

China gives go-ahead for human trials of COVID-19 vaccine



Fighting the virus: Chinese President Xi Jinping, second right, visiting the Academy of Military Medical Sciences in Beijing on March 2. •AP

Researchers will do tests on 108 healthy persons

REUTERS
BEIJING

China has given the go-ahead for researchers to begin human safety tests of an experimental coronavirus vaccine in the race to develop a shot against the COVID-19 epidemic that has killed more than 7,000 people world-

wide. Researchers at China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences, affiliated to the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), received approval to launch early-stage clinical trials of the potential vaccine starting this week, the ruling Communist Party's *People's Daily* reported on Tuesday.

Scientists in the United States said on Monday that clinical trials had begun for a vaccine developed by its Na-

tional Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the U.S. biotech firm Moderna.

COVID-19

Details in the Chinese clinical trial registration database show that a "Phase 1" test that will examine whether experimental shot is safe in humans aims to recruit 108 healthy people.

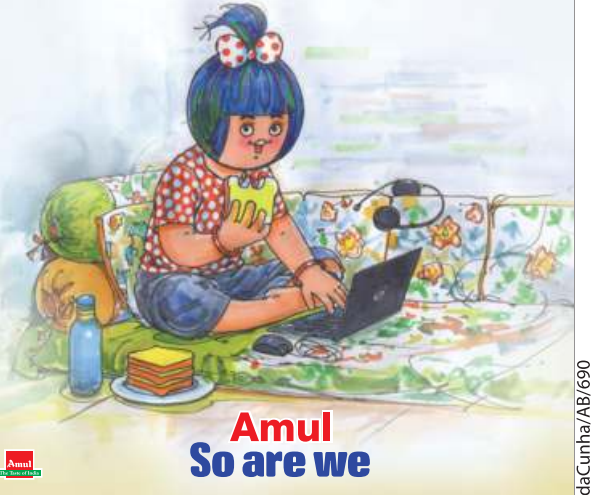
The volunteers will take

part in the study to take place from now until December 31.

The trial will be conducted by China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and the Hong Kong-listed biotech firm CanSino Biologics, the database showed.

Experts at the World Health Organization say they do not expect any fully tested and approved vaccine to reach the market until the middle of next year.

Home for breakfast, lunch and dinner?



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Actor Idris Elba tests positive for coronavirus

Tom Hanks and wife out of hospital

REUTERS
LONDON

British actor Idris Elba said on Monday he had tested positive for the new coronavirus, joining Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, among the first major celebrities to contract the respiratory disease.

Mr. Elba, who starred in TV police drama *Luther* and played the Norse god Heimdall in *Avengers: Infinity War*, said in a Twitter post that he had no symptoms but was isolating himself from others. It was not clear where he was located.

"This morning I tested positive for Covid 19. I feel ok, I have no symptoms so far but have been isolated since I found out about my possible exposure to the virus. Stay home people and be pragmatic. I will keep you updated on how I'm doing... No panic," Mr. Elba, 47, wrote.

Mr. Elba said he had taken



Idris Elba

the test because he found out on Friday that he had been exposed to someone who had contracted the disease. He did not identify the person.

Mr. Hanks and Ms. Wilson, have left a hospital in Australia's Queensland state five days after testing positive for the coronavirus, *People* magazine has reported. The pair are now resting at a rented home in Australia and remain under quarantine in the house.

Pressing pause



Still life: A visitor inside London's Tate Britain Museum, which announced on Tuesday that it will close till May 1 as a preventive measure against COVID-19. •REUTERS

Stranded OCIs request govt. to allow them back

Students asked to leave universities

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

When Sundareshan Krishnaswamy, a vice-president with American tech company Oracle, left Bengaluru on March 3 for a business trip in the United States, he couldn't have imagined the nightmare that awaited him, that divided his family across four countries, and left him stranded without a home and access to much needed medicines.

Hundreds of Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) cardholders like him, who are permanently based in India but were travelling, studying or working abroad, have appealed to the government to make an exception for them to return, with little headway so far.

'Hands tied'

Officials say their hands are tied as the government decided on March 11 to cancel all visas issued to non-Indians, and suspend OCI rights for the duration of the coronavirus-related directions as well.

"We have lived in India for 15 years, and don't have a home outside," Mr. Krishnaswamy's son Siddharth Aatreya, a student at the U.K.'s University of Cambridge told *The Hindu* over the telephone. "[My father] has a limited supply of insulin and hypertension medication, which will run out in two weeks, he needs to return home to India," Mr. Aatreya said.

Mr. Krishnaswamy was in North Carolina, when the government issued its notification. According to his son, he immediately re-scheduled his flights to travel home via Chicago and Frankfurt. However, when he went to board his flight to Bengaluru in Frankfurt, he and about 15-20 other OCI cardholders were told that the airline would not board them. This left Mr. Krishnaswamy, who is a Canadian citizen, stranded in Germany, while his wife is in Bengaluru, one son in the U.K. and the other, also a student, in Canada. "Living outside India for all of us will mean moving into a hotel, which is a huge financial strain,"

said Mr. Aatreya, who has tried to contact the local Indian High Commission and even addressed tweets to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), with no response yet.

Missions overwhelmed
While Indian missions worldwide have been authorised to issue visas for urgent requests, they too are inundated, said officials. Several missions that had originally put the 'emergency visas for OCIs' form on their website have had to take them down, given the huge response. Hopes for the Krishnaswamy family returning early have been further complicated as more and more countries are put on the Ministry of Health's no-fly list.

Apart from business travellers, the OCI rule has affected hundred of students with OCI status in various universities abroad, whose parents and family live in India. Anju Sharma (name changed at her request) says that she had no choice but to fly to the U.K. so as to care for her children, whose hostels have been shut down, but who can't fly home.

Many are going online to try and get their protests heard. A petition on the website change.org started by a parent last week has received nearly 4,000 signatures. "Please let our children enter India," says the petition addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, by Kavitha Prasad, a parent. "Our kids have to vacate their college rooms and have nowhere to go," it adds.

MEA response

When asked about the demand from OCIs to allow them to return to India, MEA spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said the matter is "under constant review by the Group of Ministers and the Committee of the Secretaries". "The discretion to decide on compelling cases rest with Heads of Mission. However, the country-specific travel advisories and applicable health protocols will still be enforced," said Mr. Kumar.

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