



Bollywood faces the heat over COVID-19 outbreak

15-20% impact expected on revenue from big ticket Hindi films, far less impact on South industry; board exams, protests also factors, say observers

NAMRATA JOSHI MUMBAI Baaghi 3, at ₹17.5 crore net, may have logged in the highest opening day collections for a Hindi film in 2020 so far...

According to the box office forecast of trade magazine Super Cinema, the opening day range for director Ahmed Khan's Tiger Shroff starrer had been projected at a much higher range...

Shailish Kapoor, CEO of media consulting firm Ormax Media, concurs. Ormax's opening day projections for the film had also been substantially higher at

₹21 crore. Its projections for the upcoming Sooryavanshi stand at a whopping ₹30.8 crore. However, in a virus-less market, the figure for the Rohit Shetty biggie starring Akshay Kumar would have been even higher at about ₹36 crore, says Mr. Kapoor.

He predicts a 15-20% impact on the big ticket Hindi films in the coming months and an even bigger one on the medium and small films which are anyhow regarded as "easier to skip for a later day".

The impact has been felt far less in South film industries with fewer cases detected so far. An Ormax study of the impact of COVID-19 on theatre-going behaviour conducted across 80 cities in the Hindi-Tamil-Telugu industry belt on Thursday-Friday-Sa-

turday last week showed that 23% regular theatre goers in India are likely to stay away from theatres till the threat is reduced. The proportion is higher in Hindi-speaking markets (26%) than in south India (17%).

Ormax will conduct the study every three days. The next round of figures will be out on Thursday.

Delhi-based exhibitor Sanjay Mehta, however, thinks there are several factors eating into the earnings of Baaghi 3 and other recent films. "The low pre-Holi period and board exams have come in the way and Baaghi is a predominantly youth-oriented franchise," he says.

According to Mr. Mehta,

things will come to a head if things go out of control in the weeks ahead and if the government decides to shut down theatres temporarily. He remembers the case of a film Main Khiladi Tu Anari distributed by him back in 1994. "It started off at 100% collection. On the 6th day, the Delhi government ordered cinema closure due to a plague scare. The film couldn't gather the same momentum when the theatres reopened," he remembers.

According to Mr. Kapoor, it's the possible changes in release calendar that are more worrying. Already there are rumours about Reliance Entertainment delaying Sooryavanshi, slated for a March 24 release, and Kabir Khan's 83 that is supposed to come out on April 10. A Sooryavanshi spokesperson, however, said the decision will be taken only on Wednesday.

"A massive 27-film franchise like James Bond has a bigger market and a lot more at stake but the seven-month postponement could make even the bigger Bollywood producers do a rethink," says Mr. Mohan. "It will mean that there will be no film of sizeable scale and star cast in the next three-four weeks," says Mr. Kapoor.

The only other time the industry had faced such a crisis in recent past was during demonetisation. However, things had stabilised by the time of the big Christmas releases. "Uncertainty is a big factor. With six new cases detected, theatres in Kerala will be closed till March 31 and film releases postponed. A lot, for Bollywood, however, will still depend on how Baaghi 3 fares in the first week," says Mr. Mohan.

Viral effect

The international convention of the Indian film industry, FICCI Frames, scheduled to be held in Mumbai from March 18 to 20, has been postponed to a "later and safer date"

Saregama India's foray into the live events space with musical Disco Dancer, a stage adaptation of B. Subhash's cult classic film of the same name starring Mithun Chakrabarty, was to have its premiere run in Mumbai from March 26 to 29. It now stands deferred to June

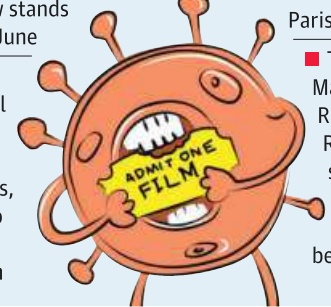
The International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) awards, scheduled to be held for three days in

Indore from March 27, now stand postponed. New dates to be announced later

The big trailer launch event of Kabir Khan's 83, scheduled at MMRDA Grounds, has been postponed. "We don't want to have a public event because of the coronavirus situation. We are monitoring the situation and will take decision soon," Mr. Khan said.

Deepika Padukone has cancelled her trip to Paris Fashion Week

The shoot of Maddock Films' Rajkumar Rao-Kriti Sanon starrer, set to start in Delhi on March 15, has been cancelled



23%

regular theatre-goers in India said they are likely to stay away from theatres till COVID-19 threat is reduced

This proportion is higher (26%) in Hindi speaking market than in south India (17%)

Source: Ormax media survey



The 'Coronasur' effigy. AFP

'Coronasur' burnt in Holi fire in Worli

Press Trust of India MUMBAI An effigy depicting coronavirus was burnt during Holi festivities in Mumbai on Monday night. As the new virus, which has rattled the world after emerging in China's Wuhan city, is making news daily, residents of Worli decided to burn the effigy, dubbing it 'Coronasur (corona demon)'.

Belapur couple stuck in Iran

RAINAA ASSAINAR NAVI MUMBAI A retired officer of the Public Works Department and his wife, both residents of Belapur, are among 44 Indian tourists stranded at Qom in Iran due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Sharifuddin Momin (72), who retired as PWD secretary in 2003, and Jaitunbi (70), were on their way to Iraq, their son Rafiq (44), an architect, has said.

On February 21, the couple and 42 others, mostly from Kolhapur, flew from Mumbai to Tehran. The group of senior citizens, which was going to Najaf and then Baghdad to visit the mausoleum of Abdul Qadir Gilani, reached Tehran airport at 6 p.m. and had a connecting flight to Iraq at 10 p.m. "The group had booked the pilgrimage with Saad Tours and Travels based in Kolhapur. The travel group has arranged their



Jaitunbi and Sharifuddin Momin. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

stay and food till now," Mr. Rafiq said.

He said the tour was supposed to be till March 3. On learning that the Iran-Iraq border was closed, the tour operator took the group to visit mosques, dargahs and holy places in and around Tehran. "They booked a ticket for India for February 28. But from February 27 evening, the Indian government stopped flights from Iran," Mr. Rafiq said.

The group is now waiting for news on when they can return home. "A medical team from India has reached Iran and they have been sending back samples, but this group is still waiting to be tested. They are frustrated. We are in touch through video calls. I had approached [NCP leaders] Sharad Pawar and Supriya Sule, tweeted about the problem, yet their is no clarity," Mr. Rafiq said.

Airport gets more doctors, thermometers

DGCA warns airlines to ensure self-declaration forms are available on board

ADITYA ANAND MUMBAI With all international passengers arriving into the country being screened for COVID-19 and the resultant queues over the long weekend, Mumbai airport has added 90 doctors and infrared thermometers.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), meanwhile, has pulled up airlines for not ensuring enough self-declaration forms are available on board, leading to crowds at the terminals.

Officials of Mumbai International Airport Ltd said 1,27, 819 passengers from the Brijhanamumbai Municipal Corporation along with 10-15 medical and paramedical staff from the Airport Health Organisation (APHO). This will be enough to effectively screen the arrival corridor," an airport official said. From 42 doctors and pa-



Passengers being screened at Mumbai airport on Tuesday. AAP

ramedics in three shifts last week, Mumbai airport now has 136 doctors and paramedics working in three shifts, along with 25 infrared thermometers. The official said passengers were being screened by the APHO at 10 additional counters being set up by the airport. "Passengers are advised to fill up the self-

reporting form in the flight before disembarking and are mandated to submit it to the APHO at the time of screening. However, this was not happening effectively, leading to long queues," the official said.

Taking note of this, the DGCA on Tuesday evening issued a circular. "It has come to our knowledge that some airlines are not ensuring availability of self-declaration forms as specified in the circular dated March 4. This is leading to long queues at arrival points," it said.

The aviation regulator warned all airlines operating on the international sector to ensure sufficient self-declaration forms as specified by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are available on board, and to get passengers to fill them in duplicate before disembarkation.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Institute of Medical Sciences and Research SVP INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) TO USE HELIPAD FACILITY Air Ambulance In Ahmedabad

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Mumbai Weather max min Mumbai Airport 30 19 Pune 33 16 Mumbai City 30 19

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IN BRIEF

**4-year-old boy drowns in tank in Govandi**

MUMBAI  
A four-year-old boy drowned after he slipped and fell into a tank in Govandi on Tuesday. Mohammad Arif Nasullah Shaikh was playing with friends when the incident occurred. Before rescue teams reached the site, passers-by rescued the boy. The police took him to Rajawadi Hospital, where he was declared brought dead. The body has been taken for a post-mortem.

**Man drowns in Thane, teen dies in Palghar**

THANE  
A 32-year-old construction worker from Kalyan drowned in a creek while celebrating Holi, the police said. In another incident, an 18-year-old girl died after she fell off a motorcycle in Vasai in Palghar district. PTI

# Fake currency racket based in T.N. busted

Notes were printed in Tiruppur, sent to Mumbai for circulation



**As good as real:** The police found genuine currency notes being scanned and then printed on a paper similar to the one used in currency printing at the accused's house. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

GAUTAM S. MENGLE  
MUMBAI  
The Mumbai Police Crime Branch has busted a fake currency racket based in Tamil Nadu, where counterfeit notes were printed in Tiruppur and sent to Mumbai with couriers for circulation in the city's markets.

According to Crime Branch officials, the lid was blown off the racket when the Crime Branch Unit IV picked up Bhaskar Nadar (53) near a Bank of Baroda branch at Sion Circle on March 3 based on a tip-off. He was found to be in possession of 151 counterfeit currency notes of different denominations, with a face value of ₹1.28 lakh.

He was arrested and booked for possession of counterfeit currency notes under the Indian Penal Code. "During his interrogation, Mr. Nadar told us that

he had been arrested in an attempt to robbery case in 2011 and had come to Mumbai from his native Tiruppur for a court appearance. Before he left, he was approached by Sarvanan Vaniyar, who gave him the counterfeit notes and told him to hand them over to a receiver in Mumbai," a Crime Branch officer said.

**Raid in Tiruppur**  
Acting on the information, the Unit IV sent a team to Tiruppur, which, working with the local police, conducted a raid at Mr. Vaniyar's residence on Monday.

"We found a set-up in Mr. Vaniyar's house, where genuine currency notes were being scanned and then printed on a paper similar to the one used in currency printing. The accused would then paste green-coloured plastic strips on the notes to

make them look like security strips," the officer said.

The Unit IV team seized a total of 1,473 notes of ₹500 denomination and 85 notes of ₹200 denomination, with a face value of ₹7.55 lakh, from Mr. Vaniyar's residence and arrested him.

The police are now working on apprehending the person who was to pick up the consignment from Mr. Nadar. The team is also trying to find out how long the racket has been active and pumping fake currency notes into the city's markets.

Last week, the Crime Branch Unit IX had arrested two people who were allegedly printing counterfeit currency notes using a sophisticated set-up in Ulwe in Navi Mumbai. The racket was found to have links in Kerala. The Unit IV is probing to confirm whether the two rackets are connected.

# Holi: over 4,600 held for traffic offences

2,656 caught for riding without helmets, 1,285 for speeding, 336 for drunk driving

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI  
Holi celebrations on Tuesday were subdued due to the novel coronavirus threat, but the police and CCTV cameras caught over 4,600 traffic offenders.

Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Madhukar Pandey said 1,285 motorists were caught for speeding, 286 for riding triple-seat, 2,656 for riding without helmets, and 336 were nabbed for drunk driving.

In all, 4,612 people were held for traffic offences in between Monday night and 5 p.m. on Tuesday, police said. "Those who were caught



**Strict vigil:** A biker takes a breathalyser test in Dadar on Tuesday afternoon. ■ EMMANUAL YOGINI

for drunk driving have had their licences seized. They will be produced in court on

Wednesday for further action," Mr. Pandey said. An official said several

thousand CCTV cameras set up along roads and at traffic junctions played a key role in enforcing discipline on the ground. The CCTVs were particularly handy in nabbing speeding motorists as well as two-wheeler riders without helmets, he said.

**Topping the list**  
The highest number of drunk driving cases were in DN Nagar in Andheri at 36, while Chembur came second with 27. Malad topped the list for those caught riding without helmets at 252, while Worli at 26 saw the maximum people caught for riding triple-seat.

## 2 held with mephedrone

Duo part of larger supply chain: police

GAREEMA BANGAD  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Police Crime Branch arrested two people with 200 grams of mephedrone worth ₹6 lakh on Tuesday. Investigations indicate that the duo is just a link in a larger supply racket of the drug in south and eastern Mumbai.

The accused have been identified as Aslam Khan (41) and Firoz Khan (39), both residents of Sewri. The duo was intercepted on the basis of a tip-off received by senior police inspector Sunil Mane of Unit X.

A Crime Branch officer said, "According to the information, the duo would be present near the court in Sewri on Tuesday with drugs. As soon as we received confirmation from our informant about their arrival, we stopped and searched them."

The duo was arrested and charged with possession of commercial quantities of a controlled substance under the Narcotic Drugs and Psy-

chotropic Substances Act. They will be produced in court on Wednesday.

The officer said, "Inquiries indicate that the duo had picked up the consignment from Mr. Aslam's nephew, who is based in Dongri and said to be among the bigger suppliers of mephedrone in the city. They were supposed to deliver it to the next link in the supply chain when they were intercepted. The multiple supply levels that have come to light in just one day of investigation and the quantity of drugs seized indicate that this is a bigger racket."

**Interrogation on**

The Crime Branch is interrogating the duo to find out the identity of the intended recipient, the activities of Mr. Aslam's nephew and how wide the scope of the racket is. Inquiries are also being made with other police stations in Mumbai and neighbouring commissionerates to find out if the two have a criminal record.

## People suffer minor injuries

GAREEMA BANGAD  
MUMBAI

A 18-year-old girl from Wadala who had ingested colours by mistake was rushed to KEM Hospital on Tuesday. Dr. Hemant Deshmukh said eight others were treated

for various injuries after Holi celebrations. He said while one man dislocated his shoulder, an inebriated man suffered a fall. Six people were treated at Nair hospital, while 23 were treated at Sion hospital.

**Pollution watch**

FORECAST TODAY (AQI*)	
Bhandup	97
Colaba	86
Malad	228
Mazagaon	372
Worli	144
Borivali	318
BKC	150
Chembur	235
Andheri	138
Navi Mumbai	292

*AIR QUALITY INDEX		
Good	Satisfactory	Moderate
0-50	51-100	101-200
Poor	Very poor	Severe
201-300	301-400	401-500

**IN MAJOR CITIES**

	PM10	PM2.5	AVG.
Mumbai	125	82	199
Delhi	177	83	176
Pune	84	53	67
Ahmedabad	156	86	186

# BEST to float tenders to tackle 'change' problem

Agency or bank to be appointed to collect and deposit coins and currency notes

AJEET MAHALE  
MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking will be floating tenders to appoint an agency or a bank to collect and deposit its loose change and currency notes.

The BEST has been witnessing a surge in collection of coins since it slashed fares last year. Senior BEST officials said ICICI Bank had sought a handling charge to collect the coins and deposit them, which the BEST couldn't afford.

Anil Patankar, BEST com-

mittee chairman, said he had raised the issue of appointing an agency to tackle the issue during the committee's meeting on Monday.

He said, "The general manager told us that he will be raising the issue with officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and request ICICI Bank to reconsider imposing the handling charge. They should ideally exempt the BEST from such charges as we are a public service."

Mr. Patankar said due to the impasse, around ₹12 crore in coins is lying idle across bus depots. To ease

**They should exempt the BEST from such charges as we are a public service**

ANIL PATANKAR  
BEST committee chairman

the crisis, the BEST has been paying employees a part of their salaries, around ₹2,000, in coins. However, sources in the BEST said efforts are on to create stacks of ₹10,000 at every depot for disbursement if the issue is not resolved by March 13, when employees get their salaries.

A BEST spokesperson said the general manager would

be meeting with the RBI officials soon to find a solution. BEST officials said ICICI Bank had not levied any service charge earlier, but in a letter to the BEST had said it would charge ₹100 for every ₹1,000 collected in coins. The BEST on an average earns ₹2 crore a day, and coins make up ₹15 lakh.

BEST officials said after fares were reduced in July 2019, they had tied up with toll collection agencies to get rid of loose change. "With the introduction of FASTag, even that avenue is no longer available," an official said.

# How the 'least smart kid' made it big in business

Stephen Schwarzman says he never had a problem working with 'smarter' people

SHREYA SHARMA  
MUMBAI

Businessman, investor and philanthropist Stephen A. Schwarzman never had trouble working with smarter people; he recognised rather early on that though he had a good sense of judgment, in matters of raw intelligence, he could not match up to many others.

Mr. Schwarzman, chairman and CEO of global private equity firm The Blackstone Group, was sharing anecdotes and insights from his recently released book, *What It Takes - Lessons in the Pursuit of Excellence*, at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay campus in Powai.

In conversation with Unique Identification Authority of India founding chairman and Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani, Mr. Schwarzman spoke candidly about being the 'least smart smart kid'.

Mr. Schwarzman said, "I was 17 years old when I found myself on the waiting list at Harvard. I called up



**Insightful:** Stephen A. Schwarzman (left), chairman and CEO of The Blackstone Group, with Nandan Nilekani, chairman of Infosys, during an interaction at IIT-Bombay. ■ FILE PHOTO

the Dean of Admissions, thinking I could convince him that they had made an error by not admitting me. He, however, told me that I could not simply call him up, and had to go to Yale instead. Years later, I met the same man, who told me that he had been following my career graph over the last 30 years, and said that sometimes bad decisions are taken, which result in the right people not getting admission."

Today, Mr. Schwarzman is an investor in several

**When you dream big, people just prefer to let you live in your fantasy world**

Nandan Nilekani  
Infosys chairman


universities worldwide, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Oxford. "The reason I've invested so much in Oxford is because they are really focusing on ethics along with artificial intelligence (AI). They have the best humanities

department. MIT, on the other hand, is more technology-centric, and hence I have only focused on boosting their infrastructure," he said.

Mr. Schwarzman credited his foray into the AI industry to a chance meeting with Jack Ma, the founder of e-commerce giant Alibaba. The two tycoons met on a bus, where they got talking. "We had a long conversation about how AI is already so big in China and how it is only going to grow in the coming years," Mr. Schwarzman said.

**'Being up to date'**  
Mr. Nilekani too recalled his experiences, highlighting the need to always be abreast of technological advancements so as to not be rendered obsolete. This, he said, helped him sustain a multinational corporation.

Mr. Nilekani also harked back to the time when he was setting up Infosys. "When you dream big, people just prefer to let you live in your fantasy world," he said.



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