

3 THE OUTBREAK WEST BENGAL

PM'S ₹20 LAKH CRORE PACKAGE

Mamata on Centre's stimulus: A big zero

'Nothing for unorganised sector, public spending, employment generation'



Passengers board a bus in Kolkata on Wednesday as limited bus services began on 50th day of the lockdown. Shashi Ghosh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MAY 13

CLAIMING THAT "it has nothing for the states", Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Wednesday called a "big zero" the Central government's special economic package to tide over the economic crisis.

"The special economic package announced by the Union government is nothing but a big zero. It is an eyewash to fool the people. There is nothing for the unorganised sector, public spending and employment generation," she said while addressing an e-press conference here.

"Yesterday, when the PM (Narendra Modi) announced Rs

20 lakh crore package, we were hopeful that the interest of the states will be looked into, the FRBM (fiscal responsibility and budget management) limit would be increased. But today, after the Union finance minister made the announcements, it was found that everything that was said yesterday was a bluff," she said.

The Rs 20 lakh crore economic package was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address to the nation on Tuesday evening. The details of the stimulus were unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday evening.

The Trinamool Congress chief accused the Central government of trying to bulldoze

federalism and mislead people with the economic package. She also hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states to amend labour laws and jeopardise job security.

Suggesting a protracted battle against the pandemic, the chief minister said one should not expect any quick relief from the disease in the near future. Strengthening infrastructure in rural areas was the key to the state economy, she said.

"I think the revival of the state economy lies in rural Bengal. We have to strengthen the rural economy. In the days to come, this will be the roadmap for the entire country. There is no need to be worried about Covid-19.

We will overcome it. But life cannot come to a halt because of this disease," the CM added.

The impact of pandemic - mutate - mapping prediction and calculate

The chief minister said that West Bengal would soon map low and high risk areas affected by the novel coronavirus under an initiative, called Sentinel Survey. The initiative is also aimed at tracking the virus's infection journey. She said, "West Bengal is the first state in India to start this community prevalence survey for Covid-19."

She said the state had generated 13.2 lakh man-days in MSME sectors producing masks, PPEs and hand sanitisers.

Bengal will never tweak labour laws like BJP-ruled states did, says Mamata

ENS & PTI KOLKATA, MAY 13

WEST BENGAL will never alter the existing labour laws in the wake of the coronavirus-triggered lockdown, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asserted on Wednesday, while criticising the BJP-ruled states that have brought about changes to such regulations and "jeopardised" workers' job security.

Banerjee said there will be no quick relief from COVID-19 in the near future and the key to revival for the state's economy lies in strengthening the infrastructure of rural Bengal.

"We have come across reports that some BJP-ruled states have either suspended labour laws or tweaked them. The employees and labourers in those states would work more but get paid less, they will not have any job security.

"We do not support this and

would never take such a step. We will follow the existing labour laws and ensure that the migrant labourers returning to the state can be employed here. The government can employ them under the 100-day-work scheme (MGNREGA)," she said, addressing a video-conference on the Covid-19 situation.

Banerjee's comments come in the backdrop of states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh announcing suspension of certain labour laws with the objective to assist businesses re-coup from the coronavirus blow.

"There is no need to be worried about COVID-19. We will overcome it. But life cannot come to a halt because of this disease," the chief minister added.

The Trinamool Congress chief also advised the district administrations to take precautionary measures against dengue, keeping in mind the approaching monsoon.

Relief for 10 lakh govt staff: Festival bonus comes early

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MAY 13

IN A move that could benefit 10 lakh government employees, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced an increase in the festival advance and ad hoc bonus for them for Ramzan and Durga Puja. These employees include school teachers, university staff and even contractual employees across civic bodies. The expected burden on the exchequer is Rs 400 crore.

Addressing an e-press conference, she said, "Most states have reduced or delayed salaries of government employees. The Centre has frozen DAs (dearness allowances). But we have not done anything, as we are a humane government," she said.

With the national lockdown and coronavirus pandemic impacting revenue, the Union Finance Ministry had put on hold increment in DA for 50 lakh Central Government employees and 61 lakh pensioners till July 2021. The Delhi government followed suit.

The ad hoc bonus has been increased to Rs 4,200 from Rs 4,000 last year, while the festival advance has been hiked by Rs 2,000 to 10,000. Even, the salary limit for bonus and advance has been widened.

The order titled Announcement of Grant of Adhoc Bonus and Festival



CM Mamata Banerjee

The burden on the exchequer is estimated to be Rs 400 crore

Advance for 2020-21 (Ramzan & Durga Puja), read, "The State govt has decided to grant the following: Ad hoc bonus of Rs 4,200 for 2020-21, an increase from Rs 4,000 in 2019. Also, the salary ceiling for getting festival bonus is increased from Rs 30,000 (in 2019-20) to Rs 34,250. The festival advance is also being increased from Rs 8,000 in 2019-20 to Rs 10,000. The salary ceiling for eligibility for festival advance is also being increased from Rs 34,250 (in 2019-20) to Rs 41,100."

The order further said, "This increase in Bonus and Festival Advance and also the eligibility will benefit over 10 lakh Govt. employees - employees of Panchayat and Municipal bodies, University and School employees, all contractual and casual employees. The total financial implication will be about Rs 400 crore."



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

Adhir praises PM for 'sincere attempts' to ferry stranded migrants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KOLKATA, MAY 13

EVEN AS his party has been up in arms against PM Narendra Modi on the migrant labourers issue, Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has appreciated Modi's "sincere attempts" to bring back those stranded to their home.

Chowdhury, the five-time MP from Berhampore Lok Sabha seat, in a letter to the PM last night, urged him to reduce the rate of tickets, if not making it free, keeping in view the fact that these out-of-job labourers are facing severe financial crunch.

"I do like to appreciate your sincere attempt of sending back stranded persons, which include migrant workers, patients and their family, students, pilgrims and tourists, to their native places by announcing 300 special trains," Chowdhury wrote in the letter.

The migrant workers and those grounded away from their home are now facing a severe financial crunch. They cannot afford the fare, which is quite high and beyond their reach, he said. "Please consider the reduced rates of tickets if not free travel," the former minister of state for railways wrote.

Chowdhury made a request to add non-AC coaches along with the air conditioned ones of the special passenger trains as common passengers are unable to buy the high-priced tickets.

The Congress, which has repeatedly slammed the Modi government for poor handling of the problems faced by stranded labourers, has already announced that all its state units will bear the cost of rail travel of the needy migrant workers and labourers stranded at their workplaces due to lockdown and seeking to return home.

Advertisement for Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGS Indraprastha) featuring an admission notice for 2020-21. It lists programs like B.Tech. (CET Code 131) and MBA (CET Code 101) and provides contact information for the Registrar.

Advertisement for Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) featuring an admission notification for 2020-21. It lists various programs including Ph.D., PG, UG, and Professional Diplomas, along with application dates and contact details.

A large advertisement for E-xplained by The Indian Express. It features the text '45 days of lockdown, factories cautious, services stalled, markets choppy' and 'Tracking the impact of Covid on the financial markets'. It promotes a discussion with Nileshe Shah, Managing Director of Kotak Mahindra AMC, and Sandeep Singh, Associate Editor of The Indian Express. The event is scheduled for May 14, 2020, at 07:00 PM on Zoom.

10 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WATCH



In Kathmandu, after some curbs were lifted

NEPAL Highest 1-day spike in Covid cases reported

Kathmandu: Nepal registered its highest spike in the number of cases with 85 new infections within a day, including 26 from the Indo-Nepal border taking the total tally to 219, health officials said. Nepal, which is under lockdown to contain the spread of deadly coronavirus, is among the nations that has the least number of cases of the deadly COVID-19 with no deaths. The total number of people infected by the novel coronavirus has climbed to 219 in Nepal with 85 new cases, the highest number of confirmation of virus transmission in 24-hours.

LESOTHO Last African nation to confirm virus case

Maseru: Southern Africa's tiny kingdom of Lesotho on Wednesday confirmed its first case of COVID-19, making it the last African country to report the disease. With the announcement, all 54 countries in Africa have now reported coronavirus cases. Lesotho's health ministry said one person who recently arrived in the country had tested positive but was not showing signs of being ill. The patient was being isolated. The country of 2 million people is surrounded by South Africa, which has the highest number of confirmed cases in Africa with 11,350.

THAILAND No new cases for first time in two months

Bangkok: Thailand has reported no new confirmed cases of the coronavirus for the first time in more than two months. There also were no new deaths reported on Wednesday, leaving the country's total at 3,017 cases with 56 fatalities. Since the beginning of May, Thailand has reported single-digit daily increases with the exception of May 4, when a cluster pushed the number to 18. The last time Thailand reported no new cases was on March 9, when there were 50 cases in total with a single death.

Next step for Europe: Unlocking travel



(Left) Commuters at Stratford station in London on Wednesday; two young travellers at the international airport in Frankfurt, Germany.

EU pushes for measures to salvage tourism UK eases lockdown as economy takes a hit

THE NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MAY 13

The coronavirus pandemic has devastated the tourism industry, as countries sealed their borders, flights grounded to a halt and billions of people sheltered at home. As summer draws closer, increasing fears that many areas reliant on tourism will miss out on their biggest season, countries and businesses are beginning to take cautious steps to ease restrictions or reinstate travel services.

The European Commission on Wednesday, in a bid to resume travel and salvage the summer tourism season, announced its recommendation for travel across the European Union, saying countries with similar levels of coronavirus outbreaks should ease restrictions. It said this should ultimately lead to a complete restoration of free movement among its 27 member states. Some countries have already

E.U. GUIDELINES FOR TRAVEL AMID CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

General	Air Travel	Rail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passengers will be encouraged to buy tickets, reserve seats and check in online. Passengers should wear facemasks Transport staff should have adequate protective equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventilation should be strengthened, with hospital-grade air filtering Passenger flows should be managed with early arrival, priority for e-check-in Minimise contact at baggage drop-offs, security and border control points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency, capacity of trains should be increased to reduce passenger density. For short-distance trips, passengers should leave seats empty between them Rail operators should use passenger counting systems to manage capacity.

begun plotting their own way forward. Three border checkpoints between Austria and Germany were opened Wednesday morning, a day after Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Chancellor Sebastian Kurz of Austria agreed to the measures that would institute free movement between the two nations. Chancellor Angela Merkel

urged Germans to be "courageous and vigilant" Wednesday as the country emerges from its shutdown, calling on them to avoid a relapse into tougher restrictions even as officials set out plans to relax border controls, as per an Associated Press report. Germany started loosening coronavirus restrictions on April 20, about a month after they were introduced. The easing has

EXPLAINED

Patchwork policies

THE EU'S response to the coronavirus has led to experts highlighting a potential issue with the system: that the Commission's advice is not mandatory. This means that member nations will likely follow their own directions without sufficient coordination. This, as per analysts, could become a serious concern: It could create difficulties in planning travel. It could also lead to erratic variations in restrictions, which could be detrimental to public health.

ALISTAIR SMOUT & BEN MAKORI
LONDON, MAY 13

ENGLAND TENTATIVELY began easing its coronavirus lockdown on Wednesday, with some people who cannot do their jobs at home urged to return to work, as stark economic data showed the disastrous impact of the pandemic. The worst-hit country in Europe with more than 40,000 deaths from COVID-19 according to official data, Britain has been in extensive lockdown since March 23. As of Wednesday morning, people in manufacturing and certain other sectors were being asked to return to work if they could. GDP data on Wednesday showed the economy shrank by a record 5.8% in March from February, and the April data is

likely to be even worse as the country was under lockdown for the entire month. "We are seeing one (quarter of GDP contraction) here with only a few days of impact from the virus so it is now, yes, very likely that the UK economy will face a significant recession this year and we are in the middle of that as we speak," finance minister Rishi Sunak said. The government is loosening restrictions only gradually, for fear of triggering a second peak of infections. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has described the process as a "supremely difficult" balancing act. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have semi-autonomous governments, are sticking with a "stay at home" message for now, leaving England, the most populous UK nation, to take the lead in sending some people back to work. **REUTERS**

5 plagues from China in last 20 yrs, it has to stop, says US

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, MAY 13

AS MANY as five plagues have come out of China in the last 20 years and at some point it has to stop, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien has said, holding the country responsible for the origin of the coronavirus pandemic which has killed over 250,000 people globally. People across the globe are going to rise up and tell the Chinese government that "we can no longer have these plagues coming out of China", whether it is from labs or wet markets, neither one is a good answer, he told reporters at the White House on Tuesday. "We know it came from Wuhan and I think there's circumstantial evidence that it could have come from the lab or the wet market. But, again, if you're China, neither one's a good answer," O'Brien said. "We've had five plagues from China in the last 20 years. We've

Legislation to sanction China proposed

Washington: Nine influential US senators have introduced a legislation in Congress seeking to authorise President Donald Trump to impose sanctions on China if it fails to cooperate in providing a full accounting of the events leading up to the outbreak of the coronavirus. It mandates the President to make a certification to Congress within 60 days that China has provided a full and complete accounting to any COVID-19 probe led by the United States, its allies or the United Nations affiliates such as the World Health Organisation and has closed all operating wet markets that have the potential to expose humans to health risks through the introduction of zoonotic disease into the human population. **PTI**

3 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM U.S. HEALTH EXPERTS' HEARING

- LACK OF TESTING, TRACING CAPABILITY** Experts noted the US lacked critical testing capacity and the ability to trace contacts. Dr Anthony Fauci warned "there is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control"
- VACCINE UNLIKELY TO BE READY SOON** Fauci said it was a "bridge too far" to think a vaccine or treatment would be ready by the time classes start this fall, on a question about college students returning to campus
- DEATH TOLL LIKELY GREATER THAN 80,000** The official also said the coronavirus death toll in the US is likely greater than 80,000 due to some going unrecorded

Malaysian PM delays confidence vote citing virus, Mahathir objects

REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 13

MALAYSIAN PRIME Minister Muhyiddin Yassin will not face a confidence vote on May 18 as scheduled, the speaker of parliament said on Wednesday after the government said the battle against the coronavirus was a priority. His predecessor, 94-year-old Mahathir Mohamad who resigned in February after his coalition collapsed, denounced the decision as a possible sign of Muhyiddin lacking a parliamentary majority. Speaker Mohamad Ariff Md Yusof last week approved a motion brought by Mahathir seeking a vote of no confidence in Muhyiddin's leadership. But, in a statement, the speaker said Muhyiddin later told him the government had decided to list only a single order of parliamentary business for the one-day sitting, the opening



Muhyiddin Yassin

Breaking 23-day streak, Hong Kong reports new local cases

THE NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MAY 13

HONG KONG reported two new locally transmitted infections on Wednesday after more than three weeks of no such cases and as social distancing measures began to relax, and a third case recorded on the same day was imported from Pakistan, bringing the total infections in the city to 1,051. A 66-year-old woman and her 5-year-old granddaughter, who live separately, were infected, health officials said on Wednesday. Neither had recently travelled, and it was unclear how they had contracted the virus, the officials added. The news came as Hong Kong, having seen no local transmissions for 23 days, began to restart some previously restricted activities. Health officials said on Wednesday that there were currently no plans to bring back the measures and closures imposed more than a month ago.

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

Death toll from attack on Kabul maternity clinic rises to 24

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL, MAY 13



Outside the hospital. Reuters

AFGHAN OFFICIALS on Wednesday raised the death toll from the militant attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul the previous day, saying that 24 people were killed, including two newborn babies, their mothers and an unspecified number of nurses. Militants stormed the hospital in Dashti Barchi, a mostly Shiite neighbourhood the western part of Kabul, on Tuesday morning, setting off an hours-long shootout with the police. The Interior Ministry spokesman, Tareq Arian, initially

said 16 people were killed in the attack and over 100 women and babies were evacuated from the building under fire. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but both the Taliban and the Islamic State group frequently target Afghan military and security forces in Kabul, as well as civilians. The Taliban denied they were involved. In the past, most of the attacks in Dashti Barchi were carried out by IS. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced that Afghan security forces would no longer operate in the defensive posture taken in the wake of the peace agreement. Instead, he called on security forces to launch attacks against Taliban insurgents. "The Taliban have not given up fighting and killing Afghans, instead they have increased their attacks on our countrymen and public places," despite repeated calls for a cease-fire, Ghani said.

'Evidence of Russian role in German parliament hack'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, MAY 13

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Angela Merkel said Wednesday there is "hard evidence" of Russian involvement in a cyberattack on the German parliament in 2015 that reportedly also involved the theft of documents from her own parliamentary office. German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported last week that federal prosecutors have issued an arrest warrant against an alleged officer with Russia's GRU military intelligence agency identified as Dmitry Badin, who already is being sought by US authorities. On Friday, news magazine Der

Spiegel reported that correspondence from Merkel's parliamentary office was among the documents targeted in the 2015 hack. Merkel was asked about the theft of data from her office in a question-and-answer session with lawmakers in parliament Wednesday. She replied: "I get the impression that they picked up relatively indiscriminately what they could get." "I can say honestly that this pains me: on the one hand, I work every day for a better relationship with Russia, and when you see on the other hand that there is such hard evidence that Russian forces are involved in acting this way, this is an area of tension," she added.

Israel: Pompeo meets Netanyahu to talk West Bank annexation

DAVID M HALBFINGER & LARA JAKES
JERUSALEM, MAY 13



Mike Pompeo with Benjamin Netanyahu. Reuters

WITH ISRAEL preparing to annex territory in the occupied West Bank and a flurry of clashes claiming the lives of an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian teenager, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Jerusalem on Wednesday promising to push ahead with the Trump administration's proposal to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "There remains work yet to do, and we need to make progress on it," Pompeo said of the administration's "vision for peace" at the

start of a lightning-quick, seven-hour visit. It is the first official trip to Israel by any country's diplomats since the coronavirus pandemic shunted face-to-face meetings onto videoconferences. Pompeo, who disembarked from his jet wearing a red, white and blue mask, said his meetings with Israeli leaders would also address efforts to fight the coronavirus and to stop Iran's nuclear project and contain its expansionist moves in the Middle East. Opponents of annexation have warned that it would kill the chance of a two-state solution to the long-running conflict and would spark violence that could quickly lead to the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank under the Oslo accords. The State Department has in recent weeks sought to downplay the Trump administration's role in shaping Israel's annexation plans. **NYT**

Invest in independent journalism. Subscribe to The Indian Express E-paper

Introductory offer

~~₹1299~~ **₹999 per year**

+ 30 days free trial

Save 29%

[CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE](#)

Available on

 indianexpress.com |  E-mail |  WhatsApp |   The Indian Express App

* Offer valid till **MAY 31, 2020** | **Full refund, if cancelled during the Free Trial period.