

Fake news targeting minorities, Tablighi chief's audio: BPRD red-flags these in its report, then pulls it down

Some corrections being made, says police research bureau under Home

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A REPORT by a Union Home Ministry think tank on "how to spot and investigate" fake news, which red-flagged the targeting of minorities over the Covid pandemic and mentioned the audio of the Tablighi Jamaat chief in its discussion on fake audio, has been pulled down within a day of being posted online.

The 40-page "guide for law

enforcement agencies" was uploaded by the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) on its official website Saturday and removed Sunday. When contacted by *The Indian Express*, BPR&D spokesperson Jitendra Yadav said: "There are some corrections being made in the booklet. It will be uploaded again after that."

Incidentally, *The Indian Express* had reported Saturday that an initial investigation by

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A screengrab from the BPR&D report. Once the text is extracted, the words become clear: "Tablighi Jamaat chief's leaked audio on COVID-19 lockdown".

After denying report, police summon Express reporter

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A DAY after it called a report in *The Indian Express*, Tablighi FIR: Police probe indicates Saad audio clip was doctored, "factually incorrect... purely conjectural", the Delhi Police emailed a notice on Sunday evening to the City Editor and Chief Reporter, requiring the reporter to join the probe Monday or face legal

action under Indian Penal Code Section 174 — it can result in a prison term and fine.

The notice was sent on the day *The Indian Express* published the Delhi Police's rejoinder with its own response that the report was based on conversations with sources and officials aware of the probe against Maulana Saad, and that calls and a message to Special CP (Crime) Praveer Ranjan Friday for his

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In Kerala hotspot Kasaragod, last patient is cured, leaves for home

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 10

OFFICIALS IN Kasaragod, the hotspot at Kerala's northern tip that accounted for nearly 35 per cent of the state's Covid count, with 178 of 512 cases, said Sunday that the district's last positive patient has returned home after being cured.

"We have successfully completed the first phase. We were able to track all the cases. There was not a single case with missing links of infection. Due to a strong surveillance mechanism, we could limit the virus spread within the families of those with travel history," Dr AT Manoj, the district surveillance officer, told *The Indian Express*.

"Now, we are geared up for the next stage, with the arrival of expats evacuated from abroad and those returning from hotspots in other parts of the country," Manoj said.

According to district officials, they were able to catch up with the outbreak and get ahead by adopting an "evolving" strategy

that included a tweaked quarantine protocol of up to 55 days, intensive sealing of local hotspots and aggressive home surveys.

Kasaragod initially had only one case with travel history from Wuhan, which was reported on February 3. And when the lockdown was imposed on March 24, the district had reported just six cases. But the second bout of infection, which began on March 17 mainly with the arrival of travellers from the Middle East, led to the district turning into Kerala's Covid epicentre.

"A large number of regular commuters from the Gulf and Mumbai made the district a potential hotspot. But we had anticipated the threat. In fact, orders were issued that those who entered the district after February 20 should not attend any public function," said District Collector Dr D Sajith Babu.

But with the spike in cases, the local administration ramped up its efforts. The district's two government hospitals were converted into Covid centres and scores of health workers were

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BOOKINGS OPEN 4 PM TODAY

Moving back on track: Beginning tomorrow, 15 trains from New Delhi

More routes may be added after 10 days based on demand for inter-state travel

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

IN A MAJOR decision that signals a gradual resumption of normal activities after 47 days of lockdown, the government Sunday said inter-state train services for all passengers — not just stranded migrant workers — will commence from Tuesday. Passenger rail services were shut for about 50 days since March 21 to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Initially, the Railways will run 15 pairs (30 return journeys) of air-conditioned "special trains", modelled on the Rajdhani, connecting 15 major cities with New Delhi. Eight of these (16 return journeys) from New Delhi to Mumbai, Patna, Kolkata, Dibrugarh, Jammu Tawi, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar, will run daily.

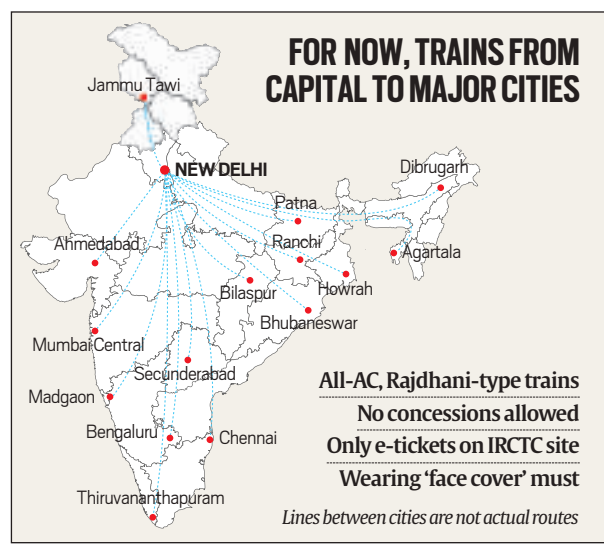
The services from New Delhi to Agartala and Secunderabad will be once a week; from New Delhi to Madgaon, Ranchi, Bilaspur and Chennai twice a week; and to Thiruvananthapuram thrice a week. The tickets for the 15 trains can be booked only on the IRCTC website.

Describing Sunday's move as part of "plans to gradually restart passenger train operations", a government statement said, "Thereafter, Indian Railways

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Migrants from UP are screened and registered before leaving Chandigarh on a special train to Gonda on Sunday. Kamleshwar Singh



Step up activities in a calibrated way, CMs likely to tell PM today

ABANTIKA GHOSH & RAVISH TIWARI
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is scheduled to meet chief ministers of all states on Monday via video conferencing to discuss the way forward in the battle against the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19). In a meeting on Sunday that has set the stage

for Monday's discussions, state chief secretaries called for a calibrated stepping up of economic activities in a video conference with the cabinet secretary.

"Our understanding is every chief minister favours graded relaxation. They want more liberalisation in the next version of guidelines... this will be a consultative process," a senior government functionary who is part of

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Historian Vasudevan dies, tested positive

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 10

HISTORIAN HARI Sankar Vasudevan, who had tested positive for coronavirus, died at a private hospital in Kolkata early Sunday. He was 68.

Vasudevan tested positive for coronavirus two days after being admitted to AMRI Hospital in Salt Lake on May 4. Soon after, he was put on a ventilator after developing respiratory distress. The state government is, how-



Was an expert on European and Russian history

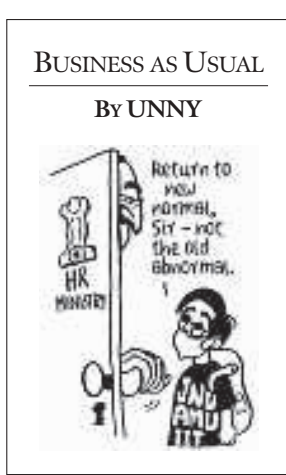
ever, yet to identify whether he died of COVID-19 or due to comorbid conditions.

Vasudevan was an expert on European and Russian history and the India-Russia relationship. A graduate of Cambridge University, where he also com-

pleted his post-graduation and PhD, Vasudevan was the director of the China Centre at Calcutta University.

Earlier, he served as director of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, of the Ministry of Culture. Between 2003 and 2005, Vasudevan was a professor at Central Asian Studies and acting director at the Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. Between 2011 and 2014, he was member

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Indian and Chinese troops clash in Sikkim, Ladakh

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA & KRISHN KAUSHIK
CHANDIGARH, NEW DELHI, MAY 10

REKINDLING TENSIONS over boundary claims, Indian and Chinese troops have clashed at two points along the Line of Actual Control this week, leaving personnel injured on both sides. The incidents took place in

the Naku La sector — it's a mountain pass in Sikkim at an altitude of over 5000 metres — on Saturday, and in a contested area near Pangong Tso, a lake in Ladakh, on the night of May 5-6.

A Colonel and a Major, sources said, were among the Indian personnel injured in the Ladakh clash. Two Chinese helicopters also arrived on their side of the LAC after an Indian

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Trend in lockdown buying: a shift from staples to ready-to-cook

AASHISH AARYAN & PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE CONSUMPTION pattern of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) witnessed a discernible trend across two distinct phases during the lockdown that started March 25. In the initial days, people stocked up on staples and essentials, and then there was a perceptible shift with higher demand for packaged food items like instant noodles, biscuits, chips and ready-to-cook meals.

In the first ten days of the

lockdown, sales of essentials such as flour, rice, sugar, salt and oil shot up due to panic buying, according to executives from a number of leading FMCG companies *The Indian Express* reached out to. Moving ahead, this changed over the next 30 days as supply chain and production problems led to essentials like pulses and wheat flour not being supplied sufficiently. This led to people stocking up on products with longer shelf lives mainly on account of uncertainty over when the lockdown would be lifted.

"Nearly 43 per cent of consumers started hoarding or

stocking up products across all categories at home. When consumers give such an indication, it becomes all the more important that the products are available in a seamless manner, and the supply chain is completely on top of demand," Anil Talreja, Consumer Leader and Partner at Deloitte India told *The Indian Express*.

For example, in the first 3-4 days, Noida-headquartered Mother Dairy saw demand for liquid milk and other dairy products such as paneer, ghee, and butter go up by as much as 10 per cent of its total sales. Similarly, sale of all kinds of edible oil rose by as much as 50 per cent in the



In the later weeks, the demand for packaged food items such as noodles, chips, and ready-to-cook meals has gone up. File

EXPLAINED Change in perception

WHEN THERE is panic, people stock up on staples like rice, flour and other essentials. But when uncertainty is prolonged and one can't step out, they opt for solutions that make life easier — ready-to-cook food, chips, and nachos. Non-essentials too start becoming essentials.

first week. "Frozen product categories like green peas, corn, mixed veggies, snacks and jackfruit also witnessed a steep jump in demand — as high as over 100 per cent," said Sangram Chaudhary, Managing Director, Mother Dairy.

Over the next 30 days till May 3, however, certain segments such as instant noodles witnessed an almost 50 per cent year-on-year jump.

"In the second phase, we saw an increased demand for packaged food such as noodles, biscuits, ready-to-make products, and hot beverages. Customers continued to buy staples and

personal hygiene products too. This phase also led to the growth of local-label goods as the supply chain faced disruption and several FMCG companies were unable to deliver their goods," said Arvind Mediratta, MD & CEO, METRO Cash & Carry India.

The partial lifting of restrictions for e-commerce companies to deliver non-essentials also prompted customers to make a beeline for certain products that became essential over time. According to online marketplace Snapdeal, key items the company shipped following the partial relaxations included

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HOW THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS HAVE MANAGED TO FEND OFF COVID-19

Approximately four months after Covid-19 was first detected, the South Pacific Islands have not yet reported any cases of the infectious disease.

VIDEO OF THE DAY



INS JALASHWA ARRIVES AT KOCHI

The Navy ship is carrying 700 Indians from the Maldives

MOTHER'S DAY



NEW MOMS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

We reach out to new mothers for whom this is a first-time experience

EXPRESS AUDIO

Lessons from the Visakhapatnam gas leak

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode of the 3 Things podcast, we look at the gas leak in Visakhapatnam, how accountability should be fixed in such cases and the legal options for victims

Citing lack of ration, migrant in Punjab kills self, probe on

DIVYA GOYAL
LUDHIANA, MAY 10

A migrant labourer from Uttar Pradesh allegedly hanged himself to death at his rented accommodation in Ludhiana late on Saturday. His family has claimed that the 38-year-old took the step as he was depressed over not getting ration for the last 10 days.

The body of Ajit Kumar Rai, who hailed from Azamgarh and was living in Ludhiana since 15 years, was found hanging with ceiling grills at his room on Saturday.

His wife Savita told *The Indian Express* they had no ration at home. "We were struggling to get ration. My husband called police...but we got nothing. There was no ration since 8-10 days and we were struggling..."

Savita said that her husband worked as labourer and would earn Rs 400-500 a day but there had been no work since the lockdown began.

Police filed inquest proceedings under section 174 of CrPc at Focal Point police station. Sub-inspector Aseem Hans, who was first to meet the family after suicide, said that the victim's wife in her statement said that Ajit killed himself because they had no ration. "However, it wasn't as if there was absolutely nothing to eat. They had some stuff but according to family, the man was in tension as there was no work and no ration supply," he said.

After Ajit's suicide, hundreds of laborers and migrants living in Focal Point area, gathered outside Focal Point police station Sunday and protested claiming that no ration was being given to them. They claimed that even after they get a call from police station to collect ration, they returned empty-handed.

14 Punjab health officials in Ropar test positive, state tally 1,823

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AMRITSAR, MAY 10

PUNJAB HEALTH Department went into a tizzy Sunday after 14 state health officials, including at least two doctors, posted in Ropar district tested positive for novel coronavirus.

Ropar Deputy Commissioner Sonali Giri said six of the 14 officials, including two doctors, belonged to Ropar district and remaining hailed from outside.

A functionary of the Health Department said of the eight positive health officials from outside Ropar district, seven are from Mohali and one is from Chandigarh. An official said an exercise was underway to ascertain where exactly the health officials were posted in the district.

Giri said that in all 46 persons tested positive in the district on Sunday, including those hailing from places outside the district.

Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said the health officials who tested positive were "asymptomatic". He added that apart from doctors, the officials testing positive were paramedical staff. Sidhu said contact tracing was on and samples of those who came in their touch with these patients were also being taken.

As per media bulletin released by the state government, Punjab reported 61 new cases of novel coronavirus on Sunday, taking the total tally to 1,823.

FROM PAGE ONE

Vasudevan dies

the Indian Council of Historical Research.

Vasudevan is survived by his wife, historian Tapati Guha Thakurta, and daughter Mrinalini Vasudevan.

Mrinalini told *The Indian Express*, "My father had tested positive for coronavirus and his condition was critical since Friday. He was on a ventilator. We learnt from the hospital that he died of multi-organ failure. His body is at AMRI, and the cremation will be as per protocol for COVID-related deaths."

After the historian tested positive, his family members were asked to go into home isolation.

"Only one of my father's friends will be allowed to see the body. The cremation will be at Dhapa," Mrinalini added.

Expressing his condolences, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar said in a statement, "A multifaceted person, he made his mark while being involved in a formal consultative capacity with projects/institutions of the Ministry of Culture, MHRD, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India and was Chairman of the Textbook Development Committee for the Social Sciences of the NCERT from 2005. His contributions to society will be ever recalled. May his soul rest in peace."

BPRD report

The Delhi Police Crime Branch has found that an audio clip mentioned in the police FIR against Markaz Nizamuddin head Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, which suggested he had asked Tablighi Jamaat members not to follow social distancing norms and prohibitory orders, may be "doctored" and stitched together using several audio files.

Responding to the report, the Delhi Police had said that "the news is not only factually incorrect but seems to be based on wholly unverified sources and purely conjectural imagination".

A reference to the Tablighi Jamaat chief's audio figures on page 10 of the BPR&D guide, under the headline "Fake news and disinformation vectors."

Para V says: "Fake/Viral Audios: In the present scenario, viral/fake newsmongers may create voice content and spread it across the social networking channels." This is followed by a screenshot with the partially masked words, "T...Jama...Leaked Audio on Covid 19 Lockdown", and the caption "A voice clip of religious leader who violated lockdown rules that went viral."

Once the text was extracted from the guide, the words were clear: "Tablighi Jamaat chief's leaked audio on COVID-19 lockdown".

The guide contained other instances of "fake news" linked to minorities, including a video of people licking plates and spoons.

Asked about the reference to the Tablighi Jamaat audio, the BPR&D spokesperson said: "There are many examples given in the booklet. I cannot comment on what examples have been given for fake audio clips and videos. These are all done by a committee. It is the committee which does these enquiries. It has technical people who find out which is a fake video or audio. Only they (the committee) can say what it is. Right now there are some corrections being carried out in the report."

The guide, meanwhile, stated: "One of the fake news spreading vectors is fake videos. Here, most of the video content carries false message, hatred, communal violence, etc., to spread panic."

The guide also suggested various steps and resources for the "investigation of fake news related videos". One case it referred to is a video that shows people acting as Muslims to discourage those in

Trains from New Delhi tomorrow

shall start more special services on new routes, based on the available coaches for Covid-19 care centres and adequate number of coaches being reserved to enable operation of 300 trains every day as 'Shramik Special' for stranded migrants."

By Sunday, the Railways had run 428 Shramik Special trains. Government sources said there were indications that this

was a "trial" to get a sense of the demand for inter-state movement, and assess its compatibility with the outbreak containment strategy. The situation may be re-evaluated in about a week or 10 days, they said.

The fares will be similar to those for Rajdhani trains. Tatkal bookings and waitlists will not be allowed. Only those without any Covid-19 symptoms

will be allowed to travel. They will be screened at departure, and required to wear a "face cover".

There would be only a few stops, mostly coinciding with operational stoppages, officials said. Only Rajdhani-model trains have been allowed since these do not have unreserved coaches, given the need to maintain social distancing.

The green light for the plan came from the Prime Minister's office Sunday afternoon. In the morning, state chief secretaries were sounded out during a video conference with Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba that some trains — other than the Shramik special trains for migrants — were being planned with multiple stoppages.

Step up activities, CMs likely to tell PM today

the Covid-19 response team told *The Indian Express*. As for further relaxation for industries, official sources said the first week of the third phase of lockdown has revealed certain aspects upon which states need to step up their administration.

Unlike previous meetings where only select CMs were shortlisted to speak, the fifth meeting called by the Prime Minister will give all CMs an opportunity to share their opinion. Ministers of home and health, secretaries of these departments, chief secretaries and Director Generals of Police (DGPs) of all states will also be present along with the CMs in the meeting.

"Though industrial activities have been allowed in the Orange and Green zones (which together accounted for 603 districts out of total 733 districts as on May 1), there has not been much activity, probably due to non-availability of labour and

disruption of supply chains. These need to be fixed. States need to discuss with the industry and other stakeholders to pursue industrial activity in a sustainable manner in these districts," said an official highlighting the teething troubles in leveraging the relaxations.

According to the health ministry, 216 districts have not reported cases till May 8. While 42 districts did not show up any fresh case in the last 28 days, 29 districts had no fresh cases in the last 21 days, 36 districts did not report fresh cases in the last 14 days and 46 districts did not show fresh cases in the last 7 days, till May 8. These numbers are subject to daily changes.

The Central government is, however, still undecided on lifting the lockdown completely. Citing instances of crowding when some states opened up liquor shops, an official said, "At times, it is not the virus as much as community compliance that

is a problem. This raises alarm bells over compliance with social distancing norms when the lockdown is fully lifted," said the official underlining the government's cautious approach. It is most unlikely that shopping malls, cinema halls and restaurants would be opened or gatherings like weddings and political meetings permitted, for an extended period.

The officials noted that 10 states which account for 97 per cent of all cases would remain the focus for Covid response efforts at the Central level. Of these, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Tamil Nadu, which witnessed higher caseloads since the lockdown was liberalised on May 4, and today account for almost two-third of all cases, will be closely monitored and attended to, they said.

In the meeting with chief secretaries and health secretaries of states, inputs were sought on the ground situation

for a re-zoning of districts ahead of the end of the third phase of lockdown on May 17. States were also asked to reinforce quarantine norms.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reported 128 deaths during the last 24 hours, the highest so far in a day, taking the total toll to 2,109. With 3,277 fresh cases during the last 24 hours, the total cases now stand at 62,939. So far, 19,357 people have been cured, of which 1,511 patients were cured in the last 24 hours. This takes the recovery rate to 30.76 per cent.

The ministry said there are currently 7,740 facilities in 483 districts in all states/UTs, including hospitals and facilities of the state/UTs and the Central government. There are 6,56,769 isolation beds, 3,05,567 beds for confirmed cases, 3,51,204 beds for suspected cases, 99,492 oxygen-supported beds, 1,696 facilities with oxygen manifold and 34,076 ICU beds.

the community from following precautions related to the pandemic.

Some of the other instances of "fake news" cited by BPR&D included UIPIs for PM CARES Fund, a Ministry of Health order on PPE kit specifications and a Telangana government order on opening of liquor shops on March 28.

Apart from recommending basic enquiries of sources, dates and authors of such news, and verification from other sources, the BPR&D has asked law enforcement agencies to guard against their own beliefs.

"Watch out for information that confirms your pre-existing beliefs. Review facts before sharing the information. Stories that seem hard to believe are often untrue," the guide stated.

The bureau has also provided guidelines on how to forensically investigate fake news in order to make it admissible as evidence in courts and asked agencies to use tools, such as reverse image search, geo tagging and geo fencing, and other methods.

Express reporter

comments before publication received no response.

A notice under Section 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, invoking powers of a police officer to require attendance of witnesses, by Inspector Satish Kumar, Investigating Officer, SOS-1, Crime Branch — forwarded to the City Editor and Chief Reporter — contained directions for *The Indian Express* Special Correspondent Mahender Singh Manral to appear before him Monday and produce "all relevant documents/material required for the purpose of investigation" and to "disclose all the facts" relevant to the investigation.

The notice directed the reporter to "join the investigation of the case as and when required" and warned of legal action under IPC Section 174 in the event of "Failure to attend/Comply with the terms of this Notice".

The Indian Express reported that an initial investigation by the Delhi Police Crime Branch has found that an audio clip men-

tioned in the police FIR against Markaz Nizamuddin head Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, which suggested he had asked Tablighi Jamaat members not to follow social distancing norms and prohibitory orders, may be "doctored" and stitched together using several audio files.

FMCG sales

personal grooming products, stationery products, steel utensils, apparel, footwear and electronics like power banks, phone and laptop chargers.

"Summer products including t-shirts, Bermuda shorts, skirts, cropped tops dominated the apparel category. Nightwear items like cotton night shorts, top and pyjama sets, nighties and night-suits, figure high on the shopping lists. Simple footwear like chappals and sandals is also being picked up by users," a company spokesperson said.

The late growth in specific categories of food and retail goods could also be attributed to the fact that online grocers, shopkeepers and other organised retailers have been limiting their stock-keeping units (SKUs) to better manage the supply chain. This has mainly been on account of hurdles in transportation, and unavailability of certain mainstream brands.

Ready-to-cook meals, a surprise entrant in the high selling food items during the lockdown period, is likely to have benefited branded labels more with people taking extra precaution about health and hygiene. Tata Consumer Products, which has a range of ready-to-cook items, saw its sales jump up to 60 per cent year-on-year, the company's head of marketing, Sagar Boke said.

Wafer, chips and nachos, which had an average shelf life of up to seven days in stores, have been selling out faster, with customers opting for the bigger stock-keeping units. For PepsiCo's, Lays as well as Green Dot Health Foods' Comitos, the average per store orders almost quadrupled to 6-8 cartons per week from two cartons a week, earlier.

"We saw sales double in Delhi,

Mumbai, and Bangalore in April. Home delivery and online ordering and delivery model helped us reach our customers," Green Dot Health Foods' Managing Director Vikram Agarwal said.

Fresh vegetables, fruits, and milk sales remained an outlier during the lockdown period of 40 days so far. "For fresh fruits and vegetables, the average daily demand has gone up from normal 160 metric ton to 230 metric ton, registering a 44 per cent growth, but during the initial lockdown period the demand had crossed 320 metric ton," Mother Dairy's Chaudhary said.

However, the sales of discretionary food products, such as ice-cream took a hit with some companies recording nil sales in the month of April.

Kasaragod

drafted to prevent community spread. Besides, a medical college under construction was converted into another Covid centre within four days.

Apart from guidelines issued by the central and state governments, Kasaragod evolved its own protocol as the case count rose in March. Officials said their "containment strategy kept evolving".

Days before the lockdown, all hotspots in the district were sealed. From March 17, the entry of vehicles from neighbouring districts was stopped. "This was a deterrent as many cases could also have entered the district through the 12 unattended routes from Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka," said Babu.

Then, a day before the Janata Curfew on March 22, prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPc was invoked in the district. Residents were allowed to come out only for six hours a day from 11 am to 5 pm, for buying essential commodities.

After the lockdown came into place, officials said, the sealing of hotspots was strengthened with police surveillance and involvement of local committees. In hotspots, no one was allowed to venture out of their homes, while police arranged supply of provi-

proposed augmentation facilities, we will be able to test 8,622 samples per day."

Though migrants coming on trains and through inter-state borders are being registered and kept at quarantine centres, there are others who have been sneaking in, the health secretary said.

"With the help of village heads who let the administration know when there are new arrivals, we have been testing this group of migrants as well. We are also close to screening our entire population through door-to-door visits. So far, we have screened 10.4 crore people and collected 3,849 samples. This suggests that our population is by and large clean. But the migrants are a real challenge," Kumar said.

By April 25, Bihar had conducted over 16,000 tests and had 239 positive cases. As of May 10, the state has conducted 35,000 tests and recorded 629 positive cases, of whom 330 have recovered.

Bihar Disaster Management Principal Secretary Pratyaya Amrit said, "We have created capacity to accommodate about 3.5 lakh migrants at about 3,500 quarantine centres at block headquarters. As precaution, we are keeping people coming from red zones in separate quarantine centres so that those from green zones are not exposed to Covid. Besides, a doctor visits a quarantine centre every day to see if anyone has Covid symptoms. We are quarantining people for 21 days."

Troops clash

helicopter, carrying a senior officer, flew in the vicinity of the contested zone on May 5 morning.

Following the Naku La incident, the Army said, "temporary and short duration faceoffs between border guarding troops do occur as boundaries are not resolved".

"Aggressive behaviour by the two sides resulted in minor injuries to troops. The two sides disengaged after dialogue and interaction at local level," it said.

On the Ladakh incident, Army sources told *The Indian Express* that there was physical altercation between the Indian and Chinese troops on the intervening night of May 5-6 near the Pangong Tso.

It is learnt that Chinese troops attacked Indian soldiers on patrol in the area. They were carrying batons studded with nails and this caused serious injuries to several Indian soldiers, some of whom had to be hospitalised.

The Indian troops, sources said, also hit back at the Chinese soldiers, and the confrontation continued until senior officers from both sides intervened. The area is said to be on a high state of alert.

Sources said there had been another faceoff in the end of April but that had been amicably resolved.

The last such clash on the LAC in Ladakh took place in September 2019 on the north bank of the Pangong lake.

WHO envoy

the virus, and to keep it contained in some urban pockets. But as the lockdown is lifted, it is "inevitable" that outbreaks will take place in many other areas, he said — and everyone in the country needed to be educated about what was happening, and prepared to deal with the crisis.

"India can live with Covid and can really keep the virus at bay only through doing the following. One is that every single person in the country needs to be made aware of the virus so that they know the importance of interrupting the transmission as soon as an outbreak builds up.

"And, second, every single panchayat and zilla parishad in India should build up capacity to suppress outbreaks quickly. That, of course, would have been accompanied with providing support to the people who are affected by this suppression because poor people

get so much hurt by it. But having this capacity to suppress the outbreak while protecting the poor is the second requirement that India must have," Nabarro said.

"If you have everybody on alert for interrupting the transmission and have widespread capacity to suppress outbreaks, which will involve restricting movement like in the current lockdown, but at very local level, then the rest of the society can go about their lives normally. It is not going to be comfortable, of course, and the first few weeks and months after the (current) lockdown ends, are going to be tough, but it is doable," he said.

Nabarro said it was this kind of approach that had helped China keep a tight lid over the resurgence of the epidemic.

"What I am hearing of China from my Chinese colleagues is that they have really implemented a nationwide network of community health personnel who are keeping a close watch on the cases. The moment they find a case, they isolate the patient immediately. They have really managed to get this right, across the country. This is what I am told.

"They (China) have also made sure that the entire population knows how serious this problem is. And then, they also seem to be very, very cautious. Because they know they will have new people coming into the country, and they are mindful of the fact that there will be multiple resurgences coming. And they are getting ready to contain them as quickly as possible. I think India would also have to do the same," he said.

Nabarro said the way India had handled the epidemic so far gave him enormous confidence that it would be able to successfully manage the next stage as well.

"One of the things that I look out from your country is the doubling time of the number of cases. I was finding out, as of a few days ago, doubling time in your country seems to be about 11 days. That is a really good, because what we know from other places is that if this virus does what it wants to do, and there is no effort to limit transmission, then the doubling time is about every two and a half days. So if you have a doubling time of 11 days, then what it means is that opportunities for transmission have been substantially reduced," he said.

"An 11-day doubling time is quite remarkable. It means that there has been a real effort, and a successful effort, to slow the spread of this virus. I have said this earlier that I see signs of an incredible achievement in a country that is normally very populous in urban areas, and there is usually a lot of movement of people," he said.

Nabarro said while lockdowns could be "brutal", and in general was a "terrible thing", it would not have been a wise decision to let the virus spread without any intervention.

"Let me tell you that if this virus was allowed to move across the world with no effort to contain it, it would cause, we believe, an enormous number of people to become ill and die. We don't yet fully understand many things about this virus. It seems to be capable of causing more than just respiratory illnesses, and it could have other impacts as well. All of us who have been working with this virus, and other coronaviruses as well, have learnt to be extremely cautious about these viruses," he said.

He also said he did not see a vaccine coming to the help of people before the next two years, and it was better that countries and people learnt to live with the virus at least for that long.

"I am encouraging everybody to think in terms of living with this virus for at least two years. And that applies to all 7.8 billion people on our planet. It is going to be a universal learning process," he said.

3 THE OUTBREAK

WEST BENGAL



MASK MESSAGE

Statues for promoting state government's Kanyashree scheme for girl students now sport masks, in Kolkata. Partha Paul

Bengal tourists stranded in Haridwar, no response from Kolkata: Uttarakhand govt

LALMANI VERMA
DEHRADUN, MAY 10

Several hundred people from West Bengal are stranded in Haridwar since the beginning of the nationwide lockdown and the Mamata Banerjee-led government has not responded to requests for arrangements to take them back, the Uttarakhand government said on Sunday. The allegations come a day after the Centre and the Bengal government traded charges over the movement of special trains in that state.

West Bengal chief secretary Rajiva Sinha told *The Indian Express* he was in contact with Uttarakhand's chief secretary in connection with the matter while senior government functionaries in Kolkata have denied the allegations.

According to Uttarakhand Cabinet minister and government spokesperson Madan Kaushik, there are around 600 people from West Bengal stranded in Haridwar.

"We are requesting the West Bengal government again and again to take its people back because these tourists are in a state of panic and they want to go home. But no response has been received yet from there," he said.

"The Uttarakhand government has made arrangements for their stay, food and medical facilities. But they want to go back," the minister added.

According to an administration official, "maximum stranded tourists are from West Bengal and most of them are from Kolkata, Hooghly and Howrah. A large number of tourists of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have left for their home in buses arranged by the govern-

ments of respective states."

According to Kaushik, the first communication with the West Bengal government regarding those stranded was made when the lockdown was initially imposed.

"Later, when the Central government allowed movement, we wrote to the Chief Secretary. But, no reply was received yet from there," he said. Responding to the allegations, West Bengal Chief Secretary Sinha said, "I am in regular touch with CS (Chief Secretary) Uttarakhand, UK Singh."

A senior government official also said, "What Madan Kaushik said is not true. We are regularly contacting all the states where people from Bengal are stranded. We are also arranging possible modes of transport for them to return."

Haridwar district tourist officer Seema Nautiyal said there were around 700 tourists from West Bengal who were stranded since the lockdown was imposed but later, some were able to travel back by hiring taxis after obtaining permission from the Haridwar district administration over the past 2-3 days.

"After the lockdown, the district administration requested hotels and dharamshalas to allow those tourists to stay there. The district administration made arrangements for their meals and medical facilities. We are facilitating obtaining permissions so they can hire taxis to travel," Nautiyal said.

Officials said there are around 40 tourists from Uttar Pradesh, 10 from Delhi, 30 from Gujarat and several from Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu who are still stranded in Haridwar.

—ENS, KOLKATA

POLITICAL BATTLEFRONT

BJP online campaign targets Mamata, TMC hits back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 8

AMID A battle of words between the Centre and state government over bringing back stranded migrant workers to West Bengal, the BJP has launched a social media campaign hitting at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for avoiding the media for over a week. The campaign has been titled as 'Bhoy Peyech Mamata' (Mamata is scared), which has irked TMC leaders.

BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya slammed Banerjee calling her government an 'absolute disaster'. He tweeted a list of accusations saying -- "Doctors crying for PPE, patients lying with dead bodies, migrant labour not allowed to leave state, Bengalis not allowed to come back home and Hospitals not taking patients, Police attacked @MamataOfficial government is absolute disaster. #BhoyPeyechMamata."

Banerjee, also the health minister of the state, did not hold any press conference in the last nine days. BJP leader Mukul Roy took a dig at her saying, "Where are you Mamata Banerjee?

Covid-19 cases are increasing, no of tests are still low and not giving permission to bring back Bengali migrant labour's from other states? #BhoyPeyechMamata," he said in a tweet.

Responding to the online campaign, TMC leader and MP Derek O'Brien criticised the party saying that it is only focussed on West Bengal Assembly elections due in 2021. "While the state government is busy fighting pandemic, the BJP is busy doing politics keeping in mind the Assembly election. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not held any press conference since taking charge in 2014. The BJP has no moral right to target the West Bengal Chief Minister," he said.

State minister and TMC leader Firhad Hakim also slammed the BJP for its campaign. "The BJP only knows how to malign our image. We are fighting the present crisis, while they are busy doing politics," he said to mediapersons.

Addressing the migrants' crisis, the state government has arranged buses for those who were found walking from Kharagpur to Malda district.

Migrant from Bengal kills self in Kerala

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, MAY 10

A TEENAGED migrant labourer from West Bengal who was stranded in Kerala allegedly killed himself on Saturday. Asif Iqbal, 17, a resident of Siropara village in Murshidabad district, had been employed at a brick kiln in Emakulum district.

Asif's colleagues and family members said he was disturbed as he wasn't able to return home.

"He used to worry about the lockdown and not being able to return home. He was disturbed for a few days. But we did not think he would take his life because of that," said Sariful Islam, who, too, works at the same kiln and is from the same village in Murshidabad.

Sariful said their names did not appear in the list of migrant labourers who returned to West Bengal in a train on May 6.

"The DM's office has all our details. However our names did not feature in the list of passengers who were given ticket to ride the train back home. We will try our luck again if another train is arranged for West Bengal," Islam told *The Indian Express*.

He said the body of the 17-year-old has been sent to Domkol in an ambulance.

Ansarul Mondal, a family member of the deceased, said: "The government is making arrangements for rich people for their safe return to the state but not for people like Asif. All lockdown norms are applicable for migrant workers but not for the rich. Asif had complained of not

LOCO PILOTS TOLD TO WATCH OUT FOR MIGRANTS ON TRACK

Kolkata: The South Eastern Railway (SER) has asked its loco pilots and other staff to keep an eye out for migrant workers walking along railway tracks after groups of labourers were seen walking along the tracks in the zone, an official said here on Sunday.

The directive came two days after 16 migrant workers sleeping on the tracks in Aurangabad were run over by an empty freight train.

On Sunday, SER officials saw a group walking near a level-crossing between Soro and Markona in Odisha, and another between Balasore and Haldipada. PTI

getting enough food to survive there and wanted to come back."

Social welfare organisation Bangla Sanskriti Mancha, which has been active in identifying stranded migrant labourers from Bengal in other states, appealed to the state and the Centre to arrange trains for the safe return of such people. "We demand compensation for the family of Asif. There are thousands like him who are stuck in various districts. Both central and state governments must ensure their safe return and help stop a repeat of the incident in Kerala," said Samirul Islam, president of Bangla Sanskriti Mancha.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Suwendu Adhikari told reporters that till May 9 the state transport undertakings — West Bengal Transport Corporation, South Bengal State Transport Corporation, and North Bengal State Transport Corporation — had provided over 2,300 buses for transporting more than 72,000 people.

He said more than 100 vehicles were being provided everyday to frontline departments such as the Kolkata Municipal Corporation KMC, and the Department of Health to help them maintain their operations. The minister said more than 260 private vehicles had been hired to enable the movement of about 7,500 people. ENS

No need to lift lockdown before Eid: Imams' body

Kolkata: With the number of Covid-19 cases in the state increasing every day, an association of imams on Sunday wrote a letter to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, urging her to extend the lockdown till May 30.

The Bengal Imams' Association said festivities can wait since people first need to survive. The imams said the lockdown should not be lifted before Eid, which will be observed on May 25.

The organisation's chairperson Mohammad Yahya advised against festivities amid the pandemic, writing that people had sacrificed a lot already and were ready to do it once again.

The association urged the CM to raise the matter with the Centre, and extended its support

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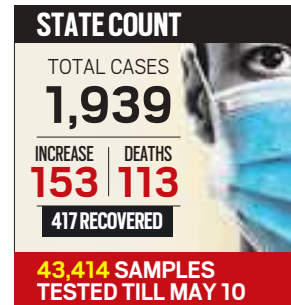
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TEST-POSITIVITY RATE AROUND 5%

Sunday surge: 14 deaths and 153 new cases in last 24 hrs



EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 10

THE STATE government on Sunday said 14 more people had died of the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19), pushing up the toll to 113. If the deaths in which comorbidities were the cause are counted, the toll is 185.

The positive case tally also saw the highest single-day jump till date, with the government confirming 153 more people had contracted the virus. While the number of positive cases at present is 1,939, active cases have increased from 1,243 to 1,337.

According to the health department bulletin, 45 patients were discharged from hospitals since Saturday evening, taking up the number of patients discharged to 417.

The government said it had tested 4,046 samples on Sunday. With this, the cumulative number of specimens examined till May 10 rose to 43,414. Out of the samples tested, 4.47% have turned out to be positive.

According to the health department, 5,921 people are still in government quarantine and 18,458 people are in home isolation at present.

Leakage in PPE supply? Govt sets up helpline for health staff

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 10

THE STATE government on Sunday set up a helpline number for frontline medical workers pandemic since many have complained they are not receiving sufficient protective gear.

In its daily press briefing, and health bulletin, the Mamata Banerjee administration mentions the number of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and other material supplied by the Department of Health and Family Welfare. With the claims of PPE scarcity persisting, the government suspects there may be some irregularities in the distribution of protective gear. To plug this alleged leak, the authorities decided to start the helpline. Health workers can also call the number to complain about other problems in their hospital, said officials.

"Regular supplies from the state level are being dispatched across the state, and the stock position of PPE and other supplies at different levels of the state health system is comfortable," the health department said in the order issued by Additional Secretary (Health and Family Welfare) Sharad Kumar Dwivedi.

"However, in spite of a comfortable stock position, reports are received from some medical personnel from time to time



Supply of PPEs has plagued from the beginning

about the insufficiency or non-supply of PPE and other supplies to them by their respective institutions," the order noted.

The helpline had been set up "to provide an institutional channel for the ventilation of issues regarding the non-availability or insufficiency of PPE and other supplies", said the government, and added that it can be accessed from 8 am to 8 pm every day.

A senior health official said this problem has plagued medical workers since the beginning.

"All the time the government said there was no scarcity of PPEs, masks and other precautionary equipment. But, this time we are basically admitting that there is some problem or malpractice during delivery from the state to primary health centres. In many cases, these equipment are not reaching properly. To address these problems the helpline has been opened," the official added.

Meanwhile, the government said from Sunday the Calcutta

Medical College (CMC) would only admit patients either suffering from the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) or suspected of carrying the infection. To avoid the infection from spreading, the hospital closed its outpatient department.

Last week, the government had announced its decision to repurpose CMC into the 68th hospital in the state to treat only Covid-19 patients.

Eight private and government hospitals in the city and its surrounding areas have closed completely recently due to Covid-19 infections, and five have closed partially.

Some health department officials believe the infections spread because of insufficient use of PPEs and other protective gear.

"In Kolkata, many patients came for other treatments and tested positive of Covid due to scarcity of precautionary equipment and also sample testing is very low," said a senior health department official.

Association of Health Service Doctors general secretary Manas Gupta urged the government to start random testing. "Because, the other patients who are coming to the hospital for the treatment, you never know whether they are asymptomatic or not. So, testing is the only solution to overcome this problem. Otherwise, the infection rate will increase in hospitals gradually," he said.

45 days of lockdown, factories cautious, services stalled, markets choppy

Tracking the impact of Covid on the financial markets

E-XPLAINED
by The Indian EXPRESS

with

Nilesh Shah

Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra AMC, Part-time Member, PM's Economic Advisory Council and Chairman, Association of Mutual Funds in India

Join us for a discussion with Nilesh Shah to understand the impact of the pandemic on businesses and markets. What are the expectations of the markets?

Mr Shah will be in conversation with

P Vaidyanathan Iyer
Executive Editor (National Affairs), The Indian Express

Sandeep Singh
Associate Editor, The Indian Express

14 MAY 2020

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Confirmation SMS will be your registration.

The Indian EXPRESS
— JOURNALISM OF COURAGE —



The former PM was admitted at around 8.45pm.

Manmohan admitted to AIIMS

New Delhi: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was admitted to AIIMS, Delhi on Sunday evening after he complained of chest pain. The Congress leader is currently under observation and in the ICU of the Cardio-Thoracic Sciences Centre (CTVS) unit of the institute.

Singh, 87, was admitted under Dr Nitish Naik, a professor of cardiology at the institute around 8.45 pm. According to sources, doctors are examining his condition. "He is under observation and the examination is going on," said a senior doctor from the hospital.

Singh is currently a Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. On May 6, he had taken part in a video conference with the chief ministers of Congress-ruled states along with party chief Sonia Gandhi and senior leaders Rahul Gandhi and P Chidambaram. ENS



A SILVER LINING

A volunteer dressed as a clown cheers up a child at a camp for stranded migrant workers at Yamuna Sports Complex in Delhi, on Sunday. Abhinav Saha

On way to UP, 6 migrants killed in MP accident

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 10

SIX WORKERS returning to their homes in Uttar Pradesh were killed and 12 others injured when a mango-laden truck overturned near Patha village in Narsinghpur district of Madhya Pradesh late on Saturday.

The truck, on its way from Hyderabad to Agra, was probably speeding when it turned sideways on the highway killing five migrant workers on the spot. One of the two workers who were referred to a hospital in Jabalpur later succumbed to injuries. The rest of the injured were admitted to a hospital in Narsinghpur.

Narsinghpur SP Gurkaran Singh said it is likely that the workers were travelling illegally and that it is not clear whether they paid money for the ride. The workers were told that they would be dropped at a bigger city in UP from where they were to find transport to reach home.

One of the injured persons was coughing when he was being taken to hospital. His sample was sent for testing.

The incident comes after 16 migrant workers from Shahdol and Umaria districts in MP were run over by a goods train near

Aurangabad in Maharashtra early on Friday.

At least three other migrant workers who were returning to UP on foot have also died in MP. Workers enter MP from Sendhwa border and thousands of them have recently taken that route. When stopped at the borders, the workers have entered into clashes with the MP Police.

Trouble began last week when UP sealed its borders, not allowing migrants to enter its boundaries after letting them do so before. When the UP government stopped their entry, the MP government also stopped letting them in, leading to tension.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday asked district collectors to offer help to workers entering the state on foot, asking to ensure arrangements for food, shelter and transport. He said collectors should appoint a nodal officer and seek help from voluntary organisations.

According to the government, 1.9 lakh workers have returned to MP — nearly half of them from Gujarat. In addition to buses arranged by the state government, 30 special trains carrying migrants have arrived in MP so far and 10 are set to reach on May 11.

NEW GUIDELINES ON COVID DEATHS

ICMR: Categorise cause of death, focus on sequence of events

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

IN NEW guidelines on recording Covid-19 related deaths, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has directed medical practitioners to list Covid-19 as an "underlying cause of death" when leading to Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), cardiac injury, pneumonia and other primary causes of death.

The fresh direction, arriving as India's Covid-19 death count surpasses 2,000 people, outlines a new standardised form where medical practitioners have to categorise the death's immediate cause, antecedent cause, and other significant conditions in separate columns.

Apart from outlining three categories to identify causal sequence of death for proper surveillance, the guidelines stress that the logical sequence of events

must be clearly articulated in the records.

"It is likely that Covid-19 is the underlying cause of death (UCOD) that lead to ARDS or Pneumonia in most of the deaths due to Covid-19 (test positive and symptoms positive). In these cases Covid-19 must be captured (under antecedent cause)," the guidelines say.

The immediate cause is the "disease, injury, or complication that caused the death, not the mode of dying". The antecedent cause is the morbid condition(s) that "gave rise to the immediate cause". The other significant conditions are those that "contributed to the death but are not related to the disease or to the condition causing it".

The guidelines state: "Patients may present with other pre-existing comorbid conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or asthma, chronic bronchitis, ischemic heart disease,

cancer and diabetes mellitus. These conditions increase the risk of developing respiratory infections, and may lead to complications and severe disease in a Covid-19 positive individual. These conditions are not considered as (underlying cause of death) as they have directly not caused death due to Covid-19." The guidelines stress that only those conditions that have contributed to death should be recorded.

In the wake of states like Delhi, Maharashtra and West Bengal deploying divergent metrics of determining Covid-19 death, the ICMR guidelines attempt to streamline mortality surveillance in the country.

"Patterns of disease and patterns of death can come from only standardised recording of clinical disease history and cause of death, and therefore epidemiological surveillance of disease and death are important. Robust data is

MISMATCH IN TOLL

Delhi govt admits to 'incorrect', late reports

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE DELHI government has, in an order sent to heads of government and private hospitals, red flagged deaths of Covid-19 patients not being reported in a timely and regular manner. This comes two days after *The Indian Express* reported on a mismatch between the Covid death toll provided by the Delhi government and hospital data — the latter being significantly higher.

The chief secretary of Delhi, Vijay Dev, wrote in the order: "It has come to notice that both public and private hospitals (both Covid dedicated and non-Covid) are not reporting deaths of positive cases of Covid-19 occurring in their hospitals in a timely and regular manner."

The order stated that hospitals were not sharing death summaries with the three-member death audit committee formed by

This comes two days after *The Indian Express* reported on a mismatch between the Covid death toll provided by the Delhi government and hospital data.

the Delhi government on April 20. "The death summaries of the deceased patients are not being provided to the committee, resulting in incorrect/delayed reports being submitted," the order said.

The order, sent to the medical directors/medical superintendents of hospitals, further stated: "The reporting of death cases of Covid-19 positive persons from all the health facilities in Delhi shall be strictly as per the SOPs."

As per the standard operating procedure, every hospital has to

report all deaths of coronavirus patients by email to the district and state surveillance units, along with a scanned copy of the case summary, medical files and all relevant data required by the death audit committee, by 5 pm every day. A day after *The Indian Express* report, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain had told reporters: "Some death summaries have not been provided to the Delhi government due to various issues and hence cannot be added in the list of deaths. As and when they arrive, we will release them."

As reported by *The Indian Express*, the number of coronavirus casualties reported by Lok Nayak Hospital, Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, Lady Harding Medical College and the Delhi and Jhajjar centres of AIIMS stood at 116 until Thursday night. According to the Delhi government's daily bulletin, a total of 33 deaths had been recorded from these hospitals.

Behind Ujjain's mortality rate, late reporting and fear of hospital

DIPANKAR GHOSE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

EVEN AS Ujjain has hit the headlines with one of the highest Covid mortality rates in the country, officials pointed to late reporting of cases, long-standing issues at the city's only medical college, and delayed test results as reasons.

Ujjain has seen 45 Covid deaths, with 4,154 tests being conducted and 237 people testing positive. Mortality rate is close to 20 per cent.

The numbers have led Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to say that the area needs special attention. Special teams have visited Ujjain, and the district saw a change of administrative guard in the form of a new district collector this week.

Senior officials in Ujjain told *The Indian Express* that one of the biggest problems was the primary Covid care hospital. "R D Gardi Medical College in Ujjain had no expertise in handling Covid cases. A lot of time was wasted. Even now, there are issues between the management and resident doctors," a senior official said.

The issues — including problems in donning and doffing areas — are being looked into, officials said. "We have created separate areas for men and women doctors. There was an issue of cleanliness, so some ward boys from outside have been stationed there," an official said.

Much like the initial situation in neighbouring Indore, officials said, in Ujjain too there was a delayed response in reporting of cases, but with an added element of fear of the hospital. "Eight patients were brought dead. In 15 cases, people died between 24 and 48 hours of reaching the hospital. The negative image of the

hospital is a big factor," a senior official said. "In Indore, there was late reporting and deaths, but things were streamlined. In Ujjain, there was late reporting and deaths, and that exacerbated bad perceptions about the hospital."

An additional issue in Ujjain was delay in test results — which took as long as 12 days. An official said, "Therefore, positive patients were not recognised early, treatment was not started on time. There were chances of the patient wandering because of lack of isolation. His contacts perhaps didn't get quarantined on time."

Asked about these issues, District Collector Asheesh Singh, who until four days ago was the Indore Municipal Commissioner, said that all pending test results have now been received. "Three days ago, I directed that all pending samples (around 550) be sent to a lab in Ahmedabad. Those results came within 24 hours. Now we will not have pendency above 36 hours," he said.

Regarding problems at RG Gardi hospital, Singh said the government was looking to enhance its capacity in the district. "There is a trauma centre with 100 beds, which will be ready in seven days. Aurobindo Hospital, with 100 beds, is also being facilitated. RG Gardi is a private medical college with 800 beds, 150 of which have oxygen facilities. If we have all of them functioning, it will be more comfortable," Singh said.

Like Indore, 250 teams comprising ASHA and Anganwadi workers have been set up to do door-to-door screening, Singh said. "A mobile app is used to survey SARI and ILI symptoms, and if they show up, a doctor visits them."

With some containment zones falling in Muslim localities, the administration has reached out to the community to increase trust.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL POLL

Cong pulls back candidate, clears way for Uddhav

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

AFTER THE Shiv Sena expressed displeasure over Congress fielding a second candidate in the May 21 Legislative Council polls, its ally Sunday decided to withdraw its candidate to make way for Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and eight others to get elected unopposed.

"The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) wanted to contest six seats. But considering the Covid-19 crisis, it is difficult to bring all MLAs to Mumbai for the voting. The chief minister himself is a candidate. He has requested us that the candidates should win unopposed. So, considering all aspects, the MVA will now field five candidates," said Balasaheb Thorat, state Congress president and Revenue Minister after a

meeting with senior leaders from his party, Sena and NCP.

With this, while MVA has fielded candidates in five seats, BJP is contesting four seats. All nine candidates are set to be elected unopposed.

The meeting was attended by Congress minister Ashok Chavan, NCP ministers Ajit Pawar and Jayant Patil as well as Shiv Sena ministers Eknath Shinde and Anil Parab. Sena MP Sanjay Raut and party secretary Milind Narvekar were also present.

"Honouring the chief minister's request, Congress has agreed to withdraw its second candidate. So, the candidates would win unopposed," said Raut.

Earlier in the day, Raut told reporters that Uddhav would not like to contest the election if it was not going to be unopposed. "We want candidates to win un-

opposed. Many people are walking on the streets and there are issues of their livelihood. It will be a blot on Maharashtra's tradition if we are not able to get the candidates elected unopposed. Uddhav is uneasy because of this," he said.

The Election Commission has announced the Legislative Council polls for nine seats in Maharashtra days after Uddhav approached Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to avoid a constitutional crisis in the state. Uddhav, who was sworn in as CM on November 28, 2019, has to become member of either house of state legislature by May 27.

Sena's Uddhav and Neelam Gorhe, NCP's Shashikant Shinde and Amol Mitkar and Congress' Rajesh Rathod will file their nominations on Monday. BJP's Ranjitsinh Mohite Patil,

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

9421568 LATE RFN SUNIL JUNG MAHAT 11 MAY

On this day No 9421568N Late Rfn Sunil Jung Mahat of 1/11 Gorkha Rifles (BATALIK) made the supreme sacrifice during 'OP VIJAY' (Kargil) in May 1999 in a true act of valour. He was the first of many to the Paltan lost on the Path of Glory that summer. The brave soldier will always be remembered for his raw courage and indomitable team spirit. To this brave Martyr we pledge that we shall always be guided by his immortal spirit and make his name proud.

CO AND ALL RANKS, 1/11 GORKHA RIFLES (BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE) (BATALIK)

Office of the Executive Engineer Water Resources Som Kamla Amba Canal Division Aspur

No. 89 **INVITATION FOR BIDS** Dated: - 6.5.2020
IFB NO. 01/2020-21

NAME OF OFFICE	Office of the Executive Engineer Water Resources Som Kamla Amba Canal Division Aspur
NAME OF WORK	Rehabilitation work at Punjpur Irrigation Project
ESTIMATED COST OF WORK	Rs. 26.97 Million
AMOUNT OF BID SECURITY	Rs. 0.54 Million
PERIOD OF COMPLETION	24 months including rainy season & canal running period
COST OF BID DOCUMENT	Rs. 10000.00
PERIOD OF SALE OF BIDDING DOCUMENT	FROM 15.05.2020 to 14.06.2020 TIME 18.00 HOURS
DATE, TIME & PLACE OF PRE BID MEETING	DATE 22.05.2020 TIME Up to 11.30 AM O/O Superintending Engineer Water Resources Construction Circle Durgapur
LAST DATE AND TIME FOR RECEIPT OF BID ON LINE UPLOAD	DATE 14.06.2020 TIME 18.00 HOURS
LAST DATE OF SUBMIT ORIGINAL DOCUMENT D.D. OF BID SECURITY PROCESSING FEE, TENDER DOCUMENT FEE, AFFIDAVIT ETC IN THE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER WATER RESOURCES CONSTRUCTION CIRCLE DURGAPUR	DATE 15.06.2020 TIME 2.30 PM HOURS
TIME AND DATE OF OPENING OF BIDS TECHNICAL PART	DATE 15.06.2020 TIME 3.00 PM HOURS
PLACE OF OPENING OF BIDS	Office of the Superintending Engineer Water Resources Construction Circle Durgapur

Detail of nIT/ bid document may be seen on website <http://eproc.raasthan.gov.in>, www.diprolite.org, www.sppp.raj.nic.in and it may be downloaded/ uploaded from <http://www.water.resources.raasthan.gov.in/> and it may be downloaded/ uploaded from <http://eproc.raasthan.gov> instruction to bidder are available on the JICAs web site shown below http://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/types_of_assistance/oda_loans/oda_op_info/guide/tenders.html

Telephone & Fax No. 02964-230056
Email ID. secon.erudr@gmail.com

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Water Resources Som Kamla Amba Canal Division
Aspur

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e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE

e-Tender No.: IRCON/2059/CGRP/19-20/KHS-DHARAMIBSP-39 Dated: 11.05.2020
e-Tender for and on behalf of Chhattisgarh East Railway Limited is invited from bidders meeting qualifying requirements for the work of "Manufacturing, Supply transportation & stacking of 1 in 16 PSC Turnout sleeper for 60 kg UIC Rail at Dharamjagar yard in Raigarh District in connection with construction of East Rail Corridor from Kharsia to Dharamjagar with spur from Garghoda to Gara Pelma New BG Electrified Double line in the state of Chhattisgarh over South East Central Railway".

Estimated Cost of the work	Rs. 70,21,000/-
Last Date & Time of Bid Submission	01.06.2020 up to 15.00 Hrs. (IST)

For further details, visit website <https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app>. Corrigendum, if any, would be hosted only on the website. **Chief General Manager/CGRP**

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU
STATE RURAL ROADS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
PMGSY III Batch I (2019-20) Road works

- For details, visit www.pmgstenderstn.gov.in
- e-Bids are invited by the Project Director, DRDA of Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri, Dindigul, Erode, Karur, Krishnagiri, Namakkal, Perambalur, Salem, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Thiruppur, Thiruvallur and Virudhunagar Districts, for the upgradation of Rural roads, package wise, under two cover system.
- The Package wise bid documents can be downloaded free of cost from www.pmgstenderstn.gov.in from 13.05.2020 to 11.06.2020
- Common date and time for downloading of Bid document, submission and opening:
 - Last Date and Time for downloading and online Submission of Bid Documents : **11.06.2020 upto 3.00 PM**
 - Date and Time of online opening of Bid Documents : **11.06.2020 4.00 PM onwards**

DIRECTOR,
Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Dept.

DIPR/1761/TENDER/2020

EASTERN RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. : RBRE/EL/KKK/CB/Gr.351/OT-5, dated 09.05.2020. Open e-Tender is invited by Chief Project Director (E), Railway Electrification, Danapur for the following work : **Name of Work with its location** : Open e-tender for "Supply & erection of various types of caution boards and various types of safety items for entire section, switching stations, stations, TSS and OHE depots in connection with Electrification of Rupsa-Bangriposi Section (Gr. 351) in Kharagpur Division of South Eastern Railway. **Approximate Cost of work** : ₹ 24,78,901.03. **Earnest Money to be deposited** : Rs. 49,600/- **Date & Time for Submission of tender & Opening of tender** : (1) Last date of submission upto 14.00 hrs. on 08.06.2020. (2) Tender will be opened at 15.30 hrs. on 08.06.2020. **Website particulars where complete details of tender can be seen** : www.irps.gov.in

MISC-14/2020-21
Tender Notice is also available at websites : www.indianrailways.gov.in / www.irps.gov.in

Migrant walking home to Jharkhand run over in Bengal

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, MAY 10

A 35-YEAR-OLD migrant labourer who was walking home to village Kesarchepa in Jharkhand's Chatra district was run over by a vehicle near Durgapur, West Bengal on Saturday, police said.

Fuldev Bhuyia, who worked as a mason in Kolkata, was left stranded after the nationwide lockdown began on March 23. Desperate to get back, he bought a bicycle for Rs 500 and started for home on May 6 along with two others. According to his family, he got separated from the other two.

"There were three of them... some problem occurred with some villagers in West Bengal. They were chased... all three got separated and he walked alone

TRAILER COLLIDES WITH TRUCK, 3 KILLED

Ranchi: A trailer ferrying 10 people from Jamshepur to Muzaffarnagar, JP, collided with a truck in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district on Sunday, leading to the death of three people. Superintendent of Police Prabhat Kumar said the driver lost control of the vehicle while trying to avoid a motorcyclist. He said, "We are ascertaining their profiles, but as of now it is not confirmed if they were migrants." ENS

As of late Sunday, Bhuiya's body was yet to reach Kesarchepa.

Tetri Devi said, "My husband bought a bicycle to carry his belongings. He cooked chapatis, and kept rice and utensils to cook it using wood fuel and set out on his foot... I spoke to him last on Friday night... The next day, we were informed of his death. *Bimari ke chahet jaan chali gayi* (He lost his life because of the disease)."

Assistant Sub Inspector Shailesh Sharma of New Township Police Station of Asansol-Durgapur police com-

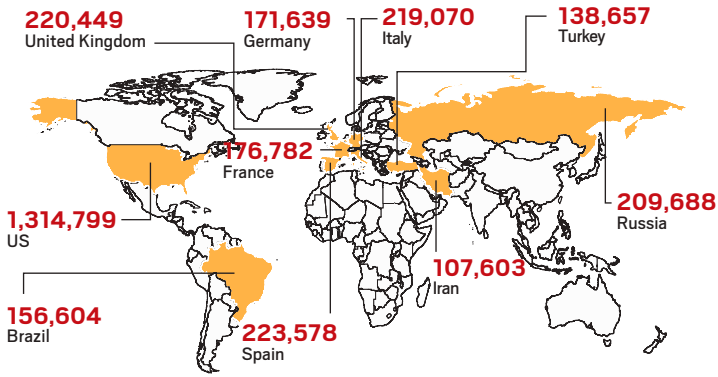


@ieExplained
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

THE WORLD



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 4,067,112 **DEATH COUNT: 280,507**

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11 pm on May 10

Covid's vitamin D link: What data from 20 countries show

A NEW study has found an association between low average levels of vitamin D and high numbers of Covid-19 cases and mortality rates across 20 European countries. The research, led by scientists from UK's Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust, is published in the journal *Aging Clinical and Experimental Research*.

due to the consumption of cod liver oil and vitamin D supplements, and possibly less sun avoidance. Scandinavian nations are among the countries with the lowest number of COVID-19 cases and mortality rates per head of population in Europe, ARU said in a statement on the new research.

"We found a significant crude relationship between average vitamin D levels and the number Covid-19 cases, and particularly Covid-19 mortality rates, per head of population across the 20 European countries," Dr Lee Smith of ARU said in the statement.

"Vitamin D has been shown to protect against acute respiratory infections, and older adults, the group most deficient in vitamin D, are also the ones most seriously affected by Covid-19. A previous study found that 75% of people in institutions, such as hospitals and care homes, were severely deficient in vitamin D. We suggest it would be advisable to perform dedicated studies looking at vitamin D levels in COVID-19 patients with different degrees of disease severity," Dr Lee said.

Source: Anglia Ruskin University



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

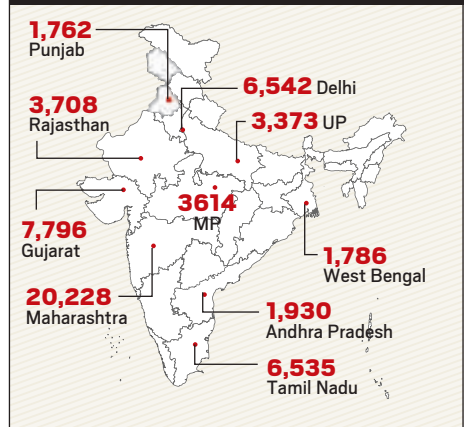
Vitamin D is known to modulate the response of white blood cells, preventing them from releasing too many inflammatory cytokines (part of the body's immune response to fight infections). And the SARS-CoV2 virus is known to cause an excess of pro-inflammatory cytokines, called a cytokine storm.

The new study shows that Italy and Spain, both of which have experienced high Covid-19 mortality rates, have lower average vitamin D levels than most northern European countries. This, the researchers said, is partly because people in southern Europe, particularly the elderly, avoid strong sun, while skin pigmentation also reduces natural vitamin D synthesis.

The highest average levels of vitamin D are found in northern Europe,

INDIA COUNT: 62,939 (2,109 DEATHS)

TOP 10 STATES



REST OF INDIA

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	33
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Assam	63
Bihar	591
Chandigarh	169
Chhattisgarh	59
Dadar Nagar Haveli	1
Goa	7
Haryana	675
Himachal Pradesh	50
Jammu and Kashmir	836
Jharkhand	156
Karnataka	794
Kerala	505
Ladakh	42
Manipur	2
Meghalaya	13
Mizoram	1
Odisha	294
Puduchery	9
Telangana	1163
Tripura	134
Uttarakhand	67

Union Health Ministry update as of 11 pm, May 10. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states/UTs with at least one case listed above.

19,358 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 32 STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

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

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What labour law changes mean

Last week, a number of state governments made key changes in the application of labour laws. What are the labour laws in the country, and how can such changes impact firms, their workers, and the economy?

UDIT MISRA & NUSHAIBA IQBAL
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

AS THE economy struggles with the lockdown and thousands of firms and workers stare at an uncertain future, some state governments last week decided to make significant changes in the application of labour laws. The most significant changes were announced by three BJP-ruled states — UP, MP and Gujarat — but several other states, ruled by the Congress (Rajasthan and Punjab) as well as BJD-ruled Odisha, too made some changes, although smaller in scope. UP, the most populous state, has made the boldest changes as it summarily suspended the application of almost all labour laws in the state for the next three years.

On the face of it, these changes are being brought about to incentivise economic activity in the respective states. Keeping aside the questions of law — labour falls in the Concurrent List and there are many laws enacted by the Centre that a state cannot just brush aside — the key question is: Are these the long-pending reforms of the labour market that economists used to talk about, or is the suspension of labour laws an ill-timed and retrograde step that critics have made it out to be?

What are Indian labour laws?

Estimates vary but there are over 200 state laws and close to 50 central laws. And yet there is no set definition of "labour laws" in the country. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into four categories. *Chart 1* provides the categorisation, with examples.

The main objectives of the Factories Act, for instance, are to ensure safety measures on factory premises, and promote health and welfare of workers. The Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, on the other hand, aims to regulate hours of work, payment, overtime, weekly day off with pay, other holidays with pay, annual leave, employment of children and young persons, and employment of women.

The Minimum Wages Act covers more workers than any other labour legislation. The most contentious labour law, however, is the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 as it relates to terms of service such as layoff, retrenchment, and closure of industrial enterprises and strikes and lockouts.

Why are labour laws often criticised?

Indian labour laws are often characterised as "inflexible". In other words, it has been argued that thanks to the onerous legal requirements, firms (those employing more than 100 workers) dither on hiring new workers because firing them requires government approvals. As *Chart 4* shows, even the organised sector is increasingly employing workers without formal contracts. This, in turn, the argument goes, has constrained the growth of firms on the one hand and provided a raw deal to workers on the other.

Others have also pointed out that there are too many laws, often unnecessarily complicated, and not effectively implemented. This has laid the foundation for corruption and rent-seeking.

Essentially, if India had fewer and easier-to-follow labour laws, firms would be able to expand and contract depending on the market conditions, and the resulting formalisation — at present 90% of India's workers are part of the informal economy — would help workers as they would get better salaries and social security benefits.

Is that what is proposed by states like UP?

As a matter of fact, no. UP, for instance, has summarily suspended almost all labour laws including the Minimum Wages Act.

Radhicka Kapoor of ICRIER characterised this as "creating an enabling environment for



Migrants head home on the Mumbai-Agra Highway. Deepak Joshi



CHART 1: TYPES OF LABOUR LAWS

- CONDITIONS OF WORK**
- Factories Act, 1948
 - The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970
 - Shops and Commercial Establishments Act
- WAGES & REMUNERATION**
- The Minimum Wages Act, 1948
 - Payment of Wages Act, 1936
- SOCIAL SECURITY**
- Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952
 - Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923
 - Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- EMPLOYMENT SECURITY & INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**
- The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
 - Industrial Establishments (Standing Orders) Act, 1946

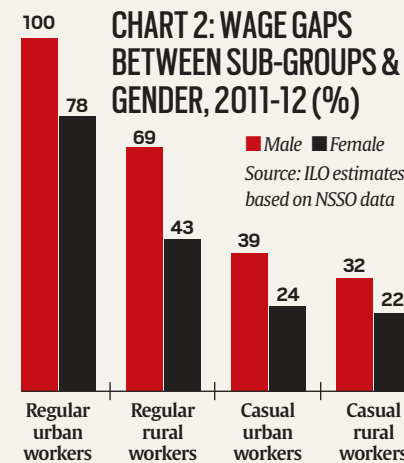


CHART 2: WAGE GAPS BETWEEN SUB-GROUPS & GENDER, 2011-12 (%)

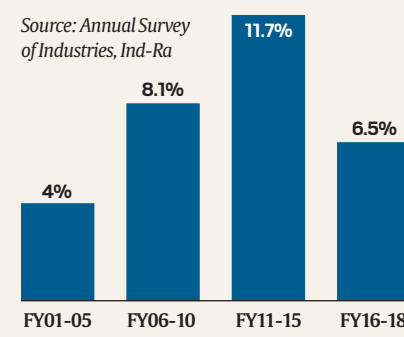
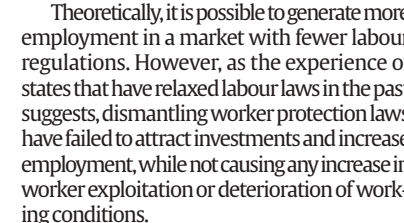


CHART 3: WAGE GROWTH IN ORGANISED MANUFACTURING SECTOR IS ALSO DECLINING

Source: Annual Survey of Industries, Ind-Ra

CHART 4: ORGANISED SECTOR INCREASINGLY PREFERS NON-CONTRACTUAL LABOUR



Source: Employment-Unemployment Surveys (2004-05, 2011-12); PLFS 2017-18

CHART 5: WHAT OTHER GOVTS ARE DOING

CANADA
As part of temporary wage top-up, \$2.1 bn for low income essential workers. \$1400 to all workers and self-employed individuals who face income loss. Govt will contribute towards employers' wage bills to reduce layoffs, pay cuts.

VIETNAM
\$70/month for 3 months for workers on unpaid leave and aid to employers for paying severance packages. Workers with no unemployment insurance or social security to get US\$40 for three months.

BANGLADESH
\$89.45 million for workers who have lost income. \$11.77 mn bonus payment package for doctors and health workers.

UK
Govt to pay 80% of usual wages of employees laid off for 4 months. Firms can claim the sick pay for coronavirus patients (current or former employees) since March 2020 under Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate scheme.

exploitation". That's because far from being a reform, which essentially means an improvement from the status quo, the removal of all labour laws will not only strip the labour of its basic rights but also drive down wages. For instance, what stops a firm from firing all existing employees and hiring them again at lower wages, she pointed out.

In that sense, from the perspective of the workers, the government has completely turned its stand from asking firms not to fire workers and pay full salaries at the start of the lockdown, to stripping workers of their bargaining power now.

Moreover, far from pushing for a greater formalisation of the workforce, this move will in one go turn the existing formal workers into informal workers as they would not get any social security.

Why will wages fall?

For one, as *Chart 3* shows, even before the Covid-19 crisis, thanks to the deceleration in the economy, wage growth had been moderating. Moreover, there was always a wide gap between formal and informal wage rates. For example, a woman working as a casual labourer in rural India earns just 20% of what a

man earns in an urban formal setting.

If all labour laws are removed, most employment will effectively turn informal and bring down the wage rate sharply. And there is no way for any worker to even seek grievance redressal, said Amarjeet Kaur, General Secretary of AITUC.

Would these changes not boost employment and spur economic growth?

Theoretically, it is possible to generate more employment in a market with fewer labour regulations. However, as the experience of states that have relaxed labour laws in the past suggests, dismantling worker protection laws have failed to attract investments and increase employment, while not causing any increase in worker exploitation or deterioration of working conditions.

Ravi Srivastava, Director, Centre for Employment Studies at the Institute of Human Development, said employment will not increase, because of several reasons.

First, there is already too much unused capacity. Firms are shaving off salaries up to 40% and making job cuts. The overall demand has fallen. Which firm will hire more employees right now, he asked.

Kaur said that if the intention was to ensure more people have jobs, then states should not have increased the shift duration from 8 hours to 12 hours. They should have allowed two shifts of 8-hours each instead, she said, so that more people can get a job.

Both Srivastava and Kapoor said this move and the resulting fall in wages will further depress the overall demand in the economy, thus hurting the recovery process. "The timing is all wrong," said Kapoor. "We are moving in the exact opposite direction," said Srivastava.

Could the government have done something else?

Srivastava said that instead of creating exploitative conditions for the workers, the government should have — as most governments have done across the world (*Chart 5*) — partnered with the industry and allocated 3% or 5% of the GDP towards sharing the wage burden and ensuring the health of the labourers "because if Covid hits them, the whole country would be sunk".

Moreover, beyond labour regulations, firms faces a lot of other hurdles like the shortage of skilled labour and the weak enforcement of contracts etc.

Why Florence Nightingale matters today, how her legacy is under cloud

KABIR FIRAQUE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE 200TH birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, founder of modern nursing, falls on Tuesday, March 12. Her relevance today cannot be understated, given the Covid-19 pandemic. And yet the events leading up to the anniversary can only be called ironic. Nightingale (1820-1910), who had considerable mathematical skills, is credited with being the first healthcare professional to use data to show that infection control improves health outcomes. Through her career she stressed a practice that is relevant as ever today — handwashing. The irony is that the pandemic has left a cloud of uncertainty over her legacy. The Florence Nightingale Museum in London, which no longer gets the visits that sustain it, has announced it is facing a battle for survival and launched fundraising schemes to save itself.

Nurse and mathematician

In 1840, Nightingale begged her parents to let her study mathematics instead of "worst work and practising quadrilles",

but her mother did not approve of this idea (Archive of Mathematical History, University of St Andrews). Eventually, they did grant her permission to be tutored in the subject. Then in 1851, she resisted her parents and studied nursing, which was not considered a respectable profession in those days.

Her signature effort came during the Crimean War (1854-56), when she answered a government call for nurses and took a posting as 'Superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment of the English General Hospitals in Turkey'. This is where she earned the name 'Lady with the Lamp', for walking around patients' beds at night, holding a lamp. This also where she did her pioneering work with statistics.

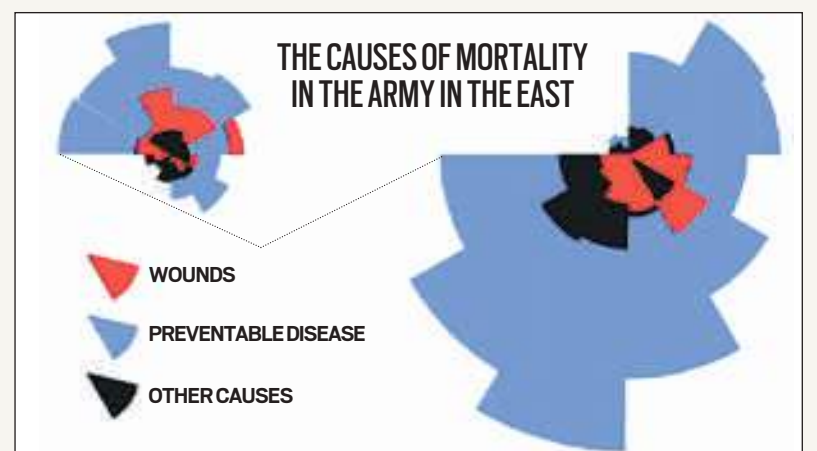
When she arrived, diseases such as cholera and typhus were rife in the hospitals. Nightingale collected data, calculated the mortality rate, and showed that an improvement of sanitary methods would reduce the number of deaths. The mortality rate dropped from 60% to 42.7% by February 1855, and to 2.2% by the spring, according to the St Andrews archive.

She used her data to create graphics, the most famous of which is a polar area dia-



Florence Nightingale's polar area diagram (right) on deaths in hospitals during Crimean war compared areas to show that deaths due to disease exceeded those due to wounds.

gram (pictured) that used areas to represent variations in death rate. The blue wedges, representing death by sickness, are far bigger than those representing wounds. In an email to *The Indian Express*, Hugh Small, author of *Florence Nightingale: Avenging Angel*, described two steps in her statistical analysis. First, it proved that there were large differences in outcomes (death



rates) between hospitals, so that deaths must have been caused by local factors in the hospital. Second, it showed that the improvement in death rate over time in one hospital following hygiene improvements showed that the local factor was hospital hygiene.

"In the context of Covid-19 the first step is important. There has been a large difference in death rates between countries, and

statistical analysis will show which country did best and what mistakes the other countries made," Small said.

Covid-19, the spoiler

The Florence Nightingale Museum, located at St Thomas's Hospital, is designed around three pavilions that tell the story of Nightingale's life. It had been planning to

celebrate big in 2020, designated the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife (May 12 is International Nurses Day every year). The 2020 bookings diary was full with exhibitions and events, Director David Green said in a statement emailed by the museum. It closed on March 17.

"Prolonged closure and decimated tourist markets for the foreseeable future now threaten the future of the museum as we rely heavily on admissions and retail income to support our small charity, which receives no core funding from government or elsewhere," Green said. On its website, the Museum has put up an appeal for donations. "If the museum at St Thomas's Hospital closes, I hope she will find a place in other museums," Small said, in reply to a question. "Perhaps these will cover more of her non-nursing work, like her statistics and her drafting of the revolutionary 1875 Public Health Act that saved so many lives."

Small has written about Nightingale's influence on the drafting of the Act, which introduced provisions covering sanitation in British slums. She built her case with her polar area diagram to show how sanitation had reduced deaths in the army.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

REFORM FOR LABOUR

Stringent labour laws need to be amended. But during COVID distress, reform will work if labour is seen as key stakeholder

THAT THE ARCHAIC labour laws in India need to be amended is beyond debate. They have protected only a tiny section of the labour force, facilitated rent-seeking, and have laid the ground for the casualisation of the labour force, the phenomenon of the missing middle in manufacturing, and the substitution of capital for labour in a capital deficient and labour abundant economy. Rationalising labour laws has been on the policy agenda for decades. Yet, labour reform hasn't taken off because the debate has been framed in terms of empowering the management while curbing the rights of labour, as is evident from industry's often-demanded concession of the power to fire workers without seeking government permission. But now, a number of states have embarked on this politically contentious course again. While efforts to reform labour laws should be encouraged, coming at a time of acute economic distress and labour insecurity, in a crisis that has exposed the lack of safety nets and the limited access of workers to healthcare, they must keep the concerns of labour at the centre.

Initiatives taken by states such as Madhya Pradesh — which aim to reduce the frequency of inspections, ease the registration and licensing process, and enhance the thresholds of when the regulatory architecture kicks in — are steps in the right direction. As is the introduction of fixed-term employment to help companies sidestep the contractor system. But, removing firms' obligation to comply with provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act constitutes blatant disregard for workers' rights. To be sure, certain parts of the Act which deal with the hiring and firing of workers have rightly been seen as impediments to flexible labour markets. Yet, instead of rationalising or doing away with some chapters, giving firms a free pass over complying with the Act strips workers of any degree of protection or redressal mechanisms. It further reduces the bargaining power of labour, their right to negotiate. While fixed-term employment is a welcome half-step, states should ensure that these contract workers receive social security benefits similar to permanent workers, as is the case under the Centre's model law. If regulations designed to support labour are suspended, it can effectively remove the distinction between permanent and contractual workers. Such moves could trigger a race to the bottom. They also raise questions over the architecture of the labour market of the future. Will this temporary reprieve to industry translate to long-term benefits? Why not increase the number of shifts as opposed to increasing the hours of work?

Any shortsighted move now will only end up increasing workers' vulnerabilities at a time of acute distress, when unemployment is likely to be at all-time highs, and when the national consensus is veering towards providing labourers safety nets. Labour reform for long has framed labour as an adversary, now may be the moment to see it through their prism — this is the only way to make enduring progress.

WHAT'S IN A NAM?

Delhi's renewed engagement is based on the bet that NAM remains a critical forum for pursuing India's global interests

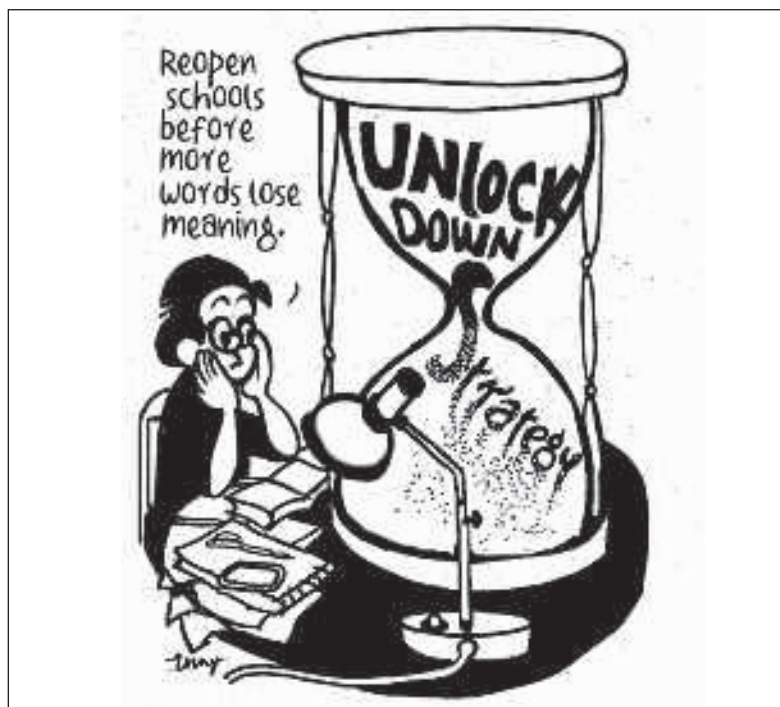
PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's video address to a summit of the non-aligned nations last week has generated criticism as well as commendation. Both sides, however, miss the recent evolution of the Indian thinking on the NAM. External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has spoken frequently about India's stakes in the so-called "Global South". He was invoking a term that refers to the entire developing world and not just members of the NAM. The minister has talked about consolidating long-standing political equities that Delhi had created in the NAM and the Global South over the last many decades. The new interest is not a throwback to seeing the NAM as an anti-Western ideological crusade. Nor is it a pretence of valuing the movement but treating it as a ritual to be performed every three years. It is based on the bet that the NAM remains a critical diplomatic forum for the pursuit of India's international interests.

But why has a routine speech by the PM on promoting global cooperation in combating the coronavirus gotten so much attention? One reason is its billing as Modi's first address ever to the NAM. After all, he had skipped the last two NAM summits, at Venezuela in 2016 and Azerbaijan in 2019. Critics of the NDA's foreign policy convinced themselves that Modi had no real attachment for the non-aligned legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru. For the traditionalists, Modi's engagement with the NAM was a welcome return to roots. For those who see the NAM as a political dinosaur, Delhi's renewed enthusiasm for it seems like a regression. But a closer look at the Modi government's foreign policy actions reveals a three-fold rationale for intensifying engagement with the NAM.

One, those who say the NAM is a relic of the Cold War must also acknowledge that a new Cold War is beginning to unfold, this time between the US and China. As the conflict between the world's two most important powers envelops all dimensions of international society, India has every reason to try and preserve some political space in between the two. Second, in the last few years, Delhi paid lip-service to the NAM but devoted a lot of diplomatic energy to forums like BRICS. Given the Russian and Chinese leadership of BRICS, Delhi inevitably began to tamely echo the international positions of Moscow and Beijing rather than represent voices of the Global South. Finally, as a nation seeking to become an independent pole in global affairs, India could do more with forums like the NAM in mobilising support on issues of interest to Delhi. An independent Indian line backed by strong support within the NAM can make a big difference to the outcomes of the impending contentions at the World Health Assembly later this month on reviewing the WHO's performance during the COVID crisis.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Food before cash



Because PMJDY cash transfers will exclude many of India's poorest, and for others, come too late

ROHINI PANDE, SIMONE SCHANER AND CHARITY TROYER MOORE

THE VAST MAJORITY of India's poor rely on daily wage labour for sustenance. With the current lockdown and its likely extension, millions of daily labourers and their families can no longer earn the money they need to survive. In this unprecedented situation, the Indian state must respond swiftly to prevent widespread acute hunger.

The state is taking this challenge seriously: India has launched its largest-ever cash transfer programme targeting women with Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts and increased food subsidies, among other efforts. Given the scale of economic distress, many have called for increases in cash transfers.

Cash is easy to carry and widely accepted. But, our analysis of nationally representative survey data, described below, suggests that these transfers will exclude many of India's poorest and, for others, come too late. The immediate need is to focus on distributing adequate food support to all the poor who need it.

The cash transfer programme will send Rs 500 per month (roughly \$7) to women with a PMJDY account for the next three months. According to official statistics, roughly 200 million Indian women (47 per cent of adult females) have a PMJDY account. Women's own reports of PMJDY account ownership, however, paint a different picture. A nationally representative survey from 2018, the Financial Inclusion Insights Survey, asked respondents whether they have a bank account and, if yes, whether it is a PMJDY account. Roughly 80 per cent of female respondents stated they have a bank account, but only 21 per cent said they have a PMJDY account. What drives the gap between government and survey numbers? Likely some combination of dormancy, account duplication in the system and the lack of knowledge among women about the type of account they hold.

To improve this, the government has planned information drives about cash transfers. Let's say these emergency programmes mean that uninformed women learn that they have PMJDY accounts, and that duplication and dormancy issues are minimal. Will targeting the 200 million PMJDY ac-

counts provide cash transfers to poor households that need it most — those that are running out of money and food due to the COVID lockdown?

Official statistics do not tell us how many of the 200 million female PMJDY account holders belong to poor households. Survey data takes us a bit further. The 2018 survey cited above uses a Grameen Foundation methodology where answers to 10 questions about a household's characteristics and asset ownership are scored to compute the likelihood that the household lives below the poverty line. The result? The survey tells us that roughly two-thirds of adult women — just over 325 million in total — are living on less than the UN-recognised poverty criterion of \$2.50 per day. In normal times, nearly nine out of 10 of these women say it would be difficult to pull together Rs 6,000 within a month to deal with an emergency.

So, even if we go by government statistics and assume that PMJDY accounts were opened only by these poor women — a generous estimate — then over one-third of poor women or 125 million women, do not have a PMJDY account. However, we know that some better-off households also have accounts. The 2018 survey numbers suggest that 75 per cent of PMJDY account holders are poor. If we instead allocate the government's count of PMJDY accounts to poor women based on these 2018 survey numbers, then roughly 175 million poor women lack PMJDY accounts. This means at least 125-175 million poor women and their households will not receive these emergency cash transfers.

A final constraint is accessing the cash: The 2018 data suggests that one in four poor women live more than five kilometres away from their nearest banking point. This, combined with current social distancing practices at banks that prolong cash distribution, suggests that some women will find it difficult to access their cash transfers as soon as they need them. In short, the current coverage of the network used for cash transfers is insufficient to stop millions of the poorest households slipping through India's social safety net. To give relief to these households, state and central governments will have to

rely on more than PMJDY cash transfers.

Access to food is the most pressing challenge during the lockdown when many individuals have suddenly found themselves unemployed and facing significant price inflation. The government's established social protection architecture has also responded by expanding access to the public distribution system (PDS). But eligibility still largely relies on the household having a ration card, and the 2018 survey data suggests that nearly 70 million poor women live in households that lack ration cards.

Given the implications of the lockdown for those living hand-to-mouth, there is simply no time to screen and document poor, uncovered households. Nor is there time to be concerned about plugging holes in the food distribution architecture — policy-makers must make do with what they have. While there is a risk that some of these resources will make it to unintended beneficiaries, this is not the time to starve the poor to fight corruption.

India has ample reserves of grain and a well-developed system for disseminating stocks to PDS shops, which are generally accessible to poor households. Some states, such as Tamil Nadu, already offer universal access to rations. Releasing additional grain would give states latitude to expand the PDS and support additional feeding efforts such as community kitchens. At the same time, states should do all they can to make sure lockdown measures do not prevent people from accessing subsidised food, while ensuring social distancing practices are in place.

The health and economic threats posed by the pandemic are unprecedented: India must capitalise upon its preparedness to address food insecurity and prioritise food distribution to protect the health and welfare of its most vulnerable citizens.

Pande is the Henry J Heinz II professor of economics and director of the Economic Growth Centre at Yale University. Schaner is assistant professor (Research) of economics at University of Southern California and Moore is director for South Asia Economics Research at Yale University's MacMillan Centre

ONE FUND, TWO SAFETY NETS

There are ways to defeat virus without adversely affecting a vulnerable economy



PREM SHANKAR JHA

A SINGAPORE STUDY has projected that if India maintains the present lockdown till May 16, it will be 97 per cent COVID-free by May 21. But while hoping for the best, the government needs to prepare for the worst. There is a catastrophic decline in production and sales within the country; an even sharper fall in the government's tax revenues, and a precipitous drop in foreign exchange inflows because of a simultaneous fall in export earnings and remittances from workers in the Gulf.

Having put all its eggs in the lockdown basket, the Narendra Modi government has run out of ideas. The only one floating around today — to free the economy in a phased manner and maintain the lockdown only in "COVID hotspots" — is so impractical that only someone who has never worked in the industry could have dreamed it up.

Every manufactured product contains dozens of components that are supplied by ancillary producers in the organised and unorganised sectors. The stocks of only one of these need to run out to bring the entire production line to a halt. With constantly shifting "hotspots", can any enterprise ever be sure that it will be able to meet a committed delivery date?

There is growing evidence, first from a study by the Sun Yatsen university in China and now from the National Environment and Engineering Research Institute in Nagpur

that, like its predecessors SARS and MERS, COVID could also turn out to be a seasonal virus that dies out in summer only to return in winter. If that proves correct, will the nation have to go through this trauma every winter?

There is only one way to ensure that it does not: Admitting that this is not an "internal" crisis born out of the malfunctioning of the market economy. So it cannot be overcome by tightening or relaxing credit, raising or lowering interest rates, or by putting moratoria on debt repayments.

Respective of its murky origins in China, COVID is a natural disaster. Its cost must, therefore, be met through emergency government spending and not, as is being attempted now, through soft loans that the recipients will have to repay.

The first step must be to create a separate emergency fund and budget for meeting the expenses that will be incurred in creating two "safety nets" — one to meet employers' fixed costs while they are not producing anything, and the other to feed and shelter workers while they are earning nothing.

Since both the central and state governments are strapped for cash, the fund will have to be created by the Ministry of Finance through the issue of treasury bills, as a one-time exception to its 1994 agreement with the Reserve Bank of India to leave the management of money supply to it in the future.

The value of the T-Bills that will need to be issued will depend upon the loss of nominal GDP per month, how long the lockdown lasts, and the rate of saving in the economy. For instance, if the present lockdown reduces the volume of transactions by two-thirds and lasts for two months, the imputed decline of nominal GDP will be 11 per cent.

At the current savings rate of 31 per cent, any money released into the economy through the issue of T-bills will create just over 3.2 times as much income before it is fully absorbed into the economy — the Keynesian multiplier. Thus, the primary injection of funds will have to be 3.4 per cent of the annual GDP — Rs 6.8 lakh crore.

However, if the volume of transactions falls only by half, the corresponding figure for the issue of T-bills will be 5.3 lakh crore. These are double, and one-and-a-half times, respectively, the Rs 3.37 lakh crore that the RBI intends to inject into the economy as soft loans through commercial banks, but which the latter are having difficulty in finding borrowers for.

This is not a daunting sum. Much of it will be recovered if the economy makes a "V" shaped recovery. But far more valuable will be the confidence it will instill in the people that they do not need to live in fear for the rest of their lives.

The writer is a senior journalist and author

MAY 11, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO



MANIPUR TENSE

THE ARMY HAS been asked to remain in readiness to assist the civil administration in any eventuality in Manipur in view of the All-Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) decision to launch an indefinite agitation on May 12 for deportation of "foreign nationals". Reinforcements from the army, the Border Security Force, the Assam Rifles and the Central Reserve Police Force have been rushed to Manipur to assist the state police in the maintenance of law and order. The governor of North-Eastern states, L P Singh, today flew to Imphal to review the situation and supervise the arrangements to meet any eventuality.

NO CHANGING 1951

THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT and the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) appeared to be on a collision course. While the state administration was busy giving finishing touches to a contingency plan to tackle the oil blockade, the AASU late last night decided to further intensify the eight-month-old agitation for detection of foreign nationals, deletion of their names from the electoral rolls and their eventual deportation. The executive committee of the AASU, which met in Gauhati last night under the chairmanship of its president, Prafulla Kumar Mohanta, resolved that there could be no compromise on the 1951 cut-off year for the detection of foreign nationals.

IRAN ELECTIONS

THE POWERFUL ISLAMIC Republican Party, said to be pressing for spy trials of the 53 American hostages, led all other political groups in early returns in the run-off elections for the Iranian Parliament, which may next month decide the hostages' fate. Teheran Radio said 52 candidates were elected in the early results. Party lists indicate that 25 of them are members of the IRP, which with its other fundamentalist Muslim allies is expected to control the new Parliament. Only three of the candidates elected were among those supported exclusively by Iran's moderate president, Bani-Sadr.

7 THE IDEAS PAGE

Plotting the revival

Exceptional situation calls for creative solutions — new set of procedures that utilise much of existing IBC framework, reformed IBC, bad banks for stressed assets in power and real estate sectors



ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN AND JOSH FELMAN

IN OUR PREVIOUS column, we argued that reviving the post-COVID economy will be exceptionally difficult because the crisis has damaged many balance sheets. India has been here before, as balance sheets were also impaired following the 2008/09 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). But this time is different: The damage is much greater, covering many more firms, in many more sectors, much more seriously. As a result, a gradualist strategy, which was pursued last time with decidedly mixed results, will not be feasible. The corporate and bank balance sheets will need to be fixed, urgently.

Why is speed so important now? First, because it is the only way to revive the economy. As revenues have dried up, most firms have been forced to let workers go and delay payments to suppliers, causing cashflow problems to cascade down the supply chain. Firms will consequently be unable to restart production unless they first get credit to pay their suppliers and workers. But impaired firms cannot get credit and impaired banks cannot provide it. So, the entire economy will be stuck unless the balance sheet problem is sorted out.

Speed will also minimise the losses from the COVID crisis. The value of bankrupt firms decays rapidly over time, and the bill for this loss will have to be borne ultimately by the government. So, speed is necessary to contain the damage to the government's financial position, which has been badly eroded by the COVID crisis. But moving quickly will be difficult. The only real mechanism that currently exists to handle stress and bankruptcy is the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) system, which has been suspended for six months.

Some commentators have therefore argued for bringing the IBC back into operation as soon as possible. But such a strategy would not be a panacea. The system is slow, with many cases taking two years or more; it could easily become overwhelmed completely if it is forced to absorb a large new set of bankrupt firms. In addition, the IBC envisages that banks maximise their recoveries by auctioning off the bankrupt firms to the highest bidder. But in a nation (and indeed a world) where all balance sheets are damaged, it is not obvious who would be able to buy these firms, or at what prices. So recovery rates from sales could be low, undermining the objective of the exercise.

Even if strong bidders could be found, there is a fundamental political, even philosophical, question of whether it is really right to take these firms away from their promoters. After all, many of these firms did nothing wrong; they got into financial difficulties because of the corona crisis. Firms stopped production for the sake of the nation's health, and at the direct request of the government. Surely, the nation should not repay them by punishing their promoters.

Such an exceptional situation calls for creative solutions. What is needed is a new set of procedures that utilise much of the existing IBC framework, but are simple, straightforward, and prompt, with a built-in expiry clause. Call them the Special Non-Adversarial Procedures (SNAP). As soon as the lockdowns are largely over, the IBC creditor committees (CoCs) could meet to assess the new wave of NPAs. The



C R Sasikumar

largest, most complex cases — say, those with debts exceeding Rs 10,000 crore — would be sent to the IBC for regular treatment. But all other cases would be eligible under SNAP. After all, the wider the set of companies that are put back on their feet quickly, the stronger the recovery will be.

Under SNAP, CoCs, over the next three months, examine delinquent firms' financial records, checking to see whether they are actually viable, undone solely because of the lockdown. If so, these firms would be designated as Lockdown Affected Enterprises (LAEs), eligible under SNAP.

Since the basis of the designation would be that the firm is fundamentally sound but for the COVID impact, an Insolvency Professional (IP) appointed by the CoC would work with existing management (who would continue to run the firm) to arrange for interim finance. Then, the IP would assess how much of a debt reduction the firm needs, and within three months would present a specific proposal to the CoC. If the CoC can reach a two-third majority in favour of the proposal, the promoter would keep the firm, while the firm would be granted a haircut and immediately released from bankruptcy. Since the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is already overloaded, it would not be involved at all in SNAP.

If the CoC cannot reach agreement within the three-month deadline, or if at any subsequent point the firm defaults on its newly reduced debt, it would be sent to the IBC for resolution. SNAP would be disbanded no later than end-December 2020.

Such a system would have a series of checks and balances, to prevent firms from securing undeserved debt reductions. Banks would need to certify that defaulters are truly LAEs; IPs would need to certify the size of the debt reduction; a large majority of creditor banks would need to agree to the IP's proposal.

With these checks and balances in place, the government should then commit to two things. First, it should provide some legal cover, ensuring that bankers would not be subject to investigations by the anti-corruption agencies, as long as they followed the LAE rules. Second, the public sector banks would be compensated for the costs of the haircuts, automatically and fully.

Besides speed, SNAP would have one further major advantage: It would reduce the adversarial nature of the IBC process, arising because promoters are forced to cede their firms. Under the proposed system, promoters would not only have incentives to cooperate; they would actually want to take the initiative, applying for LAE designation themselves, in the

Besides speed, SNAP would have one further major advantage: It would reduce the adversarial nature of the IBC process, arising because promoters are forced to cede their firms. Under the proposed system, promoters would not only have incentives to cooperate; they would actually want to take the initiative, applying for LAE designation themselves, in the hopes that they could get back to business as soon as possible. Such a system might seem difficult to envisage, but it is certainly feasible: It is a design feature under Chapter II of the American bankruptcy act.

hopes that they could get back to business as soon as possible. Such a system might seem difficult to envisage, but it is certainly feasible: It is a design feature under Chapter 11 of the American bankruptcy act.

In other words, if SNAP succeeds, some of the special procedures could be introduced permanently into the IBC framework, adding a new dimension: Not just liquidation and rehabilitation under new promoters but rehabilitation under existing management.

Then, repair of the financial system would have to go back to addressing the long-standing problems, which will have been aggravated by the crisis. Firms that were unviable even before the COVID crisis would be sent directly to the IBC, but with the IBC reformed along the lines we proposed in our December 2019 paper.

The government should issue guidelines: Focusing the CoCs on the goal of maximising value, disregarding non-commercial objectives, which are now luxuries that cannot be afforded. Directing the NCLT courts to focus on the CoCs' adherence to procedure rather than on the merits of their decisions. Increasing competition in the auction (and thereby maximising recovery values) by allowing promoters to bid for their assets, as long as they have not been declared wilful defaulters.

For the power and real estate sectors, we think that a sui generis approach via the creation of a bad bank is still the best way forward. The reasons, as we explained in the December paper, are straightforward: The viability of power assets is inextricably entwined with government policies, so the government would need to be heavily involved in any solution to electricity firms' problems. Real estate resolutions need to take into account the interests of home-owners, something that is almost impossible to do under the IBC.

In sum, we propose a three-pronged attack on today's balance sheet problems, aimed squarely at maximising recoveries from stressed assets. First, special, expedited, non-adversarial and time-bound bankruptcy procedures (SNAP) for COVID-affected firms. Second, a reformed IBC focused squarely on loss-minimisation, for firms that were unviable even before the COVID crisis. And, third, bad banks for stressed assets in the power and real estate sectors. Introducing this strategy quickly would set the stage for the economic recovery India badly needs — one that saves lives and saves livelihoods.

Subramanian is former chief economic advisor to the government of India and Felman is former IMF Resident Representative to India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"This stifling of free expression that we have been witnessing completely violates the basic principles of democracy, and the targeting of journalists simply creates confusion by depriving people of accurate and complete information."

— THE DAILY STAR

Recovery that includes reform

There is an opportunity to put India's agri-marketing and PDS system on a more efficient path



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
ASHOK GULATI

IN THESE gloomy times, looking for any good news is difficult. But, we can take some satisfaction in the fact that India seems to have contained the mortality rate from COVID-19 infections at around 3.3 per cent. This is much lower than the global average of about 7 per cent, and lower than that of countries like the US (5.8 per cent), Spain (11.6 per cent), Italy (13.7 per cent), the UK (15.4 per cent), France (14.7 per cent) and even Germany (4.1 per cent). But, India is certainly not out of the woods yet. The real test will come when the lockdown is lifted.

Next to saving lives is the necessity of having food to survive. On the food front too, India has done reasonably well. Despite initial disruptions in supply lines, India has somehow managed to feed its large population of 1.37 billion. There have been no large-scale food riots and no major flaring up of food prices for consumers. In fact, if there is any complaint, it is from the producer's side that the prices of perishables have collapsed in some parts of the country. But, from the consumer's point of view, even for perishables like milk and vegetables, supply lines were quickly restored and food is easily available in the markets at reasonable prices. On keeping supply lines for essential food alive and running, those in the government managing the food logistics surely deserve to be complimented.

States must also be lauded for having done a remarkable job of procuring the main rabi crop, wheat. A seamless procedure of issuing tokens to farmers, opening several thousand additional procurement centres for wheat, even in rice mill compounds, and putting in place the logistics to procure and move it to states that face a deficit is commendable. Within the first three weeks of the wheat procurement season (by May 7), 21.6 million metric tonnes (MMT) of wheat had been procured with Punjab leading the way at 10.4 MMT, followed by Haryana at 5.1 MMT, and Madhya Pradesh at 4.8 MMT. These three states have done a great job to ensure farmers get the minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 1,925/quintal. But Uttar Pradesh, the largest producer of wheat, and Bihar have languished. Their wheat farmers, especially from eastern UP onwards to Bihar, are getting prices that are as low as Rs 1,700/quintal to Rs 1,850/quintal. Nevertheless, since the farmers of the largest rabi crop have got reasonable money in their pockets, they are doing brisk buying of inputs for the kharif crop, from seeds to fertilisers. And since the India Meteorological Department has forecasted a normal monsoon, we hope India's food situation will remain quite comfortable in FY2020-21.

Interestingly, agriculture still engages

India's largest workforce. And it may be the only sector that registers a respectable growth this year as almost all other major sectors may plummet into negative territory. This will help absorb the shock of the coronavirus on extreme poverty and malnutrition (more on this in my next piece). Suffice it to say that we need to build on the success and resilience of agriculture. It cries out for reforms that can help farmers get a better price for their produce with consumers still paying a reasonable price for their food. This calls for large scale reforms in agri-marketing as well as in the public distribution system (PDS). While the APMC markets can keep doing their business as usual, it is time to open channels for direct buying from farmers/farmer producer organisations (FPOs). Any registered large buyer, be it processors or retail groups or exporters must be encouraged by providing them with a license, that is valid all over India. They should be exempted from any market fee and other cesses as they will not be using the services of the APMC market yards. E-NAM can flourish if grading and dispute settlement mechanisms are put in place. Private mandis with modern infrastructure need to be promoted in competition with APMCs. On the PDS front, we need to move towards cash transfers that can be withdrawn from anywhere in the country.

Here is an opportunity knocking at the prime minister's door. He can get these reforms expedited, at least in the BJP-run states. Some initiative has already been taken by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and even Uttar Pradesh is now moving along these lines. But much more can be done to put India's agri-marketing and PDS system on a more efficient path.

There is one area where India has failed miserably while handling the lockdown — addressing the problems of migrant labourers. The first mistake was imposing a lockdown from the midnight of March 24th, without any advance warning. Next day, hundreds of thousands migrant labourers thronged the railway stations and the inter-state bus terminus only to be disappointed as all means of transportation had come to a grinding halt. Thank God that it did not result in large-scale riots. The poor workers started walking on foot for thousands of kilometres. They did not receive the attention and care either from our political class or from the administration of the concerned state government and the Centre. This is a blot not only on the government's mishandling of the corona crisis, but also on every citizen of India who cares for the well-being of its people. It was so painful and shameful to watch even pregnant women walking for days together to reach their villages. They surely deserved much better treatment.

Finally, the time for immediate relief has almost run out. The recovery of the economy, whether it will be V-shape or J-shape, depends upon the package that the government announces. The mega reforms need to be built in this recovery package. This is a test of the government's wisdom and boldness. Timidity will not help.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIR



AASTHA KANT AND RIA GOLECHA

Misinformation goes viral

The infodemic on social media around Covid calls for a multi-pronged approach

TILL A few months ago, when people thought about how to make the world a better place, they thought about curing diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, through access to medicines and public health interventions. Today, a disease from a new pathogen, COVID-19, has challenged humanity's ability to intervene and manage the crisis it has caused. But, nations are fighting more than the virus. They are also up against the contagion of misinformation, which is spreading panic, anxiety and inaccurate perceptions of risk.

Given the novelty of the virus, a lack of information and its tremendous impact on health, there is a widespread appetite for information on COVID-19. With various sources (both institutional and individual) attempting to fill the information gaps, we often attend to contradictory information circulating on various social media platforms. The outbreak requires the global community to adopt a two-pronged approach to tackle both information overload and misinformation about the virus.

Misinformation is information not based on facts that is inadvertently sent to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. Its perils are far-reaching and carry serious implications. Recently, misinformation on video blogs and social media posts purportedly about special

trains being made operational for taking migrant labourers home amidst the lockdown went viral, resulting in a public health scare.

In a recent article, Michelle Williams, Dean of the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health and K Viswanath, professor at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, discuss five ways of combating misinformation: Educating oneself about COVID-19 to be able to dismiss any untrue information; pausing and verifying before sharing or forwarding by tracing the source; maintaining a healthy dose of "scepticism" by not spreading/forwarding messages that provoke fear and intolerance; accepting a level of prevailing uncertainty as researchers are still learning more about the virus and avoid filling the gap with misinformation and to stay informed by checking credible and reliable sources of information.

This evidence-based advice is particularly relevant to, India where social media use is widely prevalent. Social media is a powerful tool that has the reach to influence people's opinions and actions. At the outset of the pandemic, videos of imposters claiming to be established health experts started circulating over social media. Videos on various theories, often incorrect, on the origin of the virus, false ideas on protecting oneself by consuming a

high dose of chloroquine medication, and videos demonising a particular community for the spread of the virus have also gone viral.

Several entities are trying to counter the misinformation. The government has taken measures to curb the menace on social media by uploading information to counter myths and frequently asked questions on websites such as mygov.in and those of ICMR and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Department of Telecommunications has ordered all telecom firms to supersede ring tones with an informative audio clip on coronavirus as a pre-call announcement. To tackle misinformation, "MyGov Corona Helpdesk" and a WhatsApp chatbot have also been launched. The private sector is also supporting the government's efforts to curtail the spread of misinformation. For example, WhatsApp tightened its message forwarding limits and security settings in response to the influx of COVID-19 related misinformation circulation.

Despite intensive efforts, there is a need to do much more. Verifying genuine accounts, boosting the visibility of credible sources of information and enhancing research funding for tackling misinformation could be steps in this direction. Social media giants must implement robust in-house mechanisms to address mis-

information. Researchers must be provided access to data controlled by social media companies for analysing the effect of misinformation and generating the tools to encounter it.

In an "infodemic" crisis, we advocate a "cocktail approach" to tackle the spread of misinformation, where systemic initiatives have to be leveraged with individual efforts. At an individual level, as advised by Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health's India Research Center's dashboard on coronavirus, the "THINK twice" mantra is a guide. Ask yourself these questions before forwarding messages: Is it truthful; how does it help; does it inspire; is it necessary and is it kind.

There is also a need to mobilise a movement which offers civil society an opportunity to come together actively in community-led actions. These could include building awareness campaigns, and committing themselves towards a common goal of fighting misinformation. The need of the hour is to protect the resilience of our information systems by curbing misinformation.

Kant is project manager and Golecha, project coordinator at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health — India Research Center. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RESPECT ROBBED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Workers' choice' (IE, May 8). The lockdown had already taken away from the migrants their work, food and shelter. The controversies associated with their return home robbed them of their dignity too. Our attitude towards migrants needs to change from one of control to that of respect. The migrants had been left to fend for themselves for all these days. Their mistrust of the state is understandable.

M Abdullah Ghazali, Patna

HALF-TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A thousand words' (IE, May 7). As far as J&K is concerned, the truth told by these photojournalists is partial at best. The rest of it lies with those who die fighting terrorists leaving behind teary-eyed children, grieving widows and parents.

SK Prabhakar, Gurugram

DIFFERENT GOALS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A turning point' (IE, May 8). The editorial's definition of a turning point is in the context of ushering in peace in J&K. For the BJP, any situation which helps it in realising its political agenda is a turning point. Until these two different turning points converge for a national cause, Kashmir imbroglio cannot be wished away.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur.

IDEAS ONLINE

ONLY IN THE EXPRESS

● GOA'S FIGHT AGAINST COVID: SHOBHIT SAXENA

● CHINA'S DIGITAL TOUCH: VINEET JOHN SAMUEL

www.indianexpress.com

BHOPAL REDUX?

THIS REFERS TO the report, '10 dead in gas leak at Vizag LG factory' (IE, May 8). Another gas leak — our minds go back to the Bhopal gas leak from the Union Carbide plant in Madhya Pradesh. Lakhs of people were exposed to this gas and the leak claimed thousands of lives. Apparently, the LG Polymers India plant in Vizag has faulted on safety standards. The company had even told the state government that they did not have environmental clearance for a period of around 12 years. What action did the government take? Apparently, none. And the result is there for all to see.

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

PANDEMIC WATCH



Police at a protest in Berlin. AP/PTI

GERMANY
Protests over restrictions, dozens arrested

Berlin: Police in Germany said dozens of people were detained at protests against the pandemic restrictions after some rallies turned violent on Saturday. Berlin police said 86 people were detained after bottles were thrown at officers during a demonstration. Despite the gradual easing of Germany's pandemic restrictions in recent weeks, protests against them have swelled, bringing together far-right groups, C-list celebrities and people who believe the virus is harmless or part of a global conspiracy. AP

MALAYSIA
Restrictions extended for 4 weeks

Kuala Lumpur: Movement restrictions in Malaysia are to be extended by four weeks until June 9 despite a sharp drop in infections in the country. Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said restrictions due to end on Tuesday must continue to prevent infections from flaring up in the absence of a vaccine. The government had already let most businesses reopen with strict conditions from May 4 to help revive its economy. But mass gatherings remain barred with schools, cinemas and worship houses staying shut, while group sports are prohibited and interstate travel banned. AP

SINGAPORE
Virus cases rise to 23,336, 20 deaths

Singapore: Singapore on Sunday reported 876 new coronavirus cases, mostly among foreign workers residing in dormitories, taking the total infections to 23,336 with 20 deaths so far, the health ministry said. Vast majority of the new cases are work permit holders residing in foreign worker dormitories while only three of the infected cases are Singapore citizens or permanent residents (foreigners). Singapore is more than a month into its "circuit breaker" period to curb the spread of the virus. PTI

China refutes 24 'lies' by US

YEW LUN TIAN
BEIJING, MAY 10

CHINA HAS issued a lengthy rebuttal of what it said were 24 "preposterous allegations" by some leading US politicians over its handling of the new coronavirus outbreak.

The Chinese foreign ministry has dedicated most of its press briefings over the past week to rejecting accusations by US politicians, especially Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, that China had withheld information about the new coronavirus and that it had originated in a laboratory in the city of Wuhan.

A 30-page, 11,000-word article posted on the ministry website on Saturday night repeated and expanded on the refutations made during the press briefings, and began by invoking former US president Abraham Lincoln.

"As Lincoln said, you can fool some of the people all the time and fool all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time," it said.

The article also cited media reports that said Americans had been infected with the virus before the first case was confirmed in Wuhan. There is no evidence to suggest that is the case.

Keen to quash US suggestions that the virus was deliberately created or somehow leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the article said that all evidence shows the virus is not man-made and that the institute is not capable of synthesising a new coronavirus.

The article also provided a timeline of how China had provided information to the international community in a

W.H.O. COUNTERS REPORT OF XI, TEDROS PHONE CALL

New Delhi: The World Health Organization on Sunday denied a report by *Der Spiegel* claiming Chinese President Xi Jinping, during a phone call in January, had asked the agency's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to "delay a global warning" regarding the coronavirus outbreak.

In a statement, WHO said, "Dr Tedros and President Xi did not speak on 21 January and they have never spoken by telephone. Such inaccurate reports distract and detract from WHO's and the world's efforts to end the COVID-19 pandemic." ENS

"timely", "open and transparent" manner to rebuke US suggestions that it had been slow to sound the alarm.

Despite China's repeated assurances, concerns about the timeliness of its information have persisted in some quarters.

A report by *Der Spiegel* magazine last Friday cited Germany's BND spy agency as saying that China's initial attempt to hold back information had cost the world four to six weeks that could have been used to fight the virus.

The article rejected Western criticism of Beijing's handling of the case of Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old doctor who had tried to raise the alarm over the outbreak of the new virus in Wuhan. His death from COVID-19 prompted an outpouring of rage and grief across China. REUTERS



People at Shanghai's Disney Resort on Sunday, a day before the park reopens. Reuters

Cases spike in China, S Korea

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, MAY 10

CHINA AND South Korea reported new spikes Sunday in coronavirus cases, setting off fresh concerns in countries where outbreaks had been in dramatic decline, and new protests against pandemic restrictions erupted in Germany despite the easing of many lockdowns in Europe.

Worldwide, health officials are anxiously watching to see just how much infection rates rise in a second wave as nations and states emerge from varying degrees of lockdown.

China reported 14 new cases

on Sunday, its first double-digit rise in 10 days. Eleven of 12 domestic infections were in the northeastern province of Jilin, which prompted authorities to raise the threat level in one of its counties, Shulan, to high risk, just days after downgrading all regions to low risk.

Authorities said the Shulan outbreak originated with a 45-year-old woman who had no recent travel or exposure history but spread it to her husband, her three sisters and other family members. Train services in the county were being suspended.

"Epidemic control and prevention is a serious and complicated matter, and local authorities should never be overly

optimistic, war-weary or off-guard," said the Jilin Communist Party secretary, Bayin Chaolu. Jilin also shares a border with North Korea, which insists it has no virus cases, much to the disbelief of international health authorities.

South Korea reported 34 more cases as new infections linked to nightclub-goers threatened the country's hard-won gains against the virus. It was the first time that South Korea's daily infections were above 30 in about a month. President Moon Jae-in said citizens must neither panic nor let down their guard, but warned that "the damage to our economy is indeed colossal as well"

As Trump pulls back from virus, US Congress races to fill void

LISA MASCARO
WASHINGTON, MAY 10

AS US President Donald Trump tries to move on from the coronavirus, the Congress is rushing to fill the void and prepare the country for the long fight ahead.

Jolted by the lack of comprehensive federal planning as states begin to reopen, lawmakers of both the Republican and Democrat parties, from the senior-most senators to the newest House member, are jumping in to develop policies and unleash resources to prevent a second wave.

In the House and Senate, lawmakers are pushing sweeping proposals for a national virus testing strategy. One seasoned Republican wants a war-like public health fund. A New Jersey freshman launched neighboring colleagues on a regional bipartisan task force to help guide Northeastern states back to work.

The legislative branch is stepping up in the absence of a consistent, convincing White House strategy, in much the way governors have been forced to go it alone during the nation's pandemic response.

Unlike the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, when President George W Bush called on Congress to create a Department of Homeland Security, or during the Great Depression, when President Franklin D Roosevelt led the nation to the New Deal, Trump is not seeking a legacy-defining accomplishment in the national crisis.

Instead, Trump has turned the life-and-death decision-making away from the federal government and onto the states for the next phase of the response. The White House coronavirus task force has abandoned daily briefings.

"When the nation is in the middle of the major, historic crisis, the norm is that both branches focus on the issue," said Julian E Zelizer, a Princeton professor of history and public policy. "It's not normal for the president to just move on."

The administration issued guidelines for reopening state and local economies, but shelved a more detailed 17-page report from the experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

New projections say the death toll could essentially double this summer, from 70,000 as of Friday to 134,000 by early August, as states loosen stay-home restrictions, according to a model from the University of Washington.

Andy Slavitt, a former federal



US President Donald Trump

'CHAOTIC DISASTER': OBAMA ON TRUMP HANDLING PANDEMIC

Washington: Former US President Barack Obama harshly criticised President Donald Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic as an "absolute chaotic disaster" during a conversation with ex-members of his administration, according to a recording obtained by *Yahoo News*.

Obama's comments came during a Friday call with 3,000 members of the Obama Alumni Association, people who served in his administration. Obama urged his supporters to back his former vice president, Joe Biden, who is trying to unseat Trump in the November 3 election.

"It would have been bad even with the best of governments. It has been an absolute chaotic disaster when that mindset - of 'what's in it for me' and 'to heck with everybody else' - when that mindset is operationalised in our government," he said.

Trump has consistently defended and boasted of his response to the virus. AP

health official, told the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Friday, "There's never been a greater time when Americans need the support of Congress and their state and local leaders."

While many of the proposals coming from Congress are bipartisan, pushback is strong from some corners.

Conservative Republicans in particular resist a robust federal government intervention, preferring a state-by-state approach. Much the way governors have formed compacts with neighbouring states, lawmakers often agree there's no one-size-fits-all approach despite the need for robust federal role to ensure equitable outcomes for Americans. AP

As lockdown easing starts, Johnson tells UK to 'Stay Alert'

KYLIE MACLELLAN
LONDON, MAY 10

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson urged people on Sunday to "stay alert" to coronavirus risks, as he prepared to outline plans for gradually easing lockdown measures that have shuttered much of the economy for nearly seven weeks.

The government's decision to replace its flagship "stay at home" slogan drew criticism from opposition parties who argued that "stay alert" is too ambiguous.

"Everyone has a role to play in helping to control the virus by staying alert and following the rules. This is how we can continue to save lives as we start to recover from coronavirus," Johnson tweeted.

Johnson was due to make a televised address late on Sunday. Housing minister Robert Jenrick told *BBC TV* Johnson would not announce a "grand reopening" but would set out a roadmap for the "weeks and months ahead".

Johnson is scheduled to detail a system ranging from "green" at level 1 to "red" at level 5 that will allow the government to flag coronavirus risks in different parts of England and to increase restrictions where necessary. The government wants the

ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE

1 The French health ministry said 70 people died of COVID-19 on Sunday, as the country prepared to emerge from lockdown on Monday.

2 Deaths from the virus in Italy rose by 165 on Sunday, against 194 the day before, as the daily tally of new cases fell to 802 from 1,083 on Saturday, authorities said.

3 Spain's health minister reported 143 new fatalities from the virus on Sunday, the lowest daily increase since March 19. The total death toll for Spain is 26,621 since the start of the outbreak.

United Kingdom's other constituent nations - Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - to follow the same steps but they have the power to diverge in their measures. REUTERS



75 YEARS OF VICTORY OVER NAZIS

■ Fireworks explode over Moscow State University during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Nazi defeat in World War II on Saturday.

■ Russia marked Victory Day, the anniversary of the victory over Germany in the war, in a ceremony shorn of its usual military parade and pomp due to coronavirus.

■ Figures released Sunday recorded 11,012 new cases in Russia, the highest one-day tally, for a total of nearly 210,000 cases and 1,915 reported deaths. AP/PTI

Pak to use technology to identify corona hotspots, cases cross 30,000

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MAY 10

PAKISTAN ON Sunday said it will use technology to identify coronavirus hotspots to enforce a "smart lockdown" as the country reported a record number of 2,870 coronavirus cases in a single day, taking the total number of infections to over 30,330 amid easing

of the month-long lockdown. Addressing a media briefing, Planning Minister Asad Umar said the restrictions were relaxed as the ongoing lockdown was having a devastating effect on the low-income class, but warned that it "does not mean that all preventive measures will be lifted".

He said technology will be used to collect data to identify

COVID-19 hotspots and impose "smart lockdown".

Umar said data collection is on and all hospitals across the country would be asked to provide data to create a web portal so that real time information of the coronavirus could be consolidated in one place.

Urging people to continue taking preventive measures as it was "more important now than

ever", Umar said it was the responsibility of every citizen to follow precautions to help contain the virus spread.

Despite a surge in the number of infections, the first phase of the easing of the lockdown in Pakistan began on Saturday. The government announced removing restrictions by allowing more businesses to open and operate from dawn to 5pm.

However, doctors have warned against easing restrictions. The Representative of the Pakistan Medical Association demanded the government observe World Health Organization protocols and implement a strict lockdown.

Twenty-one deaths due to coronavirus have been reported in the last 24 hours, taking the number of fatalities to 639. PTI

HOSTILITY TOWARD FOREIGNERS IS GROWING LOUDER. SO ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO REPLACE MIGRANTS WITH CITIZENS

Virus forces Gulf states to reckon with migrant labour

THE NEW YORK TIMES
BEIRUT, MAY 10

THE KUWAITI talk show panelists were holding forth on an issue that the coronavirus has pushed to the forefront of national debate: whether their tiny, oil-rich monarchy should rely as heavily as it does on foreign labourers, who have suffered most of the country's infections and borne much of the cost of its lockdown.

In the Middle East's wealthiest societies, the machinery of daily life depends on migrant labourers from Asia, Africa and poorer Arab countries - millions of "tea boys", housemaids, doctors, construction workers, deliverymen, chefs, garbage men,

guards, hairdressers, hoteliers and more, who often outnumber the native population.

They support families back home by doing the jobs citizens cannot or will not take. But as oil revenues plummet, migrant labour camps become coronavirus hot spots and citizens demand that their governments protect them first, the pandemic has prompted a reckoning with the status quo.

Hostility toward foreigners is growing louder. So are questions about how to replace migrants with citizens and calls for reforming the way foreign labour is imported and treated.

The two things that Gulf countries depend on the most, oil prices and foreign workers, these two have been hard hit

with the coronavirus," said Eman Alhusein, a fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "The coronavirus has unleashed all these issues that have been put on the back burner for a long time."

For many of the Arab states' foreign workers, who sent more than \$124 billion to their home countries in 2017, the coronavirus's fallout is bleakly straightforward.

Tens of thousands have lost their jobs during government-ordered lockdowns, leaving them to ration dwindling food supplies while their families struggle without their remittances. Others have fallen sick as the coronavirus tears through their meager, crowded dormitory-style housing.



Migrant workers at a construction site in Qatar. Reuters file

"There are no people, no work," said Muhammad, 39, a taxi driver in Dubai who has had to stop sending money to his

family in Dhaka, Bangladesh. "In three months, if it's the same as this, I'll go home."

Globally, the World Bank esti-

mates that remittances will fall by about a fifth this year, from \$714 billion last year to \$572 billion.

With oil prices slashed and tourism gone, host countries in the Gulf, which account for more than a tenth of the world's migrants, may have to revise their relationship with foreign labour.

"Before, there was enough to go around," said Karen Young, a Gulf specialist at the American Enterprise Institute in the US. "But now states are working with half of what they had three months ago, and the cuts are coming. There'll be more discussion about what the state provides to citizens and noncitizens."

Even fantastically rich Qatar and the UAE, where legions of foreigners serve tiny local populations and build government

megadreams like Qatar's World Cup stadiums, are likely to shed hospitality and construction workers as tourism evaporates and development slows.

Analysts said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's lofty plans for diversifying Saudi Arabia's economy with tourism and flashy concerts will shrink, with the Saudi finance minister warning last week of "painful" spending cuts.

Roughly two-thirds of all Gulf nationals work for their governments, despite state efforts to push them into the private sector by offering companies perks to hire locally and charging expatriates extra taxes.

Saudis already check in hotel guests, sell perfume at Riyadh malls and welcome restaurant

diners, occupations foreigners dominated a few years ago. There and in Oman, local taxi drivers are now common. The coronavirus could accelerate those trends.

Still, analysts doubted locals would take low-paid, low-status work such as housecleaning.

"Saudis won't want to take jobs they perceive as being below their qualifications," said Yasmine Farouk, a Middle East fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noting that many businesses still prefer to hire foreigners, seeing them as cheaper and more productive, with fewer labour rights.

Whatever its long-term impact, the coronavirus has spotlighted the lopsided way their societies work.

9 ECONOMY

GOVT PUSHES DIGITISATION, BUT CASH USAGE FOR TRANSACTIONS STILL RISING

Currency with public continues to swell in line with lockdown extension

SANDEEP SINGH & GEORGE MATHEW
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, MAY 10

CURRENCY IN the hand of the public continued its surge for the fortnight ended April 24 as it rose by Rs 33,524 crore to hit a new high of Rs 24.28 lakh crore. With this, currency with the public — since the announcement of the lockdown — has gone up by Rs 82,972 crore. The rise in currency with the public comes despite appeals by the government and the RBI to use digital payment tools amidst the coronavirus outbreak.

With this, currency with the public has now increased by 15.9 per cent to Rs 3.32 lakh crore from April 2019. Simultaneously, banks have parked close to Rs 8.5 lakh crore with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) at 3.75 per cent (reverse repo rate) and bank credit to

CURRENCY WITH PUBLIC SINCE DEC 2019

Apr 24, '20	24,24,823
Apr 10, '20	23,91,299
Mar 27, '20	23,41,851
Mar 13, '20	23,08,312
Feb 28, '20	22,55,771
Feb 14, '20	22,58,272
Jan 31, '20	22,18,927
Jan 17, '20	22,15,624
Jan 3, '20	21,79,491
Dec 20, '19	21,79,500

All figures in ₹ crore

the commercial sector declined by Rs 1,19,597 crore to Rs 109.19 lakh crore in March and April, indicating the unwillingness of banks to lend.

In fact, the currency in circulation has been rising sharply since

the beginning of March when the virus started spreading across the United States and Europe, and fresh cases were also reported in India. RBI data shows that since February 28, currency with the public has jumped by Rs 1.69 lakh crore — or an average fortnightly increase of Rs 42,263 crore.

By comparison, in the 12-month period between March 1, 2019 and February 28, 2020, currency with the public had risen by Rs 2.28 lakh crore, or an average fortnightly increase of Rs 8,435 crore. Bankers say that while the announcement of the lockdown pushed the nation towards a more cash-driven economy, subsequent extensions to the lockdown and fresh rise in coronavirus cases will increase people's reliance on cash and this may further go up.

A banking insider said that people have been withdrawing more and more cash and as the

dependency on neighbourhood grocery stores has gone up, so has the requirement of cash. He, however, added that the pace of increase may go down. "As e-commerce platforms too have been allowed to deliver essential items, the pace of increase in currency with public will go down over the coming weeks," he said.

In fact, the latest data shows a decline in the pace. While in the fortnight ended April 10, currency with the public rose by Rs 49,448 crore, in the fortnight ended April 24, it rose by Rs 33,524 crore.

According to the RBI, currency with the public is arrived at after deducting cash with banks from total currency in circulation. Currency in circulation refers to the cash or currency within a country that is physically used to conduct transactions between consumers and businesses.

According to banking experts,

the rise in cash with the public indicates more usage of cash for transactional purposes. This may have also prompted more withdrawals at ATMs to support the same level of currency demand.

The RBI has been pushing for digital payments since the announcement of the lockdown, with RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das even coming on social media and TV channels with the campaign of "Pay digital, stay safe".

It is important to note that just before the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes were withdrawn from the system in November 2016, currency with the public stood at Rs 17.9 lakh crore. Cash in the system has been steadily rising even though the government and the Reserve Bank have been pushing for a "less cash society", digitisation of payments and slapped restrictions on the use of cash on various transactions.

TOTAL HOLDINGS OF THE YELLOW METAL AT 653.01 TONNES

RBI gold reserves up 40.4 tonnes in 2019-20, more than half of total holdings held overseas

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) bought 40.45 tonnes of gold in financial year 2019-20, taking its total holdings of the yellow metal to 653.01 tonnes. The RBI's total gold reserves were 612.56 tonnes in the preceding fiscal ended March 2019. With the addition of more stocks, the value of gold reserves rose to \$30.57 billion (around Rs 2,32,000 crore) by March 2020 from \$23.07 billion in March 2019.

As much as 360.71 tonnes of gold was held overseas in safe custody with the Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements, while the remaining gold is held domestically, the RBI said in its 'Report on Management of Foreign Exchange Reserves'. In value terms (USD), the share of gold in the total foreign exchange reserves rose from about 5.59 per cent as of March 2019 to about 6.40 per cent by March 2020.

Gains or losses on valuation of foreign currency assets and gold due to movements in the exchange rates and/or price of gold are booked under a balance sheet head named the Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA). The balances in CGRA provide a buffer against exchange rate/gold price fluctuations.

During the half-year period under review, reserves followed an increasing trend from \$445.11 billion as of October 2019 to \$481.26 billion by February 2020.

Thereafter, reserves decreased to \$477.81 billion as of March 2020, the RBI report said.

Out of the reserves, \$263.4 billion is invested in securities abroad and \$147.5 billion is deposited in other central banks. The RBI has the mandate to invest up to \$5 billion in bonds issued by the India Infrastructure Finance Company (IIFCL) Ltd. As of March 2020, the amount invested in such bonds stood at \$1.86 billion.

EXPLAINED

Balances in CGRA a buffer against price fluctuations

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According to the World Gold

Council (WGC), central banks of UAE (7 tonnes), India (6.8 tonnes), Kazakhstan (2.8 tonnes) and Uzbekistan (2.2 tonnes) increased their official gold reserves in the January-March period. While central bankers around the globe were focused on the measures needed to contain the economic impact of COVID-19, the need for robust, liquid and diversified international reserves was apparent. And positive net purchases of gold confirm that it remains an important component of those reserves, WGC said.

Turkey added 72.7 tonnes in the March quarter, boosting gold reserves to 485.2 tonnes, 29 per cent of its total reserves. It was by far the largest buyer during the quarter, having also been the leading buyer in 2019, accounting for 50 per cent of the last quarter's global total.

The Central Bank of Russia — the largest gold buyer since the end of 2005, the start of its 14-year buying streak — announced that it would suspend its gold buying programme from April 1. Following four consecutive years of 200-tonnes plus net purchases, buying slowed to 158 tonnes in 2019 after its central bank announced it would purchase domestic production at a discount.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka was the largest seller in the last quarter with reserves declining by 12.9 tonnes to 6.7 tonnes. Germany (2.3 tonnes) and Tajikistan (2.1 tonnes) were the other notable sellers.

India's fuel consumption dips 46% in Apr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

INDIA'S FUEL consumption fell almost 46 per cent in April as all petroleum products, except LPG (liquefied petroleum gas), saw massive demand erosion following the nationwide lockdown that halted economic activity and travel.

The demand, which showed signs of pick up in the last 10 days of April after the government allowed resumption of economic activity beyond the urban municipal limit, is likely to rebound in second half of May as more areas are opened.

India's fuel consumption fell 45.8 per cent to 9.929 million tonnes in April, down from 18.32 million tonnes fuel consumed in the same month a year back, according to official data released by the Petroleum Ministry.

As OMCs pass on crude price slide, jet fuel down but no pass-through for auto fuels

KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE PRICE of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) has fallen by about 65 per cent to Rs 22.54 per litre in the Capital since the beginning of the year, as the price of crude oil has crashed. The price of ATF, used by the aviation industry, has kept face with the collapse in international crude prices — with the price of Brent crude having fallen by 55.1 per cent since January — even as the price of petrol in the Capital has fallen by only 5 per cent and that of diesel has risen by 2.1 per cent due to higher levies by the central and state governments.

Experts say that the demand for ATF has collapsed as it is only being used for cargo transport, relief and rescue work, as well as emergency services.

Domestic flights have been suspended since March 25, after

TREND OF FUEL PRICES SINCE JAN

Date	Crude (in US\$)	Crude/litre* (in ₹)	ATF/litre	Petrol/litre in Delhi	Diesel/litre
Jan 1	66.00	31.36	64.32	75.14	67.96
Feb 1	58.16	27.64	63.45	73.19	63.2
Mar 1	50.52	24.01	56.86	71.71	64.3
April 1	24.74	11.76	35.49	69.59	62.29
May 8	29.64	14.08	22.54	71.26	69.39

*Based on \$1=₹75.55 and Barrel = 159 litres

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a lockdown to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are expected to resume operations at 25-30 per cent of their pre-lockdown capacity by mid-May. National carrier Air India is currently conducting operations to repatriate Indians stranded in 16 countries.

An official at a leading oil marketing company (OMC), who did

not wish to be named, said that the demand for ATF had fallen by about 90-95 per cent compared to demand levels before the global COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown.

According to Abhijit Bora, senior analyst at brokerage firm Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the price of ATF was linked with Asian benchmark prices for the fuel.

"We are in an unprecedented

situation where OMCs are making losses and lower margins in the refining business. With the demand for ATF going away, these companies may be making negative margins," said Bora, adding that OMCs were using higher marketing margins on petrol and diesel to make up for refining losses as there was still 30-40 per cent of pre-lockdown demand for petrol and diesel.

The central and state governments have also increased levies on both diesel and petrol to boost revenues and make up for the revenue lost due to the nationwide lockdown.

The Centre has hiked excise duty on petrol by Rs 13 per litre and on diesel by Rs 16 per litre, while a number of state governments have hiked the value added tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel, with Delhi, Haryana and Tamil Nadu hiking the VAT on automotive fuels this month.

BRIEFLY

RIL sets May 14 as record date for rights issue

New Delhi: Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) has fixed May 14 as the record date for determining shareholders eligible to apply for India's biggest rights issue of Rs 53,125 crore. RIL had on April 30 announced fund raising of Rs 53,125 crore by way of a 1:15 rights issue, the first such issue by it in nearly 30 years.

'FM to meet PSU bank chiefs today'

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will hold a review meeting with CEOs of public sector banks (PSBs) on Monday to discuss issues such as credit uptake, as part of efforts to prop up the economy hit by COVID-19. The meeting, to be held via video-conferencing, will also take stock of interest rate transmission to borrowers by banks and progress on moratorium on loan repayments, sources said. PTI

Tesla Inc sues California county

New York: Tesla Inc has sued local authorities in California as it pushed to re-open its factory there and CEO Elon Musk threatened to move Tesla's headquarters and future programs to Texas or Nevada. Musk has been pushing to re-open Tesla's Fremont, California, factory after Alameda County's health department said Tesla must not reopen as local lockdown measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus remain in effect. REUTERS

401 infra projects show cost overruns of ₹4.06 lakh crore

As many as 401 infrastructure projects have been hit by cost overruns of more than ₹4.06 lakh crore owing to delays and other reasons, as per the MoSPI's report for December 2019



₹20,65,739 cr:
Total original cost of implementation of the 1701 projects

₹24,71,954.78 cr:
Anticipated cost of implementation of all projects

₹4,06,215.78 cr:
Overall cost overruns, i.e. 19.66 per cent of original cost

1,701:
Projects worth ₹150 crore and above monitored by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

583:
NUMBER OF PROJECTS THAT REPORTED TIME ESCALATION, OF WHICH:
183: delayed by 1 to 12 months
129: delayed by 13 to 24 months
146: delayed by 25 to 60 months
125: delayed by 61 months and above
39.40 months: Average time overrun of all projects

₹10,89,178.11 CR:
EXPENDITURE INCURRED ON ALL PROJECTS TILL

401:
Projects with cost overruns whose neither tentative gestation period nor year of commissioning is reported

DECEMBER 2019, 44.06 PER CENT OF ANTICIPATED COST

REASONS FOR TIME OVERRUNS, AS REPORTED BY IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES:

- Delays in land acquisition, forest clearance and supply of equipment
- Fund constraints
- Geological surprises
- Geo-mining conditions
- Slow progress in civil works
- Shortage of labour

Source: MoSPI/PTI

With revenues likely to plunge amid lockdown, states may need succour

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

GIVEN THE Union government's gross tax revenues are likely to fall way short of the budgeted Rs 24.23 lakh crore, states will be badly hit as they receive far smaller devolutions.

Already robbed of revenues from local levies from auto fuels, alcohol, real estate transactions and entertainment during the lockdown, finances of states are in a precarious position. Their own tax revenues contribute roughly 40 per cent to their revenue receipts.

The combined revenues — states and Centre — budgeted at just over Rs 50 lakh crore for 2020-21, could fall short by about Rs 7-8 lakh crore, economists say.

The big concern is that the Centre's sharp jump in net bor-

The big concern is that the Centre's sharp jump in net borrowings in 2020-21 will pressure the bond markets, making it even more costly for states to mop up funds

rowings in 2020-21 will pressure the bond markets, making it even more costly for states to mop up funds; yields which slipped below 6 per cent on Friday are expected to climb back to over 6 per cent soon. States are estimated to borrow a net Rs 4.3 lakh crore in the current year; a clutch of 19 states managed to pick up Rs 32,560 crore from the bond market a little less than the Rs 37,500 they were hoping to, at an auction in

early April. As many as nine states raised 10-year bonds at yields between 7.80 per cent and 8 per cent on April 7, a spread of 140-160 basis points over the benchmark yield. The spreads were wider than the 115-bps at the March 30 auctions. Kerala coughed up 8.96 per cent for 15-year money.

Reserve Bank of India's indicative Q1FY21 quota for states of Rs 1.27 lakh crore is about 56 per cent more than last year's quota. However, they might need to raise a lot more with revenues in April at a fraction of the usual levels. Otherwise, expenditure, even on essentials will need to be slashed.

In November last, a clutch of state finance ministers had alleged the Centre was holding back Rs 40,000-45,000 crore of GST compensation. States own tax revenues, for 2020-21, are estimated at Rs 15 lakh crore. FE

'White House in talks with US Congress for more coronavirus stimulus, but with conditions'

DAVID MORGAN & SUSAN HEAVEY
WASHINGTON, MAY 10

THE WHITE House has started informal talks with Republicans and Democrats in Congress about next steps on coronavirus relief legislation, officials said on Sunday, but stressed that any new federal money would come with conditions.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told Fox News Sunday he was having discussions with lawmakers from both parties to understand their concerns about state budgets. But he said the White House is in no hurry to pass another fiscal relief bill.

"Let's take the next few weeks," Mnuchin said.

Since early March, Congress has passed bills allocating \$3 trillion to combat the coronavirus pandemic, including taxpayer money for individuals and com-



While White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow (left) said the talks are informal at this stage, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin (right) said he was having discussions with lawmakers to understand their concerns. Reuters file

panies to blunt an economic impact that includes an unemployment rate to 14.7 per cent in April.

"We just want to make sure that before we jump back in and spend another few trillion of taxpayers' money that we do it carefully," Mnuchin said. "We've been

very clear that we're not going to do things just to bail out states that were poorly managed."

US President Donald Trump has previously threatened to withhold more coronavirus relief funds from states that limit cooperation with federal immigration

enforcement, and advisers said last week that the White House would not consider new stimulus legislation in May.

Democrats, who control the House, are pushing for a vote as soon as this week on another massive relief bill that would include more money for state and local governments, coronavirus testing and the US Postal Service.

"It's not that we're not talking. We are. It's just informal at this stage," White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told ABC's 'This Week' programme Sunday, referring to discussions between the White House and Congress.

"We're collecting ideas for next steps, which will undoubtedly be data-driven," he said. Kudlow said he took part in a Friday conference call with House lawmakers from both parties, and that he planned to do the same on Monday with members of the Senate. REUTERS

Players and everyone else need to live with this virus; probably they have to get used to it that there is a virus and that it will be around. Players might end up catching it, and you got to live with it.

GAUTAM GAMBHIR
FORMER INDIA OPENER

Road ahead: Barter & free agents

Clubs likely to look at alternatives to big-money transfers when the window opens

SHASHANK NAIR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

'THE 100M signings are finished', 'The uncertain future of the loaned', 'Revolucion en el futbol' – a month back, three Spanish newspapers signalled what most of the world was preparing to face – the end of football and the economics of it as we know it. A global pandemic that forced the game to come to a standstill has now resulted in European clubs realising that their way of life could be a relic of the past.

Barcelona's squad has agreed to a 70 percent wage reduction till the return of football. Clubs in Germany that have qualified for the Champions League – Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, RB Leipzig and Bayer Leverkusen – have pledged to help out stricken German clubs.

Players in the lower leagues of England are torn between taking a pay cut and demanding their salaries remain the same, only for the club to shut shop. As the effects of the pandemic stretch, so do the delicate finances that thread together the world of football in so many different ways.

Free agency

Most clubs in Europe will now see free agency as the best possible means of getting mid-to-top tier talent. With no large transfer fee involved, signing free agents would be all about agreeing wages, a signing-on bonus and other agent-related fees.

Cutting the transfer fee option out of the equation ends up saving the purchasing club some of their transfer budget. This would mean that players have the option to be the kings of their own future. Clubs that want to extend their contracts will have to pay top dollar and clubs that can't afford to do so, will see their best players leave on a free.

Tottenham Hotspur player Jan Vertonghen is currently set to be a free agent and has found that the coronavirus has had a positive impact on his market.

"The lockdown has brought a lot of uncertainty to the transfer market and, strangely enough, it has only had a positive



Barcelona's squad has agreed to a 70% wage reduction till the return of football.

effect on interest," Vertonghen told Belgian TV channel Play Sports.

He then added, "Of course I'm free and many clubs don't have the money to do transfers. Free players like me are even more coveted in the coronavirus crisis. But I will wait a little longer, because I really want to sign for the right club, that could also be Tottenham again... Since January, a number of clubs have come forward with serious proposals. Spain and Italy are certainly options."

Former Arsenal chief scout Steve Rowley has said that clubs will have to be more careful when it comes to scouting. "One of my managers used to tell me, 'Scout creatively', and that will be a buzz phrase for the foreseeable future. With travel so restricted, and with few games taking place, video analysis is going to be fundamental. It will not come as a shock to clubs in the top two divisions, because most of them are already very advanced on

that side of things, but it will bring difficulties," Rowley told the *Guardian*.

Player exchange deals

Is it likely to see Barcelona attempt a multiple player swap with Paris Saint Germain in order to get Neymar back to Camp Nou? In a marketplace that has lesser and lesser sums of money but value in the form of players and their long-term contracts, it wouldn't be out of the ordinary for clubs to rely on exchanging players without any money involved in the transaction.

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu recently said in an interview, "We predict that this transfer market will have a lot less money because of the (coronavirus) pandemic, but there will still be a lot of moves and I predict player exchange deals."

Despite Bartomeu's insistence that the summer transfer window will be dominated by player exchange deals, the same is a tough proposition owing to the fact that two clubs rarely agree on the valuation of a player and

therefore getting an equilibrium in such a deal mostly derails it.

Youth academies

One of the major changes clubs will have to make is to look within. A KPMG Football Benchmark estimate suggests that developing young players and selling them for a premium in the future might be the best case option for some clubs once football resumes.

The KPMG report states that, "While players nurtured within the clubs' youth system may be lacking in experience, they can offer a valuable alternative during such unique circumstances and, after having gained playing experience, some could also be sold at premium prices. In this regard, it is important to highlight that young footballers might also suffer from the current uncertainty; some still don't have a professional contract, and might not even know whether they will be kept by their clubs or will have to look for alternative options."

De-valuation

According to the KPMG Football Benchmark estimate, four billion euros might very well be the cumulative loss the big five leagues in Europe (England, Spain, Germany, Italy and French Leagues) stand to suffer should they announce the close of their respective seasons on an immediate basis.

These valuations were made by KPMG by evaluating ten leagues (adhering to a closed system for simplicity) and the values they have assigned to players – values that are sometimes not the actual price of the player according to the transfer market. For example, Neymar was purchased by Paris Saint Germain for €222 million in 2017 but his current value according to KPMG stands at €175 million.

On the other hand, a restart and completion of the season behind closed doors leads to revenue losses of around one-third to one-fifth of the total loss estimated for a full cancellation of the season. KPMG also came up with two scenarios to go by. Scenario 1 states that the season in all ten leagues comes to an immediate end as it is. Scenario 2 states that all leagues will find a way to complete their season. In scenario 1, Neymar's valuation falls by 21.7% to €137 million and in scenario 2, his valuation falls by 14.7% to €149 million.

Week before Bundesliga restart, Dresden squad in quarantine

REUTERS
BERLIN, MAY 10

GERMANY'S PLANS to restart competitive football on May 16 suffered an early setback after the entire team of second tier Dynamo Dresden were placed in a two-week quarantine following two positive coronavirus tests.

The Bundesliga 2 club announced on their website that tests taken on Friday had revealed two new positive cases and local health authorities had ordered the team into quarantine.

"After an intensive analysis of the situation, the health authority in Dresden... decided on Saturday that the entire second division squad, including the coaching and support team, must now go into a 14-day quarantine at home," the club said.

"Due to the quarantine measures, (the club) will not be able to travel to Lower Saxony for the away game on matchday 26 as planned," the club added.

Dresden were scheduled to play Hanover 96 next Sunday in their first game back following the stoppage that was caused by the coronavirus outbreak."

In the past few weeks, we have made enormous efforts in terms of personnel and logistics in order to strictly implement all the prescribed medical and hygienic measures," said Dynamo sports manager Ralf Minge.

"We are in contact with the responsible health authority and the DFL (German Football League) to coordinate all further steps. The fact is that we can neither train nor participate in the game in the next 14 days."

The Bundesliga announced this week that it would restart on May 16 after being given the green light by the government.

Stringent testing

The league has drawn up a detailed set of regulations and guidelines for training and matches in order to reduce to the minimum possible the risk of transmitting the virus, including stringent testing.

However, the question of how to respond to positive tests is out of the hands of the league as German law states any response to cases is a matter for the local health authority. DFL chief executive Christian Seifert told broadcaster ZDF that

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THOSE MONTHS, THOSE MINUTES

Forced into an unprecedented lockdown, sport is staring at an unfathomable despair. Indian athletes, though, have given the country reasons to rejoice in the past. *The Indian Express* looks back at a bunch of these memories.



IN THE early 90s Kerala Police won back-to-back Federation Cup football titles. Striker CV Pappachan, in a chat with SANDIP G, recalls the 1990 final, the first of the titles, against Salgaonkar at Thrissur.

[READ THE STORY ON indianexpress.com](#)

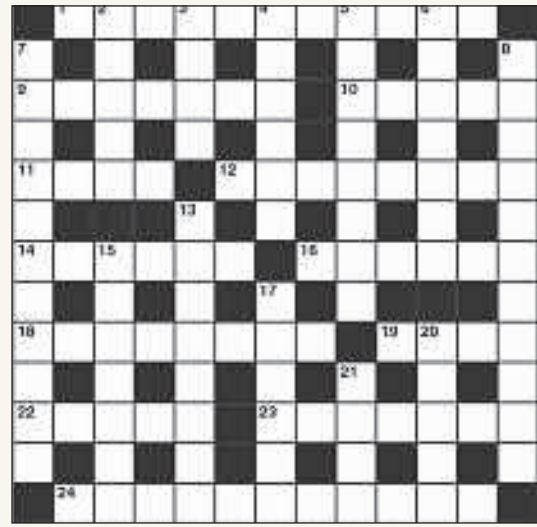
the aim was still to end the season. "We said from the beginning that this is something we have to be prepared for," he said. "If a 14-day quarantine is now scheduled, then we have to deal with it next week in the spirit of the game plan."

"At the moment, however, this does not upset our timetable. The DFL has been working on this concept for a long time and we have always stressed that it is the local health authorities that decide on each individual case, on each team."

"For the 2nd division, where 81 matches are still to be played, two of Dynamo Dresden's matches cannot be played at the moment. But we are not changing our goal to finish the season."

"The league has been on hold since mid-March because of the coronavirus outbreak which has brought football to a standstill around the world and Germany's progress is being closely watched by other leagues. On Monday, the DFL said it had registered 10 positive cases in a blanket test of 1,724 players and staff at its 36 first and second division clubs.

CROSSWORD 4114



- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| ACROSS | Down |
| 1 Tender names perhaps (11) | 2 This is one form of disturbance (5) |
| 9 Clothing is torn without intention (7) | 3 Quits to get it? (4) |
| 10 Time to inspire poets perhaps (5) | 4 Sell and tell (6) |
| 11 Arm offensively thrust out (4) | 5 Weather men caught in a flurry of sleet (8) |
| 12 Distributes but runs short (5,3) | 6 Refreshment stood in the garden (3,4) |
| 14 A cheap combination of brave and tough (6) | 7 Priceless stonework found in lodges (11) |
| 16 Master switch for the current (6) | 8 Look at and study the working pattern (11) |
| 18 How to beat the streaker? (8) | 13 Put up with the closed shop (8) |
| 19 Call for a shower (4) | 15 The case of the diplomat's aide (7) |
| 22 A fringe gathering of lace makers (5) | 17 Young crab (6) |
| 23 A grand player, perhaps, from his score (7) | 20 Foreign article upsets Neil (5) |
| 24 Dimension of certain chaps in the flesh (11) | 21 Mother, I'm seriously hurt! (4) |

Solutions Crossword 4113: Across: 1 Render, 4 Angelica, 9 Unused, 10 Step on it, 12 Dais, 13 Seems, 14 Stern, 17 Frankenstein, 20 Let well alone, 23 Eddy, 24 Amiss, 25 Scar, 26 Shivered, 29 Carmen, 30 Linguist, 31 Stones. Down: 1 Round off, 2 Nautical, 3 Eyes, 5 No time to lose, 6 Espy, 7 Innate, 8 Asthma, 11 Keen swimmers, 15 Skied, 16 Midas, 18 Coachman, 19 Bearings, 21 Vessel, 22 Adrian, 26 Peru, 27 Rant.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

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

Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we _____. - Carl Sagan (2,7)

DWEER	GORTHN
CKROO	EINTGW

Answer: Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we **dream**. - Carl Sagan
SOLUTION: REWEED, CROOK, THROCK, TWINGE

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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4205



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