

TESTING IN PRIVATE LABS TO BE FREE,
orders SC, tells govt to provide PPEs to doctors

SURVEILLANCE, AAROGYA APP DATA
will be merged to test the symptomatic

FINANCE MINISTRY TIGHTENS BELT,
puts limits on expenditure for next 3 months

Message in the chorus: Stay with lockdown

PM consults parties, final decision on April 11 after talk with CMs

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

ON A day when the number of COVID-19 cases across the country crossed 5,000, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the first clear signal that some restrictions are likely to continue after the 21-day lockdown period ends on April 14.

In a video conference with floor leaders of various political parties on Wednesday, Modi said the government's priority is to save each and every life, and the feedback from districts, opinion of experts and experience of other countries all showed that a lockdown is perhaps the only way to check the spread of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, 485 fresh cases and 25 more deaths were reported in the last 24 hours; the number of cases has now gone up to 5,274 (411 recovered), and the death toll is 149.

According to a government statement, Modi emphasised that several state governments, district administrations and experts had pressed for extension of the lockdown. He, however, said he would hold another round of discussions with the chief ministers on April 11 before taking a final decision.

Last week, Modi had told the chief ministers to formulate a common but staggered exit strategy to lift the lockdown. "The Prime Minister underlined that the situation in the country is akin to a 'social emergency'. The country has been forced to take tough decisions, and must continue to remain vigilant," the statement quoted him as saying.

This was Modi's first interaction with leaders of political parties on Wednesday. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Migrants quarantined at a school in Nanpara area of Bahraich district in Uttar Pradesh. Vishal Srivastav REPORT, PAGE 6



People crowd shops in Noida after the sealing announcement Wednesday. Gajendra Yadav

Across party lines, one demand: Need more aid from Centre, more tests

MANOJ CG & HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

CUTTING ACROSS party lines, floor leaders of political parties on Wednesday asked the Centre to announce more financial relief measures, economic stimulus package, ramp up testing for COVID-19, release all dues including GST compensation to states and called for procurement of rabi crops from farmers.

In their video conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, some also raised the Tablighi Jamaat issue, and asked the government to ensure that there is no communalisation.

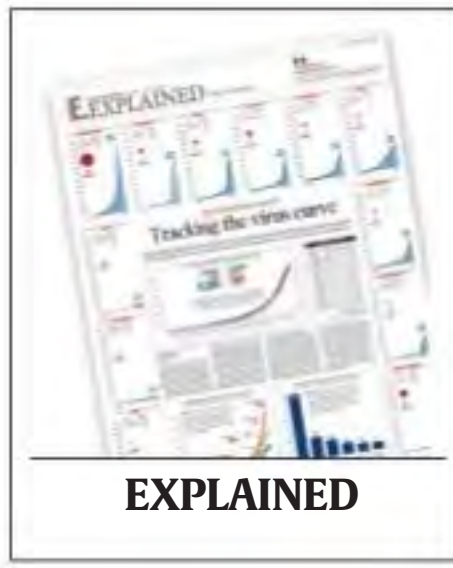
This was Modi's first interaction with leaders of political parties on Wednesday. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Virus curve up, lockdown impact may take a while

AMITABH SINHA & KARISHMA MEHROTRA
PUNE, NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

THERE IS good reason why the central government and several states are inclined to extend the current lockdown beyond April 14. Two weeks into the lockdown period, there is no indication yet that the largest quarantine exercise in the world is having the desired effect of slowing down the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

Scientists using computer models to measure the spread of an infectious disease say they are yet to notice a "flattening of the growth curve". This does not mean that the lockdown has been a



wasted exercise, however. It is too early to draw such a conclusion.

Sitabha Sinha of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai said he expected the impact of the lockdown to be significant. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

UP and Delhi seal hotspots until April 15: No one gets in or out

MAULSHREE SETH, AMIL BHATNAGAR & SOURAV ROY BARMAN
LUCKNOW, APRIL 8

THE UTTAR Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to seal coronavirus hotspots in 15 districts until April 15 as part of a cluster containment exercise, where only medical services and home delivery of essential items would be allowed.

While entire districts will not face such stringent lockdown

CITY

22 POCKETS NOW IN DELHI CONTAINMENT ZONES, NET TO WIDEN

IN KEJRIWAL CHAT WITH MPs, PPEs FLAGGED PAGES 3, 4

measures, movement of people will be completely curbed in these hotspots, and all shops will be shut.

In Delhi, too, 20 small pockets, including lanes and apartment complexes, were notified as 'containment zones', wherein tougher restrictions, including on essential services, will be implemented. By Thursday, more areas are likely to be sealed, which include Central Delhi's Sadar Bazar and pockets of West Delhi, district magistrates told *The Indian Express*.

"Many cases were reported from the Sadar area, so it is being contained and sealed. There are more cases. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Trump snaps at WHO — and India quietly sidestepped some of its advisories on virus

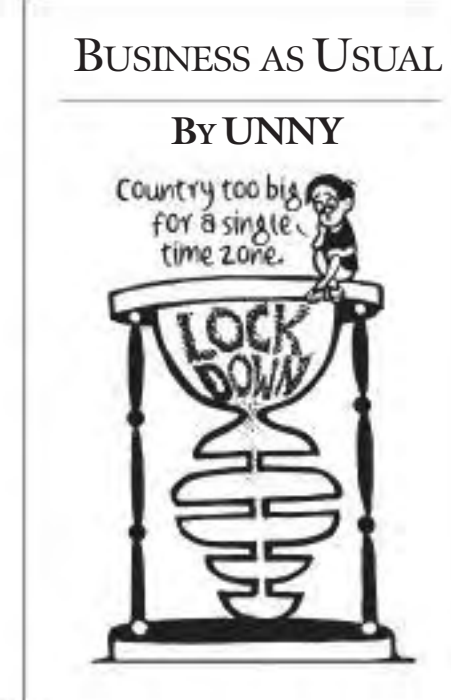
ABANTIKA GHOSH & SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

THE PUBLIC snub to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and a threat to cut its funding is characteristic of Donald Trump, and may not find an echo in New Delhi.

However, the fact is when it comes to key aspects of COVID management, the government has politely sidestepped the periodic "advice" from the WHO and, instead, leaned on the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the experience of several state governments — from Kerala and Uttar Pradesh to Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

This despite the fact that the WHO has been, like with immunisation, TB and other neglected tropical diseases, closely working with the Centre and states on the novel coronavirus outbreak, and its staff are helping state governments ramp up training and capacity-building.

Most recently, on April 3, the government's advisory on the use of masks while stepping out



of the house was at variance with that of the WHO, which said this should be only for those who are symptomatic, health workers, or caregivers to COVID patients.

That's not the only point where the government veered off the WHO track.

Consider: ■ On January 30, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that WHO did not recommend travel restrictions to China — in fact, it **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Cash 'stress': Finance tells ministries to limit spends during Q1

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

THE FINANCE Ministry is of the view that the situation arising out of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown may cause "stress" to the government's cash position in the first quarter (April-June) of 2020-21.

In an office memorandum issued by the Budget Division in the Department of Economic Affairs on Wednesday, the ministry put the Demand for Grants, or in simple words, the expenditure estimates, of various departments or ministries, in one of the three categories A, B or C.

For instance, under Category B, 31 Demands for Grants are listed, including those of ministries such as fertilisers, posts, external affairs and home affairs. For these demands, the Finance Ministry has stipulated that the monthly expenditure should be kept at 8 per cent of the BE for April, and 6 per cent each for the next two months. In other words, these ministries have been asked not to spend beyond 20 per cent of their full year Budget Estimate.

Similarly, under Category C, Demands for Grants of 52 departments or ministries are listed. These include ministries and departments such as coal, chemicals and petrochemicals, tourism, steel, women and child development, youth affairs and sports, shipping, mines, higher education, among others. The Finance Ministry has asked these **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

From Ground Zero: Tested in hospitals, they died hours later

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA & SAGAR RAJPUT
MUMBAI, APRIL 8

HESPENT his final hours on a chair in the ICU, pulling oxygen from a tube. He watched attendants wrap up the bodies of two patients. Finally, he was given a bed of his own in the middle of the night. Six hours later, he was dead.

Buried under the countless stories of the coronavirus outbreak in Mumbai — 714 cases and 45 deaths at last count — are the frantic final hours of those who died barely hours after reaching hospital and being tested.

Like the 67-year-old father of a dates trader who watched two bodies being taken away in front of him at KEM Hospital. Or, the 57-year-old electrician who

crossed 40 km and four hospitals before succumbing to the virus. And the 43-year-old mother whose daughter is still struggling to understand what happened.

Most of them had underlying health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure. "In most of the deaths, the patients reached us in a critical stage," says Dr Hemant Deshmukh, the Dean of KEM hospital, one of the government hospitals that is treating COVID-19 patients.

With 1,135 cases and 72 deaths so far, Maharashtra's death rate (6.3 per cent) is much higher than the national count (2.6 per cent) and the global average (5.5 per cent).

At the state's Ground Zero in Mumbai, where over 10,000 tests have been done so far, *The Indian Express* tracked the final days of **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

INSIDE



HARYANA, DELHI GOVTS GAVE MOST MEALS, KERALA SHELTERED 3 LAKH

FOR POST-APRIL 14 PLAN, RLYS TO ASK STATES ABOUT NEED FOR SPECIAL TRAINS PAGES 5, 6

THE IDEAS PAGE

AVOID THE FOOD LOCKDOWN BY JEAN DREZE PAGE 9

Pooled testing planned in zero-case districts to get the real picture

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

PUSHING FOR increased testing, health authorities are all set to do pooled testing in some of the 436 districts of the country from where no case of COVID-19 has been reported. This will be done to get a "realistic estimation" of the spread of the disease, highly placed government sources said, and the areas will be selected based on information available.

Into the third week of the 21-day lockdown, there is realisation in the government that without adequate testing in the COVID-free districts, there is an inherent risk in taking any decision on the lockdown. That is why information from two databases — from Aarogya Setu app and surveillance — will be merged to choose the areas where pooled testing



Pool testing to be via RT-PCR, not serological tests. P71

will be done among symptomatic people. These tests will be done through RT-PCR, the nucleic acid-based test that India has been using from the start, and not the recently introduced faster option of serological tests, sources said.

"We already have a couple of crore downloads of the Aarogya Setu app. The tracking data from that will give us an idea about **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Cash over, women queue to draw Rs 500 from Jan Dhan accounts

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & SANTANU CHOWDHURY
BONGAON, KOLKATA, APRIL 8

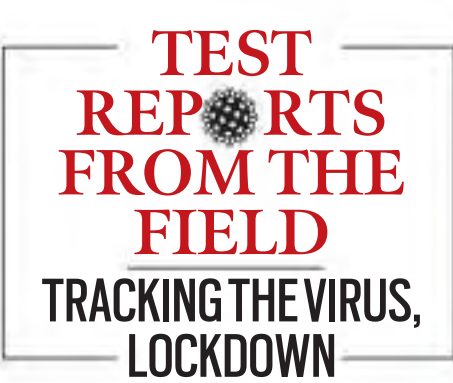
AT 4 AM, Saswati Das, 22, left in her husband's toto (e-rickshaw) with her mother-in-law Parul, 40, and her 12-year-old son to join the queue outside the State Bank of India's Customer Service Point in Chandpara in West Bengal's North 24-Parganas district.

At nearly noon, both women still had some distance to go to reach the cash counter. Saswati's husband and child were waiting for them in the toto. "The government has put Rs 500 in our

accounts. We need the money. My husband drives this toto and he has had no work," Saswati said, adding that he used to earn about Rs 400 a day before the lockdown.

To help families tide over difficulties brought by the 21-day lockdown, the government had announced that Rs 500 per month would be deposited in the accounts of women Jan Dhan Yojana beneficiaries for three months. The first installment was to be deposited starting April 3.

For the last couple of days, long queues of women — accompanied by children or other family members — have been



seen outside banks in districts across West Bengal. Many of them have been seen walking with their children or cycling to these centres. Most banks have been dispensing cash through Customer Service Points, mostly single-room set-ups in rural areas.



"I was here yesterday too, but before I could get to the counter, they shut. Yesterday, my mother-in-law was home and she looked after my child and did the cooking. But today, both of us decided to come. If both of us get Rs 500 each, we can at least ensure food for some more days," said Saswati. "When the lockdown was announced, we rushed to buy food with whatever cash we had. Now people have been saying the lockdown will continue.

At Gaihata, North 24-Parganas in West Bengal, Wednesday. Partha Paul

we have no cash left." With the lockdown entering Day 15 and earning members without work, families in rural Bengal have seen their cash depleting fast.

About 10 km away from where Saswati and Parul stood, near Bus Stand No 44 in Bongaon, also in North 24-Parganas district, Bithika Mondol, 35, stood in another snaking queue — she said she had been waiting since 3 am. Her husband Nitai, who drove a van, has been without work since March 22.

"We decided against coming on the first two days because we **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**