

CENTRAL MINISTERS' GROUP MEETS,
discusses concerns over harvest process

SEROLOGICAL TESTS ON WIDER SCALE
as lockdown enters final, critical phase

ON HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE, INDIA SAYS
will help affected nations, neighbours

Centre's cue: States want longer lockdown

Clarity likely after April 10 when disease trajectory is more visible

LIZ MATHEW & ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

WITH THE number of COVID-19 cases in India nearing the 5,000-mark, the Centre is considering suggestions from a number of states that the restrictions in place during the 21-day national lockdown should be extended beyond the deadline of April 14, government sources said Tuesday.

"The central government is thinking on the same lines, but the Prime Minister will take a final call after considering all aspects and holding discussions with experts. We are sure that every state will follow the decision he takes," said sources.

Meanwhile, an informal Group of Ministers (GoM) on COVID-19 headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh discussed measures to enable operations in the farming sector. "This is the harvest season, and the focus is on how to smoothen the process. There is already some relaxation in the movement of machines and for farm labourers. But there is lack of information on the ground...this has to be communicated properly, and states encouraged to expedite work," said sources.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video-conference with chief ministers last week, at least seven states, including Maharashtra with the maximum number of cases (868) so far, have indicated that they would continue to have some restrictions in place after the three-week period.

The chief ministers had conveyed to the Prime Minister that they would prefer to take some steps to revive the farming and manufacturing sector. The Centre had also signalled that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Around 200 people from a JJ cluster in Noida's Sector 8 were taken to a quarantine facility late on Tuesday evening. *Abhinav Saha* REPORT, PAGE 3

As case count nears 5000, Govt plans big testing push in make-or-break week

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

AS THE last week of the three-week lockdown begins, amid indications that some restrictions may continue post-April 14, the government is preparing to massively scale up testing for COVID-19 over the next few days. Sources said the test results during this "make-or-break week" will be a deciding factor in determining whether the lockdown continues or not.

With 508 new cases being confirmed in the last 24 hours, the total number of cases detected across the country touched 4,789 on Tuesday. While 124 people have died so far, 353 have been discharged.

"This week, you can say, is the make-or-break week so far as the future course of the epi-



Drones spray disinfectant on quarantine sites in Ahmedabad. *Javed Raja*

demic in India is concerned, whether we continue with the lockdown or not. The criticism has been that we did not test enough, but we have always maintained that if it (infection) was really happening that much, the death toll would not be so low; also, influenza-like illnesses across the country have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In capital's quarantine for Tablighis: 1000 in 2 buildings, flat number is ID

ANAND MOHAN J
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM loudspeakers never stop at the quarantine facility at Narela in outer Delhi.

Around 2 pm, members of the Tablighi Jamaat step out of their flats and form a line, as instructions boom from a loudspeaker. They are supposed to be screened for symptoms of the coronavirus — part of a daily routine at the facility.

Just last month, the 1,000-odd men quarantined at the facility had participated in a gathering at Markaz Nizamuddin, in

what has now become an epicentre of the country's coronavirus outbreak, with cases being reported across the country. More than 2,300 people were evacuated from the Markaz last month — those with symptoms were sent to hospitals, and others to quarantine facilities.

At the Narela facility, the men are known less by their names and more by their flat numbers. During the daily screening, a nursing attendant announces flat numbers one by one. "Flat number 218," the attendant says, and a man raises his hand and identifies himself.

The Army has accepted a request by authorities to handle



Quarantine facility in Narela. *Gajendra Yadav*

medical screening at this facility, which has doctors, nursing attendants, maintenance staff and civil defence volunteers at the forefront.

"We have deputed around 20

officers, including doctors and nursing assistants. They are working along with civil and medical professionals as a part of the process of taking over screening duties. In the interest of smooth running of the facility, it is being ensured that the takeover process will be gradual," Army sources told *The Indian Express*.

There are around 1,300 people under lockdown in three buildings. Two buildings house around 1,000 Tablighi Jamaat members, while the third houses people who came from abroad last month and were sent to quarantine from the airport.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CORONA COUNT

4789 CASES 124 DEATHS

353 RECOVERED

1,14,015 samples have been tested as on April 7, 2020

INSIDE



UK PM JOHNSON IN ICU, STABLE

SOME LEVELLING OF CASES IN NEW YORK, SPAIN RISING AGAIN

PAGES 3, 4, 5, 7, 10

Delhi lines up 'five-Ts', Chief Minister invokes South Korea experience

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

THE DELHI government will start conducting rapid antibody tests, as recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in areas identified as coronavirus hotspots in the national capital, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Tuesday.

Kejriwal said the five-point action plan being rolled out by the government involves testing, tracing of contacts, treatment, teamwork and tracking. In terms of tracing, the government is go-

ing to expand the surveillance net by sharing mobile numbers with the Delhi Police of some 2,300 men who were present at the Tablighi Jamaat gathering at Markaz Nizamuddin last month. "After consulting doctors and other experts, we have prepared a five-point plan, which are essentially five Ts. The first T is testing. Countries that did not undertake tests could not contain the spread of the virus. On the other hand, consider South Korea's case, on how it got tests conducted at a mass scale," he said.

"Carriers of the virus were identified so that they don't

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'HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE FOR BADLY AFFECTED COUNTRIES'

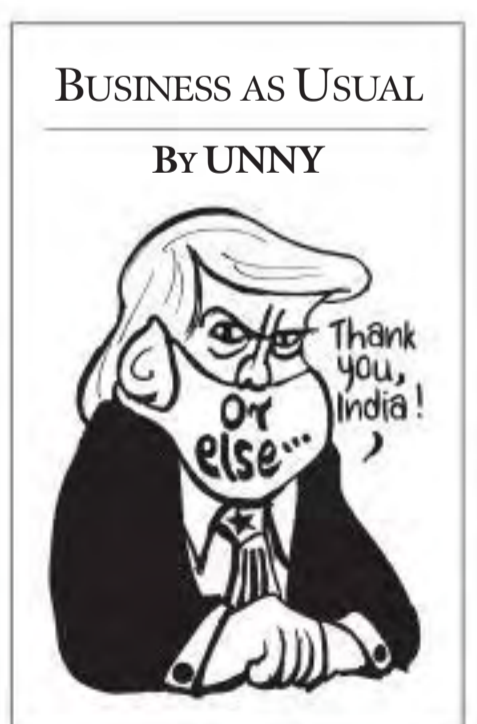
Trump says may retaliate; Govt rethinks export ban, says enough stocks at home

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

SHORTLY AFTER US President Donald Trump said that "there may be retaliation" if India does not agree to export Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a key anti-malaria drug, India Tuesday said that it will supply essential drugs to "some nations who have been particularly badly affected" by COVID-19 and to "neighbouring countries who are dependent on India's capabilities".

New Delhi also said that a "comprehensive assessment" of India's domestic requirements has confirmed the "availability of medicines for all possible contingencies". It said that it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



THE DRUG EVERYONE IS LOOKING AT EXPLAINED, PAGE 7

Pharma majors ramp up capacity to meet demand in country and abroad

PRABHA RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

INDIA'S DECISION to reverse the April 4 export ban on hydroxychloroquine within 74 hours is based on an assessment that pharma companies Ipca Laboratories and Zydus Cadia can ramp up capacity to cater to the increased domestic as well as overseas demand.

On Tuesday, India said it would license hydroxychloro-

quine, primarily an anti-malarial drug also used for autoimmune diseases, and pain-killer paracetamol, allowing their export to some countries. The demand for hydroxychloroquine had shot up globally with several countries pushing India — among the top suppliers of the drug globally — for the drug's use in their fight against COVID-19.

While the demand position of these drugs would be "continuously monitored", the Ministry

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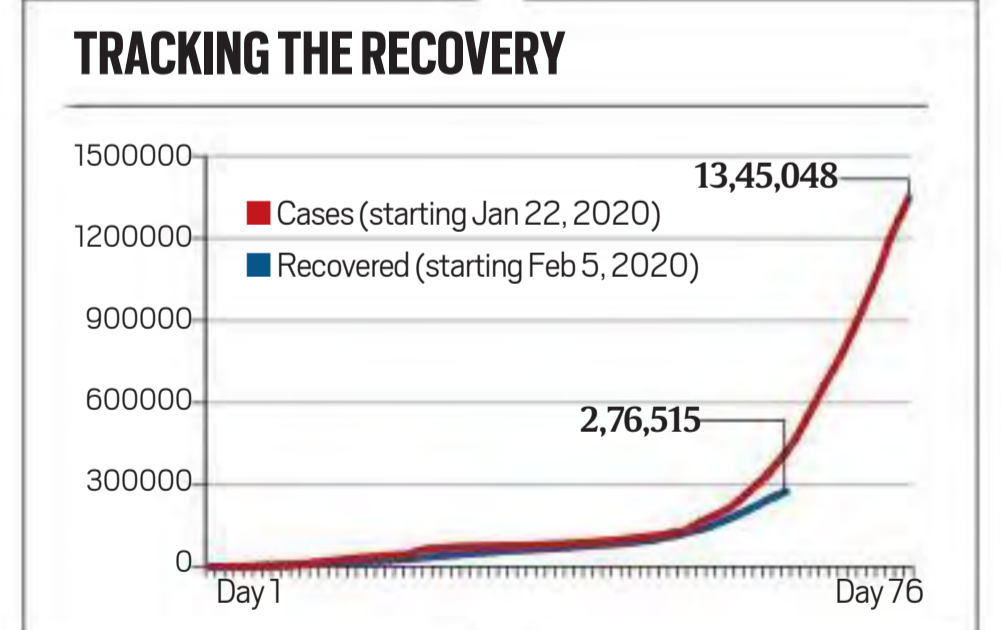
Globally, tally of recovered closely follows total cases, with 14-day lag

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

MAPPING the number of COVID-19 patients who recovered against the global case load reveals an interesting trend - it mimics the exponential growth curve of the pandemic, but also appears to closely trail the case-load, with a 14-day lag.

Absolute numbers on a particular date of the number of positive COVID-19 cases and recovered cases may still look intimidating. A two-week reflection, however, shows the recovery rate is trailing not too far behind the caseload.

For example, the Johns Hopkins database suggests 2,92,467 recovered cases Tuesday as against a global load of 1,365,004 cases. Two weeks ago, the caseload was 3,78,235,



JHU statistics show.

Over a month back, March 1 saw 88,369 cases globally with only 42,716 recoveries. However, two weeks later, on March 15, there were 76,034 recoveries.

In other words, for roughly two months (from March 1 to April 6), recovered numbers

grew exponentially, and clearly trailing the case load with a lag of 14 days (the incubation period).

Explaining this trend, Sitabhra Sinha, a scientist at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai said, if everyone who fell sick on Day 1

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Kerala plan: no flights till end of May, schools only for exams

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 7

A TASK force of experts constituted by the Kerala government has recommended district-wise, phase-by-phase relaxation of the COVID-19 lockdown measures post April 14, lasting till after middle of May, while keeping a close eye on the number of new infections in the state.

The 17-member task force headed by former chief secretary KM Abraham, that submitted the report to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Monday evening, said large-scale movement of people across international and state boundaries should not be considered till the situation was "under control in every state".

Calling for a withdrawal strategy "calibrated to ensure that the case load is always kept below the (surge) capacity of the healthcare system", the panel laid out the phases in which relaxation could be done post the lockdown.

The first phase would include districts that haven't seen more than one new case for a week leading up to the April 14 review (i.e. April 7-13); have not seen an increase of more than 10% in the numbers under home surveillance in that period; and have no coronavirus hotspots. Each phase would be a fortnight-long.

In the second phase would be included districts that have not seen more than one new case of COVID-19 in an entire

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

On Maharashtra highways, dhabas home for stranded truckers

IRAM SIDDIQUE
KOLHAPUR, APRIL 7

"WHEN PEOPLE from villages go to work in cities, they have at least a couple of people to help them. Here on the highway, no one knows me," says Kanhaiya Singh as, lying on the front seat of his truck, he tries to tune into his mobile radio for news updates.

Transporting 40 motorcycles, the 40-year-old and his driver Harpreet Singh had covered over 700 km from Bengaluru and were just 85 km short of their destination Pune when the country went into lockdown.



Truck drivers near a dhaba on NH-48 in Satara. *Nirmal Harindran*

dhabas like Kanhaiya or at petrol pumps. Their rations are running out, and with many dhabas shut, so is food.

Police patrols shoo them away from tolls, or tell them to turn around. "Even when an order has been issued to allow essential services, the understanding on the ground is to only give priority to essential items. Those returning after offloading their goods are being stopped on return journey," says Bal Malkit Singh, the Chairman of the All India Motor Transport Congress.

While many have abandoned their trucks and left, those like Kanhaiya, afraid of leaving



Truck drivers near a dhaba on NH-48 in Satara. *Nirmal Harindran*

their cargo unattended, pass days counting their money, and surfing phones for news.

Five of them have now been parked since at least a fortnight at Suchar Singh's dhaba, on Turjapur Road in Osmanabad district. Many others have left their trucks behind in Suchar's care, putting their phone numbers down on a piece of paper, and their truck papers and details of their consignments in a dusty folder. The 60-year-old's joint is a favourite with truckers, its "special Punjabi khana" drawing up to a hundred customers every night.

Rana Pratap, among the five drivers living at the dhaba, says

every time he has tried to make his way out, police have forced him back. He was carrying cotton from Raipur to Kolhapur when he got stuck on Janata Curfew day on March 22.

Asking why the government had not arranged shelters for them, the 35-year old who has been driving trucks for 11 years says, "We will die of hunger on the road."

Bal Malkit says the All India Motor Transport Congress had asked the state government to tie up with districts to arrange food for the truckers, but not heard back. "We are making efforts but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2