



**WORLD P6**  
**WUHAN, WHERE CORONAVIRUS EMERGED, TO LIFT LOCKDOWN**

**WORLD P6**  
**PEOPLE RUSHING TO BUY 100-OUNCE GOLD BARS**



PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM BENGALURU, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND NEW DELHI

## CORONAVIRUS IMPACT

### FOOD RIOTS ARE A REAL POSSIBILITY: PRONAB SEN

Former chief statistician Pronab Sen has warned that if the food requirements of migrant workers with no income are not fulfilled amid a countrywide lockdown, then food riots are a real possibility. In an interview to Karan Thapar for *The Wire*, Sen said that if the coronavirus pandemic spreads in rural areas, containment would be impossible. "If the supply system doesn't come unstuck, if the requirements of people who have no income are not met then food riots are a very real possibility," Sen added. **10**

### Power discoms receive 3-mnth payment relief

Power distribution companies (discoms) have been allowed to defer payments to power generators and transmission companies in the wake of delayed payments by electricity consumers, till June 30. The ministry of power has asked the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission to provide three months moratorium to discoms for paying them. **3**

### CRISIL downgrades SpiceJet's loans

CRISIL has downgraded the rating of SpiceJet's long-term loans to "B" from "BB-" on significant deterioration in business risk profile, and cut the outlook to "negative". The rating actions came after the airline discontinued international operations till April 30 and suspended domestic flights till March 31, in response to the coronavirus pandemic. **3**

### Corporate fraud probes take a back seat

Law enforcement agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Serious Fraud Investigation Office, have decided to delay investigation in major matters for at least a month, citing the global pandemic. According to them, summons, questioning and related action have been postponed. **3**

### Telcos to opt for EMI moratorium: COAI

Debt-ridden telecom operators may opt for a three-month moratorium to avoid cash crunch during the lockdown, industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said on Saturday. The telecom operators have spoken in favour of raising mobile call and internet rates at the earliest, however, they will keep the prices stable during the lockdown, COAI Director General Rajan S Mathews said. **3**

## IN DEPTH

### On the streets, the mood changes to empathy



Bureaucratic insensitivity gave way to compassion on the third day of the lockdown, with the state administration, police and passersby, joining forces to help the stream of migrants fleeing the city, write ARCHIS MOHAN & INDIVJAL DHASMANA **7**

# High-level panel set up to clear logistics hurdles

Committee will ensure smooth supply of essential goods during 21-day lockdown

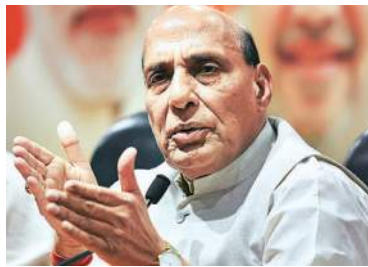
ARINDAM MAJUMDER, SHINE JACOB & MEGHA MANCHANDA  
New Delhi, 28 March

The government has formed a ministerial-level committee headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to mitigate the supply-chain problems as India undergoes a 21-day nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The committee also comprises Home Minister Amit Shah, secretaries from the consumer affairs, road transport, civil aviation, shipping, textile, and health ministries, and chairman of the Railway Board. It has been tasked with ensuring unhindered supply of essential items during the ongoing lockdown, and will meet daily at 11 am through video conferencing.

According to experts, while the lockdown, which came into force on Wednesday, was essential, it was hastily drawn, putting huge pressure on the country's logistics system. Local authorities, they said, were facing confusion over the interpretation of government orders.

"The biggest need now is that all authorities work in tandem and implement the orders in unison," said an official, who is part of the committee. **Turn to Page 4**

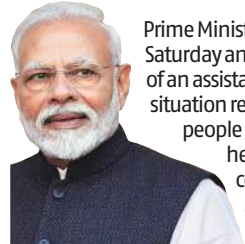


Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is heading the committee

## THE ACTION PLAN

- Civil aviation ministry to push more passenger aircraft to improve the delivery of protective suits from China and diagnostic kits to laboratories
- Local police to ensure availability of food for truckers carrying essential commodities
- NAFED, FCI told to immediately start the supply of food
- Shipping ministry to ensure availability of trailers, trucks at ports
- Supply of kerosene, food materials to Ladakh, north-eastern states to be improved

## Modi launches PM-CARES fund to fight virus



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the creation of an assistance and emergency situation relief fund where people can contribute and help in the fight against coronavirus. The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief

in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES) will go a long way in creating a healthier India, he said on Twitter. "People from all walks of life expressed their desire to donate to India's war against Covid-19. It is my appeal to my fellow Indians, kindly contribute to the PM-CARES Fund," he said. PTI **Turn to Page 4**

## THE JOURNEY BACK HOME



Migrants, constituting a large chunk of the country's unorganised sector, expressed their frustration through a mass exodus from several cities without caring about the prescribed social distancing norms

PHOTO: SANJAY K SHARMA

# After the long walk, jobless migrants head home by bus

SOMESH JHA  
New Delhi, 28 March

The long walk of migrants, captured non-stop in striking visuals for the past few days, came to a halt on Saturday as the Centre and state governments stepped in to send them home. To begin with, some 1,000 buses were pressed into service to carry migrants from Delhi to many parts of Uttar Pradesh. If it's any relief, the bus journey would be free for migrants, who lost their income after the 21-day coronavirus-linked lockdown forced companies to shut factories and plants.

Ever since businesses took harsh steps due to Covid-19, migrants, constituting a large chunk of the country's unorganised sector, expressed their frustration through a mass exodus from several cities without caring about the prescribed social distancing norms. With luggage on their shoulders, toddlers in arms and other family members by the side, thousands of them decided to leave the cities they had

known as their own, catching the administration unawares.

After days of indecisiveness, the governments on Saturday decided to come together in resolving a growing crisis. As soon as the word spread that the Uttar Pradesh government had lined up buses at Anand Vihar station in New Delhi to take them to their towns and villages, jobless and mostly cashless migrants gathered in thousands in the hope of reaching home, and that too not by foot or makeshift rickshaws.

At Anand Vihar bus station, it was like a human chain. While social distancing was impossible, authorities attempted some degree of hygiene through distribution of masks and thermal screening. The bus station was sanitised too, not with sanitisers but by sprinkling tap water.

"We are noting down the details of all the passengers and their destination," Ghaziabad's Additional District Magistrate Shailendra Kumar Singh said. **Turn to Page 4**

## INDIA CASES RISE OVER 900, DEATH TOLL AT 19

The number of Covid-19 cases in India climbed to 918 on Saturday, while the death toll was 19, according to the Union health ministry. The number of active cases in the country was 819, while 79 people were either cured/discharged and one had migrated. The cases in the country included 47 foreigners. Maharashtra had reported the highest number of cases at 180. **10**

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# Keep banking channels up & running: FM

Sitharaman tells banks that cash withdrawals must happen without disruption

ABHIJIT LELE  
Mumbai, 28 March

The Union government has asked all banks to ensure that their banking channels — branches, ATMs, and the business correspondent network — are up and running across India for transactions, especially cash withdrawals.

Banks are expected to witness a surge in transactions across channels next week, owing to salary payments to employees. Pensioners will also be visiting branches in the first few days of April. The beneficiaries of the direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme are also likely to withdraw money from their accounts, senior

## BANKING ON THEM

- Banks to ensure all their branches and ATMs continue operations
- To implement social distancing at all points
- Provide authorisation to staff
- Seek district administration help for smooth passage of staff

public sector bankers said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman held one-to-one interaction with chief executives of banks on Saturday. The nationwide lockdown to prevent the



spread of Covid-19 has led to disruptions in banking operations in the field. Banking services have been declared as essential services. According to the finance ministry's Twitter handle, during the

call, banks raised specific problems and were heard in detail. Solutions to these issues are being found through coordination with state governments and all the problems are being addressed, it said.

FM acknowledged the role of public sector banks and encouraged them to keep up their efforts in providing uninterrupted banking services across the country.

Financial Services Secretary Debashish Panda and Madhesh Kumar Mishra and Suchindra Mishra, both of whom are joint secretaries in the Department of Financial Services, were also present during the calls. **Turn to Page 4**

# Tatas commit ₹1,500 crore to fight Covid-19



SHALLY SETH MOHILE  
Mumbai, 28 March

Tata Trusts, the philanthropic arm of the Tata group, and Tata Sons, the group's holding company, on Saturday committed ₹1,500 crore to fight the Covid-19 crisis.

"The current situation in India and across the world is of grave concern and needs immediate action. Tata Trusts and the Tata group's companies have in the past risen to the needs of the nation. At this moment, the need of the hour is greater than any other time," Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata Trusts, said in a statement. "Today, Tata Trusts continue their pledge to protect and empower all affected communities, and is committing ₹500 crore," he added.

## CORPORATE PLEDGES

- ITC **₹150 crore**
- Hero Cycles **₹100 crore**
- Bajaj Group **₹100 crore**
- Vedanta Group **₹100 crore**
- HUL **₹100 crore**

Tata said urgent emergency resources were needed to be deployed to cope with the one of the "toughest challenges the human race will face". In a separate statement, Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said the company had earmarked ₹1,000 crore to battle Covid-19 and for related activities. "We will work together with Tata Trusts and our chairman emeritus, Ratan Tata. We will work in a collaborative manner to bring the full expertise of the group," he said. Tata Sons is also bringing in ventilators and is gearing up to manufacture the same in India soon. "All of us will have to do whatever it takes to alleviate and enhance the quality of lives of the communities we serve," he said. **Turn to Page 4**

# Test that can detect coronavirus in 5 minutes

Abbott to supply 50,000 tests a day starting April 1

MICHELLE FAY CORTEZ  
28 March

Abbott Laboratories is unveiling a coronavirus test that can tell if someone is infected in as little as five minutes, and is so small and portable it can be used in almost any health-care setting.

The medical-device maker plans to supply 50,000 tests a day starting April 1, said John Frels, vice president of research and development at Abbott Diagnostics. The molecular test looks for fragments of the coronavirus genome, which can quickly be detected when present at high levels. A thorough search to definitively rule out an infection can take up to 13 minutes, he said.

Abbott has received emergency use authorisation from the US Food and Drug Administration "for use by authorised laboratories and patient care settings," the company said on Friday.

The US has struggled to supply enough tests to detect the virus, even as the outbreak

## HOW THE TECHNOLOGY WORKS

- A nasal or throat swab is mixed with a chemical solution, breaking open the virus and releasing its genetic material
- The mixture is inserted into Abbott's ID Now system (pictured), which weighs 3.18 kg

- The technology identifies and amplifies select sequences of the coronavirus genome and ignores contamination from other viruses
- A positive test result takes as little as 5 minutes, while a negative result to definitively rule out an infection can take up to 13 minutes



threatens to overwhelm hospitals in New York, California, Washington and other regions. After initially restricting testing to high-risk people, and problems with a test designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US regulators have rushed out diagnostics made by the world's leading commercial-testing firms.

"This is really going to provide a tremendous opportunity for front-line caregivers, those having to diagnose a lot of

infections, to close the gap with our testing," Frels said. "A clinic will be able to turn that result around quickly, while the patient is waiting."

The technology builds on Illinois-based Abbott's ID Now platform, the most common point-of-care test currently available in the US, with more than 18,000 units spread across the country. It is widely used to detect influenza, strep throat and respiratory syncytial virus, a common bug that causes

cold-like symptoms.

The test starts with taking a swab from the nose or the back of the throat, then mixing it with a chemical solution that breaks open the virus and releases its RNA. The mixture is inserted into an ID Now system, a small box weighing just under 7 pounds that has the technology to identify and amplify select sequences of the coronavirus genome and ignore contamination from other viruses. The equipment

can be set up almost anywhere, but the company is working with its customers and the Trump administration to ensure the first cartridges are sent to where they are most needed. They are targeting hospital emergency rooms, urgent-care clinics and doctors' offices.

Last week, Abbott's m2000 RealTime system got US Food and Drug Administration approval for use in hospitals and molecular laboratories to diagnose the infection. That system can churn through more tests on a daily basis, up to 1 million a week, but it takes longer to get the results. **BLOOMBERG**

IN BRIEF

**Practo makes online booking available for Covid-19 tests**

Practo, a digital healthcare platform, said Covid-19 testing is now available for booking on its platform. Practo said it has partnered with Thyrocare, a chain of diagnostic and preventive care laboratories, to conduct Covid-19 detection test, which has been authorised by the government and ICMR. While starting from Saturday the test has been made available for Mumbai residents, it will be expanded to the rest of the country. "Widespread testing is critical to track the scale and prevent the transmission of Covid-19. To ensure that everyone can get tested, the government is constantly working on expanding the list of labs and centres. We've partnered with Thyrocare to ensure that access to these tests is not an issue," said Dr Alexander Kuruvilla, chief health strategy officer, Practo.

**Infosys engineer sacked for FB post on coronavirus**

An Infosys software engineer, who gave a call to the public to sneeze in public to spread coronavirus, has been sacked, the company said. The firm, which had initially believed that it could be a case of mistaken identity, confirmed later that Mujeeb Mohammad was its employee and stated that he has been terminated from service. "Infosys has a zero tolerance policy towards such acts and has accordingly, terminated the services of the employee," it tweeted.

**Tech M tweaks logo in solidarity with fight against corona**

Tech Mahindra made a temporary change in its brand logo to reflect its commitment towards the well-being of its associates and clients. The "e" in the IT firm's logo is boxed inside the picture of a home for the next few weeks. The tweak showcases how Tech Mahindra's over 130,800 associates have adjusted to the crisis and are meeting the organization's commitments to keep critical systems running for global clients, it said on Saturday.

**Trump to GM: Stop 'wasting time', produce ventilators**

US President Donald Trump on Friday invoked emergency powers to require General Motors (GM) to build much-needed ventilators for coronavirus patients after he accused the largest US automaker of "wasting time" during negotiations. Trump for the first time invoked the Defense Production Act, saying GM was not moving quickly enough even though earlier on Friday the largest US automaker announced it would begin building ventilators in the coming weeks. Asked about negotiations with GM over ventilators, Trump expressed anger with the company's decision to close an assembly plant in

politically important Ohio. He also criticized GM's prior decisions to build plants outside the US. "I didn't go into it with a favourable view," Trump told a news conference of the GM talks. White House advisor Peter Navarro said the administration ran into "roadblocks" with GM this week. GM said in a statement in response to Trump that it has been working with ventilator firm Ventec Life Systems and GM suppliers "around the clock for over a week to meet this urgent need" and said its commitment to Ventec's ventilators "has never wavered". The act grants the president power to expand industrial production of any key materials or products for national security and other reasons.

**IT firms may lose exports revenue worth \$15 billion**

DEBASIS MOHAPATRA  
Bengaluru, 28 March

IT services players are set to face higher client specific issues in the coming quarters, mainly in the airlines, oil and gas, and tourism sectors.

According to experts, clients in these sectors are likely to hold back their IT spends, which could potentially affect 10-12 per cent of IT exports revenues, aggregating around \$15 billion. "All major airlines such as Delta Air Lines, Cathay Pacific; major cruise companies, apart from firms involved in oil and gas segments, are likely to cut their IT spend in the coming quarters. However, there are no project cancellations as of now though clients are asking for furloughs owing to halting of operations amidst the Covid-19 outbreak," said Pareekh Jain, an IT outsourcing advisor and founder of Pareekh Consulting.

With travel ban imposed by many nations, several airlines have informed their investors regarding the cut in their budgets. While US-based Delta Air Lines has gone public about reducing its expenditure, its peers such as United Airlines, American Airlines, JetBlue, and Southwest Airlines have hinted at the same. Similarly, Hong Kong-based air-



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

line Cathay Pacific has said it will incur losses in the first half of 2020 owing to the pandemic. With airlines industry being largely impacted, manufacturers like Airbus and Boeing are also expected to spend less on digital technologies. "All major firms, including TCS, Infosys, HCL Technologies, Mindtree, and L&T Technology Services, have exposure to these firms or their supply chains in some way or the other," said another outsourcing advisor.

Similarly, with cruise companies coming to a halt, many of the global IT firms, including some marquee Indian names, can see adverse impact. Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and Norwegian Cruise Lines have sought a bailout from the US administration, indicating the state of affairs of the industry. Even falling oil prices have

**COVID-19 HITS CLIENTS HARD**

Plunging of crude oil prices is likely to adversely impact the major oil processors' ability to spend on new-age technologies, though this may not impact the tech maintenance and support work.

With the auto sector also taking a severe hit, all major global original equipment manufacturers are feared to cut their spending in coming quarters. Mid-tier IT firm KPIT Technologies' red-flag over earning can be seen as early warning on supply side disruption. IT firms can take solace from the fact that they don't have much exposure to Italy since the country is home to many luxury brands. "Italy's fashion firms like Versace, Gucci, Armani, Valentino, and Prada don't have much exposure to Indian IT firms. These high-end fashion firms, which never face any demand slowdown, usually work with global biggies like Accenture and IBM," added Jain.

**Airlines, cruises, firms in oil & gas and automotive segments plan budget cuts**

10-12% of revenue of about \$15 billion may be affected due to ongoing spread of virus

Even though project cancellations have not yet started, clients are asking for furloughs

Indian IT firms don't have much exposure to Italy, home to major fashion brands

**Sugar mills boost hand sanitizer production**

VIRENDRA SINGH RAWAT  
Lucknow, 28 March

Sugar mills have ramped up production capacity of hand sanitizers to about 100,000 litres a day to cater to the rising demand in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Apart from sugar mills, grain-based distilleries have also augmented production capacity, taking the capacity to 200,000 litres a day.

Responding to the advisory by the central and state governments to increase production of ethanol/ethyl alcohol-based hand sanitizers, sugar mills, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, have moved fast to supplement sup-

ply with greenfield facilities at their captive distilleries. "The central and state government departments and agencies, including sugar, excise, drug controllers, have worked in perfect coordination resulting in speedier sanctions of licenses and subsequent hand sanitizer production," Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) Director General Abinash Verma told Business Standard on Saturday.

He said while production data was being collated, about 50 sugar mills had capacity totaling 100,000 litres per day with the majority producing roughly 2,000 litres each. While, some sugar firms are



producing and marketing hand sanitizers, or supplying it to other firms for bottling and marketing, others have firming up contracts to supply its raw material viz. ethanol/ethyl alcohol/extra neutral alcohol (ENA) to external sanitizer units.

Verma also said there were no reports of any disruption in crushing operations after the 21-day lockdown was announced, and there was no reason yet to revise the seasonal sugar production estimates pegged at about 33 million tonnes (MT). "There was a little disruption at lime quarries in Rajasthan and lime transportation to the mills. However, it has now been sorted out with the intervention of the relevant central and state authorities," Verma added.

Prakash Naiknavare, managing director of National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, said there was over 35 MT of standing sugarcane crop.

**Budding devices firms go on a war against Covid-19**

**ADVANCED TECH TO THE RESCUE**

- Smart ventilators that can reduce lung injury
- Sensors and AI to quantify the level of hand sanitization
- Screening devices based on the non-touch thermometer
- Digital advisory which connects doctors, social workers and psychologists with patients and families for support
- Face masks that ensure complete leak-proof coverage of eyes, ears, nose

PEERZADA ABRAR  
Bengaluru, 28 March

Smart ventilators that reduce lung injury, contactless devices for sanitization and a software for detecting infection on CT scan and X-ray are some of the innovations budding medical devices firms are coming up with to tackle the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

All these will be available on Healthcare Innovation for Indian Healthcare (Hiih), a medical entrepreneurship and innovation-enabling platform.

Hiih has launched an initiative to bring together top healthcare firms that can collaborate and provide critical facilities to fight the disease.

"This is an unprecedented situation in the history of humankind. We need to be able to think and act in an agile manner and innovate as required. Hiih was created to enable the Indian medical fraternity respond quickly," said Jagdish Chaturvedi, founder

of Hiih, a noted ENT surgeon and stand-up comedian. "This platform is doing a small bit to help the society and hopefully gives strength to all of us to fight this disease," said Chaturvedi. He said medical start-ups are critical to fighting the epidemic, as they are nimble and have innovative ideas that can be deployed easily.

There are seven categories of start-ups that are working to help ease the Covid-19 crisis. They include ventilator development, disinfection and sanitization as well as mask and personal protective equipment. The other categories include drug development and helpline and support services.

One firm, Aerobiosys Innovations, is developing Duo-Vent, an artificial intelligent (AI)-enabled cost-effective and smart ventilator that can reduce lung injury and provides targeted therapy so that the ventilation time can be reduced. This allows the next person in the queue to get ventilation early.

Another firm Aikenist Technologies is providing automated detection of the severity of pneumonia due to Covid-19, based on artificial intelligence via X-ray and CT scan. This can also be used as an effective screening solution, along with reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests. Aikenist said it provides solutions for detection of 'opacities' and 'consolidation' using AI algorithms on CT scan and X-ray images. This will help as AI assistance to radiologists for quick

diagnosis. The solution is cloud-based and compatible with all CT and X-ray machines.

Pink Tech Design has worked on developing solutions for digitally assuring sanitation. It has built three inter-connected systems for sanitation. This includes a hand sanitization station, which uses IoT (Internet of Things) sensors and AI to quantify the level of hand sanitization. The system shows a red light when hands are not properly sanitized and a green light when they are. Many employees like pantry boys, street food vendors and paramedics are also required to wear gloves and masks. Pink Tech's AI-based system uses a camera and underlying computer vision algorithms to detect if a person has worn gloves and a mask.

Using a phone or a standalone system with a camera, it can detect if the user is wearing gloves and masks and record that in an adherence database.

Sensesim Technology is developing a Covid-19 screening device based on a non-touch thermometer. This can be used to screen people at public places like parks, community halls, cinema halls, bus and train stations to avoid community spread.

BillionLives, a social impact start-up, has launched CoronacareLife, a digital advisory and specialist consulting platform which connects doctors, social workers and psychologists with patients, who are seeking accurate and actionable advice on the virus.



**Tea plantations may incur losses of ₹2,000 crore**

AWISHEK RAKSHIT  
Kolkata, 28 March

Tea plantation companies may head towards a consolidated loss of nearly ₹2,000 crore this calendar year, as all estates have been closed to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Initially, estates were kept open as plantation firms were of the opinion that the risk of infection at the gardens is extremely low. But the call to shut down was taken following the announcement of the 21-day lockdown by the Centre and state governments.

All the 1,422 registered tea estates and more than 250,000 micro-small planters have stopped production. This is due to the safety of workers, unavailability of transport to ferry finished tea and practically no demand either domestically or from importing countries. "It is of utmost importance to stop the spread of coronavirus and estates are thus closed," said Arun Kumar Ray, deputy chairman at the Tea Board.

Estimates from plantation companies pegged production losses in excess of 100 million kg (mkg) across India, which is worth around ₹2,000 crore. Usually, plantation firms in Assam and West Bengal produce around 15 per cent of the total tea during March-April. Referred to as the tea pot of India, Assam produces around 50 per cent of the beverage in

the country annually. The figure was around 1,390 mkg in 2019 in India.

The closure period incidentally has affected the prime first flush in the Darjeeling and Dooars region. During this time, teas are usually sold at a premium. However, there aren't any buyers this time.

"Even after the estates open, another 10 days will be needed for skiffing to clear overgrown leaves," said Atul Asthana, managing director at the Goodricke Group.

Plantation companies are of the view that if the estates are

shut till mid-April, production cannot commence before May. The second flush season, which produces the best quality teas that are priced extraordinarily high, begins from May. "However, a lot of preparation is needed to produce the best teas from the second flush. If operations start from May itself, it may be too late to produce the priciest teas," said a planter from Darjeeling, who exports luxury teas to Germany and Japan.

On the other hand, exporters said there is practically no demand from major importing countries as most of them, including Iran, Japan, Germany, the UK and the US among others, are currently grappling with the pandemic. It, in fact, led to the cancellation of the Mombasa auctions as buyers are unable to travel.

**Indian start-up debuts on global quantum computing stage**

AJAI SHUKLA  
New Delhi, 28 March

An Indian company called QNu Labs aims to be a global player in the futuristic field of quantum computing, after becoming the world's fourth company to build a deployable "Quantum-Safe Security" product.

Only three companies worldwide can boast of such an achievement. Quantum-Safe Security is regarded as a relatively small, billion-dollar niche in the overall field of quantum computing, which could soon be a trillion-dollar industry.

The Bengaluru-based QNu Labs has matched global firms Quintessence Labs, ID Quantique, and Toshiba in developing Quantum-Safe Security solutions. These safeguard sensitive data by upgrading conventional network encryption to foil "hacking" attempts from hostile quantum computers. In the emerging era of "quantum supremacy", hackers using quantum computing can quickly crack contemporary encryption algorithms.

Quantum computing relies on vastly enhanced computing capacity to quickly crack problems that would

take conventional computers years to solve.

The benefits of supercomputing were highlighted last fortnight in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, when IBM's Summit supercomputer quickly identified 77 chemical compounds that might form the basis of an eventual drug against the virus.

A quantum computer could do the job far faster. Last October, Google's Sycamore processor — a quantum computer — performed a calculation in 200 seconds that would have taken the world's most powerful supercomputer 10,000 years to solve.

India's government has announced its intention of becoming a global leader in quantum computing. The 2020-21 Union Budget allocates ₹8,000 crore towards this end.

But quantum computing also has a dark side. Its computing power can quickly overwhelm ("hack") the encryption that protects data and communications in critical systems such as military and nuclear command networks, government agencies, banks, financial institutions and power grids.

"We at QNu anticipated that the power of quantum computing, in the wrong hands, has immense



Quantum computing relies on vastly enhanced computing capacity to quickly crack problems that would take conventional computers years to solve

destructive capability. So there is a need for Quantum-Safe Encryption (or Quantum-Safe Security) to safeguard networks against malevolent quantum computing," says Sunil Gupta, one of the four co-

founders of QNu Labs. The Bangalore-based QNu Labs, which describes itself as a "true research & development-led, intellectual property-focused quantum player", believes that the

current public-key encryption method is highly vulnerable and is a huge Indian security weakness.

"Hackers carry out 'harvest now, decrypt later' attacks, where they can copy and store encrypted data and decrypt it at a later stage with quantum computers... QNu Labs intention is to protect data at a national level," says the company.

With critical networks now looking at Quantum-Safe Security solutions to ward off break-in attacks from quantum computers, this niche will become a \$25 billion industry within three years, say industry experts.

Eying that market segment, QNu Labs has recently launched a "Quantum Random Number Generator" called Tropos and "Quantum Key Distribution System" called Amros, which it says is fully resistant to hacking attacks from adversarial quantum computers.

The national security establishment is clearly interested in QNu Labs' expertise. Potential adversaries like China's People's Liberation Army are developing sophisticated capabilities to hack into, and paralyse, Indian command and infrastructure networks. QNu Labs has given technical

briefings to the National Security Agency and the Defence R&D Organisation (DRDO). The company has signed a memorandum with Bharat Electronics (BEL), in case quantum-safe security systems are required to be built in the future through a public sector entity.

"We have about 14-15 critical trade secrets, which we will safeguard as our own intellectual property. We have filed four patents already and will be filing nine more for our technologies," says Gupta.

QNu Labs was incorporated in 2016, after being incubated in Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. Gupta says the Coronavirus pandemic will restrict the current year's turnover to \$250,000 (₹2 crore) but, with his products ready to hit the market, the target for 2020-21 is \$5 million, \$15 million for 2021-22 and \$30 million for 2022-23.

The four co-founders own the company, along with some angel investors who are high-net worth individuals (HNIs) interested in deep technology. Funds are also being raised from venture capitalists, nailing its global ambitions, QNu Labs has incorporated a subsidiary in the US in October 2019, called QNu Inc.

# Discoms receive payment relief

Centre allows firms 3-month moratorium from payments to power generators and transmission companies

SHREYA JAI  
New Delhi, 28 March

Power distribution companies (discoms) have been allowed to defer payments to power generators (gencos) and transmission companies (transcos) in the wake of the delayed payments by electricity consumers (till June 30).

The Union ministry of power has asked the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) to provide a three-month moratorium to discoms for paying to gencos and transcos.

R K Singh, Union minister of state for power and new and renewable energy, has also asked state governments to issue similar directions to State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs), said a statement.

The Centre and the state governments can issue directions to regulators under the Electricity Act for matters relating to public interest.

The ministry also directed all central power gencos and transcos

to continue supply/transmission of electricity even to discoms that have large outstanding dues.

"During the present emergency, there will be no curtailment of supply to any discom," the ministry said in a public statement.

State-owned discoms collectively owe ₹85,000 crore to power gencos (as of December 2019). In

June last year, the Centre made it mandatory for power discoms to prepay power generators through letters of credit (LC) issued by banks. The prepaid amount has now been reduced by half for power supplied during the 21-day lockdown period.

The LC mechanism was aimed at ensuring timely payments to generators by distribution companies.

The statement further noted that due to the lockdown, consumers are unable to pay their dues to discoms. "This has affected the liquidity position of discoms, thereby impairing their ability to pay the generating and transmission companies," it said.

Haryana, for instance, on



State-owned discoms collectively owed ₹85,000 crore to power gencos as of December 2019

Friday announced that due to the coronavirus epidemic, no surcharge will be levied on the electricity bill for one month since all-cash counters of the department were closed for one month.

Apart from this, consumers paying their electricity bills digitally will be given a special discount of 2 per cent.

The Centre's move comes as a

big relief to state-owned discoms which had cumulative losses of ₹18,316 crore as on December 2019.

Gencos delay payment to coal companies. The paper recently reported that power generating companies, especially state-owned units, owe ₹22,770 crore to Coal

India (CIL), Singareni Collarries (SSCL) and Neyveli Lignite (NLC).

In its statement, the ministry

said in order to maintain the continuity of supply by domestic coal companies and transportation by railways, the ministry is in touch with the ministries of railways and coal.

The Uttar Pradesh government had earlier sought a direction by the Centre to treat non-payment by the state department as force majeure event. The state requested that Coal India and the railways should not insist on advance payment in the wake of the lockdown and COVID crisis.

"The present notice has been issued under the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), notifying the event effecting the performance of obligations of UP Power Corporation (UPPCL) under the PPA. Accordingly, no cause of action or breach will arise as consequence of the Force majeure event," said the letter by the UPPCL on Friday.

It also said discoms in Uttar Pradesh will face a major challenge in bill collection. The state said it is promoting online payment. However, till then, it will have a "significant impact on other utilities of the power sector value chain."

# Telcos to opt for EMI moratorium: COAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi, 28 March

Debt-ridden telecom operators are likely to opt for three-month moratorium to avoid cash crunch during the lockdown, industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said on Saturday.

The telecom operators have spoken in favour of raising mobile call and internet rates at the earliest, however, they will keep the prices stable during the lockdown period, COAI DG Rajan S Mathews said.

"There is debt of around ₹1.6-2 trillion that telecom operators owe to Indian banks. They will opt three-month moratorium in loan repayment to help them maintain cash flow. It is a relief for them," Mathews said.

The RBI on Friday allowed banks to put on hold EMI payments on all term loans for three months, slashed the cost of fresh borrowing by cutting policy interest rate by steepest in more than 11 years and infused a massive ₹3.74 lakh crore liquidity as it joined the efforts of the government to counter the economic fallout of coronavirus pandemic.

COAI also allayed fear of hike in tariff by the telecom operators.

"Telecom companies understand market situation. They will give tariff stable for now," Mathews said.

Telecom operators have been asking



Telecom operators owe debt of around ₹1.6-2 trillion to Indian banks

for fixing minimum tariff for call and data rates. Vodafone Idea has suggested that the minimum rates should be fixed starting April 1, 2020.

Mobile subscribers get access to 4G data at a price as low as ₹3.5 per GB but if the floor price is fixed as demanded by telecom operators, mobile internet prices will rise 5-10 times from the current level. Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea has proposed that the minimum price of data should be fixed at ₹35 per GB, Bharti Airtel has proposed minimum price of ₹30 per GB for low data users and Reliance Jio wants it to be hiked gradually to ₹20 per GB.

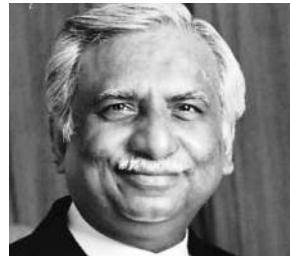
# Covid-19 puts the brakes on corporate fraud investigations

SHRIMI CHOUDHARY  
New Delhi, 28 March

The coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak appears to have come as a blessing in disguise for Rana Kapoor and others, who are being investigated for their alleged involvement in corporate fraud cases.

Sources say law enforcement agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation and Serious Fraud Investigation Office, decided to delay full-scale investigation in major matters for at least a month.

Business Standard spoke to senior officials in these agen-



One of the pending matters pertains to YES Bank former MD Rana Kapoor (left), where the ED summoned big borrowers, including Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal (second left), Reliance Group Chairman Anil Ambani (centre), Essel Group Chairman Subhash Chandra (second right), and Indiabulls Founder Sameer Gehlaut

cies. According to them, summons, questioning and related action have been postponed due to the lockdown. "We have considered pleas for adjournment of summons that were

being served to people in ongoing matters. In some cases, we have given fresh date, which is between April end and May first week," said an official of a federal agency.

This may give relief to the accused and slow the investigation in crucial matters, especially cases that need immediate attention. This is because evidences might be distorted or

get influenced, said an ex-official of a probe agency.

One such matter pertains to the YES Bank Rana Kapoor case, where the ED summoned a clutch of big borrowers,

including Reliance Group Chairman Anil Ambani, Essel Group Chairman Subhash Chandra, Indiabulls Group founder Sameer Gehlaut and Jet Airways

founder Naresh Goyal.

Some of these people have already been issued fresh summons and were given a new date for personal appearance. Those who got extension from the previous date can also be given exemption, said officials in the enforcement agency. Kapoor's bail plea, which was listed on Thursday, has been adjourned by the sessions court.

The Bombay High Court sought a feedback from J J Hospital to take a call on the bail plea of Kapoor. Other cases of ED which get impacted are - Chanda Kochhar's quid pro quo, Edelweiss-Capstone forex violation matter, Jet Airways-

Goyals' shady firms, Air Asia probe where ED was to submit its report to the Delhi HC.

They also include financial fraud at Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS), chargesheet in former finance minister P Chidambaram's matter and so on.

Similarly, probes by CBI and SFIO, which are examining most of these matters from corruption and the company law violation perspective, have also been affected.

Sources said the probe agencies are planning to move an application, seeking more time with respect to the filing of chargesheet in matters.

# CRISIL downgrades SpiceJet's loans

ABHIJIT LELE  
Mumbai, 28 March

CRISIL has downgraded the rating of SpiceJet's long-term loans to "B" from "BB-" on significant deterioration in business risk profile, and cut the outlook to "negative".

The rating actions come after the airline discontinued international operations till April 30 and suspended domestic flights till March 31, in response to the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic.

If the situation continues

for longer than this, it may have further impact on credit profile of airline operators, including SpiceJet, CRISIL said in statement. The outlook was revised from "positive".

Against a modest revenue expectation, the company will have to continue to incur fixed costs such as lease rentals and workforce costs. This will result in operating losses and a weakening of the financial risk profile. Cancellations of existing travel plans will further put pressure on liquidity, the rating agency said.

## TAX SAVING

## Utilise extended deadline to make the right choices

Avoid errors like investing beyond the permissible limit

DEEPESH RAGHAW

With the coronavirus epidemic bringing the entire country to a standstill, many taxpayers, who had procrastinated and left the task of investing for tax saving for the last few days of the financial year, had got stuck. Fortunately for them, the government has extended the deadline until June 30, 2020, for people to make their tax-saving investments for the financial year 2019-20. This relief will matter especially to those who are not savvy enough to make their investments online. Now that tax savers have got a second opportunity, they should exercise due diligence and make their tax-saving investments with a lot of care. In this article, we shall discuss some of the common mistakes that investors tend to make when doing tax-saving investments.

**Avoid acting in haste:** Now that you have got three additional months, do not once again leave the task of making tax-saving investments for the last few days of June. Most people who make the wrong investments are those who invest at the last moment, and hence buy the first product they are pitched. In their haste, they do not take the trouble to understand the product.

Do not rely exclusively on the sales pitch of salespersons. Such people may only highlight the positive aspects of a product, but may not inform you about its associated risks. If you want to avoid being misled, do some in-depth reading on the product you are being sold, or obtain advice from a financial advisor.

**Do not give in to pressure from relatives and friends:** Many of us have purchased a sub-optimal product just because we could not say no to a friend or a distant relative. You must avoid this mistake as it can take a heavy toll on your financial life. Insurance plans, especially, are very long-term commitments. Once purchased, you cannot exit them with-



## ELSS VS PPF: HOW THE TWO STACK UP

Feature	ELSS	PPF
■ Lock-in/maturity	3 years for each investment	Matures in 15 years
■ Return guarantee	None	Yes
■ Return	Market-linked	Revised periodically by the Finance Ministry
■ Maximum investment limit per FY	None	₹1.5 lakh
■ Taxation	EEE	EEE
■ Tax benefit on investment	Up to ₹1.5 lakh under Sec 80C	Up to ₹1.5 lakh under Sec 80C
■ Open to NRIs?	Yes	No

Source: Personal Finance Plan.in

out taking a massive financial hit. Therefore, invest in only those products that fit your financial requirements. Learn to say no to poor-quality products.

**Stay away from traditional life insurance plans:** You must stay away from them for the simple reason that in trying to combine both insurance and investment, they fulfil neither of these two goals well. The insurance cover that you get in these plans is likely to be inadequate. And since they invest mostly in bonds, the returns you get from them are also likely to be

low. Over a 25-30-year period, large premiums channelled into such a product that barely gives a return of 4-5 per cent can mean the difference between retiring comfortably and retiring with an inadequate corpus.

Retail investors often find it difficult to identify whether the product being sold is a traditional insurance plan. Here is the rule of thumb you should follow. Steer clear if the insurance plan offers investment benefits too. Similarly, if the name of the insurance product comes with keywords such as assured, guaranteed, suraksha, endowment, savings, money-

back, etc., you are most likely being sold a traditional life insurance plan.

If you must purchase life insurance, opt for a term plan. It is the cheapest way to purchase life insurance. For a small premium, you can buy a large cover that will ensure your family's well-being in your absence.

**Unit-linked insurance plans can also be avoided:** Though not as bad as traditional life insurance plans, unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs) can also be avoided. In a term insurance plan, the premium remains constant throughout the life of the plan. In a ULIP, the mortality cost (the amount that is deducted from the premium to pay for the life insurance cover) rises with age. Some ULIPs can have very high-cost structures. Such products are not in the investor's interest. It is best, therefore, to keep insurance and investment separate. Use a term plan for your life cover needs and mutual funds to meet your investment needs. And if you do purchase a ULIP, make sure you go with one that has a very low-cost structure.

**Entire premium is not eligible for deduction:** The entire life insurance premium is not eligible for deduction under Section 80C. Annual premium is eligible for tax deduction only up to 10 per cent of the sum assured. Keep this in mind if you are buying traditional plans or ULIPs, especially single-premium products. More importantly, in cases where the sum assured is more than 10 times the annual or single premium, the maturity proceeds will be taxable.

**Be wary when you visit a bank branch:** Visiting a bank branch can be a risky proposition, especially during the tax season. You may have gone there to invest in a tax-saving fixed deposit or PPF. Instead, the bank staff could push you into a ULIP or a traditional plan. The branch has income targets that fixed deposits and PPF investments don't really help achieve. Traditional plans, ULIPs and other

fancy products do.

**Take into account all tax-saving contributions:** All of us make many involuntary Section 80C investments. For instance, your Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contribution is eligible for deduction under Section 80C. Similarly, principal repayment on home loan and tuition fee paid for two children are also eligible for tax benefit under this section.

When you take into account these items, you may find that you have only a small amount left to reach the Section 80C limit of ₹1.5 lakh. When an investor is aware of this, the pressure on him to make Section 80C investments goes down and he becomes less susceptible to mis-selling.

**Other tax-saving options also exist:** Most taxpayers focus only on Section 80C benefits. But there are tax benefits under other sections also that you can avail of. You can, for instance, avail of deduction under Section 80D for expense on health insurance premium and health check-ups. However, one point that needs to be borne in mind is that the amount of health insurance you buy should be governed by your family's needs. It should not be limited to the amount of premium on which you will get tax benefit.

You get a deduction of up to ₹2 lakh for interest payment on housing loan under Section 24. Another deduction is available under Section 80E on payment of interest on education loan. Therefore, do not fixate on Section 80C alone.

**Be aware of the rules:** Taxpayers are often not aware of some of the nuances of the rules that govern tax-saving investments. For instance, a buyer is eligible for tax benefit on principal and interest repayment on a home loan only after he receives possession of the house, or once its construction is complete. If you claim tax benefit prior to possession, you could face scrutiny by the Income-Tax Department.

Similarly, if you invest more than ₹1.5 lakh in PPF account, the excess amount won't earn any interest. Do note that this limit of ₹1.5 lakh is cumulative for your PPF account and also those PPF accounts where you are the guardian.

Finally, make sure that your tax-saving investments help you meet your financial goals. You do not have to be an expert in finance to avoid the above-mentioned traps and pitfalls. Be curious, ask the right questions, and exercise a bit of discipline.

## BS TUTORIAL

Jayant Pai

## Financial literacy

## 1. Who proposed the Golden Arches theory?

- A. Milton Friedman
- B. Thomas Friedman
- C. Paul Samuelson
- D. Amartya Sen

## 2. Which author's book contained the statement that bankruptcy came gradually at first...and then speeded up.

- A. Ayn Rand
- B. Ernest Hemingway
- C. P.G. Wodehouse
- D. Jane Austen

## 3. Who undertook this landmark commitment in 2012, "We will do whatever it takes to save the Euro"?

- A. Ben Bernanke
- B. Angela Merkel
- C. Mario Draghi
- D. Christine Lagarde

## 4. On which Company did Warren Buffet write his college Thesis on?

- A. Coca Cola
- B. GEICO
- C. BNSF Railroad
- D. Nebraska Furniture Mart

## 5. "Fairly earned...wisely used". Who said he would like this on his epitaph?

- A. Bill Gates
- B. Bill Miller
- C. Walter Schloss
- D. Charlie Munger

**Solutions:**  
 1. B. It points out that no two countries that have McDonald's franchises have ever gone to war due to the cost and the contact between them.  
 2. B. In his novel, 'The Sun Also Rises' a character Mike answers, "Gradually, then suddenly."  
 3. C. Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, made this commitment during a speech in London in July 2012.  
 4. B. The company, which Buffett liked the best, became wholly-owned subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway in 1996.  
 5. D. He said this at the 2011 annual meeting of Berkshire Hathaway.

The quiz master is a certified financial planner and head-products, PPFAS Mutual Fund. Send your queries and feedback at yourmoney@bsmail.in

## ECONOMY

## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

BINAY SINHA

## Bank body seeks transportation, police protection for working staff

GIREESH BABU  
Chennai, 28 March

The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) has asked the government and managements to ensure transportation for staff and police protection at branches. This comes as the Centre recently announced various measures under different schemes, the funds of which have to be released through these banks.

The AIBEA said this will lead to a sudden and huge crowds at branches (for funds), which are struggling with staff shortage. Also, with more people visiting branches, the likelihood of coronavirus (Covid-19) spreading looms.

With the Prime Minister announcing a nationwide lockdown and public transportation being stopped in most cities, many employees are unable to attend office.

Restricting the banking business to four hours, the facility of alternative day attendance and working from home, among others, have been some measures that have helped in these adverse circumstances, said C H Venkatachalam, general secretary of the AIBEA, in a statement issued on Saturday.

The announcement of various measures by the government is set to benefit the concerned target groups. But this is bound to result in sudden and huge crowding in branches, especially in rural and semi-urban ones. The number of employees in these branches are low and it would be impossible to manage anxious customers, who may enter branches in large numbers.

## SBI raises \$100 mn via green bonds

The country's largest lender State Bank of India has raised \$100 million through two-year green bonds in very volatile market conditions. The bonds were priced at around 2 per cent (three-month London Inter-Bank Offer Rate of 1.10-15 per cent + 80 basis points). The bond issue was done through private placement.

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FROM PAGE 1

## After the long walk, jobless migrants...

"We will send these details to the village-level authorities so that they are in isolation to avoid the spread of the virus. There are about 1,000 buses that are being deployed," Singh added.

On Saturday, there was hope in the air in the midst of despair. It was the same for 35-year-old construction worker Raheez Ahmed, who covered some 16 km on foot from Okhla to Anand Vihar bus station to catch a bus to HarDOI (Uttar Pradesh) — over 400 kilometers away.

"I get paid on a piecemeal basis and generally in the range of ₹400-450 a day. I'm not eligible for the announcements made by the government so far related to welfare of workers as I am not registered for these services. With cash drying up and no work, I have no option but to head back," Ahmed said.

Although police high-handedness has come up for criticism over the past few days, on Saturday cops were seen helping workers board buses to reach Anand Vihar for onward journey to UP. "The images of workers walking on foot to reach their domicile states have sent out a wrong signal. And we are doing our best to help them reach the bus stations so that they don't have to walk all the way to get there," a sub-inspector manning a police checkpoint said. The officials dealing with the crisis were however cautious about the lockdown rules and provided logistical help discreetly, a source pointed out. Nobody wanted to give an impression that the administration was going easy on lockdown.

The Home Ministry issued a statement on Saturday saying that the government had committed "all support to migrant workers during the lockdown period as per the directions of the Prime Minister."

The press statement, however, had no mention about the bus services. It stated that the Home Secretary had written another letter to the state governments to "immediately set up relief camps for migrant workers or pilgrims who are returning to their domicile states or trying to do so during the lockdown period." The states were also advised to set up relief camps and tented accommodation along the highways for people on the move, to ensure lockdown rules were not broken.

Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation managing director Raj Shekhar wrote a letter to all the district magistrates in UP seeking their cooperation in sending the workers home.

"Government has now taken a decision to allow these passengers en route to reach their destination," the letter read. The transport services will be available on Sunday as well, according to the letter.

Volunteers on the road distributed food and water to those boarding the overloaded buses. Rajesh Sahni was one of them. With the help of 25-30 residents of Kilokari village in Maharani Bagh, he distributed home-cooked food to thousands of migrant workers over the last two days.

Passengers waited for hours to catch the bus that would ultimately take them to where they belong.

But not everyone was as lucky. "Bengal bohut door hai (West Bengal is too far away). How will I walk 1,400 km from here? We thought lockdown would be for one day, then it got extended till March 31 and now till April 14," 40-year-old Guld Mandal from Malda (West Bengal) said, showing the last few hundred rupee notes in his pocket.

If during the last few days, migrants' walk has reminded many of migratory birds in search of resources, the jury's out on whether the latest developments would be a turning point.

## Tatas commit ₹1,500 crore to fight Covid-19

The donation by Tata Sons and Trusts is the biggest sum committed by a corporate and its philanthropic arm since the outbreak of Covid-19. Others, including Reliance Foundation, Mahindra Group, Bajaj Group, and ITC, are lending support too in the battle against the pandemic.

The amount committed by Tata Trusts will be deployed for purchasing personal protective equipment for the medical personnel on the frontlines and procuring respiratory systems and testing kits to increase per capita testing. It will also be utilised for setting up modular treatment facilities for infected patients. Knowledge management and training of health workers and the general public will be other focus areas.

## Modi launches PM-CARES fund to fight virus

This Fund will also cater to similar distressing situations, if they occur in the times ahead," he said. A statement posted on his official website said

while the prime minister is the chairman of the new public charitable trust, its members include the defence minister (Rajnath Singh), home minister (Amit Shah) and the finance minister (Nirmala Sitaraman).

People can visit [www.pmindia.gov.in](http://www.pmindia.gov.in) to make contributions using credit and debit cards, UPI, net banking and RTGS or NEFT, it said.

## High-level panel set up to clear logistics hurdles

"Hence, the committee has been formed, which will collect daily inputs and ensure coordination to solve the issues," he added.

For instance, according to the minutes of the meeting, held on Friday, Priyank Bharti, joint secretary in the road transport ministry, raised the issue of truckers facing the shortage of food on their way as all roadside eateries were closed. He also mentioned that police were stopping goods carriers. The home ministry later issued instructions to all chief secretaries to ensure the movement of people associated with transport of essential supplies and precisely classifying them.

Officials who attended the meeting said north-eastern states complained that the supply of essential commodities, including food and medicine, had slowed.

"The hurdle was that there weren't enough freighter jets available to ensure supply as the aviation regulator wasn't permitting passenger aircraft to be used for cargo transport. This has been sorted, as Air India as well as private airlines are now being allowed to carry food and medicine supplies," said a second official who is part of the committee.

On Saturday, Air India used both A320 and smaller ATR aircraft to operate 12 flights to ferry medicine and food items to Imphal, Agartala, Bhubaneswar, and Raipur. Similarly, private airline IndiGo operated two A320 aircraft carrying supplies.

US aerospace major Boeing has sent a proposal to Spicejet and Air India Express to convert their 737 passenger jets into freighter planes. "We are evaluating the proposal as passenger jets are anyway grounded now," a SpiceJet executive said.

A senior official of Indian Railways said that following suggestions from the committee on Friday, 34,648 wagons carried supplies to keep the supply chains functional. Of these, 23,682 wagons of sugar, salt, coal and petroleum prod-

ucts were ferried by Indian Railways in 425 rakes. The number of wagons carrying essential commodities during the past five days has reached about 125,000.

"The national transporter's focus will be on the delivery of essential commodities like rice, wheat, sugar, salt and vegetables. In the last three days, we have already increased the loading of essential commodities. With the new committee in place, we would ensure that these goods are delivered covering long distances. To monitor the uninterrupted movement of essential commodities over the Indian Railway system, an emergency freight control is working in the Ministry of Railways," said a senior railway official.

Executives of consumer goods companies say the committee should be flexible enough to change the definition of essential and non-essential commodities.

"We have factories in Maharashtra and Karnataka which produce sodium hypochlorite, used as raw material to manufacture disinfectant. With the lockdown, we are unable to manufacture and distribute these chemicals to hospitals or residential complexes. This needs to be put in essential commodities," said an executive of 3M, an MNC in health care product.

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, secretary of consumer affairs, raised the issue in the meeting on Saturday.

## Keep banking channels up &amp; running: FM

Bankers have conveyed that over 90 per cent of branches are working for transactions and special care is being taken to keep adequate cash at branches, ATMs and with BCs. Some branches are not able to function due to local factors like restrictions on the movement of people. Bank executives are sorting out these issues by coordinating with district magistrates, police and state governments.

Bankers are considering additional steps for BCs like insurance coverage and additional financial incentives as transactions at BC points have declined sharply in March after the lockdown in various states.

Meanwhile, public sector lender Indian Bank has launched mobile ATM, which is going to colonies, residential localities, and vegetable markets in Chennai for the benefit of all civilians. The bank is also in process of starting similar facility in other places, including New Delhi, said its MD & CEO Padmaja Chundru.



E-commerce giants Flipkart, BigBasket, and Grofers — led by Kalyan Krishnamurthy, Hari Menon and Albinder Dhindsa — whose services were earlier interrupted because of the nationwide lockdown, have resumed their services in some cities



Mark Zuckerberg-led Facebook is said to be in talks to purchase a significant stake in Mukesh Ambani-controlled telecom major Reliance Jio, which has close to 370 million active users

# Exodus of workers, logistical hurdles hurting biz: India Inc

SUBHAYAN CHAKRABORTY  
New Delhi, 28 March

The mass exodus of workers, bottlenecks in transportation, and harassment by local authorities continue to impede industrial production just four days into the 21-day national lockdown, India Inc informed the government.

The issues formed key concerns raised by industry during a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal held via video conference on Saturday. Multiple sources said the issue of seizures of goods and restrictions on the movement of industrial and consumer goods imposed by local authorities was the primary complaint. The meeting was attended by 16 national and regional industry bodies and sectoral business lobbies.

Apart from industrial goods, stakeholders said key grocery items and essential fast-moving consumer goods were stuck. Businesses said the Centre could marshal resources to help provide additional transport facilities to industry as existing channels had reduced. "Smaller businesses depend upon vehicles to source, move and distribute products. With widespread panic of getting beaten by police, many companies have found it difficult to move stockpiles," a senior functionary of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry said.



**"GOVERNMENT IS FULLY COMMITTED TO SUPPORT ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY, AND IS TAKING RELIEF AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES"**

PIYUSH GOYAL  
Commerce and Industry Minister

Businesses also requested that the minister ensure better coordination between the Centre and states to implement these measures as local authorities were often not aware of the Union home ministry's guidelines.

## CII requests govt to revise norms

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) met Corporate Affairs Secretary Injeti Srinivas on Friday and asked for some relaxations. It requested that firms be allowed to pass circulars, resolutions without the requirement of conducting a board meeting up to June 30. Currently, board meetings are required for matters such as deciding on buy-back of securities, investing funds of the company, borrow monies, taking over a company or acquiring a substantial stake in another firm. The chamber also called for relaxing the requirement of holding board meeting in physical presence for appointment of directors and independent directors in casual vacancies. The Centre has allowed holding board meetings through video conference. However, the issue of bandwidth remains. CII requested that meetings should also be allowed to be held via audio conferencing and there might not be any need to record them since IT personnel were not able to reach office.

BS REPORTER

However, Goyal is believed to have said that updated government instructions make it clear that movement of any type of goods would not be curtailed and assured that local authorities would make sure of it.

## Loss of labour

Industry sought government help to stem the mass exodus of workers — both fixed employees and casual workers — from industrial areas to the countryside. "While some corporates have begun to provide housing and food to employees, it's not possible to extend this to all workers. As a result, the government has been requested to use facilities like schools, which are closed, to house them," said a senior automobile industry functionary present at the meeting.

The government has been hard-pressed to stem the flow of workers. Shipping Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, also present at the video conference, stressed on retaining workers and labourers on firms' payrolls. He said that the migration would jeopardise the lockdown, and also impair chances of early normalisation after the virus passes. "CII has mobilised a coalition of manufacturers in collaboration with other industry associations. Manufacturers will produce and procure medical equipment including ventilators, masks, and personal protection equipment for medical and other emergency staff," Chandrajit Banerjee, CII director general, said. As a result, CII has asked the government to consider removing Customs duty on the items and their inputs temporarily.

A follow up meeting has been scheduled for next week to take stock of the situation, sources said.

# Government ends FY20 divestment programme with ₹14,700-cr shortfall

ARUP ROYCHOUDHURY

The Centre ended the divestment programme for 2019-20 with proceeds of ₹50,298.6 crore, a shortfall of ₹14,701 crore, compared with the Revised Estimates of ₹65,000 crore. The Centre's divestment plans for February and March, which included a number of offers-for-sales, an initial public offering (IPO) and a Specified Undertaking of Unit Trust of India (SUUTI) sale, were hit first by the markets reacting to economic slowdown, and then to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The last three deals finalised were that of the sale of the government's 100 per cent stake in NEEPCO and 75 per cent stake in THDC to NTPC, which together fetched the Centre ₹11,500 crore, and the sale of its 67 per cent stake in Kamarajar Port to Chennai Port Trust.



The planned IPO of Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) and an ₹8,000-crore sale of the Centre's stake in ITC and Axis Bank through SUUTI, have now been put on hold. A number of OFSS, including SAIL, NMDC, PFC, Coal India, IRCON, Hindustan Aeronautics, and others have also been scrapped.

## DISINVESTMENT TRANSACTIONS 2019-20

	Mode of divestment	Centre equity divested (in %)	Receipts (₹ crore)	Centre equity post divestment (in %)
RVNL	Initial public offering	12.12	475.89	87.88
CPSE ETF	5th follow-on fund offering	-	10,000.39	-
IRCTC	IPO	-	637.97	-
Bharat 22 ETF	2nd follow-on fund offering	-	4,368.8	-
RITES (Nov 2019)	Offer-for-sale	10.01	730.33	77.39
MOIL	Buyback	-	250.47	53.84
RITES (Feb 2020)	Offer-for-sale	5.37	399.25	72.02
CPSE ETF	6th follow-on fund offering	-	16,500	-
Enemy share sale	Others	-	1,881.21	-
MDL	Buyback	-	277.88	-
THDC	Strategic divestment (to NTPC)	74.49	7,500	0
NEEPCO	Strategic divestment (to NTPC)	100	4,000	0
Kamarajar Port	Strategic divestment (to Chennai Port Trust)	66.67	2,383	0
Remittances from SUUTI	Others/buyback	-	600	-
SPMCL	Buyback	-	293.45	-
			<b>Total: ₹50,298.64 cr</b>	

CPSE: Central Public Sector Enterprises, RVNL: Rail Vikas Nigam, ETF: Exchange-traded fund, IRCTC: Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, MOIL: Mangalore Ore India, MDL: Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders, THDC: Tehri Hydro Development Corporation, NEEPCO: North Eastern Electric Power Corporation, SUUTI: Specified Undertaking of Unit Trust of India, SPMCL: Security Printing & Minting Corporation of India

# Toll collection period in contracts to be extended

MEGHA MANCHANDA  
New Delhi, 28 March

With toll collection on national highways suspended across the country amid the Covid-19 crisis, the operators will be compensated through extension of their collection period by the same number of days for which the non-tolling is in force.



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

incident that prevents someone from fulfilling a contract. It is included in contracts to remove liability for natural and unavoidable catastrophes that interrupt the expected course of events and restrict participants from fulfilling obligations.

The clause, said a National Highways Authority of India official, had been invoked for all such projects, as it is allowed in the contracts signed with contractors. So is extension of tolling periods after it is suspended. In the wake of



the massive demonetisation exercise in late 2016, highway tolling had been suspended for weeks. And, the companies' toll collection period was extended by that many days.

India Ratings and Research says the massive lockdowns to

contain the Covid-19 outbreak would hit infrastructure construction and revenue growth of the implementing companies. Add the fact that many of their workers are returning to their homes in interior parts and are likely to return only after the

situation normalises, which could be a month from now or even later. Combined with the fact of continued expenditure in the form of overheads and finance charges and there's a clear hit on profitability.

"At this point, nothing is moving from Point A to Point B. Things have come to a standstill and it will take at least three to four months for the work to even begin," says Jayant D Mhaiskar, chairman of MEP Infra.

Even if lockdown is lifted, workers would not be available and there will be restrictions at construction sites, he noted.

# HEALTH

## FIT & PROPER

Your weekly health guide

## Vit-B for pregnancy



RANJANA SHARMA  
Senior Consultant, Apollo Cradle Royale

Maintaining a balanced and healthy diet is important at any stage of life. When you are pregnant, it becomes all the more important to take care of your body to make sure the development of your baby is healthy and you do not develop deficiencies. When it comes to nutrition for pregnant women, B vitamins, or vitamin B complex, holds particular importance. Specifically, vitamin B6, B9 (Folic acid), and B12 are known to help with pregnancy symptoms and reduce the risk of birth defects.

Taking prenatal vitamins is important as it assures that your baby and you are getting the required vitamins for a healthy pregnancy. Having said that, vitamins only support a healthy diet, they do not replace one. All eight vitamin B complex play an important role in your health and strength while your baby develops. While the B complex can be found in supplements, it is still more desirable to get these nutrients from vitamin-rich foods. Foods rich in Vitamin B provide nourishing nutrients for your developing baby and boost your natural energy but extra folic acid as supplement is recommended three to four months before pregnancy until the first trimester.

Vitamin B-1: Thiamine: This vitamin B complex plays an important role in the development of the baby's brain. Around 1.4 milligrams of vitamin B-1 is the recommended daily dosage for pregnant women. Natural sources of the vitamin include yeast, brown rice, whole-grain pasta and pork.

Since vitamin V-2 is water-soluble, the body does not store it, which is why you need to replace it through prenatal vitamins or your diet. Riboflavin is important for the health of your eyes and skin. Around 1.4 milligrams of vitamin B-2 is the recommended daily dosage for pregnant women. Some common sources of the vitamin are turkey, chicken, fish, green vegetables, dairy products and eggs. Vitamin B-3: Niacin: This vitamin improves your nutrient metabolism and digestion. 18 milligrams of vitamin B-3 is the recommended daily dosage for pregnant women.

Vitamin B-5: Pantothenic acid: This vitamin is helpful with leg cramps and also helps in creating hormones. Six milligrams of vitamin B-5 is the recommended daily dosage for pregnant women.

Vitamin B-6: Pyridoxine: It plays an important role in the development of the brain and nervous system of your baby. Vitamin B-6 also plays a role in the production of two vital neurotransmitters — serotonin and norepinephrine. Natural sources of Pyridoxine include bananas, whole-grain cereals, beans and nuts.

Vitamin B-7: Biotin: Around 30 mcg of vitamin B-7 is the recommended daily dosage for pregnant women. Biotin deficiency can occur during pregnancy, so you need to make sure you get enough. Natural sources of Biotin include egg yolk, liver, Swiss chard, yeast and milk. Vitamin B-9: Folic acid: It is perhaps the most important vitamin B for pregnant women. 400 mcg of vitamin B-9 is the recommended daily dosage during and after pregnancy. Food sources include grapefruits, oranges, broccoli and green, leafy vegetables like spinach. Asparagus is good, too.

Vitamin B-12: Cobalamin: It helps maintain your nervous system. Pregnant women are advised to take around 2.6 mcg of Cobalamin per day. Fish, poultry, and milk are good sources of Vitamin B-12.

# Coronavirus symptoms similar to heart attacks in patients

GINA KOLATA  
28 March

The 64-year-old patient arrived at a hospital in Brooklyn with symptoms looking like those seen in patients having a serious heart attack.

An electrocardiogram revealed an ominous heart rhythm. The patient had high blood levels of a protein called troponin, a sign of damaged heart muscle. Doctors rushed to open the patient's blocked arteries — but found that no arteries were blocked.

The patient was not having a heart attack. The culprit was the coronavirus.

The Brooklyn patient recovered after 12 days in the hospital and is now at home. But there have been reports of similar patients in the United States and abroad, and the cases have raised troubling questions for doctors.

What should doctors do these days when they see patients with apparent heart attacks? Should they first rule out coronavirus infection — or is that a waste of valuable time for the majority of



patients who are actually having heart attacks?

Should every coronavirus patient be tested for high blood levels of troponin to see if the virus has attacked the heart?

"I don't know what the right answer is," said Nir Uriel, a cardiologist at Columbia University and Weill Cornell Medicine in New York.

The Brooklyn patient had myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart that has been seen in patients with other viral infections, such as MERS —

also caused by a coronavirus — and the H1N1 swine flu.

But the new coronavirus, called SARS-CoV-2, mostly infects the lungs, causing pneumonia in severe cases. Believing it caused respiratory disease, many cardiologists thought the coronavirus was outside their specialty.

"We were thinking lungs, lungs, lungs — with us in a supportive role," said John Rumsfeld, chief science and quality officer at the American College of Cardiology. "Then

**The risk of death is more than four times higher among patients with existing heart complications**

all of a sudden we began to hear about potential direct impact on the heart." A report on heart problems among coronavirus patients in Wuhan, China, was published in *JAMA Cardiology* on Friday.

The study, led by Zhibing Lu at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, found that 20 percent of patients hospitalized with Covid-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, had some evidence of heart damage.

Many were not known to have underlying heart disease. But they often had abnormal electrocardiograms, like the patient in Brooklyn, in addition to elevated troponin levels, which sometimes soared to levels seen in patients with heart attacks.

The risk of death was more than four times higher among these patients, compared with patients without heart complications.

The journal also published a report, by doctors in Italy, describing a previously healthy 53-year-old woman who developed myocarditis.

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# Theme park in UK opens drive-through Covid testing facility

ESTELLE SHIRBON  
London, 28 March

A drive-through coronavirus testing facility for health workers has begun operating in the car park of a popular resort near London, part of a British government drive to ramp up testing for those on the frontline of the pandemic.

The Chessington World of Adventures theme park, which usually hosts families seeking a fun day out, has turned one of its main car parks into a testing unit for National Health Service (NHS) staff, a spokeswoman said on Saturday.

The government, which had been criticised by some doctors and nurses for not providing them with enough protective gear and testing kits, announced on Friday it was introducing a much bigger testing regime for the NHS.

The United Kingdom has so far reported 14,754 cases of the virus and 1,019 deaths, with the peak of the pandemic in the country expected to come in several weeks.

The country is largely on lock-down, with Britons urged to stay home. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and health minister Matt Hancock are among those who have tested positive.

The minister for Scotland, Alistair Jack, announced on Saturday that he had developed a mild temperature and a cough in the past 24 hours and was now working from home in isolation.

Jack has not been tested for coronavirus. He answered questions on Scottish issues from lawmakers in the House of Commons on Wednesday, immediately before Johnson spoke in the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session, during which Jack was seated on the government bench behind Johnson. Efforts were under way in multiple parts of the country to keep building up the NHS's capacity to cope with the epidemic.

The unit at Chessington, which is being run by health ministry officials and conducted its first tests on Friday, consists of a series of cabins widely spread out across the car park.

**The United Kingdom has so far reported 14,754 cases of the virus and 1,019 deaths**

# Doctor working with Amazon tribe tests positive for coronavirus

REUTERS  
28 March

A doctor working with the largest tribe in the Amazon has tested positive for the coronavirus, Brazil's Health Ministry said on Friday, ringing alarm bells that the epidemic could spread to vulnerable and remote indigenous communities with devastating effect.

The doctor, who has not been named, had returned from vacation on March 18 to work with the Tikunas, a tribe of more than 30,000 people who live in the upper Amazon near the borders with Colombia and Peru.

He developed a fever later that day and went into isolation, testing positive for the respiratory disease Covid-19 a week later, the ministry said.

Eight tribe members he treated on his first day back working for the indigenous health service Sesai have also been isolated in their homes and are being monitored, the ministry said.

The doctor's infection is the first confirmed case of the virus directly present in an indigenous village.

It raises fears of an outbreak that could be lethal for Brazil's 850,000 indigenous people that have a history of decimation by diseases



**Doctors fear the virus could spread fast among tribes whose immune systems are often weakened by malnutrition**

brought by Europeans, from smallpox and malaria to the flu.

Health experts say their way of life in communal hamlets under large thatched

structures increases the risk of contagion if any single member contracts the new coronavirus. Social isolation is hard for tribes to practice.

The ministry said the doctor had no symptoms when he returned to work using a protective mask and gloves, but quarantined himself as soon as he developed a fever.

News website G1's columnist Matheus Leitão reported that the doctor is Brazilian and may have caught the virus while vacationing in southern Brazil or on the boat ride up the Amazon to his work place at Santo Antônio do Itá.

So far, Sesai has reported four suspected cases of the coronavirus in indigenous communities, with only one in the Amazon.

But doctors fear the virus could spread fast among tribes whose immune systems often are already weakened by malnutrition, hepatitis B, tuberculosis and diabetes.

About a third of indigenous deaths in Brazil are caused by existing respiratory diseases.

The H1N1 epidemic in 2016 killed hundreds of indigenous people, mainly of the Guaraní tribe in the colder south of Brazil, where about half of them caught the bug.

# US passes historic \$2.2-trillion coronavirus relief bill

DAVID MORGAN & SUSAN CORNWELL  
Washington, 28 March

The U.S. House of Representatives on Friday approved a \$2.2 trillion (£1.77 trillion) aid package — the largest in history — to help cope with the economic downturn inflicted by the intensifying coronavirus pandemic, and President Donald Trump quickly signed it into law.

The massive bill passed the Senate and House of Representatives nearly unanimously. The rare bipartisan action underscored how seriously Republican and Democratic lawmakers are taking the global pandemic that has killed more than 1,500 Americans and shaken the nation's medical system.

"Our nation faces an economic and health emergency of historic proportions due to the coronavirus pandemic, the worst pandemic in over 100 years," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said at the close of a three-hour debate before the lower chamber approved the bill.

"Whatever we do next, right now we're going to pass this legislation."

The massive bill also rushes billions of dollars to medical providers on the front lines of the outbreak.

But the bipartisan spirit seemed to end at the White House. Neither Pelosi nor Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer was invited to Trump's all-Republican signing ceremony for the bill, aides said.

Their Republican counterparts, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, did attend, along with three Republican House members.

"This will deliver urgently

needed relief to our nation's families, workers and businesses," Trump said. "I really think in a fairly short period of time ... we'll be stronger than ever."

The Democratic-led House approved the package on a voice vote, turning back a procedural challenge from Republican Representative Thomas Massie, who had sought to force a formal, recorded vote.

To keep Massie's gambit from delaying the bill's passage, hundreds of lawmakers from both parties returned to Washington despite the risk of contracting coronavirus. For many, that meant long drives or overnight flights.

One member who spent hours in a car was Republican Representative Greg Pence, the brother of Vice President Mike Pence, whom Trump has put in charge of efforts to handle the coronavirus crisis.

Pence drove the nearly 600 miles (966 km) from his home state, Indiana, to Washington on Thursday. "We can't afford to wait another minute," he said on Twitter.

**'Third-rate grandstander'**

Massie wrote on Twitter that he thought the bill contained too much extraneous spending and gave too much power to the Federal Reserve, the U.S. central bank. His fellow lawmakers overruled his request for a recorded vote.

Trump attacked Massie on Twitter, calling him a "third rate Grandstander" and saying he should be thrown out of the Republican party. "He just wants the publicity," wrote the president, who last week began pushing for urgent action on coronavirus after long downplaying the risk.

Democratic and Repub-



US President Donald Trump signing the bill on Friday. "This will deliver urgently needed relief to our nation's families, workers and businesses," he said

ican leaders had asked members to return to Washington to ensure there would be enough present to head off Massie's gambit. The session was held under special rules to limit the spread of the disease among members.

At least five members of Congress have tested positive for the coronavirus and more than two dozen have self-quarantined to limit its spread.

The Senate, which approved the bill in a unanimous vote late on Wednesday, has adjourned and is not scheduled to return to Washington until April 20.

Democratic and Republican House leaders

appeared together at a news conference at the Capitol to celebrate the bill's passage — an unusual event for a chamber that is normally sharply divided along partisan lines.

"The virus is here. We did not ask for it, we did not invite it. We did not choose it. But with the passing of the bill you will see that we will fight it together, and we will win together,"

McCarthy said.

He did not say whether Massie would face any disciplinary measures from the party.

The rescue package is the largest fiscal relief measure

ever passed by Congress.

The \$2.2 trillion measure includes \$500 billion to help hard-hit industries and \$290 billion for payments of up to \$3,000 to millions of families.

It will also provide \$350 billion for small-business loans, \$250 billion for expanded unemployment aid and at least \$100 billion for hospitals and related health systems.

The number of coronavirus cases in the United States exceeded 100,000 on Friday, according to a Reuters tally, the most of any country.

Adding to the misery, the Labor Department reported the number of Americans filing claims for unemployment benefits surged to 3.28 million, the highest level ever.

REUTERS

# Wuhan, where the coronavirus emerged, begins to lift lockdown

BRENDA GOH  
28 March

The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus outbreak first emerged, began lifting a two-month lockdown on Saturday by restarting some metro services and reopening borders, allowing some semblance of normality to return and families to reunite.

After being cut-off from the rest of the country for two months, the reopening of Wuhan, where the epidemic first erupted in late December, marks a turning point in China's fight against the virus, though the contagion has since spread to over 200 countries.

Among those on the first high-speed trains allowed into the city on Saturday morning was Guo Liangkai, a 19-year-old student whose one-month work stint in Shanghai stretched to three months due to the clamp down on movement.

"It makes me very happy that I can see my family," Guo told Reuters after being greeted by his mother at the main station. "We wanted to hug but now is a special period so we



Passengers at a subway train station in Wuhan on Saturday

can't hug or take any actions like these."

Authorities took draconian measures to stop people from entering or leaving the industrial city of 11 million people in central China. Families were confined to their homes. Bus and taxi services were shut, and only essential stores were allowed to remain open.

"I think the resumption of work represents a kind of hope.

It at least shows that China is victorious," said Zhang Yulun, 35, returning to Wuhan for work.

China's National Health Commission said on Saturday that 54 new coronavirus cases were reported on the mainland on Friday, all involving so-called imported cases. Mainland China now has 81,394 cases, with the death toll rising by three to 3,295, the commission said.

REUTERS

# China readies stimulus measures as local virus cases dwindle

China's authorities plan stronger steps to revive an economy hit by the spread of coronavirus, as the nation on Saturday reported no new locally transmitted infections for the previous day.

The ruling Communist Party's Politburo said on Friday it would step up macroeconomic policy adjustments and pursue more proactive fiscal policy, state media reported. With the world's second-biggest economy expected to shrink for the first time in four decades this quarter, China is set to unleash hundreds of billions of dollars in stimulus.

The Politburo called for expanding the budget deficit, issuing more local and national bonds, guiding interest rates lower, delaying loan

repayments, reducing supply-chain bottlenecks and boosting consumption.

"We expect government ministries to roll out more tangible measures in the coming weeks as this Politburo meeting gave them no choice but to do more," Goldman Sachs analysts said in a note.

The Politburo did not elaborate on plans for the central government to issue special treasury bonds, which would be the first such issuance since 2007.

Restrictions on foreigners entering the country went into effect on Saturday, as China reported no new locally transmitted infections and a small drop in so-called imported cases.

REUTERS

# Condom shortage looms amid Covid-19 crisis

A global shortage of condoms is looming, the world's biggest producer said, after a coronavirus lockdown forced it to shut down production.

Malaysia's Karex Bhd makes one in every five condoms globally. It has not produced a single condom from its three Malaysian factories for more than a week due to a lockdown imposed by the government to halt the spread of the virus.

That's already a shortfall of 100 million condoms, normally marketed internationally by brands such as Durex, supplied to state healthcare systems such as Britain's NHS or distributed by aid programmes such as the UN Population Fund.

The company was given permission to restart production on Friday, but with only 50% of its workforce, under a special exemption for critical industries.

"It will take time to jumpstart factories and we will struggle to keep up with demand at half capacity," Chief Executive Goh Miah Kiat told Reuters.

"We are going to see a global shortage of condoms everywhere, which is going to be scary," he said. "My concern is that for a lot of humanitarian programmes deep down in Africa, the shortage will not just be two weeks or a month. That shortage can run into months."

Malaysia is Southeast Asia's worst affected country, with 2,161 coronavirus infections and 26 deaths. The lockdown is due to remain in place at least until April 14.

The other major condom-producing countries are China, where the coronavirus originated and led to widespread factory shutdowns, and India and Thailand, which are seeing infections spiking only now.

Makers of other critical items like medical gloves have also faced hiccups in their operations in Malaysia.

REUTERS

# Bolsonaro questions coronavirus deaths, says 'sorry, some will die'

REUTERS  
28 March

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro on Friday cast doubt on Sao Paulo's death toll from the coronavirus outbreak and accused the state governor of manipulating the numbers for political ends, without giving evidence for his claims.

Bolsonaro's accusations were the latest broadside in an ugly battle with Brazil's governors, who have chafed at the president's view that protecting the economy takes priority over social distancing measures to combat the spread of the highly contagious virus.

Following the advice of health experts, the vast majority of the country's 26 governors have banned non-essential commercial activities and public services to contain the outbreak in their states.

"I'm sorry, some people will die, they will die, that's life," Bolsonaro said in a television interview on Friday night. "You can't stop a car factory because of traffic deaths."

Bolsonaro said that in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil's economic powerhouse, the death



Bolsonaro added: 'You can't stop a car factory because of traffic deaths'

toll seemed "too large." Sao Paulo has the most cases and deaths so far of coronavirus in Brazil, at 1,223 cases and 68 deaths.

# Germany to remain in lockdown until at least April 20

Germany will not ease measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus before at least April 20, Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff told a German newspaper. "We are not talking about any easing before April 20," Helge

"We need to look at what is happening there, this cannot be a numbers game to favour political interests," Bolsonaro said.

Earlier on Friday, Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, a former Bolsonaro ally who many expect to be a rival in the 2022 presidential election, accused Bolsonaro of promoting "disinformation" by launching a TV ad campaign criticising the restrictions, featuring the slogan "#BrazilCannotStop."

Brazil's justice ministry on Friday barred all non-resident foreigners from entering the country via its airports. The travel ban goes into effect on Monday and follows similar measures in several other South American nations.

Braun told Tagesspiegel's on Saturday. Germany in mid March closed schools, shops, restaurants, playgrounds and sports facilities and many companies have stopped production to help slow the spread of the disease. REUTERS

# Abe vows unprecedented stimulus as Tokyo virus cases rise by daily record

STANLEY WHITE & DAVID DOLAN  
Tokyo, 28 March

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday promised a massive unprecedented package of steps to cushion the economy from the coronavirus pandemic, saying the country was close to a national emergency as infections surged in Tokyo.

Abe told a country that is seeing a rising number of deaths and cases from the outbreak that the "huge, powerful" measures would be greater than the response to the global financial crisis of 2008.

"Japan is holding up barely, but it would not be strange if there were a rapid spread (of the virus) at any time," Abe told a nationally televised news conference, though he held back from declaring a state of emergency. He also announced plans to approve the drug Avigan that has proved helpful in treatment.

The government will craft the stimulus within about 10 days, Abe said, as officials confirmed a further 60 cases in Tokyo. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike earlier issued a plea following a surge in coronavirus infections this week that she



Passersby in masks at the Ginza shopping district in Tokyo on Saturday

said put Tokyo on the brink of an emergency.

She has asked the tens of millions of people in the city and surrounding regions to avoid non-essential, non-urgent outings until April 12.

Infections in Japan have climbed to more than 1,400, with 47 deaths, excluding those from a cruise ship quarantined last month. Hit early by the coronavirus in its initial spread from China, Japan had seen a more gradual rise than the

recent surge in much of Europe and the United States.

Abe this week called the situation "a national crisis". People in the Osaka area in western Japan have also been asked to stay at home.

While the current level of infection appears low for a city of nearly 14 million, with many millions more living in surrounding suburbs, experts warn there is a high risk that the number of cases could spiral soon.

REUTERS

# Spain reports 832 deaths in deadliest day yet

Spain said 832 people died from coronavirus in the last 24 hours, its deadliest day since the outbreak began. That brings the total to 5,690 after the country recorded 769 deaths on Friday.

Spain has been in total lockdown for two weeks, with citizens confined to their homes, except for essential activities, in an effort to curtail the spread of the virus.

The outbreak is stretching Spain's health-care system, with doctors sometimes having to choose who should live or die. Madrid, the epicentre of the outbreak in the country, has set up a temporary hospital in the Spanish capital's main conference centre and is preparing a second space to accommodate the flood of patients needing treatment.

BLOOMBERG

# Why people are rushing to buy 100-ounce bars of gold

JOE DEAUX, YVONNE YUE LI & JACK FARCHY  
28 March

There are few corners of the global financial market that have been upended as spectacularly, or as oddly, by the coronavirus pandemic as gold trading.

Not only are prices swinging in an erratic fashion — surging one moment and crashing the next — that is undermining the metal's vaunted status as a haven in times of crisis, but unprecedented logistical disruptions have also kicked off a frantic hunt for actual bars of gold.

At the centre of it all are a small band of traders who for years had cashed in on what had always been a sure-fire bet: shorting gold futures in New York against being long physical gold in London. Usually, they'd ride the trade out till the end of the contract

when they'd have a couple of options to get out without marking much, if any, loss.

But the virus, and the global economic collapse that it's sparking, have created such extreme price distortions that those easy-exit options disappeared on them. Which means that they suddenly faced the threat of having to deliver actual gold bars to the buyers of the contract upon maturity.

It's at this point that things get really bad for the short-sellers.

To make good on maturing contracts, they'd have to move actual gold from various locations. But with the virus shutting down air travel across the globe, procuring a flight to transport the metal became nearly impossible.

If they somehow managed to get a flight, there was another major problem. Futures contracts in New York are based



on 100-ounce bullion bars. The gold that's rushed in from abroad is almost always a different size.

The short-seller needs to pay a refiner to re-melt the gold and re-pour it into the required bar shape in order for it to be

delivered to the contract buyer. But once again, the virus intervenes: Several refiners, including three of the world's biggest in Switzerland, have shut down operations.

Signs of distress picked up on Friday, March 20, when the

cost to swap New York futures and spot physical gold in London — the world's biggest market — rose to about \$2.

Typically, this trade cost almost nothing. After the close of the next session on Monday, that premium had jumped further to \$6.75.

When traders in Asia entered Tuesday morning, there weren't many sellers or offers, and suddenly they were scrambling to buy whatever gold they could get their hands on. By the time London came in, most of the market was squeezed and nobody wanted to sell.

"I realised it was going to be an extremely volatile day," Tai Wong, the head of metals derivatives trading at BMO Capital Markets in New York, said of Tuesday. "We watched this panic develop literally over the course of 12 hours. Having seen enough market dislocations, you recognise that

the frenzy wasn't likely to last, but at the same time you also don't know how long it would extend."

By the time the panic finally subsided Tuesday night, major investors and decades-old veterans were reeling. At the peak of the carnage, potential total losses were estimated at as much as \$1 billion, according to market participants. That's even though the people involved in the trade represented less than 4% of total open interest — or the amount of outstanding contracts.

Traders in need of physical metal went as far as to cold-call holders of gold bars in hopes that they're in possession of exchange-approved metal.

Some investors paid massive fees to have the remaining operating refineries to mint new gold bars, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The spread between April and June futures contracts on Tuesday jumped to \$20 an ounce, meaning it cost that much more to buy metal for April than it did for two months later. That signaled more near-term demand for bullion and the need to soon have physical supply in hand.

By the end of the week, though, the situation had flipped. The June contract cost almost \$30 more than the April contract, suggesting that traders appetite for physical gold has subsided for now.

BLOOMBERG

# On the streets, the mood changes to empathy

Bureaucratic insensitivity gave way to compassion on the third day of the lockdown, with the state administration, police and passersby joining forces to help the stream of migrants fleeing Delhi, write Archis Mohan & Indivjal Dhasmana



Delhi Police personnel distribute food to migrants who are leaving the city for their villages

PHOTO: PTI

On Saturday afternoon, Pradeep Kumar stood in front of the open trunk of his Ecoo van metres from Noida's sector 37 bus stop.

As an unending stream of migrant workers passed him, most on foot, some on cycle rickshaws and even horse-drawn carts, the Uttar Pradesh government employee offered them chilled water, small packs of glucose biscuits, and a variety of chocolate biscuits for their children to choose from.

"I couldn't bear to see visuals on television of people walking hundreds of miles hungry, went to a shop in the morning and bought as many packs of biscuits as I could," Kumar, in his late 30s, said. As

he rearranged his mask, the Noida resident said he was following precautions but was quite sure he would not get coronavirus on the road.

If the story of the first three days of the lockdown was of a lack of planning, chaos and forbearance millions of migrants displayed in the face of bureaucratic insensitivity and police brutality, day four had triggered empathy for them among the more fortunate.

Several like Kumar had halted their cars on the roads of Noida and Ghaziabad, Delhi's suburban cities that lead to the hinterland of Uttar Pradesh (UP), offering migrant workers food and water.

In the national capital, as news spread

that Uttar Pradesh state transport buses could take them closer home, all roads led to the Anand Vihar bus terminal on the Delhi-UP border.

People came from as far as Dwarka on the other side of the city, New Ashok Nagar, Lajpat Nagar to go to their hometowns or villages on the assurance of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath that they will get transport back home.

Either on foot or in Delhi government-run buses, some of which did not charge any fare, not just men but increasing number of women with bags on their shoulders and children in tow, headed towards the terminal.

Several said they had stayed back for

the first few days thinking there were no means to reach home and did not want to risk the safety of their womenfolk and children by walking hundreds of kilometres.

They are now reassured that the buses have started plying. They said they hoped they would return some day, but feared it may not be anytime soon.

"The word is the lockdown will extend until June and even beyond. How will I pay my rent and feed my family if my company were to throw me out," Arun Singh, employed with a car showroom in Patparganj Industrial Area said.

Singh said he did not trust the appeal by the government that landlords should not charge rent, or companies should not sack employees. "This is a disease spreading in cities," Singh said, adding how with a plot of family land back home in Saharanpur and a joint family awaiting him, he was confident that his wife and two children, all of whom queued up for UP state transport buses at Anand Vihar, would at least get two meals a day.

The initial horror of finding thousands in serpentine queues awaiting their turn to get on to the buses at the terminal was chastened by the dozens of samaritans distributing food and water to them, the restraint the cops showed in managing the surging crowds after facing severe criticism and bus drivers who stopped and waited in the middle of empty roads if they saw families hailing them.

At Anand Vihar terminal, dozens of nameless non-governmental organisa-



## They left after riots, now leaving again

In Mustafabad and Maujpur in northeast Delhi, which saw violent communal riots from February 24 to 26, dozens of young men, many of them in skullcaps, stand on the main road leading up to Anand Vihar bus terminal, distributing food, water and fruits to a continuous stream of people.

"This is the least we can do. This is a double whammy for several of these migrants who live in these colonies. Some of them had stayed back, or returned after the riots, but have to leave again," Haji Wahid, who runs a garment manufacturing unit in Katra Neel in Chandni Chowk, said. The elderly Wahid and his band

of young disciples say they are collecting food for victims of riots as well who were yet to find their bearings after their homes were burnt, and several local Hindus have also come forward with help.

**This is a double whammy for several migrants who live in Mustafabad and Maujpur. Some had stayed back, or returned after the riots, but have to leave again**

Wahid and his jamaat members say in unison that it pains them deeply when Indian Muslims are asked to go to Pakistan or called anti-national. "Offering namaz in a mosque is central to Islam, but we have stopped it because of this disease. We have done it for the people of this country, for you and I. We have adhered to what the government has said," Wahid said.

tions and individuals distributed food and water, but there was also a sizeable presence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh volunteers in their distinct black caps.

"My husband and I thought we needed to help people, so we are here distributing bananas," Sushila Saini said. She and her husband, salespeople with a private firm, said they had bought 10 kgs of bananas as that was all they could carry on their motorcycle. "It isn't much, but we plan to make a couple of more rounds," Saini said.

Let alone migrant workers jostling to clamber on to the buses, even the samaritans couldn't care less about social distancing. "I am trying to take precautions, but you tell me how is it possible. Nothing will happen. A power greater than us watches over us," Ashfaq, ferrying people in autorickshaws from riot-hit Mustafabad to the bus terminal, said.

The crisis has also been quite a leveller as not just millions of poor migrants, but even middle-class professionals found themselves queuing up.

Sanjay Singh, associated with Anand Book Publications in Vijayawada, had tried to book a flight from that city to Varanasi, the constituency that Prime Minister Narendra Modi represents in the Lok Sabha, on May 23, but that was cancelled. When he asked the airline staff if there was any ticket available, he was

told the going rate was ₹36,000.

"I told them I don't want to buy the aeroplane, but only a ticket," Singh said. He booked a ticket to Delhi, stayed in the company's office, which is near the bus terminal, but complained there was no food available.

On Saturday, the police relaxed the "curfew" both in Noida as well as Delhi. Cops asked fewer questions at checkpoints, allowed some taxis, autorickshaws and cycle rickshaws to ply and drop people at bus terminals and even facilitated samaritans and NGOs distribute food and water.

At Anand Vihar terminal, the police tried not to use the baton indiscriminately, distributed food packets that had come for them, even sought help of people in plainclothes to manage the crowds or shouted instructions on loudspeakers. "These are tough times, see how people are milling about. So much for social distancing," said a senior cop overseeing his subordinates and quietly imploring them to be careful in their use of force.

Meanwhile, a bus came for Etawa, with the conductor asking people to board the bus quickly. Several tried to get on it, causing a melee.

As dusk settled, the numbers at Anand Vihar surged exponentially. People said they would sit on the road the entire night, and hoped it wouldn't rain as it had the previous night.

## Hungry and starving on Delhi's fringes

As samaritans across Delhi provided succour to thousands of migrants trudging on foot on the city's wide empty roads to the Anand Vihar bus terminal, those living in its remote rural areas and slums were quite forgotten.

In Bhatti Mines Sanjay Colony, full of open deep abandoned mine pits, nearly 300 widows and their children have found little to eat for the past three days. Most of them belong to

nomadic tribes whose families settled in the area a couple of generations back.

"Most are whose husbands have passed away because of silicosis from stone crushing, and they have children to take care of," Rati Singh, a social worker, said. She has been trying to arrange food for these families. It isn't as if government

and non-government organisations are not sending food, but it gets distributed on the roads leading up to the remote colony. "Here the problem isn't that of exodus, but of starvation," Rati said.

In northeast Delhi's Tahirpur potter's colony, a roadside slum cluster of 20-odd potter families, the problem is

similar. "The sale of our earthen pots and pans is down, and there is no money to buy food," Munna Lal, 65. These families, again from a nomadic tribe, have been living near the roadside for the past 25 years.

"This is the only home we know. We have nowhere to go. Please ask people to buy our pots and give us food," Shakuntala, 60, also a potter, said as her young grandsons said they would figure out something.

## In corona fight in Scandinavia, Sweden stands apart

The country has drawn global attention with an unorthodox approach while its neighbours have imposed extensive restrictions

CHRISTINA ANDERSON & HENRIK PRYSER LIBELL

When the coronavirus swept into the Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark scrambled to place extensive restrictions on their borders to stem the outbreak. Sweden, their neighbour, took a decidedly different path.

While Denmark and Norway closed their borders, shut restaurants and ski slopes and told all students to stay home this month, Sweden closed only its high schools and colleges, kept its preschools, grade schools, pubs, restaurants and borders open — and put no limits on the slopes.

In fact, Sweden has stayed open for business while other nations beyond Scandinavia have attacked the outbreak with various measures ambitious in scope and reach. Sweden's approach has raised questions about whether it's gambling with a disease, Covid-19, that has no cure or vaccine, or if its tactic will be seen as a savvy strategy to fight a scourge that has laid waste to millions of jobs and prompted global lockdowns unprecedented in peacetime.

By Saturday, Norway, population 5.3 million, had more than 3,770 coronavirus cases and 19 deaths; Denmark, population 5.6 million, reported 2,200 cases and 52 deaths; Sweden, with 10.12 million people, recorded more than 3,060 cases and 105 deaths.

A recent headline in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, encapsulates the



Sweden has kept its preschools, grade schools, pubs, restaurants and borders open despite the coronavirus threat

question ricocheting around Europe, "Doesn't Sweden take the corona crisis seriously?"

There is no evidence that Swedes are underplaying the enormity of the disease rampaging across the globe. The country's leader and health officials have stressed hand washing, social distancing and protecting people over the age of 70 by limiting contact with them.

But peer into any cafe in the capital, Stockholm, and groups of two or more people can be seen casually dining and enjoying cappuccinos. Playgrounds are full of running, screaming children. Restaurants, gyms, malls and ski slopes have thinned out but are still in use.

The state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, said in an interview that Sweden's strategy is based on science and boiled down to this: "We are trying to slow the spread enough so that we can deal with the patients coming in."

Sweden's approach appeals to the public's self-restraint and sense of responsibility, Tegnell said. "That's the way we work in Sweden. Our whole system for communicable disease control is based on voluntary action. The

immunisation system is completely voluntary and there is 98 per cent coverage," he explained.

"You give them the option to do what is best in their lives," he added. "That works very well, according to our experience."

Sweden's approach flies in the face of most other nations' stricter strategies. India is attempting a lockdown that affects 1.3 billion people. Germany has banned crowds of two or more, except for families. In France, residents are asked to fill in a form stating the purpose of each errand when they leave their homes; each trip requires a new form. Britain has deployed police officers to remind residents to stay home.

Still, while Sweden may appear to be an outlier in Scandinavia and in much of the wider world, it is too soon to say whether its approach will yield the same results as other countries'. And the Swedish authorities could still take stronger action as coronavirus-related hospitalisations rise.

In explaining Sweden's current methods, experts point to other underlying factors: The country has high lev-

els of trust, according to the historian Lars Tragarth, and a strict law in the Constitution prohibits the government from meddling in the affairs of the administrative authorities, such as the public health agency.

"Therefore, you don't need to micro-manage or control behaviour at a detailed level through prohibitions or threat of sanctions or fines or imprisonment," Tragarth said in a phone interview. "That is how Sweden stands apart, even from Denmark and Norway."

The government has deferred to the agency's recommendations to fight the virus, which has infected more than 600,000 people and killed more than 27,000 worldwide by Saturday. If the health agency were to say that closing borders and shutting down all of society was the best way to go, the government would most likely listen.

Tragarth said Swedes' level of trust was manifested in other ways: Not only do citizens have confidence in public institutions and governmental agencies and vice versa, but high social trust exists among citizens, as well. That is evident in the country's approach to the virus. Norway did not completely shut its 1,000-mile land border with Sweden, but most people returning from abroad must enter a two-week quarantine (Reindeer herders and daily commuters are exempt). Finland closed the borders of its most populous region — which has 1.7 million people and includes the capital, Helsinki — for three weeks to fight the outbreak there.

Norway limited groups outdoors to no more than five people, and those indoors must keep a distance of more than six feet (except relatives). Denmark closed its borders, sent public workers home with pay and encouraged all other employees to work from home. It shut nightclubs, bars, restaurants, cafes and shopping centres, and banned gatherings of more than 10 people outdoors.

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IMO



A view of the Bandra seafront in Mumbai

### RBI MORATORIUM ON LOANS

MKVenu@mlvenut  
Shouldn't RBI's 3-month moratorium on repayment of term loan instalments be extended to farm loans and small retail loans taken by individuals? Everyone is under stress, right?

### Amitabh Kant@amitabhk87

Way to go: Progressive & timely measures by @RBI @DasShaktikanta 's by giving 3 month moratorium on payments of term loan instalments (EMI) & much-desired relief on interest on working capital. Slashing Repo Rate & reverse Repo Rate will infuse liquidity. Big, bold steps.

### Rahul Gandhi@RahulGandhi

The Govt announcement today of a financial assistance package, is the first step in the right direction. India owes a debt to its farmers, daily wage earners, labourers, women & the elderly who are bearing the brunt of the ongoing lockdown.

### Menaka doshi@menakadoshi

Okay then. The devil, as they say, is always in the detail. The loan moratorium will be decided on by each bank, based on board-approved policy. (Face with rolling eyesFace with rolling eyesFace with rolling eyesFace with rolling eyesFace with rolling eyes) RBI circular just out.

### Anurag Thakur@ianuragthakur

Decision taken by @RBI@DasShaktikanta will provide stability and ease the stress on individuals & organisations.  
-3 month moratorium on payments of term loan instalments (EMI) & interest on working capital was a demand that has now been addressed.

### CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Rohini Singh@rohini\_sgh  
The first Coronavirus case in India was detected on Jan 30th. The whole of Feb was spent organising a massive gathering to impress Trump instead of stressing on social distancing and quarantining those coming in from abroad. The delays were also on account of the central govt!

### Matt McCarthy@DrMattMcCarthy

New: 20% increase in #coronavirus cases in India so far today. Testing limitations similar to United States; conservative estimate: at least 22,000 cases currently in India. Models suggest 100-200 million cases by July.

### Amish Devgan@AMISHDEVGAN

Italy Failed, Spain Failing, USA is struggling, India is fighting a bold battle wid #Coronavirus with its limited resources. Fact is no govt has ever come across a time like this. But 'propaganda elite' is busy carrying it's negative agenda. If you can't help system don't damage it.

### CURFEW IN INDIA

Jenan Moussa@jenanmoussa  
If you break the curfew, the police in Punjab (India) will force you to do squats while chanting: "We are enemies of society. We cannot sit at home".

### Rahul Roushan@rahulroushan

In Italy, lockdown news had got 'leaked' and that caused people from an infected region to panic and flee, and possibly infect others. Maybe that's why India imposed it without advance announcement, but now we've similar problem. Just hope they're not infected

### Kiran Mazumdar Shaw@kiranshaw

The nationwide #lockdown seems to be helping to flatten the curve in India; it's imperative for everyone to follow the #lockdown strictly to see significant results in the next 20 days

**Daughter's rise, cabinet's restlessness**

Those watching Telangana politics were surprised when K Chandrashekar Rao, announced that his daughter Kalvakuntla Kavitha would become a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), Telangana's Upper House. Kavitha was defeated in the May 2019 Lok Sabha elections by the Bharatiya Janata Party's Aravind Dharmapuri from the Nizamabad Lok Sabha seat. Many thought she would be sent to Delhi via the Rajya Sabha (The Telangana Rashtra Samithi got two members elected unopposed), she was named to the Upper House in the state, spurring speculation that she will become a minister in the government. The only problem is the cabinet already has 18 ministers, including her father, which is the maximum Telangana can have (15 per cent of the size of the legislature which is 120 MLAs). But as Kavitha cannot have been inducted in state politics just to twiddle her thumbs, ministers are now nervously looking over their shoulder wondering who will KCR sack — or indeed, whether the whole council of ministers will be sacked prior to a reshuffle, possibly in October or November.

**Rahul puzzles observers**

What's going on with Rahul Gandhi? A reporter recently lauded his intervention in Parliament. Instead of thanking him, Gandhi retorted: "I have lost all respect for journals like you: who say one thing to my face and another in stories, Twitter, etc". The reporter tried to protest but to no avail. Something is bothering the man and may be even he doesn't know what it is!

**OPINION**

GENG SHUANG

## 'No country can face the pandemic by going it alone'

**Phoenix TV:** US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in an interview yesterday (March 24) talked about moving medical equipment supply chain back to the US from China and elsewhere. President Trump also stressed in a daily briefing on coronavirus that the US should never be reliant on a foreign country for the means of its own survival. US media reported that the US is preparing an executive order to relocate the supply chain of enterprises. Do you have any comment?

**Geng Shuang:** In an era of globalisation, the interests of all countries are closely intertwined. The formation and development of global industrial and supply chains are determined by market forces and companies' choices. As such, it is unrealistic and insensitive to try to sever them or even trumpet "shifting" or "decoupling" theories as they run counter to economic law. In the face of the pandemic, such practice will not help solve problems at home. It will only harm the interests of US businesses and people.

China is a leading manufacturer as well as a major producer and exporter of epidemic-related and medical supplies. As the situation is getting better at home, China is gradually resuming its normal socio-economic order. We are providing support to the steady operation of global industrial and supply chains by accelerating resumption of work and production. Chinese businesses are speeding up manufacturing of urgently needed medical supplies for the world. China has pledged assistance to 82 countries, the WHO and the African Union, and facilitated commercial procurement in China for countries in need, like I said earlier. Our responsible practice has been well recognised by the international community.

To sum up, I want to stress that no country can face the pandemic by going it alone. It's time for solidarity and cooperation rather than division and decoupling.

**Beijing Youth Daily:** China released information on several video conferences on COVID-19 recently. Could you give us a number of such meetings? Will there be more?

**Geng:** After the outbreak of COVID-19, China has been fighting it with all-out efforts. The most comprehensive, stringent and thorough measures taken have produced positive effects. Thanks to the Chinese people's arduous efforts, the situation at home keeps trending for the better. China has made tremendous sacrifice in this battle and its efforts are an important contribution to the world as they bought precious time for other countries. We have also gathered valuable experience in this process.

With the pandemic breaking out and spreading in many places across the globe, China, with the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind and a responsible attitude towards global public health security and people's well-being, has been sharing its experience through communication, coordination and cooperation with relevant countries and regional organisations in an open and transparent manner.

As of today, incomplete statistics show that China has held about 20 video conferences for experts with more than 100 countries in Northeast Asia, South Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Pacific as well as international organisations including the Asean, the EU, the AU, the SCO and the Caribbean Community. The latest conference was held yesterday with over 200 specialists and officials from Nicaragua and 24 Latin American and Caribbean countries having diplomatic ties with China. Exchange through this mechanism has helped countries across the globe.

The Chinese side shared via video link what we have learned about COVID-19, including epidemiological features, prevention and control strategies, clinical diagnosis and treatment, and tracing of close contacts, and offered suggestions to foreign counterparts. Participants all expressed thanks to China and spoke highly of the open, transparent, information-rich and professional meetings, where Chinese experts shared everything within their knowledge that their foreign counterparts can learn from.

As we speak, China is still receiving requests for such conferences from many countries. Competent departments are doing all they can to coordinate arrangements. We will continue close communication and exchange with other parties through video link to help developing countries enhance capacity-building and mount a concerted response to the pandemic for regional and global public health security.

Besides these conferences, China has also released the seventh version of its diagnosis and treatment protocol and sixth of prevention and control protocol. They are a collection of combat experience gathered over the course of more than two months. They represent the wisdom and hard work of tens of thousands of frontline medical personnel in China. With the protocols translated into many foreign languages, we are sharing them with WHO and the international community.

The video conferences and diagnosis and treatment protocols are both examples of how China is contributing to the global response through technical assistance and public goods.

I want to stress that large-scale infectious diseases are major unconventional security threats to mankind. The virus is a common scourge facing all. With our future linked together, countries can only overcome the challenge by standing in solidarity. China will stay committed to the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, work together with other countries to defeat the virus through mutual assistance, and contribute our wisdom, experience and prescription to the international community.

**Bloomberg News:** We are wondering if you had any comment on President Trump's decision to stop using the term "Chinese virus"?

**Geng:** China has made clear its stance on the origin of the virus. We firmly oppose stigmatisation on China. This stance has not changed. The virus knows no borders and ethnicity. It can only be defeated by the concerted efforts of all mankind...

*Edited excerpts from a press briefing by China Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang, in Beijing on March 25*

**DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?**

"AS PRESIDENT OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, I WOULD LIKE TO STATE THAT WE WILL SUPPORT AND COLLABORATE FULLY WITH EVERY STEP TAKEN BY THE UNION GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THE CONTAINMENT OF THE PANDEMIC"

Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi on March 26



Former Maharashtra Chief Minister **PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN** defends the state government, in which his party, the Congress, is a partner, on charges of laxity in handling the COVID-19 crisis. Excerpts from an interview with **Aditi Phadnis**

## 'Error of judgement by the central govt has led to this'

**Maharashtra was one of the first states to see a spike in COVID-19 cases. The disease spread to other parts of India because the Maharashtra government was lax in its handling and did not take the pandemic seriously enough initially. Why was this?**

It is not true that the Maharashtra government was lax about the coronavirus epidemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Corona as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. The Maharashtra government began restrictions within 48 hours. First, they declared closure of schools in Pimpri-Chinchwad and Pune and also ordered closing down of crowded places like malls, gyms and swimming pools. On March 14, the government closed down all the schools and colleges in four large metropolitan cities. On the 18th, the restrictions were further tightened. Internal traffic was restricted and a limit was put on the number of employees in each office (only 5 per cent). On March 21, the entire state was put under a lockdown. The bus services, the local trains and the metro services were suspended. Mumbai is a large city and is also the financial capital. It has many establishments under the supervision of the central government, e.g. the international airport, the banks and the financial institutions, the ports and the local suburban trains. They are controlled by various central ministries. Getting their concurrence took a little time.

However one major mistake for a spike

in the positive cases was the failure to impose quarantine on the individual passengers who landed in Mumbai (and other international airports) on their own. The authorities took a simple undertaking from the arriving passengers that they would quarantine themselves after reaching home. This just did not happen. And most of the positive cases in Maharashtra are because of the people who had recently travelled from the problem countries. What is strange is that while we quarantined all the passengers who were brought home by government aircraft, whether Air Force or Air India, from Wuhan, Rome and Tehran etc., we did not force quarantine on incoming passengers who flew in on their own. Mumbai gets the highest number of international flights (800 per day) and the highest number of international passengers (about 16,000 per day). This error of judgement on the part of the central government — the immigration authorities of the home ministry or the health ministry or the ministry of civil aviation, will cost us dearly.

**What are the specific inputs that you, a party that is part of a relatively inexperienced government, provided to the chief minister? Such situations demand decisive, aggressive action. What did you, as a party with long experience of running governments, advise?**

Maharashtra has a three-party coalition government. All decisions are taken in con-

## Restoring the glory

A local clean-up drive in Kumaon shows that there are some pay-offs of PM Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, writes **Anjali Bhargava**

Even Goddess Kali, ensconced safely at 6,000 feet and surrounded by the majestic mountains in Majkhali's famous temple couldn't have missed the flurry of activity in the first week of March all around her.

On March 2 — a few days before the COVID-19 panic hit India — 36 students of Himalayan Village School, along with four teachers, turned up with brooms, gloves and pans in hand to take part in a daylong clean-up drive led by an eight member-team from a local NGO Green Hills. Around 10-12 local residents were also present to lend a hand. The next day, enthusiasm flagged a bit and the exercise attracted a smaller number. On day three, with the enthusiasm that only children can muster, 30 students of Himalayan Village School, the eight team members of Green Hills and around eight local residents managed to gather more trash to be transported from the roads and hillsides. In these three days, around three pickups of waste were collected from roadside and sent to the trenching ground near Ranikhet.

The clean-up is part of a larger initiative taken by a set of residents including long-term

resident Ajay Prasad who leads many community initiatives in the area and Aditya Babbar, a recent settler in these parts. Like others, who have settled in the area from other cities, Babbar, too, has been increasingly alarmed by the unchecked garbage heaps all around. "When one lives in such pristine surroundings, the last thing you want to encounter is plastic, rotting food waste and other trash, all mixed and thrown on the hillsides," he says. He sought technical assistance from Green Hills which operates in Kasar Devi and the Almora region and roped in other residents into the drive. Babbar also visited another NGO Waste Warriors in Corbett to learn how to proceed with such an exercise.

The drive is part of a larger six-month pilot project in which the segregated dry waste will be collected for six months by the Green Hills team from shops, residents and other establishments in the area and sent for further processing or reuse. The larger message — that it is not acceptable to treat the hillsides as your personal dustbin — is also being relayed to the wider community in the area.

A number of factors have come together to make such an exercise even possible. One, the

**CHECKLIST****EUROPE: WHAT THE LEADERS SAY ABOUT COVID-19**

■ **European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen in European Parliament:** "When Europe really needed to be there for each other, too many initially looked out for themselves...when Europe really needed an 'all for one' spirit, too many initially gave an 'only for me' response."

■ **German Chancellor Angela Merkel:** "Not since the Second World War has our country faced a challenge that depends so much on our collective solidarity."

■ **UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson:** "Of course, I want people to go to the park, but don't think that fresh air in itself provides immunity. You have to stay two metres apart, you have to apply social distancing. Take this advice seriously, follow it, it is absolutely crucial. This is not the time to apply curfews and prohibitions but if the British people do not follow the current measures, the government would be forced to bring restrictions

on people all together."

■ **France President Emmanuel Macron:** "We are at war, certainly a health war. We are not fighting against an army or against another nation. But the enemy is there, invisible, elusive, advancing. And this requires our general mobilisation."

■ **Ireland Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar:** "We cannot stop this virus, but working together we can slow it in its tracks and push it back. These are extraordinarily difficult times for everyone — in Ireland and around the world. But no matter what happens, we will always put your life and your health ahead of any other concern."

■ **Spain Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez:** "The worst is yet to come, when our health system receives the impact of highest number of infected, when the days of confinement increase, when the consequences of crisis show in the economy..."

sultation with all the three partners. There is a coordination mechanism. Recent decisions were taken in the Cabinet, as well as at the political level. Although the Congress Party is numerically the smallest group in the coalition, we are a national party with large experience of governance, both in the cabinet and outside.

We must, however, appreciate the unprecedented challenge thrown up by the coronavirus pandemic. It has to be met at three levels — first, there is the all important medical challenge of saving lives, which requires rapid ramp up of testing kits, emergency hospitals, ICU beds and ventilators as also trained medical professionals — doctors, nurses and paramedics; second, there is a major economic upheaval. Saving the economy from a complete collapse is a huge

challenge — the daily wagers have to be fed, permanent jobs have to be saved, wherever possible, the factories have to be kept functioning, and most important, while the economy will certainly slide into a recession, we should prevent a depression. Economy must bounce back to a robust rate of growth of the GDP as soon as possible; And then there is the third challenge and that is at the social level. The lockdown has created unprecedented social tensions and law and order problems. The persons in the unorganised sector with no social safety net will literally starve unless some efficient ways are found to reach some sustenance to them. There will be a huge financial cost. These challenges can only be overcome if there is a complete unity of purpose in the ruling alliance in the state as well as a healthy dialogue with the opposition parties across the aisle. There is a Bharatiya Janata Party government at the Centre. Unless they fully and sincerely cooperate with the state government, we as a nation may not be able to meet the onerous challenge that we face.

**The state's lockdown is now complete, but it will be at a cost. The state's finances were never healthy to start with. How will the government balance its books?**

There will be a heavy price to pay on account of the complete lockdown. Contraction of the economy will reduce revenues. The required stimulus package, both at the central level and at the state level will cost the exchequer hugely. The informal economy will be especially hit hard. They will have to be supported with a huge stimulus. Every sector — the daily wage earner, the small businessman, self-employed person, shopkeeper, small and medium enterprises and even the larger industries, all will require state support.

There is naturally a debate on the size of the stimulus package that we would need. Only yesterday, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced a stimulus package of ₹1.7 trillion (\$22 billion). Let us compare what other large economies have done. Only a few days back, the US Senate passed a stimulus package of \$2 trillion. Considering the size of the US economy, which is about \$20 trillion, their stimulus works out to about 10 per cent of the GDP. The UK, with the size of its economy at \$2.6 trillion, has announced a package of \$410 billion including a loan guarantee component of \$330 billion, which works out to 16

per cent of its GDP. Even Germany's initial package of \$810 billion, works out to 22 per cent of the German GDP of \$3.7 trillion. In comparison, India's \$22 billion package is just about 1 per cent of India's GDP of \$2.8 trillion. India must reach a figure of 10 per cent of its current GDP. This would mean an ultimate stimulus package of \$280 billion or about ₹21 trillion. So, we certainly have a long way to go. Of course, how to utilise this money effectively will be another question.

**Most cities in Maharashtra, especially Mumbai, have a big floating population. Now that all these people, who performed a service away from home are returning, what are the kind of tensions you see: both from the gap in labour and the demands they will make in their native places?**

Mumbai has a large migrant labour population. People come from the hinterlands of Maharashtra and also from poorer states in the North. I talked about the social tensions that the lockdown will create. On the one hand, there is a feeling that migrant workers have taken jobs away from the local population, and therefore there is even a

demand for up to 80 per cent reservation for local people. But the migrant labourers invariably work in the low-paying jobs involving physical labour. Local people do not take up these menial jobs. When migrant labourers leave for their home-towns, there would be a crisis in Mumbai. We will have to ensure that migrant labourers do not leave even if they are asked to stay at home and they have no jobs. We will have to ensure that they are paid minimum subsistence wages and there is cooked food available to them because they don't have their own kitchens. The taxi and rickshaw drivers, dock workers, *mathaadi kamgars* in the *mandis*, the vegetable sellers and the milkmen, all are required for smooth functioning of Mumbai. Anyone who thinks that departure of migrant labour will be good for Mumbai is being very short sighted. And also when they go to their native places, mostly rural areas, they will have to be supported with a hefty MGNREGA programme.

**Is it time now for the Maharashtra government to launch a massive subsidy plan for food, essentials, transport and other things? Whenever the epidemic is past, is the government geared to seeing a return of labour and the problems that movement will cause?**

After the epidemic gets over, rehabilitating the economy, and returning people back to gainful employment, will be a humongous challenge. There will have to be a massive subsidy programme — food subsidy, transport subsidy, housing and rent subsidy, help to self employed to restart their businesses. Part of the central government's stimulus package will fund this. We are asking for deferment of loan instalments, EMIs and interest payments during the crisis period, but after the epidemic ends, these payments to the financial institutions would have to be made good (*The RBI announced some reliefs for borrowers on Friday*). Only then shopkeepers, small businesses, and SMEs would be able to restart their businesses, and re employ workers.



Earlier this month, 36 students and four teachers of Himalayan Village School and Government Inter College turned up near the Majkhali Kali temple for a clean-up drive

influx of an educated lot from the cities has helped bring more awareness and some knowledge as well as expertise on how to proceed. In Kasar Devi, for instance, Asha De'Souza who has worked with various international bodies including the International Labour Organization in Geneva has formed the Green Hills NGO and brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise and wisdom to the table, dealing with her own garbage using the Japanese Bokashi method.

What has changed is the attitude. Local shops, establishments and hotels are now paying attention unlike a few years back when everyone just turned a blind eye. To the surprise of all, some holding properties in the vicinity willingly agreed to contribute funds for the clean-up, a departure from the past since even in places totally dependent on tourism such as Corbett, the resort owners don't want to finan-

cially support such initiatives. It is always perceived as "someone else's problem".

Although locals are yet to fully buy into the attempt, the good news is that locals don't look at you as if you've "lost your mind" when you suggest a clean-up drive. A similar clean-up drive attempted by the Waste Warriors in Himachal and Kumaon failed to drum up any support whatsoever from the locals prior to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Locals were of the view that these "mad" experiments by the outsiders would never succeed and were not worth their while.

But somewhere now there appears to be a slow and subtle change in mindset. Even if they are not yet enthusiastic, they are no longer derisive or dismissive. They may not yet be lifting a hand to join you but at least they don't chuck a plastic packet onto the hillside right before your eyes.



# COVID's sporting victims

Spare a thought for the lesser mortals of sport

The misery of the COVID-19 global lockdown has been compounded for sporting fans around the world, with all major sporting events either cancelled or postponed. From the European football leagues, to the Indian Premier League (IPL) — the 2020 edition of which still hangs in the balance — Formula 1 racing season, tennis, rugby, golf, basketball to the athletics and the Olympics, no sport — not even chess — has been spared the virus' deleterious effect. In the general mayhem that COVID-19 has wrought on the global economy, the problems arising from the postponement or cancellation of a major form of entertainment may appear a mar-

ginal issue. Indeed, the impact on this industry may not be as severe or as visible as, say, the poverty and destitution that India's unorganised sector workers face. But as with most other branches of industry, it's the lesser mortals of the sporting world who are likely to feel the impact most.

Sports fans on social media lavish considerable attention on how the stars are coping with the lockdown. Any number of videos are being circulated, from Rafa Nadal's impressive workout to Liverpool veteran James Milner's hilarious number on pruning his garden with a pair of nail scissors to pass the time. Meanwhile, two former stars of Manchester United, Ryan

Giggs and Gary Neville, have opened up two of their jointly-held hotels for NHS staff free of charge. As far as income security goes, the stars, whether in teams or as individuals, are safe as are the organisations — clubs or individual teams — that support them. That is because most are backed by hefty sponsorship money and endorsement deals, which are typically paid up-front, and hedged by protective insurance clauses. The loss of match (or appearance) fees and prize money will merely dent their earnings. This also applies to "closed" tournaments, such as the IPL or the National Basketball Association — i.e. those that do not play within promotion or relegation set-ups like, say, the European football leagues — which obtain more finance from upfront fees than gate money. The impact will be far more severe on rising or aspiring sportspeople, especially those in individual sports. Tennis, for example, is one of the world's

most unequal sports income-wise, with about 80 per cent of players on the circuit earning next to nothing. The earnings of those outside the top 20 depend critically on match fees, which is why the cancellation of the ranking-points tournaments has spelt career-ending trouble for hundreds of players. A woman player ranked number 371 has started an online petition calling for struggling lower-ranked tennis players to be given financial help. This asymmetry is true for professional footballers in the lower leagues as well where, say, Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo may earn an eye-watering €565,000 per week but players in the lower leagues take home less than €10,000 a week, none of it bolstered by endorsements and much of it critically dependent on a club's gate money earnings.

The postponement of major tournaments could help some of them recoup their earnings but much of this is contingent on

how fast and how permanently COVID-19 abates. It is ironic that the developed world is the centre of the sports industry and the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak. Indeed, it is easy to see that the sports business will take a hit for at least a year or two until public confidence revives sufficiently to encourage the crowds to jettison social distancing and come to the stadiums. This factor alone is likely to have a knock-on effect on thousands of invisible agents that support sporting events, most of them small or individual businesses with little wherewithal to cope with postponements or cancellations. The suppliers of food and drink for matches and tournaments, the small hotel owners who have readied their properties for the influx of fans, sportspeople and their support teams and private transport networks are all indirect victims of COVID-19. Sports fans should sympathise with their plight too.

# Three ways to combat coronavirus

Strengthening primary and community health care, combined with vastly expanded testing, will be key to overcoming the pandemic that threatens to rage through the country

PAVITRA MOHAN & JAGDISH RATTANANI

The fight against COVID-19 has been likened to fighting a war with an insidious, dangerous, but invisible enemy. We need to carefully chart out the strategy to emerge victorious. While no formal strategic plan has been issued by the government, the broad parameters of its strategy can be drawn from the series of actions it has announced. This includes closing of all schools and colleges, and imposing a 21-day lockdown, with only essential services allowed to function.

What is not clear is the level of preparedness of other components of the containment or mitigation strategies. This includes steps such as expansion of testing to include all those who show symptoms and their contacts, and arrangements for managing large numbers of cases, should the epidemic grow. What is emerging, however, is the economic and social costs to a large number of marginalised people in the immediate run. While the lockdown provides an immediate respite from the growing epidemic, there is an urgent need to ameliorate the adverse economic and social impact of the "battle" itself, and fine-tune the strategy to address the "enemy".

The lockdown in most states and Union Territories is causing a medical and a humanitarian situation. Thousands of migrant labourers are returning home from different cities and towns, as workplaces shut. They are mostly stranded at state and district borders or on highways, without any money or food. Simultaneously, the number of people affected by COVID-19 is increasing, as are deaths, though absolute numbers are still low. Massive restrictions on movements and difficulty in accessing basic amenities and healthcare, especially when away from home, can have significant adverse effects on the basic right of every citizen to life and survival. While these are extraordinary times, the State must provide basic amenities of food, shelter, humane treatment and timely repatriation back home.

## Allow people to return home

The central government has done a remarkable job in bringing back hundreds of students and other Indian citizens stranded in foreign lands, with due precautions to ensure that they do not become carriers and disseminators of the virus in the country. Having done that, we cannot leave behind labourers and migrant workers on our highways to fend for themselves, when all shops, establishments and services are closed. This will create a crisis that may be worse than the one we seek to fight, as we try to fend off the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of difficulties faced by these thousands of internal migrants, and the fact that, as many scientists have warned, the transmission of the virus is unlikely to stop anytime soon, the Central and state governments must make arrangements to bring them home safely.

All symptomatic people can be tested at the borders, and, if found to be negative for the virus, should be repatriated immediately. If found positive, they can be kept in isolation, as was the protocol followed when repatriating people from overseas. This will not only give the government a truer and fuller picture of the extent of the COVID-19 threat in India's interiors, but it will also send a signal that will get many more to seek help and report their condition to the authorities. In the absence of this, we run the risk of the threat slipping underground, leading



The fight against COVID-19 has been likened to fighting a war with an insidious, dangerous but invisible enemy. We need to carefully chart out the strategy to emerge victorious. PHOTO: PTI

to a slow but more severe spread of the disease.

## Expand testing

The number of people currently being tested is small, while the number under lockdown is huge. While providing a respite for a short period, this is not sustainable, and as many experts have pointed out, may lead to a resurgence after the lockdown is relaxed. We need to progressively reverse this situation: Have much more expanded testing (with rigorous promotion of social distancing) and fewer people under lockdown. Currently, only about 100 laboratories, almost all located in large cities, provide testing facilities for COVID-19.

We would urge the government to follow the example of South Korea (as recommended by the World Health Organisation and many experts), and urgently expand testing facilities, with sample collection facilities being opened outside hospitals and laboratories. This will have to be through home collection, walk-ins and drive-through centres, to facilitate access and restrict exposure. For this to work the test must be free for patients, or cost very little. A test for ₹4,500 — the current fee in Mumbai — will not work.

## Strengthen primary health care

We need to prepare ahead to provide health care to large numbers of patients requiring it. As revealed by a review of about 160,000 patients from China and Italy, 90-95 per cent of patients would be man-

aged at home or in primary care settings, and only 5-10 per cent would require in-patient care. Of the latter, about 30 per cent would require critical care, while 70 per cent would require supportive care and oxygen. Even in the best of health systems, the mortality rate among those who require critical care is upwards of 50 per cent. So, it is clear that primary care would be extremely critical in providing care to and preventing deaths of large numbers of patients through providing supportive care and oxygen.

A lot of attention in the media has been focused on increasing the capacity for critical care and the number of ventilators, which will address only 30 per cent of severely ill patients, and would, in the best of situations, save only 50 per cent of the severely ill. The government should urgently review and strengthen primary health care (PHC) centres, community health centres (CHCs) and district hospitals, to enable them to provide supportive care, isolation and oxygen to the 70 per cent who would require in-patient care, almost all of whom can be saved.

An analysis based on data from 2012 to 2014 showed that no oxygen is available in about 30 per cent of PHCs and 10 per cent of CHCs. Small private general practices, nursing homes and hospitals must also be roped in for this fight, with controls on the charges they can levy. This would mean the supply chain of oxygen, which is now highly inadequate, will have to be quickly reactivated if we are to claim that we are truly prepared to fight the threat of COVID-19.

Mohan is a paediatrician, public health expert and co-founder of Basic Health Care Services. Rattanani is a founder of The Billion Press and a faculty member at SPJIMR. © The Billion Press

# Afghanistan's chaos and India's critique

HARSH V PANT

Earlier this week, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Afghanistan failed to bring the two main rival factions in the war-torn nation together, leading to the US decision to cut \$1 billion aid. Expressing his "disappointment" bluntly, Mr Pompeo made it clear that the inability of Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah to resolve their differences had "harmed US-Afghan relations and, sadly, dishonours those Afghan, Americans, and coalition partners who have sacrificed their lives and treasure in the struggle to build a new future for this country."

Two parallel inauguration ceremonies earlier this month have ended up becoming the defining image of a divided and ruptured Afghanistan, even as the war-torn nation has entered a new phase. Afghanistan remains a deeply divided nation at a time when the Donald Trump Administration has begun to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan as part of a deal it signed with the Taliban on February 29, ostensibly aimed at bringing peace to the country after 18 years of war. The US promised to reduce its troops from about 12,000 to 8,600 within 135 days of signing the agreement. This was a pre-condition laid down by the Taliban in return for its desire to start the intra-Afghan dialogue.

This intra-Afghan dialogue is the most crucial aspect of this so called peace process. The Taliban had long refused to sit with the government in Kabul, arguing that the actual power centre lies in Washington. Both the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani administrations had been trying to get the Taliban to talk, despite their apprehensions. Now the two sides have begun to sit across the table, but not without some initial turbulence. The Taliban had demanded the release of 5,000 prisoners as a confidence-building measure to initiate direct talks with the government and this was part of the US-Taliban arrangement as well.

But President Ghani refused to comply with this demand initially, arguing that this prerogative lay with Kabul, not Washington. After his formal inauguration as president earlier this week, he signed a decree to release 1,500 Taliban prisoners, as part of which all released Taliban prisoners will have to provide "a written guarantee to not return to the battlefield." The Taliban rejected the move by claiming that they had handed a list of 5,000 prisoners to the US and would wait for all of them to be released before any talks could be started.

Both sides have been positioning themselves for talks and preparing for battle. Soon after the signing of the deal with the US, the Taliban broke the 11-day long ceasefire and launched 43 attacks on checkpoints belonging to Afghan forces in

the Helmand province. The Taliban might be signalling their intent to continue fighting throughout the intra-Afghan talks, to improve their negotiating position. In response, the US launched air strikes against the Taliban to underscore their commitment to wider Afghan stability.

While de-escalation soon happened, the wider challenge to intra-Afghan negotiations comes from political disunity among the mainstream Afghan political parties. There were two Presidential inauguration ceremonies in Kabul with Mr Abdullah contesting Mr Ghani's narrow victory in the September elections. This comes at a terrible time for Afghanistan, with intra-Afghan talks about to begin. The US wants the two sides to patch up and by making its backing of Mr Ghani clear, it is sending a message to Mr Abdullah. But, as various Afghan factions look to a post-US withdrawal landscape, they are making their own calculations. Factionalism is only going to grow, precisely when unity is sorely needed. And this would pose a serious challenge to Kabul when it sits down across the table with a resurgent Taliban.

For the US, this is a deal that allows it to get out of Afghanistan, a promise President Trump had made during his last election campaign. Despite his repeated pledges to

**The deal with the Taliban is full of contradictions, but it is the best the US could come up with. Rather than criticise it, New Delhi should think about what its own options are in securing its flanks**

end America's involvement in the war, he has gone back and forth on this. As part of his South Asia strategy, he ended up adding 4,000 US troops to the 8,900 American forces already deployed there. But with elections coming up, he clearly wants to get out, and this has the support of the American people. After investing more than \$1 trillion and losing more than 2,400 lives, there is some truth to his assertions that the US has done its bit for Afghanistan; others should now shoulder more of the burden.

It is therefore strange to see the Indian commentariat react to the deal in Afghanistan by criticising the US. Washington can hardly be criticised for taking care of its own interests after investing in blood and treasure for 18 long years. Those who are complaining the most about the deal in India are also the ones who want India to continue with the status quo in its Afghanistan policy.

If India believes it has interests in Afghanistan that need to be preserved, then it should be doing much more than just berating Washington for its deal with the Taliban. Like all such deals, it is riddled with confusion and contradictions. But that's the best that the US could come up with to protect its flanks. New Delhi should be thinking more about what its own options are in securing its flanks. So far, no satisfactory answer has been forthcoming.

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## OTHER VIEWS

### Relief package is a good start, but more should be done

The economy needs a stimulus; this is no time to worry about the fiscal deficit

The ₹1.70-trillion relief package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 — Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) — is a good first step towards alleviating the distress caused to vulnerable sections of the population by the 21-day lockdown imposed to combat the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). What is noteworthy about the package is not the amount but the innovative ways in which the government is seeking to offer relief. It covers various sections of the vulnerable, ranging from farmers and women Jan Dhan account holders, to organised sector workers, to the most important of all — healthcare workers, who will now get a sizeable insurance cover of ₹50 lakh.

The effort appears to be to keep the funding within the budget as much as possible and retain control over the deficit. It could also be to preserve firepower, as there is no saying how long this uncertainty will last. But, at some point soon, the government will have to break the fiscal deficit shackles. In fact, ideally the government ought to have announced a relief package for the corporate sector and the middle class along with the PMGKY. It should now turn its focus towards businesses that are running out of cash and may soon default on even salaries



and statutory commitments if relief is not given. There are enough ideas to borrow from others such as the US, which is in the process of finalising a \$2 trillion package.

The Hindu, March 27

### Horror in Kabul

Violence continues despite peace deal

The attack on a gurdwara in Kabul, in which 25 people were killed, all except one from Afghanistan's Sikh community, has shown that the coronavirus may well be vanquished by science, but human beings will continue to inflict barbarity upon each other. The attack, carried out by three gunmen, took place in the early morning hours, when over a hundred people were present inside. Within hours, it was claimed by the Islamic State, which later also said it had carried it out in revenge for Kashmir. Appearing to hint at something more sinister, the ministry of external affairs called the attack "diabolical" and condemned the "perpetrators and their backers", a formulation usually reserved for attacks suspected to have

emanated from, or to have the backing of Pakistan. The Taliban's operational leadership is now in the hands of Sirajuddin Haqqani of the Haqqani group, which has been blamed for several attacks on Indian targets, including the 2008 Indian Embassy bombing in Kabul.

On Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made an appeal for an immediate ceasefire in theatres of conflict across the world, to enable governments, health workers and humanitarian aid agencies to access those who might be most vulnerable to COVID-19. Indeed, Afghanistan faces two contagions, new and old — COVID-19 and the relentless violence.

The Indian Express, March 27

### States need more resources

Centre must provide requisite access

In India, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic will require, among many other things, a massive mobilisation of financial resources. The Union government can stretch its fiscal deficit to borrow more from the market, or from the Reserve Bank of India. States, however, have much less room when it comes to mobilising additional resources. They are allowed to borrow 3 per cent of their state domestic product as per the limit set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003. The states require additional finances for two urgent reasons. The first is to acquire more medical equipment for prevention, tests and treatment of potential and actual Covid-19 patients. The sec-

ond is for extending economic support to the poor and the vulnerable - daily wage earners or small traders who are left without any incomes. They will need cash and food immediately. The West Bengal chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, has rightly urged the Union government to raise the limit to borrowing set by the FRBM Act from the current 3 per cent to 5 per cent.

The least Narendra Modi and his government can do is to allow states greater access to financial resources in their battle against the deadly virus. The size of the fiscal deficit ought to be the last thing on Mr Modi's mind at the moment.

The Telegraph, March 27

# INDIA CASES CLIMB TO 918, TOLL 19

## Govt boosts capacity to fight virus

## INFECTIONS TOP 600,000 GLOBALLY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi, 28 March

Amid looming fears of the coronavirus infection entering the community transmission stage, India is boosting its overall health infrastructure by initiating measures like designating dedicated hospitals for affected patients in states, ramping up procurement of ventilators, and mobilising resources of Railways and armed forces to deal with any eventuality. As of now, the country reported 918 coronavirus cases and 19 deaths.

Even though the Health Ministry and the Indian Council of Medical Research have been insisting that there is "no solid evidence" of community transmission so far, the government has started scaling up health infrastructure to deal with any situation.

India is under a 21-day lockdown from Tuesday midnight as part of efforts to check spread of coronavirus. In an



PHOTO: PTI

urgent communication, the Centre has asked all states to earmark hospitals only for treating Covid-19 patients and ramp up their capacity to manage increasing number of cases. At least 17 states have started work on it.

The armed forces are keeping ready 28 service hospitals to provide treatment to Covid-19 patients apart from five hospitals which are carrying laboratory tests for

the infection. Defence public sector undertaking Bharat Electronics has been tasked with manufacturing ventilators while premier defence research laboratory DRDO is producing protective gears for medical personnel and supplying hand sanitizers and face masks to various agencies involved in patient care.

On Friday, the government granted emergency financial powers to Army corps and divisional commanders to procure equipment to set up medical and quarantine facilities for affected people.

### SHOT IN THE ARM

#### INDIA

▶ TIHAR JAIL AUTHORITIES RELEASE 400 INMATES TO DECONGEST PRISON

SRL DIAGNOSTICS gets ICMR nod to conduct tests

NHPC earmarks ₹4.5 crore to fight coronavirus

INDIAN PILOTS' GUILD alleges 'sub-standard' protective equipment on rescue flights

CONGRESS constitutes task force to intensify efforts in party-ruled states

CENTRE DIRECTS states to keep some beds reserved for creating isolation facilities

AIR INDIA operates cargo flights to move medicines, medical equipment

SUN PHARMA commits ₹25 crore worth of drugs, sanitizers to fight Covid-19

REDUCTION IN VIRAL LOAD has been observed in patients who were given hydroxychloroquine: ICMR

FIVE VILLAGES in Jammu & Kashmir's Rajouri district declared red zones

DOCTORS ACROSS COUNTRY are being trained to manage patients with the help of AIIMS, Delhi

THE CENTRE asks hospitals to postpone all non-essential surgeries in the wake of the pandemic

US continues to lead in number of patients; new cases stack up in Europe

AGENCIES  
28 March

The number of confirmed coronavirus infections worldwide topped 600,000 on Saturday, as new cases stacked up quickly in Europe and the United States and officials dug in for a long fight against the pandemic.

While the US leads the world in reported infections, five countries exceed its roughly 1,700 deaths: Italy, Spain, China, Iran, and France.

In India, the total number of cases climbed to 918, according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The ministry had, earlier in the day, announced that the toll had hit 19. It said that 79 people had recovered from the infection so far.

The number of coronavirus patients in Maharashtra who died rose to six on Saturday when it was confirmed that an 85-year-old Mumbai doctor, who succumbed at a private hospital on Friday, had the infection, the health department said.

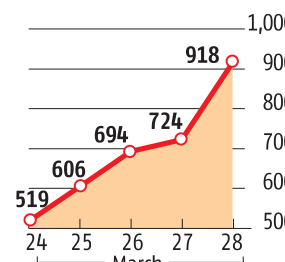
For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. But for others, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, the virus can cause severe illness, and lead to death.



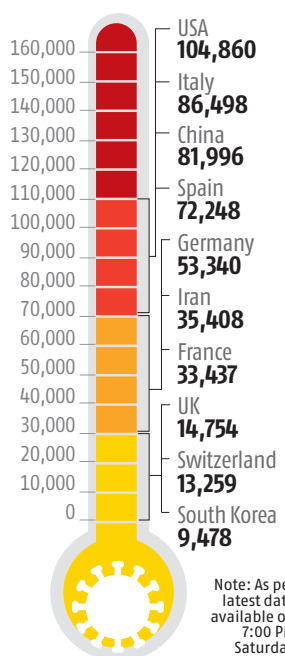
### TELANGANA ENTERS TOP 3

Total confirmed cases	Indian nationals	Foreign nationals
Maharashtra	177	3
Kerala	168	8
Telangana	46	10
Karnataka	55	0
Uttar Pradesh	54	1
Rajasthan	52	2
Gujarat	44	1
Tamil Nadu	34	6
Delhi	38	1
Punjab	38	0
Haryana	19	14
Madhya Pradesh	30	0
J&K	20	0
West Bengal	15	0
Andhra Pradesh	14	0
Ladakh	13	0
Bihar	9	0
Chandigarh	8	0
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	6	0
Chhattisgarh	6	0
Uttarakhand	4	1
Goa	3	0
Himachal Pradesh	3	0
Odisha	3	0
Manipur	1	0
Mizoram	1	0
Puducherry	1	0

### INDIA'S TALLY CROSSES 900



### ITALY OVERTAKES CHINA



Note: Total differs from sum of individual numbers, as state-wise figures are yet to be updated. Source: Media reports, Ministry of Health, Johns Hopkins University

## Food riots are a real possibility: Sen

BS REPORTER  
New Delhi, 28 March

Former chief statistician Pronab Sen has warned that if food requirements of migrant workers with no income are not fulfilled amid a country-wide lockdown, then 'food riot' may be a real possibility.

In an interview to Karan Thapar for *The Wire*, Sen said that if the coronavirus pandemic spreads to rural areas, containment will be impossible. In the wake of the country-wide lockdown to combat the coronavirus threat, thousands of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other states have started returning to their home states from cities, including Delhi and Mumbai.

"The problem is that if food is not made available (to migrant workers) and this, we have experienced in this country earlier, we had food riots during the times of famine...we could have food riots again if food is not made available. Let's be clear about this," the economist said while replying to a question on the impact of the lockdown on

India's vulnerable section. "If the supply system comes unstuck, if the requirements of people who have no income are not met, then food riots are a very real possibility," Sen asserted.

On Friday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said that from Saturday, the government will be serving lunch and dinner to nearly 400,000 people at over 224 night shelters, 325 schools and other locations.

"Now, if we are in a situation when a very large number of population are forced to come together at a very short period of time in order to access food, whether it is cooked meal in rain basera, or what they have done in Punjab and Uttarakhand, which is that shops will open only three hours in the morning, a classic curfew model... you will probably get a higher spread of infection because of this...." Sen observed.

Sen said panic had been created by the prime minister's incorrect use of the term 'curfew' to describe a lockdown. A curfew is very differ-



Pronab Sen said if the pandemic spreads to rural areas, containment will be impossible

this was a problem the finance minister had not addressed. However, if mandis function then the front-loading of PM-Kisan would cover their interim needs. But there is no clarity on whether mandis will function.

Sen said that in India's federal system the real burden of helping the most vulnerable would fall on state governments but they do not have the capacity to raise resources for this nor all the necessary permissions from the central government. He said the Centre must immediately give them the necessary authority and agreed that so far there is no public sign the Modi government has done so or is going to do so.

Speaking about the finance minister's economic package, Sen said on the assumption there were many more steps planned, this was a good first step. At this stage, the crisis did not call for a big increase in the fiscal deficit because the problem was largely a supply-related freeze and not a demand-related concern, he added.

## US to airlift citizens stranded in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Washington, 28 March

The US government is making arrangements to airlift over 2,000 American citizens stranded in India because of the suspension of flights and the lockdown in the country to limit the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the US State Department has said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced a three-week lockdown in the country as part of measures to curb the spread of the virus that has claimed over 26,000 lives globally. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Ian Brownlee, Bureau of Consular Affairs on Covid-19, said that there were about 1,500 Americans in the New Delhi area, between 600 and 700 in the Mumbai area, and 300 to 400 Americans elsewhere who have identified themselves.

"We are working with a multiplicity of options here. We are facilitating the necessary permits for that aircraft. They're ready to take out 150 or so Americans," he said.

According to Johns Hopkins University in the United States, the total number of cases in India is now 933, as of 8 pm on Saturday. Earlier, the university distanced itself from reports attributing a claim to it, which said India may witness as many as 40 crore cases.

### IN BRIEF

**In Rajasthan, lockdown violators ordered to serve in quarantine wards**

Coming out with a unique way of 'engaging' those flouting lockdown orders, the district administration in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu area has decided to send such violators to the quarantine wards to take care of patients.

**Yogi Adityanath directs quarantine of 100,000 people who have entered the state in past 3 days**

The CM also issued directives that these people be kept in quarantine and arrangements for their food and other daily must be fulfilled. "No one in the state should remain hungry during the lockdown," he was quoted as saying.

**Delhi government converts schools into night shelters to accommodate stranded migrant labourers**

The Delhi government has started converting schools in the Ghazipur area into night shelters to accommodate stranded migrant workers amid the lockdown, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday.

## NATION UNDER LOCKDOWN

### UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

As the world continues to grapple with coronavirus, a disease leaving nations — both developed and developing — scrambling to get their affairs in order, more than a billion people in India are experiencing their own struggles during the nationwide lockdown. While the streets were deserted, long queues could be seen outside stores selling essential items. Law enforcement officials found creative ways to ensure people stayed indoors.



1



PHOTOS: PTI

2

1. In Mumbai, life guards walk at the otherwise bustling Girgaon Chowpatty beach, which wore a deserted look during a nationwide lockdown, imposed in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic

2. In what went viral online, a police officer in Chennai wore a helmet modeled on coronavirus, and requested commuters to stay at home to avoid spread of the disease

5. A prototype of an isolation ward was created by the Railways for treating coronavirus patients inside non-air-conditioned train coaches in New Delhi, as fears over increase in the number of infected cases rose



5



4



3. Abiding by social distancing rules, people maintained space between each other as they stood in a queue to buy vegetables in Shimla on Saturday

4. Railway police officials patrol the Churchgate station as cases in Maharashtra continue to soar

