID 19 virus. The reactor design is in its final stage. The production would be done at Tech City.
  - AMTRON is set to manufacture GOLD Nano particles measuring 40-60 micro meters which would produce quality Rapid Immuno Assay IgM/ IgG test Kits in large quantities locally and various other by-products. Partnerships at international/ national level is expected to be finalized shortly. The production site has been set up at Tech City, Assam.
- Many companies appear to be exiting China. In this situation if any company or investor wants to relocate to the State of Assam, IT Department/ AMTRON, Govt. of Assam, will be pleased to welcome them with open arms.  
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We are with you in this fight

SPAN - Society for people's Awareness  
Secretary - Prabir Kumar Basu  
Contact- 9331992897

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# 4 THE OUTBREAK

WEST BENGAL

## 10 held for attacking police, TMC and BJP trade charges

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

TEN PEOPLE were arrested on Wednesday for assaulting policemen in Howrah district's Tikiapara locality the evening before while the officials were enforcing the lockdown.

"Ten people have been arrested. We are conducting searches to find out others who were responsible for the attack. Three FIRs have been lodged," said Deputy Commissioner (Howrah Central Zone) Joby Thomas.

Tuesday's incident took place when a police patrol reached the minority-dominated Belirius Road area after receiving information that a large number of people had gathered at a market, violating lockdown and social-distancing norms. Howrah is a designated "red zone" district. Two policemen were injured in a mob attack that occurred when the officials tried to enforce the restrictions.

While the situation in the area remained peaceful on Wednesday as the police patrolled the streets, a war of words broke out between the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the BJP.

The TMC said stern action would be taken against the culprits behind the violence, but the saffron party alleged that the attack was the result of the state government's appeasement politics.

Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee accused the BJP of "amplifying one small incident", and maligning the state.

"One incident took place at Tikiapara that should not have taken place. It was a bad incident. I have asked the police to take stern action. If someone commits a crime then he will be pun-



If police are being attacked then the administration will take action: Partha Chatterjee

ished as per law. A crime is a criminal offence," she added.

Targeting the BJP over its response to the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests that broke out a few months ago, Banerjee asked, "What did they do when police were targeted in UP? Even we can open the Pandora's Box. How many people have died during CAA protests in Delhi?" she asked, labelling the saffron party a "carrier of negativity and destruction virus".

State Education Minister and TMC secretary general Partha Chatterjee said there was no question of "going soft" on any particular religious community. "The police are doing their job efficiently. If they are being attacked then the administration will take action," he added.

However, state BJP president Dilip Ghosh laid the blame on the state administration.

"The way policemen were beaten up and chased away from the area, it shows that there is no rule of law here. The morale of the police will take a hit. Now who will fear the police if they are attacked like this? This is very unfortunate and it shows the state government's appeasement politics," he said.



Migrant workers returning to their homes line up their bags while waiting to board buses, on EM Bypass in Kolkata on Wednesday. Partha Paul

## Kota students home-bound, says CM; govt starts sending migrant workers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said students from the state stuck in the city of Kota in Rajasthan, a coaching hub for engineering and medical degree aspirants, would be back by Saturday.

"In Rajasthan, many of our students are stuck. They will get on buses today [Wednesday] evening. Our officer PB Salim is there to coordinate. They will come back after three days. We have arranged all facilities for their journey," the Chief Minister told reporters.

The announcement came even as the Trinamool Congress administration started repatriating a number of migrant workers from Odisha and Jharkhand stranded in some of the districts. Meanwhile, officials in the

Rajpur-Sonarpur municipality area of South 24 Parganas district started sending back almost 400 stranded migrant workers and students to their homes in other parts of the state.

"The local administration and councillors [initially] made a list of migrant labourers stuck here because of the lockdown, and ordered them to be quarantined for 14 days," said local MLA Firdousi Begum, who is from the Trinamool Congress.

Narendrapur Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya student Shuvankar Champramari, 15, from Alipurduar found himself on the list. He had stayed back in the residential school because of an admission test scheduled for the first week of April. But it got postponed because of the pandemic, and he got stuck along with his father.

"The administration asked us to stay here in quarantine and

said we can go back home after the lockdown is over. Yesterday [Tuesday], the local police station called us and told us to come to Kamalgazi for a bus to North Bengal. So, we have been waiting since morning," said 51-year-old Bijay Champramari.

A senior district official said 13 buses had been arranged to take people to "Alipurduar, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur and interior places of Sundarban areas".

However, not everyone is happy. Kamal Sheikh, 30, a mason from Jangipur subdivision in Murshidabad district, said he was penniless. "All my savings are over. There are no jobs back home. I don't know what I will do after returning," he added.

Mansoor Ali, 40, a resident of Raghunathganj block in Jangipur, also said he was clueless about what he would do at home.

## Rs 1.52 lakh cr package soon to tackle pandemic: CM

88% cases from 3 districts — Kolkata, Howrah and North-24 Parganas: Govt

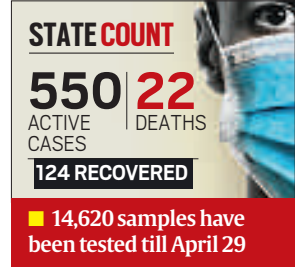
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday dismissed allegations that West Bengal did not have sufficient number of beds for COVID-19 patients, and announced a rehabilitation package of Rs 1.52 lakh crore to tackle the crisis following the outbreak of coronavirus.

"We have 790 beds in Kolkata alone, and a total of 14 labs... Our financial task force arranged a rehabilitation package of Rs 1.52 lakh crore to deal with the COVID-19 situation. We will announce the details within a few days," Banerjee said.

The announcement comes on a day when Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said that nearly 88 per cent of the patients who had tested positive for coronavirus belonged to the districts of Kolkata, Howrah and North 24 Parganas, which will continue to remain as red zones.

On Wednesday, the total number of active cases recorded in the state stood at 550, 28 more than the previous day, Sinha told reporters at the state secretariat, Nabanna. In the last 24 hours, 33 more people tested positive for coronavirus, while five more patients had been discharged from the hospital, he added.



According to Sinha, in the last 24 hours, 1,397 samples were tested, the highest number till date. The total number of samples tested till Wednesday was 14,620. The state government has a limit of testing 1,405 samples in 14 laboratories every day.

"We have almost reached a saturation point in terms of testing, but we are still trying to increase it further," he said.

As many as 4,085 people were at isolation wards in hospitals and 13,307 were in home isolation.

Sinha added that nearly 64 per cent of the COVID-19 patients were male, rest 36 per cent were female. More than 50 per cent of the patients were above the age of 45.

"We have already said that elderly people are more vulnerable to this disease. So, we are urging them to stay at home. Please don't step out," the chief secretary said.

**WEST MIDNAPORE**  
As neighbours bar mother, newborn from entering home, admin steps in to offer shelter

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

AMID RISING fear and distrust among people amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the West Midnapore administration on Wednesday came to the rescue of a woman and her newborn, after they were barred from entering the house of their relatives.

The tribal woman, a resident of Ranibandh in Bankura district, had come to West Midnapore district's Chandrakona in search of job with her husband before the nationwide lockdown was announced. Later, when she failed to return home, the pregnant woman started staying at her relative's house at Bhabhanipur village in Chandrakona.

On April 24, she gave birth to a baby boy, following which her husband went back to their Bankura house to get documents and ID cards. Meanwhile, when the woman was released from the hospital on Sunday, the residents of Bhabhanipur village refused to let the woman and her newborn enter her relative's house.

"As she was in a hospital to deliver the baby, there was a sense of panic among Bhabhanipur villagers that she might be carrying the virus. So, they refused to let her in," said a senior police officer of Chandrakona police station.

However, members of a local club gave the woman and the baby a temporary shelter on the club premises.

On Tuesday, Chandrakona I Block BDO Abhishek Mishra shifted the mother and baby to a shelter home. "We are making all arrangements to keep both of them healthy and safe," he said.

ADVERTORIAL

## A LIFE LIVED FOR OTHERS

### Society for People's Awareness

Continued from previous page

their struggle to defeat hunger out of jobless condition. Thirdly, the story of migrant labourers: 39 migrant workers stranded at Vhabikadai, Perundura, 50 labourers from Basanti Block, were with family including 30 children in Begur, 125 families from S-24 Parganas, Paschim Medinipur and Nadia district with approximately 40 children in Khogaon, District, Gurgaon. In Andhra Pradesh, 10 labourers from Sagardighi were living in Karimnagar, Hyderabad, and many more to say. All were in very poor condition without food. Finally, safety, food, water, sanitiser, medicine were provided to all these migrants including the children and this has been possible only due to the excellent and efficient generous help and cooperation of all the state help lines, Chairpersons of State Commission of Protection of Child Rights, and local BDOs. Finally, children being caged in homes expectedly not in good spirit, SPAN with the help of its youth members started online courses to present some interesting sessions of storytelling workshops, series of topics like local as well as global scenario in Wikipedia etc through WhatsApp and Zoom calling portal. In this way SPAN is helping with a total learning Expedi by the team to prepare children and youth for their fight in coming days.

### Ganapati Bhakt Mandal hands over food to all brothers and sisters

G OPI Thakker, a resident of Bhowanipore and the sect of "Ganapati Bhakt Mandal" is a

simple, common man who is known to many in the area. For the past many years Gopi Thakker has been conducting Ganesh Puja in a very large and beautiful manner. In 2018, Gopi Thakker bought a Ganesh idol from Mumbai to celebrate Ganapati Utsav at Bhowanipore.

People in bhowanipore area of Kolkata is well aware of Gopi Thakker's Ganesh Puja. The complete arrangements and executions is taken care largely by Mr Thakker and his club members. Not just during Ganesh puja, but he stands by all who needs help. He is not associated with any political party and whatever he does is out of his own passion & for the joy he receives from the

smiles from the other end. Gopi is continuing with his benevolent act during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



Gopi Thakker donating food packets

Along with members of 'Ganapati Bhakt Mandal', Mr Gopi Thakker recently donated free food packets to over 3,000 families in his area (Ward no. 70 and 72) whom he treats as his brothers and sisters. At this crucial juncture where there are many who do not know from where the next meal will come from, there are people like Mr Gopi Thakker, who makes sure that all good souls do not sleep hungry.

### Child in Need Institute: Extending a helping hand

T HE COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) disaster is raging the world over as a pandemic.

West Bengal, along with many other states in India, is facing a unique situation of lockdown. As a result, life and livelihood are in serious threat for the community living on subsistence and daily-wage, resulting into food-insecurity and economic insecurity to the millions. In these poor families, children may be pushed to malnutrition and disease over the next few months. Chief Minister of West Bengal through her inter-departmental coordination is playing a huge role in handling the situation very efficiently. The Ministry of Home Affairs has already issued an advisory to states to utilise the services of NGOs. As a response to the situation, Child in Need Institute (CINI), a national-level NGO with 46 years of excellence in community development, has come forward to complement the government's initiative.

one of the major Telecom infrastructure companies in the country is partnering



Sandip Mondal of KMC distributing dry ration packets

with CINI to cater to this unique humanitarian response. ATC CSR Foundation India, being a socially responsible organisation too extends a helping hand and support in funding the distribution of dry-ration packet to the most hard-hit 4,000 families, 500 frontline health workers and young children. Mr Sujoy Roy, Sr Manager, COVID-19 relief operations, CINI, said, "our specially trained COVID-combat forces are reaching out to around twenty thousand families with dry ration, dignity kits and Nutrimix with special focus on nutritional requirement of children and pregnant women."

### CARE FOR AUTISM: Setting the benchmark higher

Stepping stone in autism, learn your child better, give the right direction and instructions to overcome the neuro-function deficit and slow learning to accommodate and adjust with the power to recapitulate and express in meaningful ways with a deliberate effort to make the complicated process in simpler form is what CARE FOR AUTISM, the charitable trust practicing since 2011 in silent ways to overcome children suffering with ADHD, ASD and Autism. Where most of the parents are unaware about the reason behind their child's unusual behaviour, no vocabulary or using restricted words, hand flapping, jumping, self-hitting, getting annoyed, unable to follow regular daily living activities, unable to mingle with peer group or accept crowded place like other children, we CARE FOR AUTISM come forward to assess and guide the confused parents to understand the need of the hour for their children.

Mr Lalit Khetan, the founder and one of the trustees, is the brain behind the organisation as when he himself faced the challenges with his son he realised the pain and the unprecedented journey of the uncountable parents who has no place to go but

drowning in their daily unavoidable challenges due to their Autistic children and mostly they were even unaware about the term Autism before their child got detected with the same after a stressful tussle between hospitals, doctors and curious neighbours.

Apart from providing the facilities of detection, psychological counselling and intervention, personal guidance, ADL, Occupational & sensory therapy, Special education, Art & craft, Music, speech & language therapy by well trained and experienced specialists at the centre on regular basis, the organisation often conduct seminars, workshops for therapeutic art and music, speech, daily living activities, yoga, alternative medicines and diet for the children and parents too by involving renowned specialist in respective fields. As per Mr Khetan, "The organisation is extremely happy to announce that few of their children is now going to the main stream who had come to them years back with severe complications. We wish them all the best and request the parents to understand their child and give them time in meaningful ways always !."



## St. Xavier's alumni salute Corona warriors

'S t. Xavier's College (Calcutta) Alumni Association' continues its commitment and support in combating COVID-19. After helping the poor and needy people, whose livelihood has been at stake due to outbreak of corona, the St. Xavier's College (Calcutta) Alumni Association came forward to salute the Corona warriors. As many as 300 PPEs were given for the doctors and health support providers of a city-based private charity hospital on Friday by the Principal of the College and President of the Alumni Association,

Rev. Father Dominic Savio and the Rector Rev. Father Jeyaraj Veluswami. The PPEs were procured as per approved quality norms of WHO and the government.

Father Dominic Savio, said, "We need to stand by the doctors and other frontline health service providers, who are extending humanitarian service at this trying time. Our small effort will surely give a positive signal especially to that section of the society, which is trying to socially outcast these noble professionals. St. Xavier's is committed to help people who go through hardships due

to COVID-19, till the pandemic is over".

The association already took an active part in St. Xavier's Kolkata's contribution of Rs. 40 lakhs to Chief Minister's Special Corona Relief Fund. It arranged distribution of family ration to 500 needy people during Good Friday and Easter. St. Xavier's College (Calcutta) Alumni Association also took part in distribution of food packets to three thousand villagers across sixteen villages around the rural campus of St. Xavier's college at Raghobpur in South 24 Parganas district.



## ‘Present situation in Kashmir stable but fragile... peace goal for forces’

LIEUTENANT GENERAL **BS RAJU** took over as GOC of Chinara Corps, which looks after the Army's operations in the Kashmir region, including the highly active Line of Control, on March 2. He speaks to **SUSHANT SINGH** about the situation in Kashmir and the LoC, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Excerpts:

**How do you assess the current situation on the LoC? Why has it become active now?**

Pakistan has consistently been aiding and abetting infiltration for more than 30 years now. All the terrorist camps and launch pads in PoK are full. These terrorist cadres are desperate to infiltrate with the help of Pakistan Army... Numerous infiltration attempts have been foiled and Pakistan Army is constantly resorting to ceasefire violation to support the terrorist infiltration. Our befitting response to ceasefire violations has been swift, hard and punishing.

An impervious Counter Infiltration Grid and our effective response to ceasefire violations have left Pakistan helpless in furthering its agenda.

**Isn't it fair to expect that when both India and Pakistan are grappling with COVID-19, the situation on the LoC would be more peaceful and local villagers would be spared? What is Pakistan's gameplan on the LoC?**

There is only one reason for the near constant ceasefire violations, Pakistan's attempt to assist more terrorists to infiltrate into India in order to disrupt normalcy in the Kashmir valley. Pakistan Army facilitates these infiltration attempts. Even in times when the world is together in combatting the spread of the pandemic, there is no respite from Pakistan... Our soldiers along the borders are well equipped... We are ensuring that our borders are safe while the country is fighting COVID-19.

The Army along the LoC provides all types of succour and assistance to the population. Our outreach programmes range from medical help, evacuation, provisioning of rations and other material aid, help in reconstruction of damaged houses and even providing job opportunities to locals. Apart from this, education, skill development and women empowerment initiatives are undertaken regularly. We live with the locals and share the relationship of a 'Humsaya' (co-inhabitants), which means that we stand shoulder to shoulder with them through good and not-so-good times.

## 3 militants killed, 3 security personnel injured in 20-hr Shopian encounter

**ADIL AKHZER**  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 29

THREE MILITANTS were killed and three security personnel, including an Army Major, injured in a gunbattle which continued for nearly 20 hours in south Kashmir's Shopian district. Seven people also suffered pellet injuries after clashes broke out near the encounter site.

Police officers said that a cordon and search operation was launched in Melhoora area on Tuesday afternoon. "The encounter concluded today after it started around 4.30 pm on Tuesday," said a police officer.

A J&K Police spokesperson said the "hiding terrorists fired on the search party", triggering the gunbattle. The identity of the three militants is being ascertained, police said.

When the operation began, villagers from a nearby area marched towards the encounter site and clashed with the security personnel on Tuesday afternoon. In the ensuing action by security forces, at least seven people suffered pellet injuries.



**Should we expect the situation on the LoC to change anytime soon?**

Pakistan's persistence in infiltrating terrorists, proliferating false propaganda are intended to disturb peace and its actions are unlikely to change anytime soon...

**What is the internal security situation in the Valley? What are the indicators you are monitoring closely?**

The present situation in Kashmir is stable but fragile. Maintaining peace has been the prime goal of all the Security Forces, working in close synergy with each other, ie. Army, J&K Police, CAPF, intelligence agencies and the civil administration. Also, the Awam-Army connect has always been strong due to our ethical conduct and transparency in operations. The situation has been largely normal and no civil casualty due to the Security Forces' action since August 5, 2019, is one example of it. Even now, in our fight against coronavirus, the support and cooperation we have received from the Awam has been overwhelming.

**How have the guidelines on COVID-19 altered your working routine or that of your headquarters, and of units in the field?**

All precautions as per guidelines are being followed in letter and spirit by our headquarters and units. Necessary adjustments have been made in our routine and functioning in order to maintain our working and there has been no difference in our efficacy to conduct operations. Along the LoC, all the locations are isolated and to maintain social distancing and isolation norms, there is no problem at all.

FULL INTERVIEW ON [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

## ADMIN JUSTIFIES RESTRICTING INTERNET SPEED

# J&K to SC: Internet used for terror, access not fundamental right

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

UNDERLINING THAT "Internet is being used" by terror handlers in Pakistan "to support fallacious proxy wars", Jammu and Kashmir administration Wednesday justified its decision to restrict Internet in the region to 2G speed and said "right to access the Internet is not a fundamental right".

The administration also said "the type and breadth of access for exercising the right to freedom of speech and expression, and/or to carry on any trade or business under the constitution, through Internet can be curtailed" in the interest of security of state, public order etc.

Responding to petitions seeking 4G Internet speed in the region, the Union Territory Administration told the Supreme Court in an affidavit that curbs on social media had been eased post the January 10 ruling of the apex court regarding restrictions imposed in the wake of the decision to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

"Now that the restrictions on use of social media have been

# Start academic session for first-year students in Sept, UGC advises varsities

**RITIKA CHOPRA**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

THE 2020-21 academic session will start one-and-a-half months late for students entering higher education this year.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Wednesday released an indicative academic calendar for higher education institutions, suggesting that classes for first-year students can start by September 1 and for intermediate year students on August 1. It also indicated that the admission process for fresh batches of students to be conducted in August.

## UP: BJP MLA 'threatens' man in video, says he hid 'true identity'

**MAULSHREE SETH**  
LUCKNOW, APRIL 29

BJP MLA Brijbhushan Rajput, who was seen in a video purportedly questioning a vegetable vendor about his "actual name" and threatening him, told *The Indian Express* on Wednesday that as a "worker for Hindutva" living in Lucknow, where two "Hindutva leaders" had been killed, he fears for his life and is "extra vigilant" about activities near his residence.

He was referring to the murder of Hindu outfit leader Kamlesh Tiwari in October last year and the killing of another leader in Lucknow.

Rajput said, "I work for cow protection and Hindutva, and there is a threat to my life as well, but I did not say that members of any particular community cannot sell vegetables. I was just concerned about someone hiding his identity."

In the video that went viral, the MLA from Charkhari in Bundelkhand reportedly asked the vendor to reveal his real name, failing which he would be beaten up. A boy who was with the vendor was asked his name. The boy is heard saying the name, and promising that they would not repeat the act. The MLA is heard telling the vendor not to return to his locality.

Rajput said his security guard bought vegetables from the vendor. He claimed that when the vendor was questioned about permission, he tried to flee. "This made me suspicious that he was hiding his true identity," the MLA said. He alleged the vendor, "a Muslim, was citing a Hindu name and did not have any ID proof".

Asked about the video, BJP spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi said, "The BJP does not support any discrimination. The MLA is just asking for a name."

For the graduating batch, as first reported by *The Indian Express* on April 26, universities and colleges have been advised to hold their final-year or terminal semester examination from July 1 to July 15 and declare their results end of the month.

For intermediate (read 2nd or 3rd year) students, higher education institutions can hold their semester or year-end examination from July 16 to July 30 and announce results by August 14, June, as advised by UGC, can be treated as summer vacation.

Aside from making changes to the suggested academic calendar, universities and colleges, the UGC clarified, are also free to

conduct their examination in either offline or online mode and reduce the time from three to two hours. However, the examination should be held "observing the guidelines of 'social distancing' and keeping in view the support system available with them and ensuring fair opportunity to all students", the UGC guidelines states.

In case higher education institutions are unable to conduct term-end exams because of the COVID-19 outbreak, they have been advised to promote students by giving 50% weightage to internal evaluation and the rest to "performance in the previous semester".

"In the situations where previous semester or previous year marks are not available, particularly in the first year of annual pattern of examinations, 100% evaluation may be done on the basis of internal assessments. If the student wishes to improve the grades, he/she may appear in special exams for such subjects during next semester," the UGC guidelines state.

For research students, viva-voce examinations are expected to take place through video-conferencing. All MPhil and PhD students will get an extension of six months. The lockdown period will be treated as "deemed to be attended" by all students and re-

search scholars.

The 2020-21 academic year may not have a winter break and follow six-day teaching week to make up for the learning time lost due to the classroom shutdown.

Examination for the first semester of 2020-21 is likely to take place in January 2021 and for the second semester in May-June. The 2021-22 academic year is expected to start on August 2.

The UGC guidelines and proposed academic calendar are based on the suggestions of an expert committee led by R C Kuhad, head of Haryana Central University.

# How early mover MP lost the plot amid power tussle in March

**MANOJ CG & MILIND GHATWAI**  
NEW DELHI, BHOPAL, APRIL 29

ON JANUARY 25, exactly two months before the first COVID-19 death was reported in Madhya Pradesh, the state's Directorate of Health Services issued its first advisory to hospitals to be on alert. A second direction followed three days later, asking collectors to form task forces and set up isolation wards for those returning from Wuhan, China, then the epicentre of coronavirus.

On January 31, a day after India reported its first case of infection in Kerala and the WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency, the state government decided to make all those who had returned from China after January 15 undergo a coronavirus test.

As Madhya Pradesh becomes the third state after Maharashtra and Gujarat to record over 100 deaths due to COVID-19, and cities like Indore and Ujjain emerge as hotspots, what is becoming increasingly clear is that while the state had started gearing up to take on the virus early, it took its eye off the ball during the crucial period in March when it was rocked by political turmoil.

The Congress and BJP have traded charges over this period, with the Congress accusing the latter of being more interested in toppling its government in Madhya Pradesh, and the BJP saying that when it came into power, the state was ill-equipped to handle the virus.

Multiple bureaucrats, both serving and retired, whom *The Indian Express* spoke to, spoke about the confusion in Bhopal hitting coronavirus efforts in March.



Children sew face masks in Jabalpur on Wednesday. PTI

Noting that the initial momentum was lost, a senior bureaucrat said, "We had started surveying those who had come from abroad by the end of January itself. The Directorate of Health Services issued at least a dozen advisories in February alone. It was much before the fear factor had set in."

On March 3, then Chief Secretary Sudhi Ranjan Mohanty held a video-conference with district collectors and district police chiefs and directed them to ensure medical check-up of all those who had returned from abroad. But, soon after, Bhopal was overtaken by the political tussle between the Congress and BJP. "The Kamal Nath government was caught up in saving itself. His Health Minister had rebelled. There were also no cases in Madhya Pradesh, so the political class perhaps took it lightly," a senior official said.

The Health Minister at the time was Tulsiram Silawat, a close confidant of Jyotiraditya Scindia, who crossed over to the BJP. Sources said the last official meeting Silawat attended was a Cabinet meeting on March 6.

An official currently in the

government said, "We issued directions that there should be no Holi celebrations on March 10. We shut all schools, colleges, malls etc on March 13. But, as you know, all attention was on the political crisis then."

A top state official, sources said, had to pull political strings to ensure that the Gair congregation to be held in Indore on March 14 for Rang Panchami was put off. This was a task as the organisers were close to both Congress leader Digvijaya Singh and the BJP's Kailash Vijayavargiya. "We got across messages to both, urging them to impress upon the organisers to cancel. That is the way things were in complete flux between March 10 and 24," a senior official said.

Meanwhile, BJP leaders, including Shivraj Singh Chouhan, belittled the threat from the virus. "It's not corona but darona," was a line repeated by many, accusing the Congress of playing up the COVID-19 scare to save its government.

The first case in MP was reported on March 20, in Jabalpur, the day the Kamal Nath government fell.

Apart from 15 days in March,

said another senior official, "another 15 days were lost after the Chouhan government took over because there was no clear direction". Chouhan remained the only minister in the state for a month after taking oath on March 23. Now he has a Cabinet of five.

Then followed the fiasco of the entire top-level bureaucracy in the state's health department testing positive, starting April 3. "There should have been three-four teams, but everybody was put in one team, and all of them got infected. So there was no health minister, no principal secretary, health, and no director, health services," said the official.

Chouhan has sought to shift the blame of this too to the previous government, saying, "It appears the health officials were not trained and many of them got infected themselves."

Chouhan's bureaucratic shake-up included replacement of Mohanty as chief secretary, transfer of Health Commissioner Prateek Hajela (who had earlier headed the NRC exercise in Assam) and a new collector for Indore. One official said the new collector was relatively inexperienced, and took time to get on top of things.

A few days ago, the CM set up a task force on coronavirus headed by state BJP chief V D Sharma and including only politicians. There is, besides, a 13-member advisory panel headed by activist Kailash Satyarthi and, including a few doctors, which has had only one video-conference with Chouhan so far. Satyarthi's main suggestion has been to ban child pornography. A third team has been formed comprising medical professionals.

As of Wednesday, Madhya Pradesh's coronavirus figures stood at 2,560 cases and 130 deaths.

## SC ORDER ON NEET

# Long legal battle to preserve CMC Vellore's admission process ends

**ARUN JANARDHANAN**  
CHENNAI, APRIL 29

A DECADES-LONG legal battle to preserve an admission process that Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore had been following since 1946 came to an end on Wednesday, with the Supreme Court ruling that all admissions to graduate and postgraduate programmes in medical and dental courses in the country should be based on the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (NEET).

Asserting that NEET was in "national interest" to improve the quality of medical education, the apex court disagreed with a key argument of CMC Vellore — one of the petitioners — by saying that the NEET regulations do not violate minority rights as the same have been prescribed to weed out the maladies plaguing professional education.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Dr Peter John Victor, Director of CMC Vellore, said they have been following the NEET selection process for admissions in the past two years. "So there is no change in the ex-



Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Courtesy: CMC

isting system," he said.

Krishna Srinivasan, a lawyer who had been fighting the case for CMC Vellore for over three decades, said they are bound to follow the SC order. "We will continue to follow NEET admission process subject to the National Medical Commission Act, which will come in force soon," he said.

While CMC Vellore seems to have no immediate plans to seek a review, the Supreme Court order may impact the Tamil Nadu government's long-standing de-

mand for exemption from NEET. Legal battles may continue over larger questions on minority rights before a larger bench of the Supreme Court. However, the bench on Wednesday held that there was no question of discrimination in respect of minority institutions as both majority and minority institutions will have to admit students through the common entrance test conducted by the agency appointed by MCI or DCI.

A batch of petitions was originally filed in the apex court in

## Kerala institute gets ICMR nod to test plant extraction for corona cure

**SHAJU PHILIP**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 29

EVEN AS the medical research world is looking at a vaccine and drug for coronavirus, a Kerala-based research institute is exploring the possibility of a plant-based drug to tackle the virus.

Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI), based at Palode in Thiruvananthapuram district, has received the ICMR's approval for testing the effectiveness of the plant's extraction for treatment of coronavirus, according to the institute's director, Dr R Prakashkumar.

The test would be held at National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, he said.

The institute's ongoing project on "anti-viral from medicinal plants of Western Ghats" had found that a compound from a particular plant extraction is effective against chikungunya and dengue, both viral infections. The extraction has effective anti-viral property, the research found.

The findings on chikungunya and dengue is in the stage of patenting, and the project is supported by the Department of Biotechnology, under the Union Ministry of Science and Technology.

Prakashkumar said: "It is not a preliminary research work. We have a lead molecule (that was) found very effective for chikungunya and dengue. Now we are going to address whether that lead molecule is effective for coronavirus as well. We don't want to make any predictions; if we get positive result, it would be a major breakthrough."

Prakashkumar said the name of the plant cannot be disclosed, but it is easily available in Kerala. The plant extraction would not be given to NIV-Pune — instead the compound of the extraction would be handed over for the crucial test. He said, "We already have the stock of the plant extraction. But we will get the plant harvested again for preparing the extraction afresh so that the lab test gets the desired result."

Prakashkumar said JNTBGRI will sign an MoU with NIV-Pune for the test, and the Pune institute has already sent a draft of the MoU.

Prakashkumar said they have isolated a molecule and its derivatives. "We had approached ICMR through state Health Secretary Dr Rajan N Khobragade, showing our interest to test this particular molecule against coronavirus. Since the fraction has anti-viral property, it can be checked for coronavirus and its effectiveness can be ascertained," he said.

FULL REPORT ON [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)





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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## AFTER THE DELUGE

It is time to design clear rules for departure from accepted norms of fiscal prudence

**A**RVIND SUBRAMANIAN HAS likened the current economic situation to a "pralay (deluge)", in which the government should spend more than even what it ought to in a rainy day. India, the former chief economic adviser said at an e-Adda event hosted by this newspaper, must plan for a "substantially negative" growth this year that might require an additional fiscal expenditure of Rs 10 lakh crore. He has a point. Corporate indebtedness was already high before the lockdown. Not only will insolvency cases mount further, but even companies facing no significant cash flow issues wouldn't invest in an uncertain public health as well as demand-constrained environment. Banks, too, aren't going to lend, no matter how much liquidity the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may infuse. The burden of non-performing assets, which is set to get heavier in the coming months, makes it impossible for them to finance an economic recovery. Last, but not the least, are households. Faced with layoffs and pay cuts, they would rather save and will be afraid to spend.

Under the circumstances, the onus for ensuring that the wheels of the economy start moving — there's no guarantee of it happening even with all lockdown restrictions being lifted — lies on the government. Without somebody to spend, the economy is in real danger of contraction, which will, in turn, worsen the problem of businesses going bust, joblessness and loan defaults that can spread to the entire financial services industry. The one consolation today is that India is not saddled with its traditional "3F" constraints — food, fuel and foreign exchange — which were triggers for inflation and balance of payments crises. On the contrary, public foodgrain stocks are at an all-time-high, global oil prices have crashed and there is no food on the rupee, unlike during the "taper tantrum" period of May-August 2013. The risks, if at all, are tilted more towards demand-side "deflationary shocks", as Subramanian puts it, than supply-side inflation concerns.

There is a legitimate question, though: If the government has to take up the slack, where will the money for it come from? The finances of both the Centre and states are in a mess, with receipts from tax and non-tax sources hardly covering even existing expenditures. But governments enjoy sovereign borrowing powers that allow fund-raising at rates below that of triple A-rated instruments issued by private corporates, more so in the present risk-averse scenario. Also, there is the option of deficit financing ("printing money") through the RBI subscribing to primary auctions of government securities. There are, of course, costs in such powers being exercised. Past precedents — whether the issuance of ad hoc Treasury Bills to the RBI prior to April 1997 or the stimulus package post the 2008 global financial crisis — do not inspire confidence. This is the time to design clear rules for departure from accepted norms of fiscal prudence. Any stimulus has to be transparent and time-bound.

## THE PRICKLY STATE

At a time of crisis, government should welcome, not punish, ideas, criticism. These provide ammunition for the battle ahead

**I**N FACING THE coronavirus challenge, information and ideas are the only ammunition currently available, and should be welcomed and evaluated irrespective of their provenance, whether they originate from within the government or from the public. But a government which has, in better times, sought suggestions directly from the public over the web and through the Prime Minister's app, has become unduly sensitive at a time of grave crisis. When 50 young officers of the Indian Revenue Service forwarded, through their association, policy suggestions, in a report titled FORCE (Fiscal Options and Response to COVID-19 Epidemic) to the Central Board of Direct Taxes and shared them on social media, the Centre termed it as a position "contrary to current policies of government", read it as a breach of service rules and instituted an inquiry against three senior Income Tax officers. Some of the suggestions may be controversial, for instance, a hike in income tax rate to 40 per cent for those earning over Rs 1 crore a year for a limited period of time, but the response is repressive and excessively out of proportion. The officers never claimed that their document was official. Publicly dismissing the controversial suggestions would have sufficed if the government wanted to distance itself from the report.

Meanwhile, public questioning of the government's handling of the pandemic in Manipur has landed several citizens in trouble with the law — police have invoked sections of the Disaster Management Act and the Indian Penal Code, including sedition. In one case, it had merely been suggested that a proposed quarantine centre in Imphal should be moved from agricultural land to a disused airstrip. The deputy chief minister was stripped of all his portfolios, amid a controversy over rice allocation under the National Food Security Act during the coronavirus lockdown, apparently for being critical of the chief minister's assurances of adequate food supply. And in Port Blair, a journalist was booked for asking why the phone contacts of COVID-19 patients were being home quarantined. Instead of arresting him, the authorities could have simply explained that tracing call records is one way of discovering a patient's close contacts.

It is generally agreed that long after lockdowns are lifted, nations will have to remain in close cooperation, so that ideas that work in one place can be borrowed and deployed elsewhere. The principle applies domestically, too. Over-sensitive and prickly responses betray insecurity, precisely when governments must project confidence.

## HIS OWN PATH

Irrfan pushed back against Bollywood mainstream, made his audience see and believe. His best was yet to be

**W**ITH IRRFAN KHAN'S passing, we mourn the loss of a great actor. He was one of those performers who dig deep into themselves to discover the truth, even when he played the flakiest of characters. He had that very unique, most paradoxical quality, something that all great actors possess: To make his audiences accept the falsity of film as an ineluctable truth, to make them believe.

He began, in 1988, in Shyam Benegal's tele-serial *Discovery of India*. His latest film, *Angrezi Medium* released in mid-March, but couldn't reach the theatres because of the lockdown. He was a cinephile's delight. Critics loved him. But the constraints of finding good work in a film industry which coasted on formula-heavy flicks, and star-driven vehicles were also his constant companion. He began work with directors who broke into Hindi cinema, laterally, just like he had. The mid-'90s Bollywood was on the verge of a massive churn: The mainstream, under the steam of the three young Khans, Aamir-Salman-Shah Rukh, was creating demand and supply for family-friendly, mono-cultural, mono-theistic romances and sanitised social dramas. Pushback was arriving, in the shape of filmmakers who came from the Hindi-speaking heartlands of the North, from Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Tigmanshu Dhulia, who wanted to tell their stories, and needed actors who could do the job.

This Khan, who was happy to junk his surname, was finally right where he needed to be. He was capable of being as raw and visceral as the stories he was offered. And soon, he was outstanding. Big Bollywood took notice, and made a grab for him. Big Hollywood wasn't far behind, and cast him in a few mega-budget entertainers. By then, Bollywood had turned new-agey enough for Irrfan to be able to make some of his most exciting work. But his best, combining maturity and "thehraav (gravitas)", was yet to be. Farewell, Irrfan. You made us see.



DEEPAK NAYYAR

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi held his fourth round of consultations with state governments on April 27 to review the COVID-19 situation. The draconian lockdown, which completes 40 days on May 3, was discussed. As in the earlier meetings, several chief ministers urged that the lockdown be extended. While no decision was announced, the lockdown might well continue.

For governments everywhere, more so after the experience of Italy, Britain and the United States, where governments did too little too late, imposing and continuing lockdowns is a risk-averse strategy. If the spread can be curbed, it would bring political kudos. If it is not, the microbe is to blame. It is the equivalent of a one-way option in financial markets, where you cannot lose. This is even more attractive now as it conforms to herd-behaviour by governments worldwide. Of course, exit from a lockdown poses a real dilemma for governments. It is about decision-making under high uncertainty, which requires conviction and confidence.

This dilemma will always be larger than life when there is a single objective of saving lives in a pandemic. But it must also be recognised that the health of people and the health of an economy are interdependent, where both shape the wellbeing of people. Thus, saving livelihoods is an equally important objective. Obviously, getting sick and going hungry cannot be an either-or choice. Everyone would prefer to stay healthy and be well fed. It is the role of governments to strike a balance and reconcile these two objectives, rather than juxtapose them as conflicting, requiring a choice to be made.

Lockdowns, combined with mass-testing, contact-tracing, containment-zones, mandatory-quarantines, can only slow down the speed at which the infection spreads. This might help in countries where public health facilities are robust, yet not adequate for large numbers. But our public health system is poor and could never suffice for our large population if the pandemic spreads. There is no vaccine yet. From development through trials to production will be at least one year, and far longer before it becomes available in sufficient quantities for our massive population.

It is now absolutely essential to begin the process of exit from the lockdown. For one, it would enable the government to find some

Decision-making under high uncertainty requires conviction. It is now essential to begin end of lockdown

balance between the twin objectives of saving lives and saving livelihoods. For another, it would help restart the economy, which has been almost completely shut down, and the collateral damage is bound to be far greater if the lockdown is extended.

A calibrated, planned and phased exit could also help manage the spread of the virus. So far, morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 in India has been much lower than elsewhere in the world. This is possibly attributable to our immune systems, which have antibodies that could be effective in resisting the virus. After all, millions of migrants stranded in megacities or relief camps in cramped spaces have not caught the virus through contagion in large numbers. It suggests that there are already some elements of herd-immunity in India that would grow stronger as the lockdown is lifted slowly.

The economic and social consequences of the lockdown have been severe. A large proportion of the self-employed, casual workers on daily wages, and informal workers, who constitute 90 per cent of the total workforce, have lost their livelihoods. Demand has dropped sharply as employment has contracted. Supply has been strangled by the massive reduction in output. Government revenues, for both Centre and states, have collapsed. And, even if the lockdown is lifted now, economic growth during 2020-21 would be zero or negative.

For the poor — 75 per cent of rural households and 50 per cent of urban households — food security is at risk. It is a matter of survival. Similarly, for micro-small-medium enterprises, their survival is at stake. Large firms, except those with deep pockets, will also struggle. Whatever the government might stipulate, most firms will find it difficult to pay the wages of their employees, for these will only add to their cash losses during the lockdown. Healthcare for patients, except those with COVID-19, has diminished in terms of both access and quality. In education, learning outcomes, already poor, will get worse as schools and colleges remain closed. In every sphere, the short-term effects of the lockdown will have long-term consequences — hysteresis — as future outcomes will be shaped by this past.

For the economy, the sooner the lockdown is lifted the better. But the process of

exit from the lockdown will have to be in calibrated steps based on a planned transition path in terms of sequence and speed. In this phasing, the geographical size and diversity of India provide degrees of freedom that are missing in most countries.

On April 27, of the total 736 districts in India, 283 districts had not reported any COVID-19 cases so far, while another 18 districts had no new case in the last 28 days (green zones). Thus, economic activity can resume without restrictions in 41 per cent of our districts. In addition, 48 districts had no new case in the last 14 days while 33 districts had no new case in the last 21 days. Thus, in 11 per cent of our districts that are orange zones, economic activity can be resumed in a phased manner.

Similarly, on April 27, there were nine states, in descending order of numbers, that had more than 1,000 infections: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, MP, Tamil Nadu, UP, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Taken together, they accounted for 80 per cent of the infections and 57 per cent of the population in India. There were 13 states, in descending order, that had less than 1,000 infections: West Bengal, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Assam (in the last five, the number of infections was in double-digits). Taken together, they accounted for 12 per cent of the infections and 42 per cent of the population. The distribution of green, orange and red zone districts among states is uneven. The distribution of economic activity across states is also unequal. Even so, there are possibilities.

Economic activity can be resumed in districts without infections and in green zones. The orange zone districts can be brought in as they turn green. The lockdown should continue in states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi (with limited relaxations where possible) and in red zone districts, containment-zones or hot spots within cities, as long as necessary.

In this decision to begin exit from the lockdown, PM Modi will need to act with the same confidence as he did when imposing the lockdown.

The writer is an economist and former Vice Chancellor, University of Delhi



SHAH ALAM KHAN

I LIVE IN a suburban, gated (let's call it corona-secure) colony in Noida at the edge of Delhi. I don't have to worry about my livelihood, clean water, food, or money to buy hand sanitiser. For work, I take the expressway to Delhi. A few days after the lockdown was declared, I witnessed a stream of migrant workers and their families on the expressway — men carrying children, women, children carrying younger children and the elderly. Poor people, deprived of their livelihoods, were supposedly walking to their villages, some as far as 200 to 400 km.

Sitaram (name changed) sits in front of my corona-secure colony. He sells balloons and had once told me that he earns about Rs 200 a day. Sitaram lives in a shanty across the road and has three mouths to feed. After the lockdown, his only source of income has dried up. But Sitaram is still lucky — he and his family members are apparently healthy. The lockdown could mean death for a large number of the chronically-ill or those under treatment or awaiting hospitalisation.

I have written in this newspaper about cancer patients who come to metropolitan cities for treatment. Once their funds evaporate, they live on the streets near the hospitals where they are undergoing treatment ('The cancer refugees', IE, July 23, 2018). Hundreds of such cancer refugees live on the street out-

## COMPASSION, ABOVE ALL

Nation's fight against coronavirus cannot ignore the chronically sick and vulnerable

side the AIIMS, in Delhi. Within 24 hours of the announcement of the lockdown, the streets and footpaths near the hospital were empty. I'm not sure where this cohort melted away. What is more worrying is that they might discontinue their treatment. It's unfair to compare tragedies, but I feel that the chronically sick are the worst affected in situations such as the current lockdown.

According to a WHO report (2015), nearly 5.8 million people in India die every year of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Constant evaluation and surveillance hold the key to treating such diseases — this anyway is a difficult proposition in a country like India. After the lockdown, a large number of these patients could have been severely affected.

In 2018, 2.15 million new tuberculosis (TB) cases were diagnosed in India. Imagine the plight of these patients, a large number of whom would be on treatment at DOTS (directly observed treatment short-course) centres and/or at hospital OPDs, which are now either shut down or inaccessible due to the stringent curfew. The resurgence of TB — multiple drug-resistant TB — as a result of not following treatment protocols is well known. It is important that we track the health of TB patients during the lockdown period.

The devotion of my colleagues, students, nurses, ancillary staff, and other members of

the hospital where I work is worth mentioning. It was encouraging that the prime minister asked citizens to clap and clang *thalis* (utensils) as a mark of appreciation for healthcare workers. People responded to the PM's call with gusto. Unfortunately, such appreciation was short-lived — junior doctors of the hospital where I work were asked by their landlords to vacate their premises. There were also reports of a female doctor in Telangana being assaulted by the police who had stopped her for violating the curfew — she was reportedly on her way to work. I wish there was less noise and more assurances about providing equipment to medical professionals.

Physical distancing is imperative to check the spread of the virus. But the lockdown could have been implemented with more compassion. People's health is the responsibility of the state. But at no stage should it resort to methods that hurt the marginalised. The healthcare system of a nation should not be judged by its response to an epidemic but by its commitment to its peoples' health in the long term. A well-oiled healthcare delivery system would have been useful in times like these. But it's never too late to learn from bad experiences.

The writer is professor of orthopaedics, AIIMS, New Delhi. Views are personal



## APRIL 30, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

**ASSAM CLIMBDOWN**  
THE ASSAMESE HAVE modified their original stand on the foreigners issue, saying that they do not want their repatriation "but only their detention". This climbdown to an olive branch now offered to the Centre to "diffuse tensions in Assam", student leaders and Gana Sangram Parishad sources said. Denouncing the "occupation army-like behaviour" of the military and police forces in the strongest possible terms, they seriously regretted that while they had revised their stand, the Centre was "not showing any willingness to budge from their position". The Assamese leaders said that they had changed their position on the repatriation of

Bangladeshi migrants because it would be "inhuman" to do so.

**GOLD BONDS**  
GOVERNMENT MINTS ARE working overtime to refine 13,993 kgs of gold and make bars for refund to the gold bond holders after October this year. The gold had been given by the citizens under the National Defence Gold Bond Scheme in 1965 in wake of the war with Pakistan. About 1.4 lakh bond holders will get back their gold holdings. They were not only getting regular interest on their possession, but the value of gold has skyrocketed during the last 15 years. Prices have gone up from Rs 130 to Rs 1,400 per ten grams.

The finance ministry will refund the precious metal through 1,000 centres.

**KOIRALA INTERVIEW**  
"OUR RELATIONS WITH China will be 'very friendly' and our relations with India will be the friendliest," said B P Koirala, Nepal's only democratically elected former prime minister. The man can do it again, become PM, if the Nepalese people vote for multi-party parliamentary democracy in the referendum on May 2. In an exclusive interview to *The Indian Express* on the eve of the elections, Koirala said that "Nepal belongs to the Asian comity of nations. We will have to keep the Americans and Russians at a distance".



# 7 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Learning in a post-Covid world

Economy and society will not be the same after pandemic retreats. Our experiences during lockdown are pointing us in the direction of necessary and possible changes



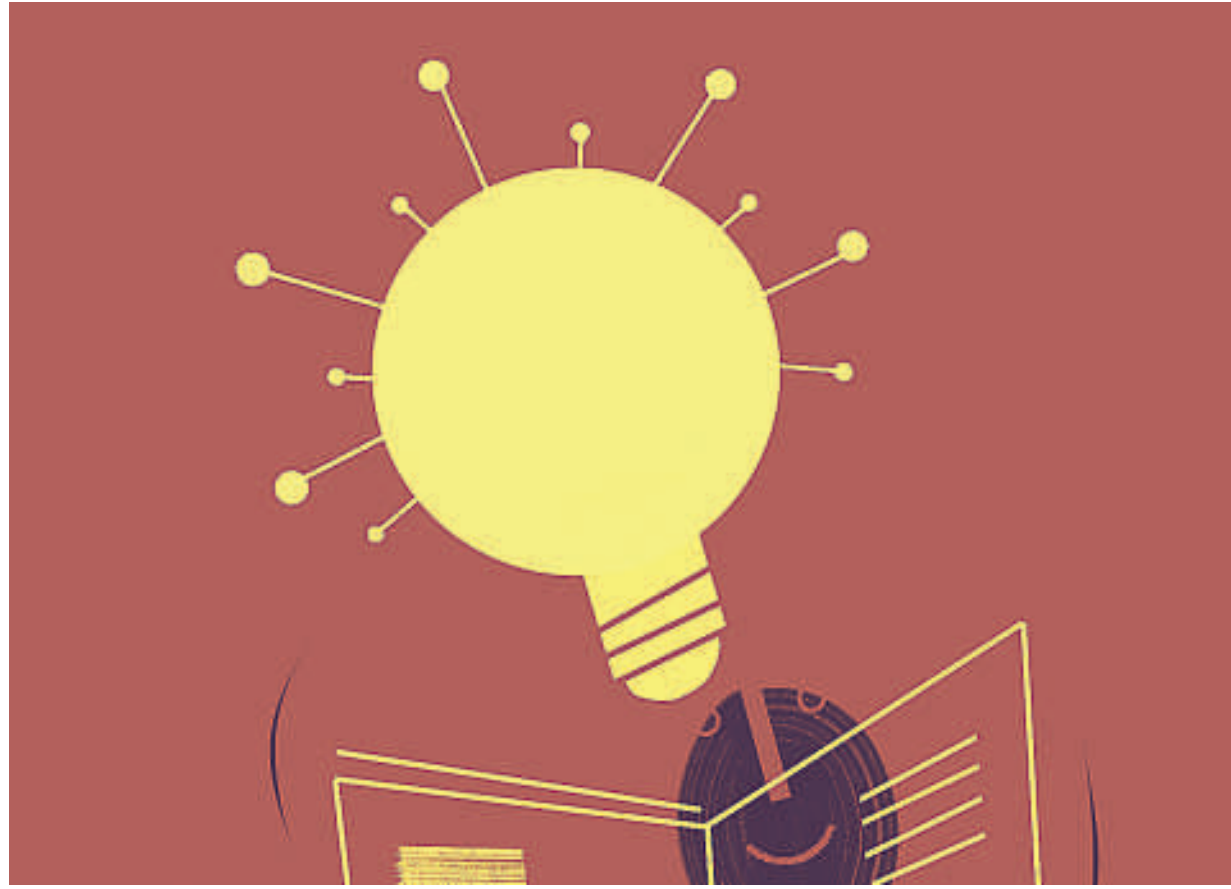
MADHAV CHAVAN

SCHOOLS STARTED SHUTTING down in China in late January and by the last week of March, all the world's schools were closed. Almost like sunset and sunrise, as the last schools in central African countries stopped working, the Chinese schools began to re-open. Other countries too are opening the doors of their schools cautiously. But there is a great deal of uncertainty in the air everywhere. In India, there are murmurs that schools could remain closed until September or October. And there is the question: What will happen "after all this is over"?

As schools began to shut down in different countries, the immediate reaction was to shift the classroom to homes using whatever technology was possible since people were locked in. There is a lot of thinking, planning, and execution happening in a hurry in every country, including India. Countries or regions or even schools that have more easy access to Internet-devices and learning resources in the appropriate medium of instruction seem to have made the transition to online learning rather quickly although not without some pain. How effective these transitions were and how good the relatively short experience was will have to be analysed not only educationally, but also socially and psychologically. Early reports from China do not paint a rosy picture. Although there are more mobile connections than people in China, only 59 per cent of the mobile connections are with internet and only 47 per cent households in China seem to have PCs or laptops. So, it must have been relatively easy for the Chinese to move to a home-based online learning system, but only for about half the population. I have not seen reports about what happened to the rest, which I suspect live in rural China or are on peripheries of the glittering Chinese economy.

In comparison to China, India has about a billion mobile phone connections. Available data indicate that of these, 87 per cent are pre-paid, which gives us a hint about the economic background of the people owning these connections. Of the billion mobile phones, 67 per cent are 3G or 4G internet-connected. Some of these owners also have laptops or desktops at home but they are limited to about 13 per cent households. Our ground-level experience matches with these numbers. In rural areas of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh although 90 per cent families have mobile phones, depending upon the state, about 40 per cent to 60 per cent of these are regular phones without internet access.

So, the Indian population can be divided into several different categories. First, the highly privileged ones with home access to broadband through multiple devices. Second, those with internet access via smart mobile phones. Third, with mobile phones but without internet and finally, those without cell phones. Broadly, this is a problem of 10:40:40:10 division of the population with the ratios varying regionally. In response to this division, various state governments have



C R Sasikumar

turned to radio-television technology of the 1980s and '90s. They are trying to get teachers and students engaged with educational resources on portals through WhatsApp messages and so on. Most efforts are centred around school subject learning although this is really vacation time. In the best of times, the classroom is not effective as various assessments have shown. How effective these hurriedly put together home-learning efforts will be, especially for the lower 50 per cent, is a big question mark. Will the underprivileged lag further behind? If we are talking about "completing the portion", almost everyone will. But there are bigger problems to consider.

These are difficult and stressful times for all. Apart from the discomfort of forced lockdown, there is the anxiety about the future among parents. Children can sense these tensions. I would not worry too much about school examination results during this period. Instead, our focus should be on creative learning activities that engage both children and parents and lead to other long-lasting lessons. Relief is needed, not more stress.

Whenever the schools reopen, the sheer relief of going back to schools may also mean there will be the desire to go back to business as usual. But experiences from the shutdown period could be used to modify the education system as we enter a new normal situation.

For example, it is observed that wherever less-educated parents have been invited to facilitate their child's learning, they have shown enthusiasm. Parents of young children today are mostly schooled if not educated and are eager to learn to help their children. Parents' role in children's education has to be enhanced by training them in a "continuing education" mode. This is especially true for the children in anganwadis and early

primary age group where strong foundational skills are learned.

Increasing public access to Internet for school-age learning by creating device libraries is a possibility. Investment in the creation of good contextualised content in Indian languages is a need. Integrating technology in education often means creating more attractive audio-visual textbooks that are really one-way carriers of knowledge. There is a need to recognise that the new technology can do much more and create non-linear paths of learning.

It is said our economy and our society will not be the same from here on. The need for learning skills that will help to survive and thrive in the new economy was already being discussed before COVID. It appears now that the economy is going to change even more drastically. There will be more people dependent on agriculture and rural livelihoods. We need more productive land resources and more rural livelihoods. A large number of people have returned to villages. Some will go back to old jobs while others will need new skills to find work. The education system has to be sensitive to the immediate needs of the youth as we contemplate long-term reforms.

As the economy changes, the need for lifelong learning is becoming more urgent than ever. During the lockdown period, people have learned things that they would never have before. They loved the experience, even if grudgingly. There is going to be individual need to learn new work skills. Our experiences during lockdown are pointing us in the direction of necessary and possible changes. We should reflect on those and act.

The writer is co-founder and president of Pratham. Views expressed in the article are personal

It appears now that the economy is going to change even more drastically. There will be more people dependent on agriculture and rural livelihoods. We need more productive land resources and more rural livelihoods. A large number of people have returned to villages. Some will go back to old jobs while others will need new skills to find work. The education system has to be sensitive to the immediate needs of the youth as we contemplate long-term reforms.



RAM MADHAV

## A new line of action

India can collaborate with the US and Germany in moulding a new world order

ONE HUNDRED years ago, there were no visas and passports for people to travel in Europe, America and their colonies. Then came World War I and things changed — national boundaries became rigid. Economic stagnation, and recession followed. Nationalism turned into ultra-nationalism, leading to another world war. After World War II, we created an interconnected and institutionalised global order. For the last 65 years, despite several hiccups, the world order has remained largely intact.

This pandemic threatens to undo that world order. Just as before, countries are turning inwards, becoming authoritarian. Some political scientists are predicting the rise of a more closed, narrow-nationalist world. Economists are writing off globalisation and free trade.

Where does this pessimism stem from? From a coronavirus virion? Not really. Two countries, considered the most powerful, have shaken the confidence of the entire world. Niall Ferguson, the American historian from the Hoover Institution, had called them "Chimerica". For the last decade or more, China and America have created an economic relationship model that Ferguson compared with Nichibei, the US-Japan economic bonding prominently in existence until the end of the last century. Coronavirus has shown that Chimerica is just a chimera.

The Chinese leadership faces accusations of hiding facts from the world, allowing the virus to cross borders and turn into a pandemic. Till last week, their official figures

stood at 82,000 infections and 4,500 deaths. Derek Scissors of the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington-based think-tank, argues that the number of infections could be as high as 2.9 million instead.

Some countries don't follow any conventional course. China is one of them. It follows what is described as "historical experience". Whatever it is today, is a product of the long revolution that had culminated in Mao capturing power in 1949. The Chinese worldview is guided by three important principles: GDP-ism, China-centrism and Chinese exceptionalism — derived from that revolution.

Deng Xiaoping had reportedly declared in the 1980s that the most important logic is economic development. Chinese economists describe it as "GDPism". The second is China-centrism. Mao insisted on independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency. "Ode to the motherland", the famous patriotic song composed by Wang Shen that declares the "grand and beautiful" land of China "over the mountains, across the plains, across the Yangtze and Huang rivers" as the "dear home of ours", is entrenched in the psyche of every Chinese. Third, is Chinese exceptionalism. China doesn't believe in learning from others. China should follow its own wisdom for answers to its problems, its leaders insist.

The Chinese nationalist worldview has a parallel in history in pre-World War II Germany. Ethnic superiority, historical claims and the Aryan exceptionalism were all very familiar to the people of the world in the 1930s. When Hitler occupied

Sudetenland, a German-speaking area of the former Czechoslovakia, Europe decided to appease him, rather than confront. Roosevelt was watching from afar when the European nations — like Britain, France and Italy — were celebrating the Munich Agreement. He even praised Hitler saying, "I am convinced that hundreds of millions throughout the world would recognise your action as an outstanding historic service to all humanity".

Unsurprisingly, Hitler violated his promise of "no further aggression" in less than one year, and World War II began. Where Britain was in 1939-40 is where America stands today. The US president Donald Trump allowed coronavirus to devastate its states before finally waking up. As late as February 28, Trump was asking his supporters in South Carolina to not heed warnings about the virus outbreak in America. He was blaming the media for "hysteria" and calling the corona threat "their new hoax". Now, the European nations, having cuddled up to China for "Belt and Road" benefits, are struggling to contain the pandemic fallout.

Interestingly, the countries that stood up to this contagion are mostly the Asian democracies. South Korea led the way, conducting more tests than America on a single day. Singapore undertook extensive testing, making a huge effort to track down any viral symptoms. Hong Kong and Taiwan, with their past experience of SARS fatalities, have taken timely measures to contain the virus effectively.

India, on the other hand, has set an ex-

ample of democratic activism in combating the corona challenge. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, together with his colleagues, is leading from the front, and has successfully implemented a lockdown and social distancing measures, with full popular support. A country with a population of about 1.3 billion has reportedly seen about 17,610 active cases. Modi did not resort to any arbitrary or authoritarian measures though there were deliberate acts of provocation and misinformation like Islamophobia. In the face of such provocations, Modi displayed enormous equanimity, calm and optimism. He proved that democracies with visionary leadership can tackle such challenges without compromising on liberal values.

In the unfolding new world order, India, along with countries like America and Germany, can play a pivotal role in building a world based on "human-centric development cooperation" as suggested by Modi. It is time for a new Atlantic Charter: Environment, healthcare, technology and democratic liberalism can be its foundations.

China has an opportunity today, even as it faces opprobrium globally and unrest within the country. The Chinese Communist Party has a phrase, "Luxian Douzheng" or line struggle. It means power struggle for some, but it also denotes the struggle for a new party line. There were several in the past. Can the world hope for a better one now?

The writer is national general secretary, BJP and director, India Foundation

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"On Monday, global coronavirus cases passed 3 million, meaning one in three patients is in the US. The US government has failed its people and also failed the world."

— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

## The ways out

Stimulus package must focus on rural areas and middle-income groups to help generate demand and kickstart virtuous cycle



SUNIL K ALAGH

BY NOW, we have all read about how unprecedented a crisis COVID-19 is — so I wish to get straight to the main issues, and possible solutions. We need to simplify our communication, present a sustainable plan and, above all, implement. Yes, we must continue testing, but I feel that we are sorely lacking in implementation.

There is no questioning the wisdom of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategy in ensuring a complete lockdown. While the Centre, RBI and states have announced a slew of good plans, why do we still hear of the stoning of doctors, the lack of following of the rules, non-availability of essential food and money for the poor. For me, the answer lies in inadequate communication and implementation. While we all must work in unified fashion, the main onus lies with our elected representatives, right down to the MLA. It is time they earned their votes and the trust that their constituents have placed in them. They must appear at least once a week before the public, after donning masks and gloves and adhering to social distancing norms, to explain in simple terms the government's policies. As the situation is dynamic, they must continuously update the general public of the changes. Making appearances on TV and giving instructions is not enough.

This is the need of the hour. Because the void of information is quickly filled by speculations and rumours, mainly through social media. Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance basically explains that people tend to look for consonance in their action — right or wrong. For instance, we are well-aware of the fact that smoking leads to cancer, but smokers bring about ill-advised consonance by following any 80-year-old doctor who smokes and has no cancer. And so it is, that when some MLAs, MPs and self-proclaimed leaders have weddings, and break the rules as VIPs, the average person wonders, "why can't I?" — thus bringing about consonance to their wrong actions.

The eminent virologist Ian Lipkin has said that complete normalcy will return to the world after a vaccine is developed, which is about a year away. The economy, though, is floundering. So what do we do in the meantime other than communicate as outlined? We should have a very short-term plan (three months) and a short-term plan (nine months), that will need to be frequently reviewed.

The very short term plan involves the

government having transparent discussions. All meetings that the prime minister has with the chief ministers should be open — like in Parliament. The people are eager to hear not only what the prime minister has to say, but what their chief ministers are planning. Agriculture must be given the top priority — buying of farmers' goods, their transportation and storage. Export oriented industries need to be opened up. White-collar workers can work from home, but not the blue-collar workers. They are the backbone of the economy. Migrant workers are grappling with no income and crowded living conditions — with rents to pay and not enough food. They must be provided these basic survival resources. It will be difficult to get these workers back from their homes when the economy opens up. The current Rs 500 per month is not enough, and this should be increased to at least Rs 3,000. The total cost for this entire exercise would not be very high — about Rs 50,000 crore. This is a small price to pay when one considers alternate scenarios which may be disastrous.

In the short-term, a fiscal stimulus needs to be given directly to the rural areas, and taxes must be reduced for the middle-income group to incentivise them to spend and generate the much-needed demand. Stimulus must also be given to the MSMEs in order for them to pay their wages and reopen their operations. Lastly, support must also be given to large industries to open up with specific guidelines, but without any draconian laws or many impediments for either new or existing industries: Nobody will open up or enter if fear is drilled into them.

Where will the money for all of the above come from? We must empower the states to act within the broad guidelines framed by the Centre which cannot, and must not act as a police force. If alcohol is an income source, then let the states decide on it. The Centre spends far too little as a percentage of GDP when compared to other countries. Any stimulus must focus on the rural areas and the middle-income groups to not only tide over the crisis, but also generate demand to kickstart the virtuous cycle. Industry will not produce anything without demand, even if it is opened.

As the PM said, "Jaan Hai toh Jahan Hai". The time has come to follow his motto in letter and spirit. A lot of the building blocks have been put in place by the PM. If a new stimulus package manages to keep/bring back workers, it will be an opportunity for us to get back on the path of growth. States, industry and citizens — all of us must support and act as Indians. The future is in our hands and our efforts can make all the difference between jannat (heaven) and jahannam (hell).

The writer is a business consultant

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### GLARING GAPS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Reset and reform' (IE, April 29). Inadequacies and deficiencies intrinsic in our health system and the absence of a support system, especially for daily wage workers, are attenuating our efforts to contain the Coronavirus. Though our government is seemingly making all-out efforts to cope with this contagion, the initial delay in our response to it cannot be just wished away. Our taking shelter under the extenuating claims like the small death toll in our country as compared to those in other countries will only show our reluctance to learn from our mistakes.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

### 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](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

Prashant Singh, Rae Bareilly

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Reset and reform' (IE, April 29). Through Ayushman Bharat component of PM-JAY, the government has tried to improve tertiary healthcare access for the vulnerable who are insured under the scheme by taking advantage of the hitherto under-utilised private healthcare infrastructure. Public health infrastructure is indispensable for any government to improve the health of its people and over-reliance on private infrastructure won't suffice. This is evident from the examples of South Korea and Singapore, which have effectively contained the spread of COVID-19. Higher spending on public health in general and investment in public healthcare infrastructure, in particular, can't be delayed. Health, along with education, is a pillar on which the health of a society and country depends.

Dimpy Bhatia, Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'School's out' (IE, April 29). There is no way online education can replace physical classrooms, but such is the crisis and need of the hour that online education has become inevitable at all levels. And barring urban locations, online education still remains a distant reality due to various issues like poor internet bandwidth, lack of awareness among students and parents and poor skills of teachers. In both healthcare and education, the COVID-19 crisis has exposed huge gaps. Going forward, both the central and state governments must focus on infrastructure.

Bal Govind, Noida

### BETTER TOMORROW

THIS REFERS TO article, 'The other pollution' (IE April 29). The transition into schooling from home has given the younger generation a rightful claim to electronic devices such as mobile



# State govt procurement gets delayed, farmers in Rajasthan pay the price

DEEP MUKHERJEE JAIPUR, APRIL 29

THREE DAYS after returning from the Krishi Upaj Mandi in Rajasthan's Sriganganagar city, 48-year-old farmer Gurpreet Singh Sandhu still can't stop reeling his loss — he had to sell most of his mustard produce of 75 quintals for much lower than the minimum support price (MSP). "I suffered a loss of Rs 900 on each quintal after selling the mustard at just over Rs 3,500 a

quintal at the mandi. Last year, I had sold my produce to the government at MSP of Rs 4,200 a quintal," says Sandhu, a resident of 8NN village of Sriganganagar.

For this year's rabi season, the Centre has fixed Rs 4,425 a quintal as MSP for rapeseed and mustard. However, with the delay in government procurement due to the lockdown, farmers in most areas of Rajasthan are unable to sell their produce at MSP.

The Rajasthan State Co-operative Marketing Federation Ltd (RAJFED) is procuring mus-



Farmers at the Kishanganj tehsildar office in Baran district after submitting a memorandum requesting an increase in the quantity of wheat and number of tokens issued. Express

tard and gram at MSP of Rs 4,425 and 4,875 per quintal, respectively, but procurement is functional only in a few districts in Kota division, leaving farmers from other districts like Sriganganagar with no option but to wait or sell their produce at throwaway prices to private players at mandis.

FULL REPORT ON [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

# Chhattisgarh dist throws up first case, question on transfer during quarantine

GARGI VERMA RAIPUR, APRIL 29

ON TUESDAY, a 58-year-old man tested positive for COVID-19 in Chhattisgarh's Raipur — the first confirmed case in the district. In the rapid test, nine others quarantined at the same shelter camp were suspected to have been infected.

A 10th person suspected to have contracted the infection was housed at a quarantine camp in Jashpur district.

Both were green zone districts, and all 12 people had arrived, along many others in a group of around 400, from quarantine centres in Rajnandgaon district on April 17.

"We have sent all patients (man who tested positive and those suspected to have been infected) to AIIMS-Raipur. I was contacted by the Rajnandgaon collector and we made arrangements for 106 people they sent to our district," Surajpur district collector Deepak Soni said on Wednesday.

This transfer of nearly 400 people to decongest Rajnandgaon quarantine centres — the district has 58 quarantine camps, housing nearly 9,000 people — has raised a question of whether people should be allowed to travel during their mandatory quarantine pe-

riod. While Rajnandgaon collector P Maurya said the people sent out had completed the required 15-day quarantine period, state Additional Chief Secretary Subrat Sahu said they had been there for hardly a "few" days.

Sahu, however, said: "It is the state's (government's) prerogative where people are kept. They were quarantined in Rajnandgaon, were transported by our vehicles, and kept in the quarantine facility in (different) districts. It doesn't break the quarantine."

According to a Health Department official, quarantine is meant to restart after every instance of travel.

The man who has tested positive in Surajpur worked as a labourer in Maharashtra's Wardha district and is a resident of Jharkhand. He was quarantined in Rajnandgaon on April 5 and was moved to Jajawal in Surajpur on April 17. The same day, four groups of about 100 people each were transferred from Rajnandgaon to quarantine centres in Jashpur, Surajpur, Koriya and Raigadh districts.

Explaining why he ordered transfer of so many people to quarantine centres in other districts, Maurya said he decided to make small groups to ensure containment after more than 400 people congregated at one camp.

# At 71, highest 24-hour toll; cases doubling in 11.3 days

ABANTIKA GHOSH NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

EVEN AS discussions on where each district stands in terms of coronavirus cases and the opening up formula continued in the government, the country recorded its highest 24-hour toll — 71, it was announced on Wednesday.

In all, 1,008 people have died of COVID-19 across the country so far.

In the last 24 hours, 1,813 new cases were reported, taking the total number of cases to 31,787, and 7,796 patients have recovered, making the recovery rate nearly 25 per cent.

So far, 7,70,764 tests have been conducted in the country in private and ICMR laboratories.

In an interaction with the Lions Club International members from across the country, Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said that there are "a little over 300 districts in the country with no cases and another 300 with minimal - between 1 and 5 - cases".

He also said that the doubling time over the last three days is 11.3 days.

According to the minister, although the global mortality rate is around 7 per cent, India has so far shown a mortality rate of around 3 per cent, with nearly 86 per cent fatality of patients with co-morbidities.

While the discussion currently is centred around a graded opening up of the nationwide lockdown, a source close to the Health Minister indicated that he is in favour of continuation of the lockdown.

The source said, "The deci-

So far, 7,70,764 tests have been conducted in the country in private and ICMR laboratories

sion has not been taken yet on how the relaxations will be implemented. The Prime Minister himself is consulting all stakeholders and taking as many inputs as possible... We cannot risk a disaster."

"If you ask the minister personally," the source added, "he would tell you that it may be better to maintain status quo."

Signalling a change in the protocol so far, the Health Ministry has already announced that offices where a COVID case has been detected need not be closed down, as was the protocol earlier.

"If there is a COVID patient in a non-COVID hospital, that facility can be used after disinfection. The same process is to be followed for any other location where a COVID patient is detected. The building can be used after proper disinfection," Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal had said on Tuesday.

In his interaction with the Lions Club members, Vardhan said: "This time the hallmark of our approach has been five-fold: (i) maintaining a continuous situation awareness, (ii) preemptive and proactive approach, (iii) graded response as per continuously evolving scenario, (iv) inter-sectoral coordination at all levels, and, most importantly (v) creating a people's movement to combat this disease."

## NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER

NO.F. 43/CPC/COVID-19/MED/DHS/2019-2020 Dated, Agartala. 27.04.2019

TENDER MEDICINE FOR COVID-19 UNDER HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF TRIPURA.

A Tender is hereby invited on behalf of the Director of Health Services, Government of Tripura from resourceful, experienced bonafide and renowned licensed Manufacturers/ Importer or their authorized Local Whole sale Distributor/ supplier for procurement of "Medicine" under Health & Family Welfare Department, Govt. of Tripura."

The details of tender, list of items with indicative quantity and Tender Documents are made available on website (<http://tripuratenders.gov.in>). The last date/time of submission of the tender documents by online is 12.05.2020 up to 4.00 pm. All future modification/ corrigendum shall be made available in the e procurement portal. So bidders are requested to update themselves from the e procurement web portal only.

Sd/- Director of Health Services Govt. of Tripura, Agartala

ICA-C/11420

**TAMILNADU CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION**  
Head Office: 12, THAMBUSAMY ROAD, KILPAUK, CHENNAI-600 010. Ph.No.(044) 26426773 Email id: tncsc.tn@nic.in CIN:U15137TN1972SGC006157

**SHORT e-TENDER NOTICE**  
No. : BS6/014085/2020 Dated : 24.04.2020  
Short E-Tender No. : BS6/014085/2020/TNCS/20-21/ET-04

Online electronic tender for "Appointment of millers based on the out-turn ratio for the conversion of raw tur into Tur Dal (Split-Husked & Fatka) as per Agmark Specification for issue under Pradan Mandi Dal (Split-Husked Fatka) (PMGKAV)"

Complete e-tender document can be viewed and downloaded through <https://www.mstcecommerce.com/eprochome/tncsc> and also available in [www.tenders.tn.gov.in](http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in)

The bidders have to participate online bidding only with Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) of Class-II or Class-III

For Registration and further details contact MSTD LIMITED, Phone:25222842/25251910/25261005 e-Mail: mstdcro@mstdindia.co.in

Last Date for Online Submission : 08.05.2020. MANAGING DIRECTOR.

## S. E. Railway Tender

e-Tender Notice No. : e-Tenders/2020/15, Dated : 28.04.2020. e-Tenders are invited by the Divisional Railway Manager (Engrg.), South Eastern Railway, Kharagpur-721301 for and on behalf of the President of India for the following works before 15.00 hrs. on the date mentioned against items and will be opened at 15.30 hrs. SI. No., Tender No., Description of work, Tender Value and Earnest Money are as follows - (1) E-KGP-West-12-2020. (i) Replacement of RCC slab to PSC slab & lowering of road including provision of drainage system for Br. No. 6 on NH-6 near Kaskikunda station. (ii) Rehabilitation of Br. No. 123 at Km 105/1-3 & Br. No. 128 at Km 108/28-30 (between Kharagpur-Balichak) under the jurisdiction of DEN/West/Kharagpur. ₹ 1,73,86,875.72, ₹ 2,36,500/- (2) E-KGP-West-13-2020. Execution of the work of (i) Renewal of 74 Sets existing 80 kg. SEJ by new 60 kg SEJ in Kharagpur-Tata Section. (ii) TRR(P) 3.78 km in Nimpura-Tata Section. (iii) TRR-TWS+WDMSG - 122 Nos. & (CS+CMSC) - 30 Nos. in Nimpura-Tata Section. (iv) TRR (CS) - 4 Nos. in Nimpura-Tatanagar Jn. Section under the jurisdiction of DEN/West/Kharagpur (2nd Call). ₹ 1,58,68,684.04, ₹ 2,29,400/- (3) E-KGP-West-14-2020. Construction of New Bridge (Br. No. 135) in replacement of existing damaged bridge over Kharagpur-Midnapur Section under the jurisdiction of ADEN/West/Kharagpur (4th Call). ₹ 2,46,03,023.95, ₹ 2,73,000/- (4) E-KGP-West-15-2020. Execution of the work of (i) Construction of Road Under Bridge (5m x 5m) on LC. No. 111 between KGP-Tata Section and shifting of LC gate no. 111 in Kharagpur-Tata Section and (ii) Construction of 2nd Road under Bridge near Br. No. 129A at Kharagpur and Construction of cover shed for approach road, drainage arrangement & fixing of height gauge near Br. No. 129A at Kharagpur by pushing technique under the jurisdiction of DEN/West/Kharagpur. ₹ 13,90,32,749.29, ₹ 8,45,200/- (5) E-KGP-HQ-19-2020. Comprehensive operation and maintenance of existing Electro chlorination plants (02 Nos. MAC-2000 and 01 No. MAC-500 & 06 Nos. MAC-100), supply, installation of 05 Nos. dosing pumps and repairing of old existing MAC-2000, 500, 100 Electro chlorination plants including supply of common salt & fitting parts in Kharagpur settlement under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Water Supply/KGP (for one year) ₹ 35,03,611.63, ₹ 70,100/- (6) E-KGP-South-08-2020. Replacement of bearings of Br. No. 215 UP & 293 UP and cast-in-situ R.C.C. bed block and ballast retaining wall at Br. No. 215 UP under the jurisdiction of Divisional Engineer (South)/Kharagpur (2nd Call). ₹ 1,26,25,749.55, ₹ 2,13,100/- (7) E-KGP-South-09-2020. Kharagpur-Rupsa : Provision of loading, ballast retainer, standard bridge table, replacement of damaged slab & wing wall & other miscellaneous works to bridges (3rd Call). ₹ 1,90,06,932.11, ₹ 2,45,000/- (8) E-KGP-East-07-2020. (i) Improvement of station Approach Road at Deuli, Mecheda and Hauri Station. (ii) Development of Level Crossing Road connecting to station at LC No. 40, 41, 43, 47 and 50 between Baganan-Duan Station. (iii) Renovation and development of Level Crossing Roads (LC No. 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23) between Moutigram-Baganan station. ₹ 4,51,85,982.82, ₹ 3,78,000/-

RFQ documents are available on MCGM portal <http://portal.mcgmgov.in> under e-tender tab. Any queries about the work can be sent on Email address [che.gmlr@mcgm.gov.in](mailto:che.gmlr@mcgm.gov.in) on or before 09.05.2020

Sd/- Chief Engineer (Bridges)

PRO/53/ADV/20-21 MCGM HELPLINE NUMBER 1800221292 from 9 a. m. to 9 p. m. FOR Homeless/Stranded Migrants/ Workers for food & shelters

**INDIAN PORT RAIL & ROPEWAY CORPORATION LIMITED**  
(A JV Company under Ministry of Shipping, Government of India) (Formerly Indian Port Rail Corporation Ltd.)

**RFQ No. IPRCL/ADI/PROJECTS/NMHC/EP/2020**  
Dated: 30.04.2020

**Construction of National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat through Engineering, Procurement & Construction (EPC) Mode.**

For more details visit website [www.etenders.gov.in/eprochome/app](http://www.etenders.gov.in/eprochome/app)

**CHHATTISGARH HOUSING BOARD DIVISION JAGDALPUR, BODHGATH COLONY, JAGDALPUR**  
Website: www.eghb.gov.in, Ph: 07782-23179, Male: 094242-99926. Advt. No. 70 Dt. 29.04.2020

CGBH invites Technical & Financial offer as per Request for Proposal from qualified and experienced firms (criteria as per in RFP document) for providing "Project Management Consultancy Services" for Proposed Township for NMDC Ltd at Niyantar Jagdalpur (C.G.)

Name of Project	Area of Land	Approx. Estimated cost put to bid Value
RFP for selection of Consultant for Project Management consultancy (PMC) for Proposed Township for NMDC Ltd at Niyantar Jagdalpur (C.G.)	118.00 Acres (47.86 hect.)	Rs. 1768.56 Crs.

The bidder has to submit process fee of Rs. 10,000.00 & Bid Security of Rs. 18,00,00,000 both in the form of DD/BG of any Nationalized Indian Bank with offer. The offer shall be submitted either by hand/ Courier/ Speed post in the office of EEC CGBH Div. Jagdalpur C.G. up to 4:00 AM dt. 22/05/2020, other conditions may be seen on website.

Executive Engineer

**SAMAGRA SHIKSHA STATE PROJECT OFFICE, KBC BOYS HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS, OPP RAITHU BAZAR, PATAMATA, VIJAYAWADA, ANDHRA PRADESH**

**Request for Proposal**  
e-procurement notice, No. SSA-16021/4/2019-MIS SEC-SSA, dt. 29.04.2020

Samagra Shiksha, Andhra Pradesh is inviting Request For Proposal for procurement and supply of set of note books under the scheme of "Jagananna Vidya Kanuka" to all the students (approximately 21 lakhs in number) studying classes VI to X in Government/MMP/ZPP/Municipal/KGBVs/Model Schools/Asrham schools/ Residential/Aided Schools of Education and welfare departments in the State of Andhra Pradesh during the year 2020-21. For details please visit <https://tender.aeprocurement.gov.in> from 01.05.2020. Tender/RFP form can be downloaded from website. Eligible firms shall upload the prescribed format as per the schedules given in the above said site. Contact No. 0866-2428599. Sd/- V. Chinaveerabhadhrudu, I.A.S., State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Andhra Pradesh

**TAMIL NADU SLUM CLEARANCE BOARD SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (CHENNAI CIRCLE-II)**  
NOTICE INVITING SHORT-TENDER  
Date: 29.04.2020

For and on behalf of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, one sealed short tender consisting of two separate sealed covers one for Pre-qualification with EMD to be enclosed in A cover and another for price schedule with name of work duly subscribed to be enclosed in B cover are invited from the registered contractors of TNSCB under Class-I and above or Government Departments/ Government Undertaking/ Public Sector Undertaking, registered as a legal entity in India by the Superintendent Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, No.5, Kamarajar Sala, Chennai 600 005 upto 3.00 PM on 15.05.2020 and the same will be opened at 3.30 PM on same day in the presence of the Tender Security Committee.

Sr. No.	Name of work/Estimate No.	Approximate Value (Including GST) (Rs. in lakhs) Period of contract	EMD (In Rs.)	To whom EMD/ Tender Schedule cost to be Drawn
1)	Construction of 702 tenements adopting Type Design 17 K /2020 (Silt + 13 Storied) including internal and external water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements with developments works at Andanimayam Thottam scheme in Greater Chennai Corporation Dn- 126 under TNHHPD. Estimate CER No. 08/HFA/2020-21	7660.00 18 Months	38,40,000/-	Executive Engineer/ Division VI, Chennai-04
2)	Construction of 1716 Nos. of Tenements adopting Type Design No. 17 K /2020 (Silt + 13 Storied) with developments works including internal water supply, sanitary and electrification arrangements at Pallakumayam in Greater Chennai Corporation Dn No. 123 under TNHHPD. Estimate CER No. 09/HFA/2020-21	18700.00 24 Months	93,60,000/-	

The EMD should be drawn as Demand Draft or Banker's Cheque or FDR or irrevocable Bank Guarantee from any Nationalized / Scheduled Banks, payable at Chennai in the prescribed form in favour of the Executive Engineer mentioned in Column (5). The tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Superintendent Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, TNSCB, No.5, Kamarajar sala, Chennai 600 005 on written requisition along with cost of the tender documents to a value of Rs. 16,900/- (Non-Refundable) in the form of Demand Draft or Banker's Cheque upto 3.00 PM, 14.05.2020 drawn in favour of Executive Engineer, mentioned in Column (5).

The tender documents are also available at [www.tenders.tn.gov.in](http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in) in which can be downloaded from 30.04.2020 to 14.05.2020 upto 3.00 PM. The downloaded tender documents shall be submitted without any alteration, whatsoever it may be, in full shape or otherwise the tender will be liable for rejection. The tenderer shall keep a watch over the Website till the preceding date of tender for any corrigendum. If the due date of opening of the tender happens to be a holiday, the same will be received and opened on the succeeding working day without any change in time. Clarification, if any on Bid Criteria and other details regarding the tender can be had on all working days from the Office of the Superintendent Engineer, Chennai Circle-II, TNSCB, Chennai 600 005.

The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reasons therefor.

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER CHENNAI CIRCLE-II  
No.5, Kamarajar Sala, Chennai-600 005 DIPR/1705/TENDER/2020

# Attacks on frontline workers: UP to bring in ordinance for strict penalty

MAULSHREE SETH LUCKNOW, APRIL 29

THE UTTAR Pradesh government is set to promulgate an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, to ensure that those involved in attacks on frontline workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic face stiff penalties, including a jail term of up to seven years and Rs 5 lakh as fine.

Citing the attack on health workers and police in Kanpur and Moradabad, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said, "Attacks on our corona warriors are a serious crime which cannot go unpunished as these warriors are working for the society by putting their lives at risk."

"That is why we have moved forward to amend Epidemic Diseases Act," he said.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, state Law Minister Brijesh Pathak said that after the Centre amended the Act, each state was supposed to amend rules concerning it. "Uttar Pradesh has decided to implement all provisions, like punishment from six months to seven years and fine imposed in the Central Act. We have decided to bring a fresh ordinance, making the punishment more strict."

While the new ordinance will be called Uttar Pradesh Epidemic Disease Control Ordinance, 2020, sources said it would include punishment for offences like spitting, running from quarantine facilities and violating restrictions.

The CM said medical teams, security personnel or even those engaged in doorstep delivery, are helping people of the state by putting their lives at risk and just a handful of people cannot be allowed to create unrest. He said that he has asked police officers not to hesitate in taking action.

"Such attacks are a direct challenge to the law and order system, and in no situation, they can be accepted. I had said it earlier too and will say it again that in Uttar Pradesh, all the health workers, security personnel, all the sanitation workers, and even social organisations are working to break the chain of coronavirus. Attacking them is an unpardonable crime," he said, adding that Gangster Act and National Security Act would also be invoked against those involved in such attacks.

# Bihar welcomes govt order on migrants

Patna: While Bihar welcomed the Centre's order on Wednesday allowing movement of labour, students and tourists stranded away from homes across the country, there was no word from it on whether it would arrange for the return of people from the state. In a statement, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "The MHA (Union Ministry of Home Affairs) order is apt and welcome. We will comply with the Central government's protocols on migrants' movement." ENS



Yogi Adityanath

## EASTERN RAILWAY

Following E-tender is invited online by Divisional Railway Manager, Eastern Railway, Howrah from tenderers having experience of similar nature of work and required financial capabilities including those registered firms for the following work: NIT No.: T-T-CMS-HWH-2020, Dated: 29.04.2020. Description of work: Outsourcing the job of Data Feeding at Crew Booking Lobbies of Howrah Division for five terminals viz - Rampurhat Lobby (2 terminals), Pakur Lobby (1 terminal), Azimganj Lobby (1 terminal) and Katwa Lobby (1 terminal) around the clock for 730 days (2 years). Total 16 numbers of manpower i.e 3 manpower in one Supervisor/Rest giver, to supervise the work of all the data entry operators in lobbies and also act as a rest giver, for all the lobbies. The outsourced data feeding operators will keep a close coordination with the on duty roster clerk under Station Master of the respective lobbies. The lobbies should be manned for 24 hrs. i.e. in 3 shifts on round the clock basis for 730 days (2 years). The operator shall make data entries on real time basis in the CMS. The agency staff should be in proper uniform and name batch with the Agency's name. Approx. Cost: ₹ 84.89,235.70. Earnest Money: ₹ 1,69,800. Closing date and time of tender: 25.05.2020 at 11.00 hrs. The details of tender are available at website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) Tenderers are requested to submit their offer online on the above website. No manual offer will be accepted. (HWH-01/2020-21) Tender Notices are also available at website: [www.eindianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.eindianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in)

## GURU GHASIDAS VISHWAVIDYALAYA

(A Central University established under the Central Universities Act, 2009, No.25 of 2009) KONI, BILASPUR-495 009 (C.G.) INDIA  
Tel. +91-7752- 260342 260021 Fax +91-7752- 260154 260148 website - www.ggu.ac.in

### ADMISSION NOTICE (2020-21)

Ref.No.03/Admission/Academic/20 Bilaspur, Date 29.04.2020  
Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur invites online applications for admission to the various courses for the academic session 2020-21 through Vishwavidyalaya Entrance Test (VET).

- Courses available for admission:  
**Honours Programmes** : B. Com (Honours), BSW, BA (Honours)-Anthropology, English, Hindi, Journalism & Mass Communication, Economics, History, Political Science, B. Sc. (Honours) Anthropology , Biotechnology, Botany, Forensic Science, Chemistry, Computer Science, Zoology, Mathematics, Physics, Electronics, Rural Technology .  
**5 years Integrated BA - LLB, B. Com-LLB**  
B. Pharm, B.Sc. in Forestry, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), B.Ed. Special Education (Learning disability), B.Ed. Special Education (Hearing Impaired), Bachelor of Physical Education (B.P.Ed.), Bachelor of Library & Information Science (B. Lib. & I. Sc.).  
**Postgraduate programme** : M.Sc. - Botany, Chemistry, Bio-technology, Forensic Science, Computer Science, Rural Technology, Forestry, Physics, Electronics, Mathematics, Zoology, M.A.- Economics, Political Science, Hindi, English, History, Journalism & Mass Communication. Master of Education (M.Ed.), Master of Physical Education (M.P.Ed.), Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Computer Applications (M.C.A.), M.A./M.Sc. in Anthropology, M. Lib. & Inf. Sc., M. Com.  
**Diploma Programme**: Diploma in Pharmacy, PGDC, CCCL  
(b) Exam Centres for VET\* -1. Bilaspur (CG) 2. Raipur (CG) 3. Jagdalpur (CG) 4. Ambikapur (CG) 5. Korba (CG), 6. Janjgir/Champa (CG), 7. Raigarh (CG), 8. Rajnandgaon (CG), 9. Patna (Bihar), 10. Ranchi (JH), 11. Vishakhapatnam (AP) 12. Prayagraj (Allahabad) (UP) 13. Bhubaneswar (Odisha), 14. Kolkata (WB) . 15. Gandia (MH), 16. Jabalpur (MP).  
Details/Names of the Centres of Examinations will be available on our website ([www.ggu.ac.in](http://www.ggu.ac.in)) from 30th May 2020.  
(c) For admission procedure, eligibility, number of seats, reservation policy, fees, scholarship, entrance test date & time, exam centre and how to apply, please refer to "Online Application for Admission 2020-21" available on university website [www.ggu.ac.in](http://www.ggu.ac.in)  
(d) Application/Entrance Test Fee-  
Online Application form - Rs. 500/- + Bank Charges for GEN, OBC and EWS, Rs. 250/- + Bank Charges for SC/ ST /PWD candidates.

- Important dates:**
- Start of Online Application Process : 4th May 2020
  - Closing date of Online submission of Application forms : 30th May 2020
  - Downloading of Admit card (online) starts from : Will be declared later on
  - Entrance test dates for All Courses : Will be declared later on
  - Declaration of Results : Will be declared later on
  - Counselling (For VET) : Will be declared later on
  - Last date of Admission (For VET) : Will be declared later on

\*The University reserves the right to change/cancel any Centre of Examination or date without assigning any reason.  
Note:  
1. Separate notification will be issued by the University for MBA, M. Tech. & M. Pharm., candidates interested in these courses need not apply against this advertisement .  
2. In case, the University will not be able to conduct Entrance Tests for courses advertised in this Admission Notice, due to lock down (COVID-19), admissions will be given to the applicants on the basis of their merit/marks scored in the qualifying examination prescribed in eligibility criteria.  
3. The closing date is tentative and it can be extended if the governments extend the lock down period.

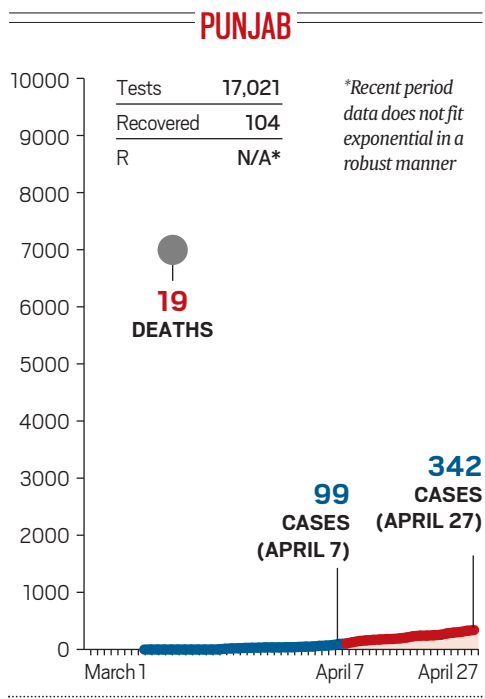
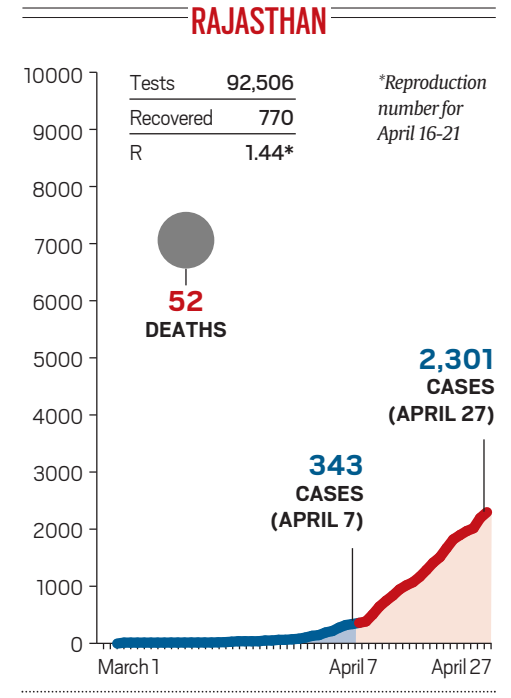
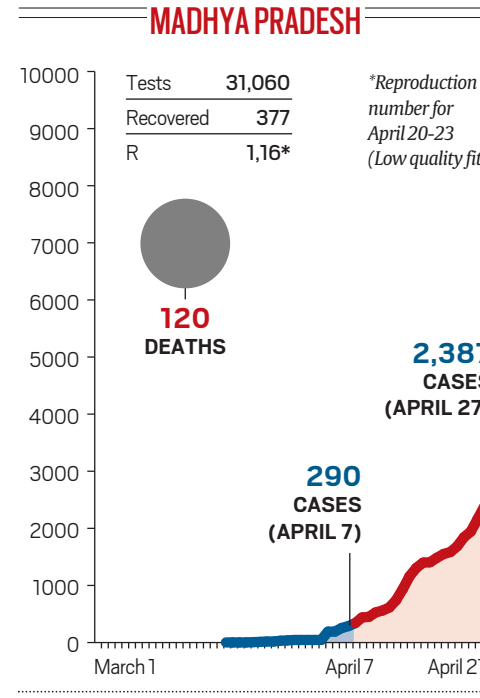
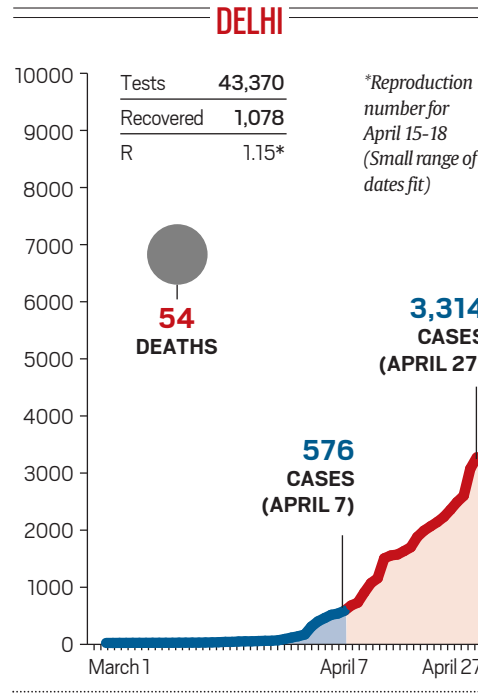
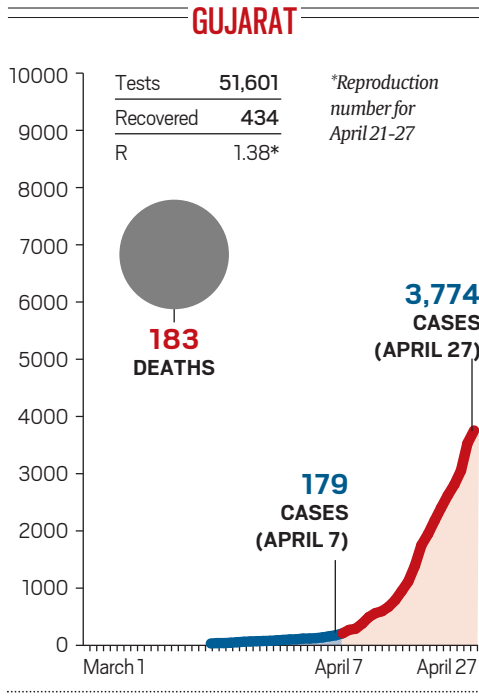
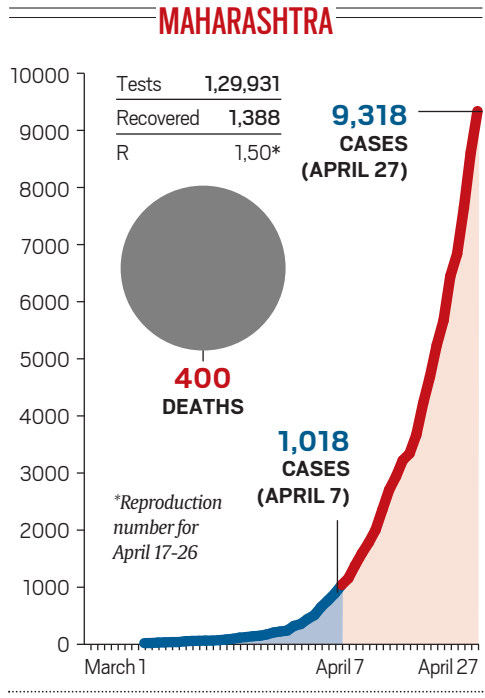
Helpline: 07752-260342 260299 (For Online) Email: [admissionsgvy@gmail.com](mailto:admissionsgvy@gmail.com) Registrar (Acting)





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



## Revisiting virus curve, to read lockdown effect

On April 9, *The Indian Express* analysed the national and state-wise COVID-19 growth curves. How have these shaped since? In updated curves, trends during last 3 weeks of lockdown

**AMITABH SINHA**  
 PUNE, APRIL 28

ON APRIL 9, we had published the growth curves of the novel coronavirus epidemic in various states. Covering data until April 7, we had showed how, just over a month after the outbreak began in the first week of March, the trajectory at the national level and in many states had begun to resemble what is so typical of the spread of an infectious disease — an exponential curve.

With less than a week to go before India steps out of a national lockdown, and into the next phase of the containment strategy, we revisit those growth curves here, in an attempt to illustrate the impact of the lockdown, or at least look at what happened during this period. The national lockdown imposed at midnight of March 24 — often described as the biggest human quarantine ever — was aimed at slowing down the rate of growth of the epidemic, so that the number of patients needing urgent medical attention could remain at manageable levels while government and local authorities would ramp up health infrastructure and prepare themselves to deal with larger number of people at a later stage. As we move towards the end of that period, the lockdown does seem to have resulted in a significant slowdown of the epidemic.

"I don't think there is any doubt that the lockdown did manage to achieve a considerable slowdown in the growth of the disease," said Sitabhra Sinha, a scientist at the Chennai-based Institute of Mathematical Sciences, who has been studying the spread of the epidemic in India through computer modelling.

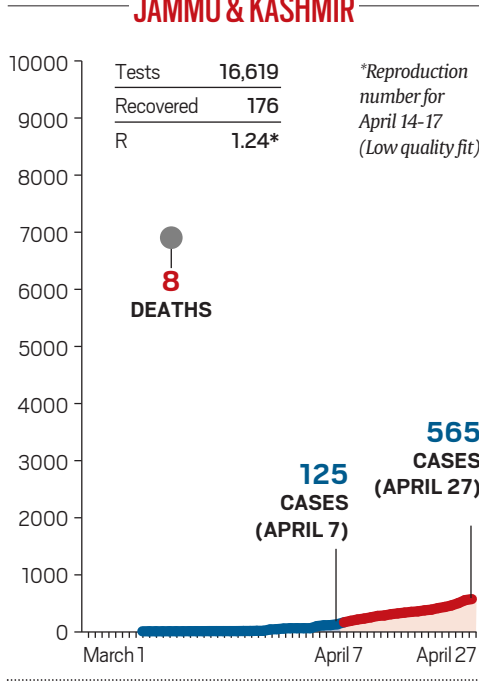
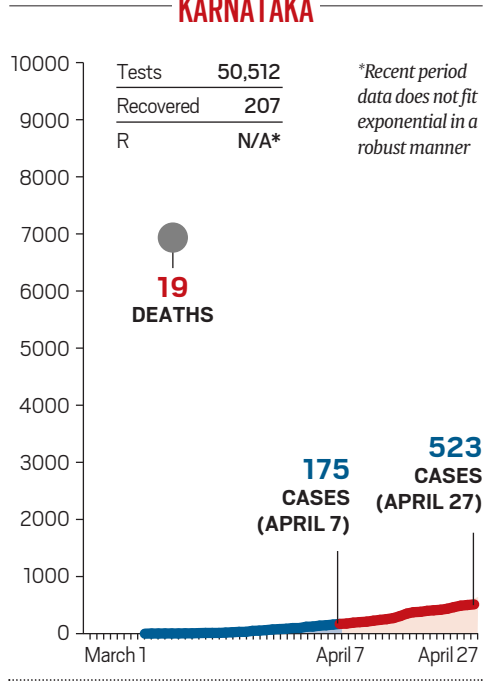
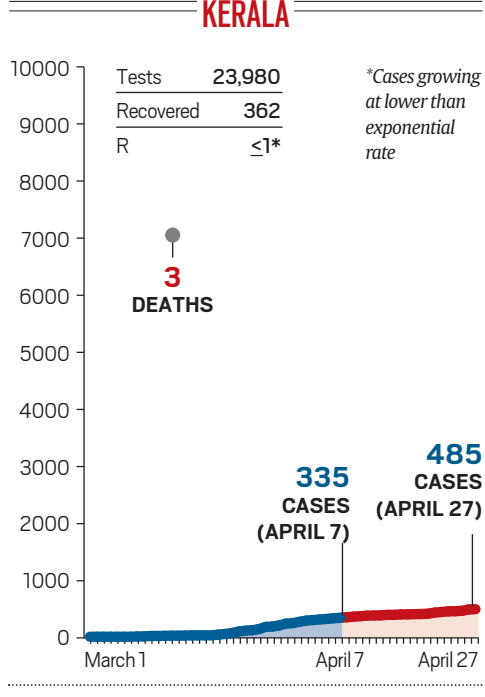
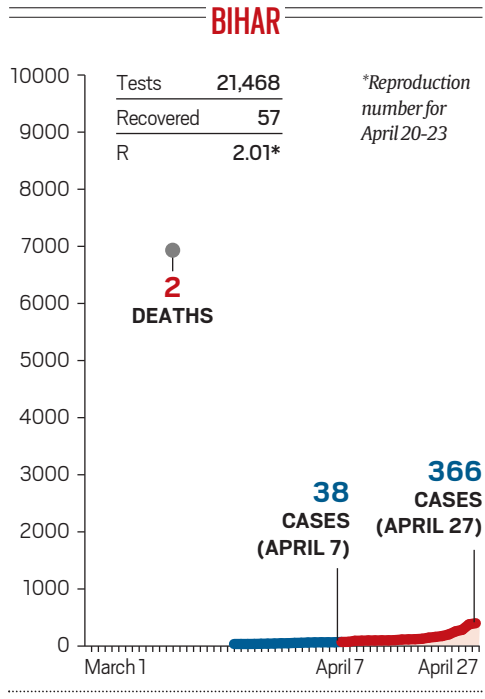
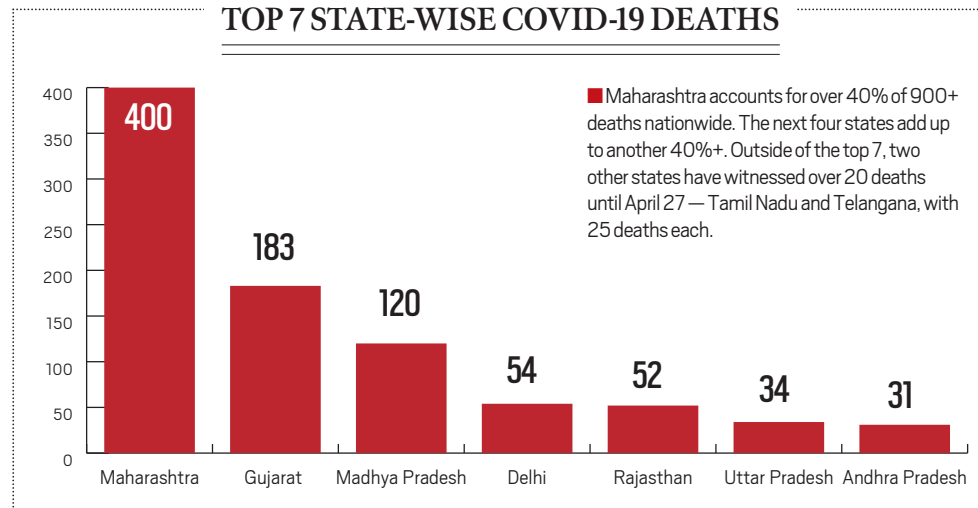
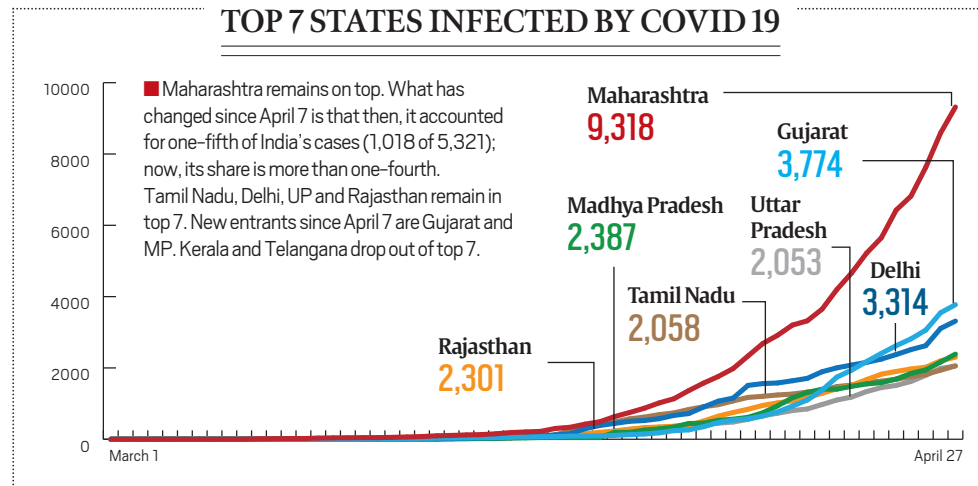
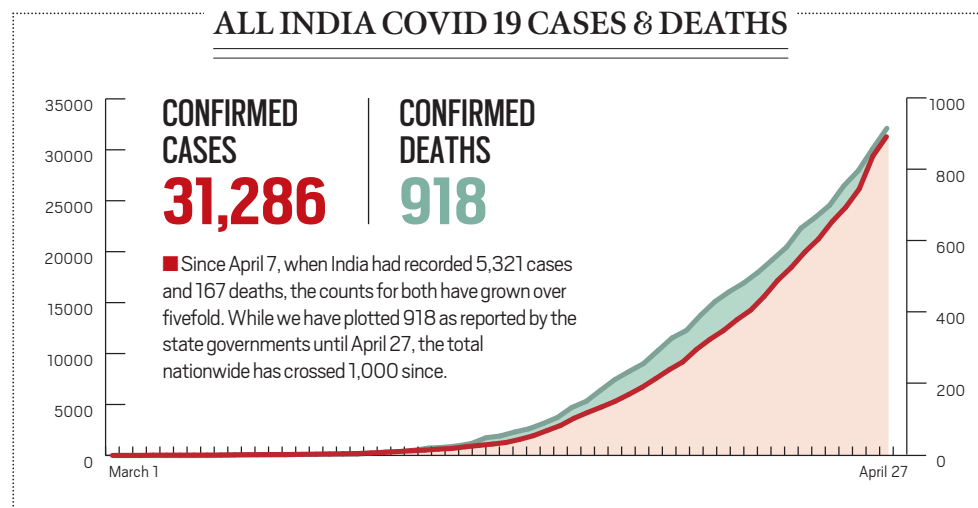
Sinha had told *The Indian Express* on April 12 that, according to a study he had been carrying out with his colleague Soumya Easwaran, the number of confirmed infected cases was likely to remain below 20,000 by April 20. This, he had said, was a direct impact of the lockdown, in the absence of which, computer models showed, the number would have reached 35,000. The number on April 20 was 18,465, well within the prediction.

The reproduction number (R) we mention here — a reference to the average number of persons infected by an already infected person — are those calculated by Sinha's team.

There has been a significant change in the growth curves of the states from the last time. Some states, such as Kerala, have done well to contain the epidemic, winning global acclaim for their efforts, while others, like Maharashtra and Delhi, have seen a steady rise in numbers.

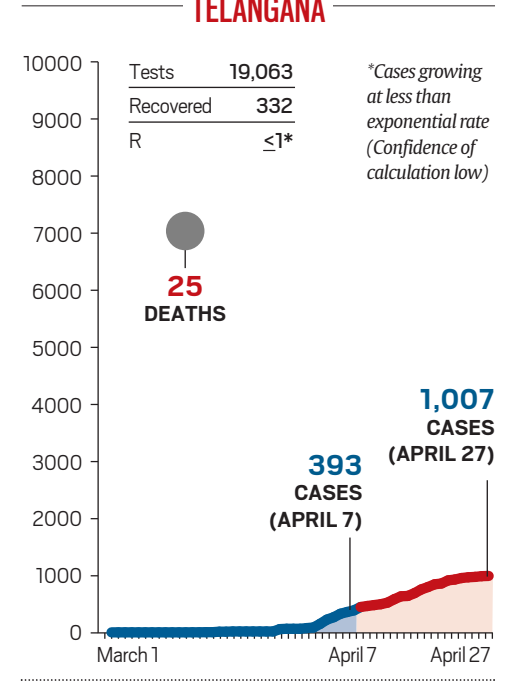
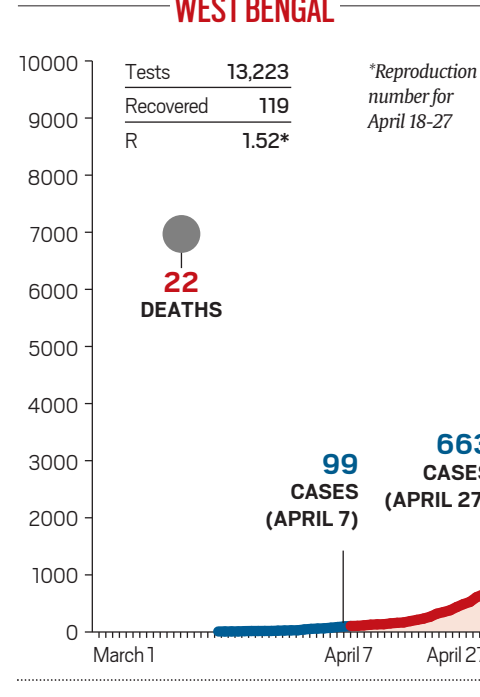
Some other states, like Gujarat, which had a modest case load at that time, have emerged as fast-growing hotspots. And states such as West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand have just begun to show signs that they could potentially turn into trouble zones over the next few days, although their current case load is not very high.

### FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY



### OTHER STATES

State	Cases	Deaths	Recoveries
Andaman	10	0	10
Arunachal	1	0	1
Assam	37	1	27
Chandigarh	56	0	17
Chhattisgarh	37	0	32
Daman	1	0	0
Goa	7	0	7
Haryana	308	4	224
Himachal	41	2	25
Jharkhand	105	2	19
Ladakh	20	0	18
Manipur	2	0	2
Meghalaya	12	1	0
Mizoram	1	0	1
Odisha	118	1	37
Tripura	2	0	2
Uttarakhand	54	0	34





# 10 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

## NEW POLIO OUTBREAK IN NIGER

The World Health Organisation says Niger has been struck by a new outbreak of polio, after the suspension of immunisation activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN health agency reported that two children were infected by the highly infectious, water-borne disease and that one was paralysed

## PANDEMIC WATCH



In Bangkok. AP

### THAILAND Bangkok to ease some restrictions

**Bangkok:** Officials in Bangkok say they are preparing to ease restrictions that were imposed to fight the spread of COVID-19, including the reopening of restaurants under strict conditions. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration announced Wednesday that it hopes to lift restrictions on eight kinds of establishments it had ordered closed through April 30. The city's plans call for the reopening of restaurants, markets, exercise venues, parks, hairdressers and barbers, clinics and nursing homes, animal hospitals and pet salons, and golf courses and driving ranges.

### NEPAL 3 returnees of Tablighi meet test positive

**Kathmandu:** Nepal on Wednesday said that three persons, who returned from India after attending a Tablighi Jamaat gathering, have been tested positive, bringing the total number of the COVID-19 patients in the country to 57. The three men, who were staying in quarantine after returning from the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi's Nizamuddin area last month, have been brought to an isolation ward of Narayani Hospital in Birgunj for treatment, according to a government spokesperson.

### SINGAPORE Govt warns of fake news

**Singapore:** Singapore on Wednesday warned against spreading fake news and videos about migrants workers, saying this could disturb law and order in dormitories where a large number of foreign workers, including Indian nationals, have been tested positive. Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam warned such videos can lead to serious law and order incidents. He said the authorities are watching those who spread the videos "very carefully". Warning those spreading fake news maliciously, he said, they will be charged if a crime was committed.

# 1 mn US cases, toll surpasses Vietnam War

**AGENCIES  
NEW YORK/WASHINGTON,  
APRIL 29**

IT HAS been 100 days since a 35-year-old man presented to an urgent care clinic in Snohomish County, Washington, with a four-day history of cough and fever and tested positive for the virus. His was the first case to be detected.

Since then, more than one million people had tested positive in the United States. In that time, residents in most states in the country — along with more than half of all humanity — have been ordered to shelter in their homes in the hopes of slowing the spread of the highly contagious virus and to try to keep hospital systems from being overwhelmed.

The death toll climbed above 58,000 on Tuesday, surpassing the loss of American life from the Vietnam War, as Florida's governor met with President Donald Trump to discuss an easing of economic restraints.

Epidemiologists have estimated that the true number of infections may be about 10 times the known number, and preliminary testing of how many people have antibodies to the virus seems to support that view. Similarly, the official death toll is likely to vastly underestimate the true number by at least sev-



Vice President Mike Pence during a visit to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. AP

eral thousand, according to analysis of mortality data by *The New York Times*.

While the timeline for the spread of the virus has shifted as public health authorities find evidence that the pathogen was spreading in communities earlier than believed, the speed at which the world has been transformed is shocking.

Masks are becoming an accepted part of public life, which is why there was such a backlash on Tuesday after Vice President Mike Pence flouted the Mayo Clinic's protocols on wearing a protective

face covering on a visit there.

In the last 100 days, the global economy has suffered such a swift and sudden decline that economists have had to reach back to the Great Depression for analogies.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, among the latest to lock down his state against the pandemic, has been weighing whether to join other states in a relaxation of workplace restrictions and stay-at-home orders that have been credited with slowing the contagion but which have battered the economy.

### US CONSIDERING SCANNING FOR INTL AIR TRAVELLERS

■ The US is considering scanning of air travellers from countries hit hard by the coronavirus to stop its spread in the country, President Donald Trump has said.

■ Trump said this could be done in coordination with either the airlines or government. "We're working with the airlines. Maybe it's a combination of both," he said.

## Final journeys are getting lonelier, last goodbyes shorter

**SRIRAM VEERA  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29**

BE IT a graveyard in central Indore, a funeral home in the midwestern US state of Wisconsin or a cemetery in Italy's northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia; the final journeys are getting lonelier and the last goodbyes shorter. At these three COVID-19 hot spots, continents apart, fear is getting the better of grief and even death doesn't provide an escape from social distancing.

Indore's Hafiz Javed, a cemetery caretaker, says the most disconcerting moment for him these days is to watch the coffin pushed, rather than lowered, into the grave. "Everyone stands some distance apart from each other. At times, there aren't enough people to lift the body, so it is difficult to lower them softly. We have to slide them into the pit," Hafiz says.

With few relatives attending burials, the last rites finish quickly. "We instruct family members to pile mud over the body, and once that is done, we rush to finish the job. No one hangs around, there is not much crying," Hafiz says.

At the Malwa mill region's crematorium, too, the pandemic's shadow looms large. Cloth pouches and steel boxes with ashes hang from hooks or sit on the floor. The lockdown means life — and death — are at a standstill.

Family members of the deceased aren't turning up to collect the mortal remains. "Some are waiting for things to open so they can travel for ashes immersion; others are paranoid about infection," says Gauri Kailashpati, a social activist from Indore.

In the US, meanwhile, funerals follow a strict protocol. Wisconsin funeral director John Wenig shares how his son was left speechless by a lady who had lost her husband after 60 years of marriage to COVID-19. "She told my son, 'Are you telling me I can't even have a proper funeral for my husband? My son said he couldn't even hug the lady who



Bodies being buried in New York's Hart Island. Reuters/File

had broken down. Rules and precautions, you see."

Elaborate funerals featuring tributes and sharing of memories are a thing of the past.

A US government advisory directs for COVID-19 deceased to be covered in two body bags, and for the face to be covered with a mask. "No one really knows if the virus is active and harmful after death; so, these are precautions."

There is also a cap on the number of mourners. A maximum of 10 relatives are allowed in the cemetery. Technology has helped. "We started live-streaming the final rites. I remember the first time we had 38 people, second time it jumped to 167 friends and relatives watching it."

In Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, in north east Italy, Cladio Prescherm is thankful that the worst seems to be over in his region. "All cemeteries are closed here. They are open only when a body is buried. No one is coming to cemetery to lay a rose in these times," Prescherm says.

"Newspapers in Bergamo are filled with death notices, page after page. That tells you the real story of how many people have died."

Prescherm's family have been funeral directors for 150 years now. "Scenes of death and grieving are familiar to me but this has been a strange experience. From fear to sorrow, everything has been different... I think we, as a country, remain shocked by this and need to heal as a group... but first, this virus has to be stopped."

**FULL STORY ON  
www.indianexpress.com**

## EXPLAINED Misinformation emerges as challenge

As the US looks at long-term plans and economic recovery initiatives, misinformation about vaccines is shaping to be a major concern before one is even ready.

The claims range from concerns that vaccine trials will be rushed, to conspiracy theories that Bill Gates wants to use the vaccine to inject microchips in people. Given that a vaccine is widely accepted as the best way to definitively end the pandemic threat, fake news-fuelled resistance to the use of vaccines could have devastating consequences.

## UK now has 2nd-highest COVID-19 death toll across Europe

**ANDY BRUCE  
LONDON, APRIL 29**

THE UNITED Kingdom now has Europe's second-highest official death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic, according to new figures on Wednesday that cover fatalities in all settings, including in nursing homes.

Some 26,097 people died across the United Kingdom after testing positive for COVID-19 as of April 28 at 1600 GMT, Public Health England (PHE) said. That means the United Kingdom has had more COVID-19 deaths than France or Spain have reported.

"These more complete data will give us a fuller and more up to date picture of deaths in England and will inform the government's approach as we continue to protect the public," Yvonne Doyle, medical director at PHE, said.

Such a high UK death toll increases the pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government which is facing criticism from opposition parties for being too slow to impose a lockdown and too slow to introduce mass testing.

In mid-March, the government's chief scientific adviser said keeping the UK death toll below 20,000 would be a "good outcome".

Although international comparisons are difficult, the new figures confirm Britain's place among the European countries worst hit hardest by the pandemic. **REUTERS**



## STADIUM TESTING

Johannesburg residents gather in a stadium to be tested for the virus on Wednesday. South Africa will begin a phased easing of its strict lockdown measures which have been in place since March 27, on May 1. It has over 4,360 cases and 86 deaths. **AP**

## 'Life has to go on': How Sweden faced virus

**THOMAS ERDRINK & CHRISTINA ANDERSON  
STOCKHOLM, APRIL 29**

SHE STOOD leaning on her cane, briefly resting among dozens of bubbly young Swedes out enjoying one of the first sunny spring days of the year.

"I'm trying not to get too close to people," said Birgit Lilja, 82, explaining that she had left her house to pick up a new identity card in person. "But I trust them to be careful with me."

Trust is high in Sweden — in government, institutions and fellow Swedes. When the government defied conventional wisdom and refused to order a



Picnickers in Stockholm last week. **NYT**

wholesale lockdown to "flatten the curve" of the epidemic, public health officials pointed to trust as a central justification.

Swedes, they said, could be trusted to stay home, follow social distancing protocols and wash

their hands to slow the spread of the virus — without any mandatory orders.

Sweden's death rate of 22 per 100,000 people is the same as that of Ireland, which has earned accolades for its handling of the pandemic, and far better than in Britain or France. Yet, on this warm spring day, at least, there was little evidence that people were observing the protocols — adding further mystery to Sweden's apparent success.

While other countries were slamming on the brakes, Sweden kept its borders open, allowed restaurants and bars to keep serving, left preschools and grade schools in session and placed no limits on public trans-

port or outings in local parks. Gatherings of more than 50 people are banned. Museums have closed and sporting events have been cancelled. At the end of March, the authorities banned visits to nursing homes.

That's roughly it. There are almost no fines, and police officers can only ask people to oblige. Pedestrians wearing masks are generally stared at as if they have just landed from Mars.

Throughout the crisis Sweden has had enough intensive care units to deal with Covid-19 patients, the minister of health and social affairs, Lena Hallengren, said in an interview. "We have 250 empty beds right now." **NYT**

## Failure to stop virus at source led to 184 countries going through hell: Trump

**LALIT K JHA  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 29**

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump doubled down on China for failing to tame the coronavirus at its very origin, saying it has led to 184 countries "going through hell", as several American lawmakers demanded steps to reduce dependence on Beijing for manufacturing and minerals.

Trump has been publicly blaming China for the global spread of the "invisible enemy" and launched an investigation against it. He has also indicated that the United States may be looking at "a lot more money" in damages from China than

the \$140 billion being sought by Germany from Beijing for the pandemic.

Leaders of the US, the UK and Germany believe that the deaths and the destruction of the global economy could have been avoided, had China shared the information about the virus in its early phases.

"It's in 184 countries, as you hear me say often. It's hard to believe. It's inconceivable," Trump told reporters at White House Tuesday. "It should have been stopped at the source, which was China. It should have been stopped very much at the source, but it wasn't. And now we have 184 countries going through hell." **PTI**

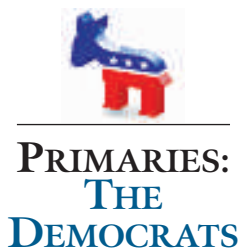
## OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

## Clinton endorses Biden: 'Wish he were president right now'

**LISA LERER, MAGGIE ASTOR & SYDNEY EMBER  
NEW YORK, APRIL 29**

HILLARY CLINTON, the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee and a political veteran who knows firsthand what it is like to compete against President Trump, threw her support behind Joseph R Biden Jr on Tuesday, the latest party leader to make the case for returning the White House to Democratic hands in November.

"I've been not only a colleague of Joe Biden's, I've been a friend, and I can tell you that I wish he were president right now but I can't wait until he is — if all of us do our part to sup-



port the kind of person that we want back in the White House," Clinton said on Tuesday afternoon during a virtual town hall-style event with Biden about the impact of the coronavirus on women.

Accepting her support, Biden said: "I really appreciate your friendship. What a, just a wonderful personal endorsement."

## Boris, fiancée announce birth of boy, two days after he returned to work

**ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON, APRIL 29**

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds announced the birth of a son on Wednesday, just two days after Johnson returned to work following hospitalisation for the coronavirus.

Johnson's office said Symonds gave birth to a "healthy baby boy at a London hospital" on Wednesday, and both mother and infant were doing well.

Johnson, 55, and Symonds, 32, announced in February that they were engaged and expecting a child together. At the time



Boris Johnson

they said the baby was due in early summer. No wedding date has been announced.

Symonds, an environmental campaigner and former Conservative Party staffer, also said she was sick for a week with COVID-19 symptoms, though she wasn't tested for the virus.

The baby is the third born to a sitting British prime minister this century. It wasn't immediately clear whether Johnson planned to take paternity leave.

## Pak media mogul remanded in judicial custody in 34-yr-old case

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LAHORE, APRIL 29**

PAKISTANI MEDIA mogul Mir Shakilur Rehman, arrested on charges of illegally obtaining government land here over three decades ago when Nawaz Sharif was the chief minister of Punjab province, has been sent to jail on judicial remand after the country's anti-graft body did not seek his further custody.

Mir Shakilur Rahman, the editor-in-chief of the Jang group which owns some of Pakistan's widely circulated newspapers and the Geo television network, was arrested on March 12 by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and was in its custody till

April 28. An accountability court on Tuesday sent Rehman to jail on judicial remand till May 12 after the prosecutor said the NAB did not need him anymore for investigation, the Dawn News reported.

The charges against Rehman relating to the purchase of several plots of land in Lahore go back to 1986 when Sharif was the chief minister of Punjab province.

The NAB alleged that Sharif allowed Rahman illegally acquire more government-owned land than he was allowed by law.

On April 27, the anti-graft body had issued an arrest warrant against the embattled former prime minister Sharif in the land corruption case.

The 70-year-old supremo of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, is currently in London for medical treatment.

NAB officials said Sharif illegally leased the land to Rehman. At the outset of Rehman's remand hearing on Tuesday, NAB Special Prosecutor Asim Mumtaz told the court that he could not be brought for the hearing as he was admitted to a private hospital owing to bad health.

However, Presiding Judge Jawadul Hassan expressed displeasure over the bureau for not presenting the suspect and also refused to entertain the medical certificate of a private hospital. Later, the NAB brought Rehman to the court in an ambulance from the hospital.



## FINAL REPORT OF TASK FORCE ON NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE

## 2020-25 infra funding pegged at ₹111L cr: Energy, roads, railways to get lion's share

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

ENERGY, ROADS, railways and urban projects would account for the bulk of allocations, involving total estimated infrastructure investment of Rs 111 lakh crore during the five fiscal year period 2020-25. This is according to the final report of the task force on National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) submitted to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday. Of the total project capital expenditure, sectors such as energy (24 per cent), urban (17 per cent), roads (18 per cent) are pegged to contribute nearly 70 per cent of the infra investments in India.

While Centre and states are expected to have almost equal share in implementing NIP, private sector contribution is expected around 21 per cent, as per a statement by the Finance Ministry. The NIP captures all projects — greenfield or brownfield, under imple-

EXPLAINED

## Aim is to boost infrastructure investments

AGGRESSIVE PUSH towards asset sales, monetisation of infrastructure assets, setting up of development finance institutions and strengthening the municipal bond market are some measures suggested by a government panel to boost infrastructure investments. The panel has drawn up a National Infrastructure Pipeline to bring greater focus in this area, which is crucial to boosting economic growth.

mentation or under conceptualisation — costing greater than Rs 100 crore per project.

Besides strengthening the municipal bond market, an aggressive push towards asset sales, monetisation of infrastructure assets, deepening of corporate bond markets, and setting up Development Financial Institutions for infrastructure sector, are among the measures that have been recommended by the government panel

to aid the process of galvanising investments in infrastructure sector in next five years.

The task force, headed by Economic Affairs Secretary Atanu Chakraborty, has also recommended setting up of three committees: a panel to monitor NIP progress and eliminate delays; a steering committee in each infrastructure ministry for following up implementation; and a committee in Department of Economic

Affairs for raising financial resources for the NIP.

Out of the total expected capital expenditure of Rs 111 lakh crore, projects of Rs 44 lakh crore (40 per cent of NIP) are under implementation, projects worth Rs 33 lakh crore (30 per cent) are at conceptual stage and projects worth Rs 22 lakh crore (20 per cent) are under development. The task force was set up after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day speech last year, highlighted Rs 100 lakh crore worth of infrastructure investment over the next five years to make India a \$5-trillion economy.

The summary report for 2019-2025 was released by Sitharaman on December 31, 2019. The final report has revised up NIP from earlier Rs 100 lakh crore "in light of additional/amended data provided by central ministries/state governments since the release of summary NIP report," the Centre said. In its summary report, the panel had suggested effective dispute resolution, contract enforce-

ment and asset monetisation among other reforms for achieving infrastructure targets. A critical step in addressing dwindling private sector participation in infrastructure can be institutionalising dispute resolution mechanism to efficiently resolve disputes related to PPP projects. Investments must be made in the institutions created under The Commercial Courts Act 2015, The Specific Relief (Amendment) Act 2018 and the New Delhi Arbitration Centre Act 2019 for speedy resolution, it said.

The RBI's latest credit growth data shows that year-on-year growth in credit outstanding to the infrastructure sector fell to a 19-month low of 3.3 per cent. FY20 saw a decline in banks' appetite to lend to infrastructure companies. Data shows in the 11-month period ended February 2020, credit outstanding for the infrastructure sector as a whole shrank from Rs 10.55 lakh crore in March 2019 to Rs 10.18 lakh crore in February 2020, thereby contracting by 3.5 per cent.

## 'GSK plans to sell HUL stake'

REUTERS

BENGALURU, APRIL 29

BRITISH DRUGMAKER GlaxoSmithKline Plc is planning a sale of its \$3.7-billion stake in Unilever Ltd's listed India unit, Bloomberg News reported on Wednesday, citing people famil-

iar with the matter.

GSK plans to offload part or all of its 5.7 per cent holding in Hindustan Unilever Ltd through a series of block trades, according to Bloomberg News.

In December 2018, Unilever struck a deal to buy GSK's Horlicks nutrition business for \$3.8 billion, boosting the Anglo-Dutch group's

position in India.

The deal consideration was paid in cash and shares of HUL, and was completed earlier this month.

A GSK spokesman declined to comment on the matter. Hindustan Unilever did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

## US GDP contracts 4.8% in Q1, sharpest fall since Great Recession

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

THE US economy contracted in the first quarter at its sharpest pace since the Great Recession as stringent measures to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus almost shut down the country, ending the longest expansion in the nation's history.

The decline in gross domestic product (GDP) reflected a plunge in economic activity in the last two weeks of March, which saw millions of Americans seeking unemployment benefits. The Commerce Department's snapshot of first-quarter GDP on Wednesday reinforced analysts'



Americans call for the end of the lockdown in California on April 26. Reuters

predictions that the economy was already in a deep recession.

"The economy will continue to fall until the country opens back up," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFJ in New York. "If the economy fell this hard in

the first quarter, with less than a month of pandemic lockdown for most states, don't ask how far it will crater in the second quarter."

Gross domestic product declined at a 4.8 per cent annualised rate last quarter, weighed down by sharp decreases in consumer spending and a drawdown of inventory at businesses. That was the steepest pace of contraction in GDP since Q4 of 2008 — the height of the Great Recession. A deepening downturn in investment by businesses was another major factor in the slump last quarter, helping to overshadow positive news from a shrinking import bill, the housing market and more spending by the government.

## Snapdeal, 4 shopping complexes figure in US Notorious Markets List

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

SNAPDEAL, ONE of India's largest e-commerce companies, along with four Indian shopping complexes have figured in the US 2020 edition of the Notorious Markets List for counterfeiting and piracy.

Other than Snapdeal, the four markets are Tank Road in Delhi, Heera Panna in Mumbai, Kidderpore in Kolkata and Millennium Centre in Aizawl.

In all, the US Trade Representatives' (USTR) annual list has 38 online markets and 34 physical markets that are reported to engage in or facilitate substantial trademark counterfeiting and copyright piracy.

"Snapdeal, one of India's largest e-commerce platforms, is known as a place to purchase counterfeit watches and shoes," the USTR said.

## The other four are Tank Road in Delhi, Heera Panna in Mumbai, Kidderpore in Kolkata and Millennium Centre in Aizawl

According to a November 2018 survey, 37 per cent of its customers reported that they had received a counterfeit product from Snapdeal.

Delhi's Tank Road market was in the Notorious Markets List (NML) in 2019. "Right holders confirm that this market continues to sell counterfeit products, including apparel and footwear. Wholesale counterfeit goods are also reportedly supplied from this market to other Indian markets, including Gaffar Market and Ajmal Khan Road (in Delhi)," it said. PTI

## List of defaulters: Chidambaram accuses FM of taking shield behind technical rules

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

THE WAR of words between the Congress and the BJP government over the list of wilful defaulters escalated on Wednesday, with former Finance Minister P Chidambaram accusing Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman of taking shield behind technical rules and asking the government why it has taken the technical loan write-off route for fugitives like Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallya.

Hitting back at Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman who had said wilful defaulters were beneficiaries of phone banking under the UPA regime and the Narendra Modi government is chasing them to recover the dues, he also asked the Government "break up the NPAs into pre-2004, 2004 to 2014 and post-2014" arguing that it "will give us an idea when the loans were given and



Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram. Express file

which loans have become NPA." "You keep on throwing these accusations that all these loans were given during the UPA regime. Is the government seriously suggesting that no loans were given after 2014? Or that all the loans given after 2014 are performing loans? I mean, what do they take the people of India for? We may be stupid, we're not so stupid. Loans have been given after 2014, loans were given prior to 2004 also. Give the breakup?" he said.

Responding to Sitharaman's statement that no loan is waived off and that provisions are made

for NPAs as per the four-year provisioning cycle laid down by the RBI, Chidambaram accused her of taking shield behind the technical rule and asked why is she applying the technical rule to those who have been declared a fugitive or an absconder. "We understand the technical rules of the RBI. We are not on the technicality... There are defaulters, there are wilful defaulters, there are wilful defaulters who are staying back in India facing inquiries and trying their best to pay back and there are wilful defaulters, who have fled India and are being declared fugitives."

"Your RBI rule can apply maybe to the first, second and third categories. After four years of full provisioning is made, you can technically write off the loan. That you can do for defaulters, wilful defaulters and wilful defaulters who have stayed back and trying to face an inquiry. But why do you apply that rule to a wilful defaulter who has fled India and your government has declared him a fugi-

tive?... Why does this rule apply to the Nirav Modis and the Vijay Mallyas and the Mehul Chokis," he said. Taking a dig at the FM, he said "a FM who was silent for the last 37 days has suddenly sprung to life and sprung to the defence of these fugitives. Isn't that a little surprising and ironical?"

On Sitharaman's remark that scheduled commercial banks had written off Rs 1.45 lakh crore in the UPA period, he said: "I am sure between 2004 and 2014, banks were applying the rule and technically writing off 1.6 lakh crore, but by the same token, between 2014 and 2019, Modi government has written off 6.66 lakh crore. So, when you mention 1.6 lakh crore should not the FM also mention the 6.66 lakh crore rupees that her government has written off between 2014 and 2019. ... But the point we are asking is, these are fugitives. They fled India under your nose. You have declared them fugitives and absconders. Why are you applying this rule to them?" he said.

## US adds 5 of Amazon's foreign operations to list

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

THE UNITED States for the first time added five of Amazon's overseas operations to its list of "notorious markets" where pirated goods are sold. The e-commerce giant dismissed the move as part of the Trump administration's "personal vendetta" against it.

The Office of the US Trade Representative on Wednesday added the Amazon.com Inc. domains in Canada, France, Germany, India and the United

Kingdom to its annual blacklist. USTR cited complaints from US businesses that consumers can't easily tell who is selling items on the Amazon platforms and that the e-commerce company's procedures for removing counterfeit goods "can be lengthy and burdensome."

Amazon fired back with a statement Wednesday: "We strongly disagree with the characterization of Amazon in this USTR report. This purely political act is another example of the administration using the US government to advance a personal vendetta against Amazon."

## US places India on 'Priority Watch List' for IP protection

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

## 'LACK OF MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS'

The USTR said India had been placed on the 'Priority Watch List' for lack of sufficient measurable improvements to its IP framework.

property rights violators accountable and to ensuring that US innovators and creators have a full and fair opportunity to use and profit from their work," said US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer after the release of annual Special 301 Report on the adequacy and effectiveness of trading partners' protection of IP rights.

In its report, the USTR said that India had been placed on the 'Priority Watch List' for lack of sufficient measurable improvements to its IP framework on the "long-standing" and "new challenges" that have negatively affected American right holders over the past year.

The US placed 10 countries, including India and China, on the list, alleging that enforcement of the intellectual properties have deteriorated or remained at inadequate levels and the Americans who rely on their protection have difficulty with fair and equitable market access. The countries placed on the list by the Trump administration on Intellectual Property (IP) related issues are Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela.

"The Trump administration is committed to holding intellectual

## '27 of top 100 companies can't sustain current salary bill'

As many as 27 of the top 100 companies listed on the National Stock Exchange will not be able to sustain current wage bill if revenue dips 30 per cent or more, a Deloitte study said

METHODOLOGY Deloitte conducted a study of the top 100 companies listed on the NSE in terms of market capitalisation

Impact will be larger since the cash stuck in inventory and receivables is likely to increase in such a scenario

Temporary solution: Dip into cash balance or borrow in short term

11 of the 27 vulnerable companies have a debt to equity ratio of more than 1

All the companies covered have an ability to pay their fixed opex, interest and compensation cost from cash and cash equivalents for about 5.5 months at the median, it said



27 companies won't be able to sustain current wage bill from cash profits, if their revenue dips by 30 per cent or more

Source: Deloitte/PTI

## Fed sticks to zero rate pledge, vows to utilise tools to help economy

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

US FEDERAL Reserve policymakers on Wednesday left interest rates near zero and repeated a vow to do what it takes to shore up the economy, saying the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will "weigh heavily" on the near-term outlook and poses "considerable risks" for the medium term.

"The Federal Reserve is committed to using its full range of tools to support the US economy in this challenging time, thereby promoting its maximum employment and price stability goals," the US central bank said in a statement at the end of a two-day policy meeting held via videoconference because of the coronavirus pandemic.

With so much uncertainty around the economic outlook, the



US Fed Chair Jerome Powell. File

Fed said it expects to maintain the target range for its benchmark overnight lending rate "until it is confident that the economy has weathered recent events and is on track to achieve its maximum employment and price stability goals."

During two emergency meetings in March, the central bank cut its benchmark rate to a range between zero and 0.25 per cent.

## Sidbi launches liquidity window for MSMEs, SFBs, NBFCs and MFIs

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

SMALL INDUSTRIES Development Bank of India (Sidbi) has launched a special liquidity scheme for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), small finance banks (SFBs), non-banking financial companies and microfinance institutions (MFIs) through banks.

The scheme would provide financial support to banks, NBFCs and MFIs by way of term loans to ensure operational continuity and promote onward lending to MSMEs. The tenor of these loans will be 90 days.

Mohammad Mustafa, Chairman and Managing Director of Sidbi said, "We were provided a special liquidity window of Rs 15,000 crore by the RBI. The funds will be channelised to MSMEs through eligible banks, NBFCs and MFIs."

## Sensex rises 606 points on easing of curbs, Fed meet

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

DOMESTIC INDICES rose on Wednesday as global markets edged up ahead of US economic growth figures and a Federal Reserve rate decision while investors seemed buoyed by more governments, including India, planned to ease anti-virus controls and allow some businesses to reopen. The Sensex rose 606 points, or 1.89 per cent, to 32,720.16 and the NSE Nifty Index gained 172 points at 9,553.35

The rupee strengthened as

much as 52 paise against the dollar to move above the 76 mark to 75.66 in the wake of the improvement in global risk environment.

Analysts said markets continued their momentum for the third consecutive session and ended with strong gains tracking encouraging global cues.

Oil prices surged after US crude stockpiles grew less than expected and gasoline posted a surprise draw. Brent crude futures were up \$2.23, or 11 per cent, at \$22.69 a barrel by 12:05 p.m. EDT (1605 GMT). US WTI futures soared \$3.58, or 29 per cent, to \$15.92 a barrel.

## SC turns down Vodafone Idea plea for immediate tax refund of ₹4,759 crore

AASHISHARYAN

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

INA setback to Vodafone Idea, the Supreme Court (SC) Wednesday rejected the telco's plea, asking the Income Tax (I-T) Department to process and deposit tax refunds worth Rs 4,759.7 crore. The apex court said the authorities were justified in holding back refunds until tax returns of the company was processed by the authorities.

The SC, however, asked the I-T department to take a decision on the pending tax refunds as soon as possible.

I-T department authorities have kept tax refunds of the company between assessment year (AY) 2012 and 2017, in abeyance, claiming that the returns of the company for these years were "under scrutiny" and since a notice had been issued to the company

contending the returns they had filed, the refund need not be processed immediately. The said tax refunds between AY2012 and 2017 have been withheld by authorities for various reasons, such as transfer pricing adjustment, capitalisation of license fees, 3G spectrum fees, and asset restoration obligation.

Vodafone Idea had sought tax refunds of Rs 4,759.7 crore from the I-T department, claiming that its tax returns between AY2012 and 2017 had not been processed by the authorities despite repeated reminders on the same.

Though the SC directed I-T to process Vodafone Idea's tax refunds worth Rs 733 crore for AY2014-15 within four weeks, the relief could be short lived. The department had raised additional tax demand of Rs 582 crore for AY2015-16, which is stuck in litigation.

## BRIEFLY

## Ex-Fin Secy is PESB chief

New Delhi: Ex-finance secretary Rajiv Kumar has been named PESB chairperson. PTI

## ILO: 305 million jobs may be lost

Geneva: The ILO estimated 305 million full-time jobs could be lost in Q2. AP

## ADB approves \$346 mn loan

New Delhi: The Asian Development Bank on Wednesday said it has approved a \$346-million loan to the Government to provide reliable power connection in rural areas of Maharashtra. The loan will support the state government's high voltage distribution system programme for new grid-connected rural agricultural customers across the state, said the multi-lateral funding agency. PTI

## NMC founder on private probe

Dubai: NMC Health founder BR Shetty said a probe conducted by his own advisors has found alleged fraud at the firm and Finablr.

## 'Groups urge delay in digital tax'

New Delhi: Lobbying groups have urged India to delay a new digital tax that will hit firms like Facebook and Google. REUTERS



## BOOKIE IN SHAKIB CASE BANNED

ICC handed a 2-year ban to Deepak Agarwal, a franchise owner in the 2018 T10 League held in the UAE, after he admitted to obstructing an ongoing investigation. The Indian businessman was named as the man involved in Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan getting banned last year.

## 'Difficult' to host Olympics if pandemic not contained: Abe

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TOKYO, APRIL 29

JAPANESE PRIME Minister Shinzo Abe said on Wednesday that the Tokyo Olympics could not take place next year unless the coronavirus pandemic is contained, as the city's governor called for an extension of the nationwide state of emergency. The International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government last month postponed the Games until July 2021 because of the coronavirus crisis. With the epidemic's worldwide infection rate climbing and experts suggesting a vaccine is a long way off, doubts have been raised about the chances of holding the huge event next year.

"We've been saying the Olympic and Paralympic Games must be held in a complete form, in that athletes and spectators can all participate safely. It would be impossible to hold the Games in such a complete form unless the coronavirus pandemic is contained," Abe said in response to an opposition lawmaker.

Abe's summary of the situation was later underlined by IOC President Thomas Bach.

"The IOC fully agrees with the position of Prime Minister Abe," Bach said in response to a question from Reuters. "From the very beginning of this crisis, we established the principle that the Olympic and Paralympic Games can only be organised in a safe environment for everyone involved. This principle has driven all our decisions so far, and we remain committed to it in the future." Abe has staked part of his legacy as Japan's longest-serving premier on holding the Games and was hoping for a boom in tourism and consumer spending. Japan has gathered some \$3 billion in domestic sponsorship, an Olympic record, and spent close to \$13 billion on preparations.

The prime minister said on Wednesday that the Olympics "must be held in a way that shows the world has won its battle against the coronavirus pandemic," and cautioned that Japan should "brace for a protracted battle".

Tokyo confirmed 47 new infections on Wednesday. The national tally stands at 13,895 infections, including 413 deaths, national broadcaster NHK said.

Abe's comments echoed statements made by other senior Japanese officials this week. Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori told Nikkan Sports on Tuesday that the Games would be "scrapped" if they could not take place in 2021.

The head of the Japan Medical Association (JMA), Yoshitake Yokokura, told a news briefing on Tuesday that "unless an effective vaccine is developed, I expect hosting the Olympics will be difficult."



**We've been saying the Olympic and Paralympic Games must be held in a complete form, in that athletes and spectators can all participate safely. It would be impossible to hold the Games in such a complete form unless the coronavirus pandemic is contained."**

SHINZO ABE, JAPAN PRIME MINISTER

# Counting the zeroes in 'zero year'

Experts feel cancelling IPL 2020 will benefit all stakeholders but BCCI not too keen to add extra year to Star contract

MIHIR VASAVDA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

LEGAL EXPERTS and market-watchers, assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sports, feel that the cancellation of this year's Indian Premier League might be the best-case scenario for all stakeholders.

Advising against delaying or shortening of the season, they say that by considering 2020 as a 'zero year', the broadcaster, Star, and BCCI will be able to deal with the present economic uncertainty better and also benefit in the long run.

"Since the pandemic will result in a change of timelines or loss of a season, broadcasters will need to review their contracts with event organisers. They may consider extending the term of their contract to include an extra season where a season has been cancelled," a paper produced by lawyer Nandan Kamath's firm LawNk says.

However, BCCI hasn't yet given up on the IPL idea. Earlier this month, BCCI secretary Jay Shah had said: "The BCCI will continue to monitor and review the situation regarding a potential start date in close partnership with all of its stakeholders and will continue to take guidance from the Government of India, state governments and other state regulatory bodies."

On the impact of the pandemic on the Star-BCCI deal, a top BCCI official said: "We will keep consulting the government and, based on their inputs, it will be decided if the IPL can take place or not. As for the Star deal, it's too early to talk about it."

However, with most mega sporting events around the world - Olympics, Grand Slam tennis, European football championship - getting cancelled or postponed by a year, the chances of IPL Season 13 taking place seem bleak.

This, according to lawyer Anish Dayal, who specialises in sports law and IPL contracts, is "a clear situation of force majeure". Explaining the legal term, he says, "Force majeure allows the suspension of obligations and this will help both, the BCCI and franchises, to mutually discuss mitigation of the loss that arises."

However, the tricky problem for the BCCI will be the implementation of the 'force majeure' clause in the broadcasting deal with Star that has promised to pay the Indian board ₹16,347.50 crore over five years till 2022.

As part of their 2020 obligation, Star has already paid the BCCI approximately ₹1,500 crore as an advance for this season's IPL. BCCI officials insist that in the case of cancellation, and the enforcement of 'force majeure', the board will return the advance payment. "Of course, we will return the amount," said an official.

Sports lawyer Vidushpat Singhania, managing partner of Krida Legal, says none of the parties may have to pay any penalties if the force majeure clause is invoked. Additionally, they can consider Season 13 as a 'zero year', and negotiate to add an extra year at the end of the contract to recover losses.

"It depends on how the contract is worded. If it is a yearly restriction, they will have to negotiate another year. However, if it is season-wise, then the contract will continue till the particular number of seasons are played," Singhania says.

The idea of contract extension hasn't found takers in the BCCI. "That might not be possible. We will go for a fresh tender once the Star deal ends in 2022," an official said.

However, if the tournament is held in October - an option the BCCI is exploring - it could result in Star losing out on advertising revenue due to a combination of factors, including the gloomy economic outlook, while still having to pay the entire rights fees.

A truncated and postponed IPL will force



The decision won't be so straightforward as a host of other commercial aspects will be decided on whether the season is cancelled or truncated as well as possible visa restrictions, which could have an impact on viewership and sponsor interest. BCCI file

**As part of their 2020 obligation, Star has already paid the BCCI approximately ₹1,500 crore as an advance for this season's IPL. Those in the know say that in the case of cancellation, and the enforcement of 'force majeure', BCCI is expected to return a part of or the full advance payment.**

Star to re-negotiate deals with advertisers who have already booked IPL slots keeping in mind the original April-May slot. An IPL later in the year could see them changing their minds. A product launch or promotion of seasonal goods can't be expected to be showcased on-air if the IPL's schedule changes.

"In such scenarios, they may be forced to renegotiate on existing bookings, rates and packages," Kamath, who has previously advised the BCCI and other stakeholders on various issues, says.

Another predicament that Star could face is the drop in advertising spending in the coming months because of the COVID-19-forced economic slump. There are those who feel that even BCCI might face the same problem. "In case they somehow do hold Season 13 in September-October this year, as it has been proposed, within months they will have to hold Season 14 in April, 2021. These back-to-back IPLs will dry up the advertisers. A market dealing with a slowdown will not be conducive for another IPL," says a BCCI member.

He goes on to add that the Board, in case it holds an IPL this year, will have to start the process of inviting bids for a new broadcaster in 2021. "The financial slump will mean they won't get good money for the TV deal. Delaying the tender process and pushing back the broadcast rights auction will be a wise decision."

## How suspension of obligations through force majeure can mitigate losses

### What is force majeure?

It's an event beyond the control of a party; something that could not be foreseen at the time of entering into an agreement - in the present circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Is the pandemic a force majeure event?

To trigger the clause, the BCCI will have to prove that it wasn't just inconvenient, but impossible, for them to hold the tournament because of events beyond their control. According to lawyer Anish Dayal, who specialises in sports law and has advised on IPL contracts, the present situation - the COVID-19 pandemic and the government imposed lockdown - "is clearly an event of force majeure".

### What happens if force majeure is invoked?

It will give IPL stakeholders - BCCI, broadcasters, franchises, players, and advertisers - temporary reprieve as they would no longer be tied down by their contractual obligations. This can possibly help the parties arrive at a negotiated settlement by coming to the table with a clean slate, not burdened by strict clauses. "Force majeure allows the suspension of obligations and this will help both, the BCCI and franchises, to mutually discuss mitigation of the loss arising," Dayal says.

### What happens to the BCCI-Star deal?

The fate of this deal has worried all IPL stakeholders the most. As is the case with all sporting leagues, it is the media rights revenue that keeps cricket's biggest brand running. In 2017, Star India bought the broadcasting rights of the tournament and promised to pay BCCI ₹16,347.50 crore over five years. Earlier this year,

as part of the deal, the broadcasting behemoth already paid BCCI close to ₹1,500 crore - half of this season's installment.

On the face of it, in case the "force majeure" clause comes into play and IPL gets cancelled, the BCCI will have to refund the advance payment to Star. However, it is open to interpretation. Chances are the BCCI might just return a part of the advance bringing in the image rights clause. Those in the know also say that there is also a possibility that the amount could be carried over to next year and considered as an advance for next season.

### Will Star get an extra year in case this season is cancelled?

That's the best-case scenario for Star in the present circumstances. Experts say that in case the tournament does not take place this year, Season 13 can be considered a 'zero year'. An extra year would mean Star getting another season to recover its losses.

### Will the franchises have to pay the players if the season is cancelled?

The franchise-player contract has two main payment conditions: the player needs to pass a fitness test and has to get a bonafide no-objection certificate from national boards. According to those in the know, the contract does not contemplate cancellation of a season. In a normal season, a franchise has to pay 60 per cent of a player's fee by April 30. So far, none of the players have been paid for the season. However, if the season is cancelled because of the pandemic, the franchises will probably not have to pay the players. "The cancellation of

the IPL by the BCCI is likely to be treated as force majeure in the context of player contracts. Unless the BCCI decides otherwise, payment obligations to players will stand suspended," says noted lawyer Nandan Kamath.

### What happens if the season is postponed and truncated?

According to Vidushpat Singhania, managing partner of Krida Legal, if the IPL is postponed "the player can still perform his duty, which means the franchises will have to pay the player his full fees".

## SIMPLY PUT

In case of a truncated season, it will depend on whether there is a clause relating to variable pay. However, it is likely that there will be a pay cut across the board - from player salaries to broadcast payments - in case the IPL season is shortened and/or held behind closed doors.

As per a paper produced by Kamath's firm LawNk, broadcasters might also face re-negotiation and refund requests from their advertisers, who have already booked spots. This means that the advertisement sales for a specific period (for example, a mobile phone launch or summer-specific products) may no longer be relevant if the tournament is held in, say, October. "In such scenarios, they may be forced to renegotiate on existing bookings, rates and packages," Kamath says. Another predicament Star could face is the drop in advertising spending in the coming months. According to reports, before the crisis hit, the broadcaster was selling a 10-second advertisement slot for ₹13-14 lakhs. The slowdown could impact these estimates in case the tournament is held this year.

MIHIR VASAVDA

## DR ANTHONY FAUCI

# 'Don't have to act on impulse... we are not ready to have all sports back'

JAMES WAGNER & KENBELSON  
APRIL 29

DR. ANTHONY S. FAUCI, the leading public health expert on President Trump's coronavirus task force, said this week that it might be very difficult for major sports in the United States to return to action this year. "Safety, for the players and for the fans, trumps everything," he said. "If you can't guarantee safety, then unfortunately you're going to have to bite the bullet and say, 'We may have to go without this sport for this season.'"

Dr. Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, is an avid runner who grew up playing basketball and baseball, is a fan of the Washington Nationals and the New York Yankees. He says he will feel comfortable returning to a stadium when the level of infection is far lower than it is now. Excerpts:

### Wagner and Belson: When and how can sports return?

What we need to do is get it, as a country and as individual locations, under control. That sometimes takes longer than you would like, and if we let our desire to prematurely get back

to normal, we can only get ourselves right back in the same hole we were in a few weeks ago.

We've got to make sure that when we try to get back to normal, including being able to play baseball in the summer and football in the fall and basketball in the winter, that when we do come back to some form of normality, we do it gradually and carefully. And when cases do start to rebound - which they will, no doubt - that we have the capability of identifying, isolating and contact tracing.

**Sports are a business, and they have a financial imperative. Some governors and mayors have discussed the possibility of sports returning without fans. But there are still hundreds of staff members who have to run the stadium, the clubhouse. What needs to be done to make sure they're also safe?**

The things we need to do to the best of our ability are try and keep the six-foot distance and wear face coverings. And do the kind of pure hygiene things you do to prevent the spread of respiratory infections: washing hands frequently; wearing gloves, particularly food service, and they do that anyway; changing gloves frequently. And if you are in a stadium, make sure that if there are people there, they maintain



Anthony Fauci, the leading public health expert on US President Donald Trump's coronavirus task force, said that return of sports must happen gradually. Reuters

that physical distance because the virus doesn't travel that much farther than that. If you can do that, it isn't completely free of risk, but you diminish the risk substantially. The density of the infection in the community will dictate the degree to which you can loosen up. I've said that many times that the virus decides how quickly you're going to get back to normal.

**All sports aren't created equal. Golf might be more suited to maintaining distance, but it would be harder in basketball or hockey. What can be done?**

You've got to be really creative. That's going to be more difficult and more problematic. But you know, there have been some suggestions that if you want to have a situation where play-

ers are going to have to come into contact, like basketball, there are certain things you can do. It may not work. I'm not saying this is the way to go, but you want to at least consider having players, if they're going to play, play in front of a TV camera without people in the audience. And then test all the players and make sure they're negative and keep them in a place where they don't have contact with anybody on the outside who you don't know whether they're positive or negative.

That's going to be logistically difficult, but there's at least the possibility of doing that. In other words, we said that for baseball, get the players in Major League Baseball, get a couple of cities and a couple of hotels, get them tested and keep them segregated. I know it's going to be difficult for them not to be out in society, but that may be the price you pay if you want to play ball.

**Is it even fair to think about sports leagues and teams getting broad access to testing if the general public or other industries aren't getting the same?**

I hope when we get to that point, when we're going to try and get the sports figures tested, then we will have enough tests so that anybody who needs a test can get a test.

**Sports are an unusual business because athletes are in close quarters for many months. What kind of runway do leagues need to start up again?**

That's the reason I stress the idea of testing everybody and having available for them tests from which you can get a result immediately... I don't want to make this conversation sound like it's going to be an easy thing. We may not be able to pull this off. We're going to have to see: Is it doable? Do we have the capability of doing it safely? Because safety, for the players and for the fans, trumps everything. If you can't guarantee safety, then unfortunately you're going to have to bite the bullet and say, "We may have to go without this sport for this season."

**Some people are clamouring for sports to resume, including Mr. Trump. Do you think that is the correct impulse?**

There's a difference between an impulse and what you're going to do. You don't have to act on every impulse. I would love to be able to have all sports back. But as a health official and a physician and a scientist, I have to say, right now, when you look at the country, we're not ready for that yet. We might be ready, depending upon what the sport is. But right now, we're not. NYT