

Covid-19's Third Shock Wave

The Global Food Crisis

The world has never faced a hunger emergency like this, experts say. It could double the number of people facing acute hunger to 265 million by the end of this year.



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Vande Bharat Mission

Thousands Return Home to India from US in 1st Phase



(By our staff reporter) The first Air India special flight, which took off from San Francisco May 9 with 225 Indians on board, landed in Mumbai on Monday, May 11th, under the Government of India's Vande Bharat mission. The second evacuation flight for Mumbai and Ahmedabad left on May 10th, 2020 from EWR Airport, Newark, NJ. India's Consul General in New York Hon. Sandeep Chakravorty personally was present to ensure that everything goes smooth, and that it did. **Photo credit - Vijay Shah**

Second flight from Oman to take off today

The 'Vande Bharat' mission is considered one of the largest expatriation exercise run by any country during the coronavirus pandemic outbreak.

(News Agencies) India will bring back more of its citizens from Oman as part of the repatriation mission under the 'Vande Bharat' initiative.

This will be the second such flight from Oman which is scheduled to take off on Tuesday.

Two flights carrying 362 people from Oman and

Kuwait had reached Kochi in Kerala on May 9. The passengers arrived on two Air India Express flights.

There were eight infants in the flights, the airport authorities said. The 'Vande Bharat' mission is considered one of the largest expatriation exercise run by any country during the

coronavirus pandemic outbreak.

These flights are being operated by Air India and its subsidiary Air India Express since May 7. Air India is operating the bulk of the flights (42) and the remaining - 24 - are being operated by AI Express.

The government of India is targeting to repatriate



14,800 Indians from 12 countries including USA, UK, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Philippines, UAE and Malaysia.

In the first phase of the evacuation, a total number

of 27 flights are bringing back Indians from the Gulf region. This included 11 flights from the United Arab Emirates, five from Saudi Arabia, five from Kuwait, and two each from Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. From the neighbourhood, seven flights are bringing back Indians from Bangladesh carrying passengers bound for Srinagar, Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai.

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149 flights to bring back Indians from 31 nations between May 16-22

Vande Bharat Mission, as the repatriation programme has been dubbed, focused on neighbouring countries such as the Maldives and Bangladesh and West Asian states such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia in the first phase that began on May 7.

(News Agencies) The government will operate a total of 149 flights from 31 countries, including from the US, Australia and France, during the second phase of its massive repatriation programme for citizens stranded abroad that will begin on May 16.

People will be allowed to board the flights, including feeder flights in the destination countries and within India, only after being thoroughly screened and provided they are asymptomatic for Covid-19, people familiar with developments said on Tuesday.

Vande Bharat Mission, as the repatriation programme has been dubbed, focused on neighbouring countries such as the Maldives and Bangladesh and West Asian

states such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia in the first phase that began on May 7.

A total of 6,037 people have been flown back to India in 31 flights operated by Air India and Air India Express in the past five days. The civil aviation ministry is coordinating with the external affairs ministry and state governments for the operation.

The maximum number of flights during the second phase will be from the US (13), the UAE (11), Canada (10), Saudi Arabia and the UK (nine each) and Malaysia and Oman (eight each).

There will also be flights from Kazakhstan and Australia (seven each), Ukraine, Qatar, Indonesia

and Russia (six each), the Philippines (five), France, Singapore, Ireland and Kyrgyzstan (four each), Kuwait and Japan (three each), Georgia, Germany, Tajikistan, Bahrain and Armenia (two each), and Thailand, Italy, Nepal, Belarus, Nigeria and Bangladesh (one each).

The aircraft will fly to destinations across India, including Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Chandigarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir. The maximum number of inbound flights are to Kerala (31), Delhi (22) and Karnataka (17). During the first phase of



Vande Bharat Mission that will end on May 15, a total of 64 flights from 12 countries are expected to bring back some 15,000 people to 14 destinations. "Each and every function in this massive air evacuation mission strictly adheres to the safety and hygiene protocol laid down by the government and the DGCA. MoCA, AAI and Air India leave no stone unturned to prioritise the safety of passengers, the crew and ground handling staff

in these sensitive medical evacuation missions," an official statement said. The people cited above said Indian missions will identify people with compelling reasons for returning to the country from among those who have registered for the repatriation flights. The costs have ranged from about Rs 15,500 for a flight from West Asian countries to Rs 50,000 for a flight from the UK and Rs 100,000 for a flight from the US.

US CDC provides \$3.6 million to support Covid-19 response in India

This initial tranche of funding from the CDC aims to strengthen and support the Indian government's efforts to increase laboratory capacity for SARS-COV-2 testing, including molecular diagnostics and serology, said a statement issued by the US embassy on Tuesday.



(News Agencies) The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will provide \$3.6 million to assist the Indian government's response to the Covid-19 epidemic, including prevention and preparedness activities in the country.

This initial tranche of funding from the CDC aims to strengthen and support the Indian government's efforts to increase laboratory capacity for SARS-COV-2 testing, including molecular diagnostics and serology, said a statement issued by the US embassy on Tuesday.

The funding will also be used to support the development of infection prevention and control (IPC) centres of excellence that

can improve the ability of hospital networks to detect Covid-19 and strengthen local health systems through enhanced surveillance and monitoring. The CDC will work with local partners to assist in the development of a strong public health workforce to support India's capacity to respond to the current pandemic and future threats.

"The scope of support will include planning for health emergency operations centres to further strengthen public health emergency management capacities. In addition, the CDC India program will provide technical assistance for the government of India's ongoing crisis emergency and risk

communication efforts," the statement said. Since early January, the CDC's India office has collaborated with sub-national and national government bodies to support the Covid-19 response. These efforts have focused on laboratory strengthening, infection prevention and control, health workforce development, emergency management, risk communication, and community engagement. The CDC has conducted training courses across India for healthcare administrators, physicians, nurses, and hospital staff on preparedness and response, infection prevention, laboratory operations, and field epidemiology to equip frontline workers with skills to collect, analyse and interpret data, and contribute to evidence-based decisions. The goal of the CDC's global health response to Covid-19 is to limit human-to-human transmission and minimise the pandemic's impact through partnerships with country and non-governmental partners to mitigate vulnerabilities.

Kerala to tighten norms as returning immigrants threaten to foil state's Covid-19 track record



(News Agencies) Kerala which is maintaining a successful disease-management protocol has decided to strengthen its tracing and quarantine norms as immigrants from the Middle-East and people stranded in other parts of the country started flocking to the state in large numbers.

Among the Gulf returnees, seven people had tested positive so far and more flights are expected in the coming days. On Monday, the state reported seven new Covid-19 cases, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's office said. Out of 7, four are people who returned from Mumbai, one from Chennai and another returned from Kuwait (earlier six others who returned from the middle-eastern countries had tested

Among the Gulf returnees, seven people had tested positive so far and more flights are expected in the coming days. On Monday, the state reported seven new Covid-19 cases.

positive). Out of 519 Covid-19 positive cases, 489 have recovered and 27 active cases are there, his office said.

With train services expected to resume in a couple of days the state is expecting more cases. It has tweaked its policies and has given strict instructions to district administrations to enforce track, trace and treat protocol ruthlessly. People with minor symptoms or those who come from red zones will have to undergo strict protocols to contain a possible third bout of infection, said health officials.

Autorickshaws, bicycles: How migrants are covering 1,600-km Mumbai-Gorakhpur journey

Many migrant workers are reaching going to as far as Indore from Mumbai in autorickshaws. Others, who can't spend money, are heading towards their hometowns on bicycles.

(News Agencies) Thousands of migrants are on the move, trying to reach their native places during the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown. And they are leaving in droves from Mumbai, one of the biggest Covid-19 hotspots in the country.

Helping them in their endeavours are autorickshaw drivers from Mumbai who are taking the migrant workers to as far as Indore in Madhya Pradesh. The Mumbai-Agra Road that touches Indore through a bypass road, is seeing a steady stream of autorickshaws from

the country's commercial capital. Officials and eye-witnesses put the number of these three-wheelers from Mumbai crossing the Indore Bypass Road at 50 every hour. Mumbai has the highest number of Covid-19 cases for any city in the country and a strict lockdown since late March has taken thousands of autorickshaws and black-and-yellow taxis off the roads there, leaving thousands of drivers and their kin jobless and without adequate cash in hand. "I have been driving an autorickshaw in

Mumbai for the past 12 years. But everything is closed there now. I spent two months digging into my savings but that, too, has run out. I have no choice but to return to my village," 54-year-old Baleshwar Yadav, who is returning to his native village in Jharkhand, told news agency PTI. He had eight people, including two women and three children, crammed into his three-wheeler. Many of them are not sure when they will return to Mumbai. "There was no food in Mumbai due to lack of work. We will think of returning to the city

later," said Ajay Yadav (36), hailing from Jaunpur district in Uttar Pradesh. Deputy Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Umakant Chaudhary said autorickshaws were being allowed to pass only after those inside are subjected to medical screening when they enter the border of Madhya Pradesh. "We have been seeing a sizeable number of autorickshaws from Mumbai on the Indore Bypass Road over the last one week. We have also received information that some drivers are charging people to transport them to their

native places in other states," the officer said. The migrants are also riding back home on their bicycles. And some of them live as far as Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh or Kalahandi in Odisha. "Traveling by a truck packed with people will cost me over Rs 3,500, bus journey will cost twice as much. And I have only Rs 700 in my pocket," said 27-year-old Ramjeevan Nishad, who left Nallasopara to reach Vaisand after a journey of 80 kilometres. He is part of a group of dozen whose destination is Gorakhpur, which is 1,600 km away.

India needs basic income scheme to make lockdown work: French economist

He also said that India has the potential to become the global democratic leader of the 21st century if it manages to address the issue of inequality.

(News Agencies) India needs to come out with a basic income scheme to make the lockdown work, noted French economist Thomas Piketty said on Tuesday. He also said that India has the potential to become the global democratic leader of the 21st century if it manages to address the issue of inequality. The government has imposed lockdown from March 25 to curb the spread of coronavirus and since then extended the restrictions twice. "I think the government would be well advised to introduce a basic income scheme, and more generally to develop a safety net in India. I do not see how a lockdown can work without a system of income maintenance," Piketty told PTI in an interview. Interestingly, the idea of universal basic income was mooted in Economic Survey 2016-17 by the then chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian and there was a discussion last year during the electoral campaign to introduce a basic income in

India. Piketty also pitched for more equitable and progressive taxation including a wealth tax and inheritance tax in India. "India has the potential to become the global democratic leader of the 21st century, assuming the country manages to come to terms with its legacy of inequality," the eminent economist emphasised.

"The attention that was put to the reservation system was not matched by sufficient attention to other issues, including land reform and the redistribution of property, and the funding of adequate education, infrastructure and health investment through a more equitable and progressive tax system (including a wealth tax and inheritance tax)," he said. Piketty, who recently wrote a book 'Capital and Ideology', noted that a pandemic like Covid-19 can have contradictory effects on inequality. "On the one hand, it can raise the legitimacy of public investment in health, infrastructure and education. But on the other hand, it can

also raise the fear of strangers and reinforce the preexisting trends toward sectarian conflicts," he said.

Before the pandemic, Piketty said the trend toward sectarian conflict reflected the lack of political ambition to change the economic system and to put in place a system that is truly based on economic justice. "This will be even more true after the pandemic: we need to think again about how to reconcile prosperity and equality," he said adding

that in his book, he explored the possibility of a system based upon educational justice and participatory socialism, involving private property for all and the permanent circulation of wealth and power. Asked how coronavirus pandemic will impact India's rising inequality, Piketty said the experience of the Spanish flu of 1918-20 is frightening. "According to some studies, mortality rates were as large as 5 per cent in India or Indonesia, as compared to



0.5 - 1 per cent in Western Europe and the US (which was already very high). "It seems unlikely that things can get so bad today, but this means that we have to be very careful," Piketty, who is currently a professor at Paris School of Economics, said.

The French economist, who has worked extensively on issues like inequality and poverty, said by looking at a broader range of historical trajectories, he

has also come to stress the key role of ideological and political change in the evolution of inequality. "The main determinants of inequality are not economic and technological: they are ideological and political," he argued. Piketty's previous book 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century' became the best-selling work in the history of Harvard University Press and made him a household name.

Uddhav Thackeray crosses election hurdle, enters legislative council unopposed

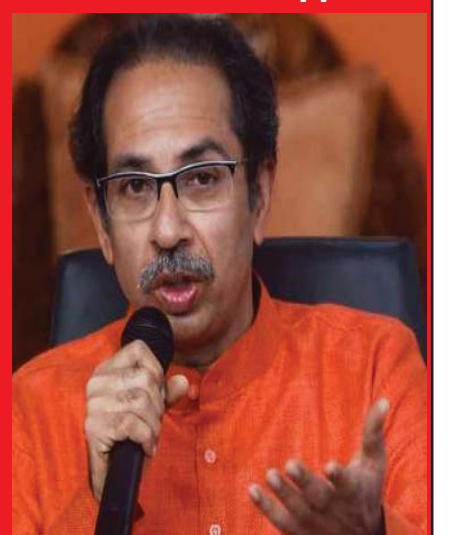
(News Agencies) Mumbai: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and eight others were declared elected unopposed to the state Legislative Council on Thursday.

Apart from Thackeray, Council Deputy Chairperson Neelam Gorhe (Shiv Sena), four candidates of BJP - Ranjitsinh Mohite Patil, Gopichand Padalkar, Praveen Datke and Ramesh Karad; NCP's Shashikant Shinde and Amol Mitkari and Congress' Rajesh Rathod were in the fray for the nine seats, which fell vacant on April 24. "All of them were elected

unopposed," an official said. "The result was officially announced on Thursday after the deadline for withdrawal of nominations ended at 3 pm," the official said.

The 288-member legislative assembly was the electoral college for the biennial elections to the nine seats. With this election, 59-year-old Thackeray, who is also the president of Shiv Sena, makes his debut as a legislator.

He was sworn in as chief minister on November 28 last year and required to become a member of either house of the legislature before May 27.



Why Covid-19 poses a sharp challenge for Bihar

It has historical baggage, weak finances, poor infra, low growth, and now has migrant workers returning home



(News Agencies)As the globalisation has grown, local epidemics tend to spread faster across the world. We are seeing this in the case of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). While the poor are generally the hardest hit, this time it is the developed countries which have been most affected. In India, the poorer states have not been affected as

much as initially believed. The spread of the virus, while not insignificant, has been relatively less in Bihar. Bihar also faces periodic challenges from other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, kala-azar and encephalitis. Given this, it must deal with the current pandemic at five levels: Historical, financial, infrastructural, issues related to migrant labour, and the revival of the economy. Historically, Bihar was part of the

Bengal presidency. The quality of governance in this region was poor because of the inefficient zamindari system. A memorandum submitted by the then state government to the Simon Commission in 1930 rued the fact that per capita expenditure on health was much lower in the Bengal presidency when compared with the Bombay and Madras presidencies. Even within the Bengal presidency, expenditure on

health was the lowest in Bihar, compared to other regions. Unfortunately, even after Independence, this trend continued. The total public expenditure on health in Bihar is budgeted at Rs 8,788 crore (2020-21), which is 4.1% of the total budget. In per capita terms, public expenditure on health in Bihar is only Rs 690. In contrast, the corresponding figure in Kerala is three times that, at Rs 2,092. Health care infrastructure in Bihar is

only one-fifth of the national average, measured in terms of hospital beds per 1,000 people. Bihar has not had any major infusion of funds to create the necessary health infrastructure for almost two decades. Since the corporate sector is all but absent in Bihar, the responsibility for infrastructure development is mainly with the state government. But the state government can do little if its finances are chronically weak.

How UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh plan to provide jobs to returning migrants

While states such as Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were criticised for amending existing labour laws, the governments in these states have defended the move on the grounds that it will pave the way for more employment avenues.



(News Agencies)As the number of migrant workers returning to their native states begins to swell, several Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states are preparing to address the challenge of creating jobs for the returnees.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday announced that the state government is making efforts to provide jobs to 20 lakh migrant workers. In Bihar, where the BJP is in alliance with the JDU, the state has issued orders to draw up a plan to cater to a similar number, while in Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan said 16 lakh workers have already been given work under the MGNREGA.

According to a person aware of the details, the issue of providing employment to the workers, most of whom had to undertake harrowing journeys, was flagged at

the meetings that the party high command had with the state units.

"Apart from the immediate help such as cash and food for workers who have been out of jobs owing to the nationwide shutdown, states have been asked to ensure that employment avenues are tapped and

that people are not left without work and means to earn their livelihood. Unemployment can lead to social unrest," said a party functionary privy to the details.

While states such as Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were criticised for amending existing labour

laws, the governments in these states have defended the move on the grounds that it will pave the way for more employment avenues. "Care is being taken to ensure that while newer investment gets a boost; the rights of labourers are protected too," the functionary quoted above said. But are states, struggling under the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, equipped to bear the strain that reverse migration will exert on their coffers? In UP, where over nine lakh migrant workers have returned so far, minister Siddharth Nath Singh said the numbers are not unrealistic as the state already has schemes that

can absorb the additional workforce. He said, the UP chief minister had set up a task force under the agriculture production commissioner, which includes people from the Panchayati Raj, the MSME sector, rural development, labour and skilling ministries to work out areas, where through coordinated efforts jobs will be generated. There are various schemes in existence already, for instance the MSME has the one district, one product scheme, there are many schemes under rural development that are linked to MGNREGA; we have also set a target of skilling about 20 lakh people and offering them

stipend. Targets have been given, we are also mapping the migrant quarantining facilities and so it doesn't seem difficult to generate jobs," he said. In Bihar, a massive data collation exercise is underway, said minister Sanjay Jha. He said the administration is collecting details of all those who arrive at the quarantine centres set up across all blocs in the state to get a sense of the skills and proficiency of the workers. "When the workers began to arrive, the chief minister gave instructions to make a data bank of their skill sets so that as soon as avenues for investment open up, we can go all out to ensure they are gainfully employed," he said.

Vande Bharat Mission: 312 passengers from Philippines, US land in Hyderabad



(News Agencies)As part of the biggest ever off-shore evacuation drive of stranded Indians under the Vande Bharat Mission, two Air India

flights with 149 and 163 passengers from Manila and Washington respectively landed here on Thursday, airport sources said. The

national carrier, Air India flight AI 1612, from Manila in Philippines arrived via Delhi at the Hyderabad international airport at 1.58 AM,

while AI 104 flight from Washington via Delhi landed at 8.22 AM. The passengers of both the flights were serviced through the fully sanitized international arrivals of the main passenger terminal of the airport, they said. The airport also enforced the social distancing among passengers right from the aerobridge to across the terminal, sources added. All the passengers and cabin crew were brought from

the aircraft in a batch of 20-25 people each. Each passenger or crew member was screened by the thermal cameras positioned at the aerobridge exit under the supervision of the Airport Health officials (APHO) prior to Immigration formalities. After the screening of passengers, CISF personnel in their protective gears escorted the group of passengers to immigration clearance, they said.

India has 8th highest active cases of coronavirus in the world

Germany, Iran, and Canada are the countries that have more coronavirus total cases than India but fewer active cases.



(News Agencies) Coronavirus cases rise unabated across the globe with over 4 million people infected by the deadly contagion. More than 2.8 lakh people have died due to Covid-19 across the globe while more than 1.5 million patients have recovered from the disease globally. The United States, Spain, Italy, France, the UK, Turkey, Germany, Brazil, Canada, Iran and Russia are

some of the top affected countries in the world besides the original Covid-19 epicentre China. India accounts for 13th highest cases of Covid-19 infections globally. However, when it comes to the active number of coronavirus cases, India stands at the 8th spot on the global tally, figures updated by global data tracking website Worldometer shows. The Union Ministry of Health on Tuesday morning updated India's active Covid-19 cases to 46,008. Peru closely follows India at the 9th spot with respect to the number of active Covid-19 cases. As per Worldometer, the country has 68,822 total cases of coronavirus

of which 44,455 are active. Active Covid-19 cases are the number of total coronavirus cases after deducting the recovered/ discharged patients and number of fatalities. According to data tracker Worldometer, the United States has the highest number of active cases of coronavirus in the world with 1,041,814 people infected. Spain, Italy, France, Russia, the UK and Brazil are countries with the highest incidence of Covid-19 active cases globally. Germany, Iran, and Canada are the countries that have more coronavirus total cases than India but fewer active cases. Germany has reported 172,576 total cases of which,

19,298 are active cases and over 7,600 have died, the Worldometer site shows. In Iran, the total number of cases is at 109,286, of which 15,179 are active. Nearly 70,000 have contracted the Covid-19 in Canada of which 31,994 are classified as active cases. The number of coronavirus cases in the country breached the 70,000-mark on Tuesday. According to the latest figures updated by the Ministry of Health, the Covid-19 national tally stands at 70,756. There are 46,008 active coronavirus cases in the country, 22,454 patients have been cured or discharged while 2,293 people have died from the deadly contagion.

Manmohan Singh out of AIIMS hospital in Delhi

The former PM, 87, was admitted on Sunday night after he suffered a reaction to a new medication and developed fever.



(News Agencies) Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi on Sunday night over chest pain, was allowed to leave hospital and go home on Tuesday. The veteran leader's tests came out well and he is now resting at home, a Congress source said. The former PM, 87, was admitted after he suffered a reaction to a new medication and developed fever. His sample was taken for ruling out coronavirus infection and he tested negative for it, PTI reported. Singh, a senior leader of the opposition Congress, is currently a member of Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. He was the prime minister between 2004 and 2014. In 2009, Singh underwent a successful coronary bypass surgery at the AIIMS. A number of leaders expressed concern over his health and wished him a speedy recovery.

No cabin luggage, those over 80 not allowed in draft SOP for domestic flights

The draft standard operating procedures (SOPs) proposed by the civil aviation ministry for passengers, airlines and airport operators at a meeting on Monday have done away with the rule of keeping the middle seats vacant in compliance with social distancing norms.

(News Agencies) Cabin luggage will be barred and passengers aged above 80 years not allowed on flights when air passengers services, suspended since March 25 because of the Covid-19 lockdown, resume in the country, according to guidelines drafted by the government for the first phase of the restart of commercial flights. The draft standard operating procedures (SOPs) proposed by the civil aviation ministry for passengers, airlines and airport operators at a meeting on Monday have done away with the rule of keeping the middle seats vacant in compliance with social distancing norms. Passenger ID checks will also be not required so as to minimise the crowd at terminal gates.

Stakeholders in the aviation business, including airlines and airport operators, have been asked to review the draft, a copy of which has been reviewed by Hindustan Times, and submit their feedback by the weekend. The rules make it compulsory for all passengers to arrive at the airport only after completing their web check-in at home. The reporting time for travellers at the airport is proposed to be increased by two hours.

Only passengers whose flights are scheduled to depart in the next six hours will be allowed inside the airports. Cabin luggage will be disallowed, and only one piece of check-in baggage weighing less than 20kg will be allowed per passenger in the first phase of resumed airline operations. Those aged above 80 will not be allowed on flights. According to the draft SOPs, passengers stopped from boarding a flight because of age or if they are found to be running a high temperature will be permitted to change their travel date without any penalty.

Downloading the Aarogya Setu app will be mandatory for all the passengers. Only those with a "green status" will be allowed to enter the airport. Airlines have been asked to open check-in counters three hours prior to departure time and close them 60 to 75 minutes prior to departure. Boarding will commence an hour prior to departure time and the gates will close 20 minutes before. Frisking of passengers has been asked to be minimised and to be carried out only if the door frame metal detector beeps. The draft SOPs also ask the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to not stamp passenger's boarding pass in this phase.

30 migrants try to travel from Maharashtra to UP in truck; stopped after 1500-km

Police here said that since the trailer was covered with a tarpal (a large plastic sheet), it gave the impression that it was carrying vegetables.

(News Agencies) At least 30 migrant workers managed to travel almost 1,500 km in a truck from Maharashtra by dodging police at multiple checkpoints in the route by covering the trailer under a large plastic sheet, police said here. But they ran out of luck Monday evening here, when they were caught by the police in Khatauli town after nearly three-day of travel, they said. Police here said that since the trailer was covered with a tarpal (a large plastic sheet), it gave the impression that it was carrying vegetables. They said upon checking it was found that nine of the 30 migrant labourers were headed to Muzaffarnagar and the rest to Aligarh, also in Uttar Pradesh. The nine workers who

were going to Muzaffarnagar were stopped here for further action for violation of lockdown norms, the rest were sent to Aligarh for the administration in the district to take it further, the police said. The workers said they believed they were not stopped at various checkpoints in the route as police thought the vehicle was carrying vegetables.



African Swine Fever infects over 14,000 pigs in Assam, alert in North-East

African swine fever is a severe, highly-contagious haemorrhagic viral disease of domestic and wild pigs.



pigs," Assam's animal husbandry minister Atul Bora told news agency ANI on Tuesday. On Monday, the state's animal husbandry and veterinary department director Pulin Das had told news agency IANS that they have no plans to cull the pigs despite the central government's advice. "We have told the central government in case of culling we will have to pay huge amounts to farmers and firm owners as compensation. Thus, for culling we need huge financial support from the central government," IANS quoted Das as saying. The Kaziranga National Park authority has dug a two-km long and six-feet deep

(News Agencies)The deadly now, 14,465 pigs have died in 10 districts, due to African Swine Flu. The government is taking all possible steps to stop the spread of the disease. For prevention of the disease, we are advising farmers deep burial of dead

What is African swine fever?

African swine fever (ASF) is a severe, highly-contagious haemorrhagic viral disease of domestic and wild pigs. This transboundary animal disease (TAD) can be spread by live or dead pigs, domestic or wild, and pork products. It is caused by a large DNA virus of the Asfarviridae family, which also infects ticks of the genus Ornithodoros. Signs of African swine fever and classical swine fever (CSF) may be similar but the ASF virus is unrelated to the CSF virus. African swine fever is a disease listed in the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code and must be reported to the OIE.

trench to protect wild boars from the ASF infection. According to the 2019 census, Assam had over 21 lakh pigs, which the authorities say could have increased to around 30 lakh now. After the outbreak in Assam, all the North-East states have

sounded high alert and asked people, especially owners of piggeries, to refrain from bringing pigs from other states. The North-East's annual pork business is worth around Rs 8,000-10,000 crore, with Assam being the largest supplier.

Maharashtra has allowed porting of ration cards for natives of 11 states, govt tells HC

Maharashtra government said wandering tribals or nomads can benefit from food camps run by the state in absence of ration cards.



(News Agencies) for receiving rations in the Maharashtra has entered into a deal to allow migrants from 11 states to port their ration cards

getting new ration cards issued in Maharashtra. The portability of ration card, initiated as a reform in the PDS, however, doesn't provide any immediate succour to wandering tribals or nomads as they do not hold ration cards at all, the state government told the Bombay High Court in an affidavit. The affidavit, filed on Tuesday in response to a petition by Pune social activist Vanita Chavan seeking provision of ration for the wandering tribals during the lockdown, said it wasn't possible as the system for

distribution of foodgrains and oil required an individual to hold a ration card issued by a ration office. "However as the wandering tribals do not have a ration card, during the lockdown the state is providing cooked meals for migrants, homeless and needy at specified food camps in each district, which the wandering tribals could benefit from," said assistant government pleader Bhupesh Samant. Samant further informed the division bench of chief justice Dipankar Datta and justice AA Sayed that the state

of Maharashtra was implementing the National Food Security Act diligently. The act stipulates that anyone holding a valid ration card is eligible to get subsidised ration provided by the government. Samant said that Maharashtra had entered into an agreement with 11 states to allow their natives living in Maharashtra to draw rations based on ration cards issued in their home states. After hearing the submissions, the bench directed the petitioner to file a rejoinder and posted the matter for hearing on May 18.

Rupee drops 10 paise to end at 75.56 per dollar

(News Agencies)The rupee slipped 10 paise to close at 75.56 against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strengthening greenback and weak domestic equities.

Forex traders said market participants were concerned about the fiscal deficit following the government's Rs 20 lakh crore economic stimulus package and lack of clarity on how it would be financed. Foreign fund outflows and the Fed's grim prognosis for the US economy further weighed on the market here, traders added. The local unit opened weak at 75.57, and shuttled between a low of 75.59 and a high of 75.30. It finally settled at 75.56 against the US dollar, down 10 paise over its previous close. The rupee had finished at 75.46 against the greenback on Wednesday. Domestic bourses wilted under selling pressure on Thursday, with the BSE benchmark Sensex falling 898.94 points to 31,109.67 and the broader NSE Nifty

shedding 228.15 points to end at 9,155.40. Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital market, offloading equity shares worth Rs 283.43 crore on Wednesday, according to provisional exchange data.

In India, the death toll due to Covid-19 rose to 2,549 and the number of cases climbed to 78,003, according to the health ministry.

Meanwhile, the number of cases around the world linked to the disease has crossed over 43.60 lakh and the death toll has topped 2.97 lakh. Forex traders said market participants are awaiting more clarity on the Rs 20 lakh crore economic stimulus package.

"Volatility for the currency has been confined to a range as market participants remain cautious on the announcement that is expected from the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the next few sessions," said Gaurang Somaiyaa, Forex &

Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Somaiyaa said "further clarity on the stimulus package announcement is likely to provide cues to the rupee. In the next couple of sessions, we expect the rupee (Spot) to quote in the range of 75.05 and 75.80." According to Devarsh Vakil, Head Advisory, HDFC Securities, "risk-off mood dragged equities lower and dollar higher as market disappointed with first tranche of stimulus announcements." Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.24 per cent up at 100.48.

"The US dollar gained after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said the US economy faces unprecedented risks from the coronavirus if fiscal and monetary policy makers don't rise to the challenge. Powell pushed back against the notion of deploying negative rates," Vakil said.

Sensex plummets 886 points as stimulus euphoria fizzles out

(News Agencies) The BSE Sensex plummeted 886 points on Thursday as concerns over the efficacy of the government's stimulus package and grim global cues hammered investor confidence. After crashing over 955 points during the day, the 30-share index settled 885.72 points or 2.77 per cent lower at 31,122.89. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty tanked 240.80 points, or 2.57 per cent, to close at 9,142.75. Market players were disappointed as the immediate spend out of the government's Rs 20 lakh crore fiscal stimulus package was seen to be relatively small, raising doubts about the revival of growth any time soon, experts said. Further, global markets tanked following the WHO's comments that the novel coronavirus "may never go away". Tech Mahindra was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, cracking 5.24 per cent, followed by Infosys, HDFC, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries and NTPC.

On the other hand, Hero MotoCorp, L&T, Maruti, UltraTech Cement and Sun Pharma led the gainers' chart, climbing up to 2.28 per cent. Meanwhile, the government released truncated data for April wholesale price-based inflation, which showed deflation in primary articles was 0.79 per cent, while fuel and power basket saw a deflation of 10.12 per cent last month amid the nationwide lockdown.

To restart, revise national strategy

Rework migrant policies; reset the Covid-19 crisis management set-up, and improve communication



India is now entering the last week of the nationwide lockdown. Whether or not the lockdown has helped “flatten the curve” and prepare the health care system is a matter of debate. But one thing is clear. So far, the lockdown has inflicted far greater economic damage on India than the disease itself. The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is not disappearing, and we have to find less damaging ways of managing it. Our policymakers may be coming to this conclusion too, as calls for extended lockdowns are giving way to “learning to live” with the virus. The graded easing of restrictions to economic activity and mobility since May 4 is the first step in this direction. But moving toward a sustained resumption of economic activity while managing Covid-19 will require a complete overhaul of the institutional and governance frameworks deployed so far. Administrative fiat, the preferred modus operandi, will only cause further damage.

First and foremost, the policy approach to the migrant crisis will need to be reset, urgently. Migrant workers have long remained invisible to policy and politics. In their determination to walk home, they made themselves heard. But the policy response in these last weeks — from the failure to provide adequate food and cash relief to the hasty attempts at responding to industry demands to hold labour captive and pushing ill-conceived labour reforms — has exposed deep fault lines in the political

economy dynamics that shape State mediation of labour-capital relations. The current policy choices are a reflection of how precarious workers rights are and the abdication of the State’s responsibility.

The lockdown made visible the indignities migrant workers suffer. But it also served as a reminder of how effectively workers can protest against the State. Workers voted with their feet, choosing to undertake a long, arduous journey home rather than face the uncertainties of inhospitable cities. A return to work, crucial for kickstarting the economy and protecting worker interests in the long-term, will need the State to recognise worker protests and put in place trust-building measures that protect rights and

restore dignity. Rather than rush to dismantle labour laws, the Centre and states will need to work in close coordination to put in place an expanded social protection system. This will serve as the foundation for the restoration of trust and an eventual return to work. This is not to ignore the reality of India’s labour laws, the hurdles they pose to productivity and the need for rationalisation. However, this cannot be done by disregarding worker rights. The debate on reforms needs to be reopened and re-imagined. Second, reset the institutional framework for Covid-19 crisis management. To impose and maintain the lockdown, the Centre invoked the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005. The institutional framework of the act legitimised a centralised, command-and-control approach to Covid-19 management, implemented through administrative diktat.

Within days, this approach began to show its limits. The difficulties in moving essential goods and regular breakdowns in supply chains — recall how the procurement of rabi crops in Punjab hit a roadblock because jute mills in West Bengal were closed, making gunny bags scarce — exposed the absence of inter-state coordination in critical aspects of the economy. In the course of time, administrative diktats under DMA served to exacerbate the problem as the home ministry took to making decisions on the minutiae of economic activity in states and then issuing follow-up clarifications in response, leaving in its wake a confused and bewildered public and local bureaucracy. With partial economic activity currently planned in red and orange zones, the need for coordination to maintain supply chains and negotiate the process of opening state borders will increase. DMA is the wrong institutional framework. It must give

way to a framework that privileges coordination over centralisation.

Coordination failures apart, the Centre’s silence on the nature of fiscal support to states (despite a near 90% fall in revenue in some states and repeated requests from chief ministers for central government action) underscores a second major fault line in fiscal federal relations — the absence of an institutional framework to negotiate Centre-state relations. The inter-state council, as this column has repeatedly argued, needs to be revived urgently. Third, reset communication. The lockdown has been managed through a plethora of over 3,000 orders laced in bureaucraticese, commanding citizens and bureaucrats alike, threatening them with penal action, but never offering a rationale for decision-making. Orders can coerce citizens into complying with State lockdown rules but not to open up. Firms and workers face an uncertain

future, and to make rational choices, they need confidence. This will come from an altogether different type of communication — one that replaces orders with a credible road map for economic revival. The Centre’s failure to offer this road map seven weeks into the lockdown is the biggest hurdle to recovery.

Writing in these pages days after the first lockdown was announced, I had argued that the lockdown would put the State through a severe test. Seven weeks later, rather than coming out on top, the lockdown has exposed critical fault lines in the State, laying bare serious gaps in its already weakened capacity. The challenge of exiting the lockdown, will require the State to reset its response frameworks in ways that credibly navigate these fault lines to build trust and confidence in people and markets. This is a tall ask for a State that has so far failed to rise to the challenge. But if we fail to press the reset button now, the consequences will be disastrous.

Scoring on the diplomatic front

India has done well to reach out to countries and offer assistance

This is a peculiar moment in global politics. There is no sign greater than the coronavirus pandemic that the fate of nations are intertwined, and that there challenges which do not respect borders. This should have, logically, given strength to multilateralism. But the opposite has happened. Countries have turned more insular, focused on their domestic priorities. The fact that the rift between the United States (US) and China has grown hasn’t helped the cause of global cooperation. And international institutions which are supposed to provide leadership such as the World Health Organization face a serious crisis of credibility.



Given this backdrop, India has done well on the diplomatic front. It has stayed away from the US-China diplomatic tiff, seeking to leverage its relationship with both in the

quest to battle the pandemic. It has used every platform to push its point of view, from convening a meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc)

to participating in a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries to nudging a conference of G20 countries. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and external affairs minister S Jaishankar have been in touch with counterparts across the world. Most significantly, as reported by Hindustan Times on Monday, it has decided to provide assistance to over 90 countries, including drugs, testing kits and other medical support. Quiet and effective diplomacy at this stage, including building goodwill with other countries, will help India at a moment of realignment in the international system.

There is a humanitarian crisis in India. Lift the lockdown, now



There is no nuanced way to say this. India is in the grip of a humanitarian crisis. And continuing the coronavirus disease (Covid-19)-sparked national lockdown will be an unmitigated disaster.

I have moved from being a reluctant votary of the initial lockdown — my understanding at the time was that it was a short-term inevitability — to an absolute opponent. I say this with the understanding that I have gained from a 60-day (and counting) road trip, reporting through nine different states in the north, west and south of the country. There is panic, paranoia, economic devastation and, above all, acute uncertainty on the ground.

We have hit a psychological tipping point. This has become apparent to me every time I have walked the highways with migrant workers. In the initial 72 hours after the first lockdown, the mass exodus of workers from cities was because they had been forgotten by policymakers, politicians and the media. Orphaned by the system and left without wages or work, labourer after labourer, in state after state, told me that if confronted with death, they would rather die at home, with the people they loved.

But even after we went through a zillion flip flops on migrant workers — first they were ignored, then they were blamed, then they were asked to stay put, then they were asked to take trains for which they were charged fares — India's workforce is in the throes of rage and anxiety.

It's ironic that as some lockdown restrictions finally ease, and we are talking of reopening factories, the workers I meet are more determined than ever before to leave. In some ways, it is the comeuppance that some of the country's businesses deserve.

But, even now, there is an assumption that, with the passage of time, these workers will return. My sense is different. In Bhiwandi, Maharashtra, it was past 1 am, when our car screeched to a halt at the sound of a child crying in the distance. In the deathly still of the night, we saw men, women and dozens of small children walking their way to Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. They were going to cover a distance of 1,500 kilometres on foot. I ventured to suggest that they might try the trains and buses that have finally been

deployed. They'd have none of it. They were just desperate to get home at any cost.

In Mumbai, a truck had been stopped at a police checkpoint. It was unclear whether the police was going to give it permission to move ahead and they did not appear keen for us to open the back flap of the vehicle. So, we clambered on to the back to discover scores of migrant workers crammed into a tiny space. They were looking to escape to Uttar Pradesh. One of them shouted at me when I tried to say crowding together might be dangerous at such a time. "I am a BSc. I am also aware of the coronavirus dangers. But I would rather die from the virus at home, than from starvation here," he said.

These responses are a sliver of what I have been able to document from worker after worker over two months. I have met the family of Ranveer Singh who died 80 kilometres short of home from a heart attack in Agra. Or the family of Mukesh Mandal who sold his phone for Rs 2,500 to buy a fan and some rations and then killed himself.

India's poorest are suffering the most. But entire swathes of the salaried middle class are also in danger of being wiped out. Sectors such as aviation and hospitality are in existential trouble. Neighbourhoods are treating patients and health workers as untouchables. And society presidents are becoming bigoted tinpot dictators against domestic help, drivers and cooks. We could have still suffered all of this had it brought us any closer to a cohesive policy against Covid-19. The lockdown's aim was to prepare hospitals better, not eliminate the virus. But as I learnt in Mumbai's Sion Hospital, where doctors speak searingly about why bodies are placed next to patients in wards, India's public hospitals are still carrying a disproportionate burden. Luckily for us, India has been an outlier in fatalities. In a country where thousands die from tuberculosis, cancer and kidney disease every day, the coronavirus death rates are not just distinctly lower than the rest of the world, but also way lower than deaths from non-coronavirus disease illnesses. But if we do not lift the lockdown with immediate effect, we shall be confronted with mass ruin and a breakdown of all our structures — social, economic and emotional.

By Barkha Dutt, Hindustan Times)

Massacre at maternity ward shows a chilling truth for women in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's "peace deal" has been blown up. The government has resumed fighting the Taliban after a horrifying attack by gunmen on a maternity ward run by Doctors Without Borders in Kabul. Mothers and nurses were the main victims in the first attack, with 16 killed. Two of the dead were newborns. Although the Taliban denied being responsible for the attack, Afghanistan's national security adviser, Hamdullah Mohib, stated on Twitter that "their attacks this spring against Afghans are comparable to the level of fighting in past fighting seasons ... This is not peace, nor its beginnings," and that there is "little point in continuing to engage Taliban in 'peace talks.'?" Whoever is responsible for the brutal massacre at the maternity ward, Afghanistan is nowhere near a peaceful settlement. This attack has left even me, a longtime analyst of Afghan women's rights, stunned. I honestly thought I could not be shocked about this country anymore. Bizarrely, this brutal attack on women and newborn babies mimics a recent episode of Showtime's prescient "Homeland," which "predicted" the demise of peace talks with the Taliban, but it mainly proves that not only was the messy "peace deal" reached in February between the US and the Taliban a joke to begin with (it kicked off an increase in attacks on Afghan soldiers and police instead) but a dangerous gamble -- especially for Afghan women's rights. It's no secret that America and Americans have serious war fatigue and want US troops home, but these talks took place in Doha, Qatar, with

no women present, even though it was the plight of Afghan women that the US government has long exploited to win the public relations and optics battle for the war. "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women," then First Lady Laura Bush said after the 2001 US invasion. She said that, thanks to US intervention, (Afghan) women were "no longer imprisoned in their homes." Yet, today here we are, almost two decades later, with Afghan women and their babies being slaughtered. If they're not safe in maternity wards, how safe are they in their homes, or anywhere in the country?

In a statement Tuesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned the hospital attack as "an act of sheer evil" and urged both sides to find a solution. "The Taliban and the Afghan government should cooperate to bring the perpetrators to justice," the statement read. "As long as there is no sustained reduction in violence and insufficient progress towards a negotiated political settlement, Afghanistan will remain vulnerable to terrorism." What Pompeo is conveniently overlooking is that yes, while without violence being scaled down there can be no peace, without women's rights there can never be democracy -- in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world.

"Women's rights" was something that the United States once stipulated was non-negotiable for Afghanistan, but today we are expecting the very terrorists we once wanted to "save" Afghanistan from to deliver her peace.

By Anushay Hossain, CNN



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A new normal' is in the offing. Ensure a balance

Prioritise controlling the spread of Covid-19, strengthening health services, and supporting each other to stay healthy

The World Health Organization (WHO) Southeast Asia region is entering a new phase in its pandemic response. In recent weeks, the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in the region has slowed, due to the unprecedented physical distancing measures that countries implemented early and aggressively. Several member-states are now preparing to transition to a "new normal" in which social and economic life can coexist with low disease transmission. To do that effectively, countries must continue to mobilise the full power of their whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches.

The spread of Covid-19 continues to cause disease, death and disruption. It has pushed even the most advanced health systems to the brink. The crude mortality ratio for Covid-19 is estimated to be upwards of 3%, but can change from country to country, and even within countries. Key variables include access to care and the availability of testing.

The region's member-states must continue to take evidence-informed action and conduct careful risk assessments before deciding to wind back on public health and social measures. Due consideration must be given to the local epidemiology of Covid-19, including hotspots and

clusters, and the capacity of systems and responders to find, isolate and care for cases, and quarantine contacts.

Whatever a country's current transmission scenario, there is no doubt that we are in for a long haul. In what will be an ongoing struggle against Covid-19, the strategies of member-states must be comprehensive and cover immediate and long-term needs. Three priorities must chart the path ahead: Control and suppression of spread, strengthening and maintaining health services, and supporting each other to stay safe and healthy.

To control and suppress spread, we must take the fight to the virus. Active case detection, isolation, testing and contact tracing are the main ways to control the virus. Should community transmission occur, they are vital to suppressing it. Strengthening surveillance and contact tracing, in particular, will help national and local authorities to rapidly adapt to evolving outbreaks, whether moving from one case to a cluster of cases, or from a cluster of cases to no cases.

Agility and innovation will be crucial, especially at the subnational level, across borders and with mobile populations. For areas with limited transmission, responders must focus on finding and isolating all cases, providing

them with appropriate care, and tracing, quarantining and supporting all contacts. Where sustained transmission occurs, they must reduce it to manageable clusters, for which they may consider reintroducing physical distancing measures in a way that minimises negative impacts.

To strengthen health services, all countries must first protect health workers. WHO continues to work with governments, industry and the pandemic supply chain network to overcome global shortages of personal protective equipment. Health workers must be provided gowns, gloves, medical masks and eye protection required to save lives and avoid infection.

Countries must continue to expand isolation and intensive care unit capacity, while also rationalising it. By networking Covid-19 treatment facilities, health leaders and administrators can better share the burden among facilities. By implementing clear triage protocols, they will ensure that all patients with severe manifestations are provided safe, rapid admission to intensive care units. Rigorous infection prevention and control is needed to prevent health facilities from facilitating transmission.

Ensuring essential health services are maintained is vital. We must not only reduce

mortality from Covid-19 itself, but also from vaccine-preventable diseases and other treatable conditions which may increase when health systems are overwhelmed. WHO will continue to support countries in the region to implement key guidelines on maintaining essential health services as they directly respond to Covid-19.

To achieve these outcomes, member-states must mobilise a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach. Regular hand-washing, coughing or sneezing into one's elbow, and avoiding contact with people with flu-like symptoms are crucial. So too is following local and national guidance on physical distancing. Avoid using tobacco, alcohol and other substances that impair the immune system. Support health workers and say no to stigma.

Look after your mental health and be supportive of others. It is

natural to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry. Helpful coping strategies include getting enough rest, exercise, eating well, avoiding harmful substances and staying in close contact with family and friends. WHO will continue to provide accessible and actionable information on coping with Covid-19-related stress and anxiety, and will support all member-states to strengthen mental health services.

We must stand together to tackle what is the greatest public health challenge of a generation. The region's strategy to control and suppress spread, strengthen and maintain health services, and support each other to stay safe, healthy and well, will help all countries to save lives and minimise impact. Our mission is clear. Our challenge is great. Together, forward in the fight against Covid-19.



India will have to contest charges of religious bias

Pakistan is spreading propaganda. But counter it through effective action and a return to constitutionalism



There is disquiet in some sections in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), among other Islamic countries, that parts of Indian society and polity are exhibiting signs of Islamophobia, especially manifest after the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried to counter this sentiment. In a tweet on April 19, Modi emphasised the need for unity and brotherhood in combating the virus for it targets all. He was conveying that it was wrong to hold all Muslims responsible for the actions of the Tablighi Jamaat. The same view was expressed more directly by a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) office-

bearer in these pages.

As in the past, this year too, Modi extended Ramzan greetings. He tweeted, "May this Holy Month bring with it abundance of kindness, harmony and compassion". Two years ago, Modi recalled Prophet Mohammad's message of equality, brotherhood and the value of charity. And in an address to the World Sufi Forum in 2016, Modi spoke of the "rich diversity of the Islamic civilisation that stands on the solid bedrock of a great religion". In the same speech, he said, "It is this spirit of Sufism, the love for their country and the pride in their nation that define the Muslims in India. They reflect the

timeless culture of peace, diversity and equality of faith of our land..." These stirring words reflect neither Islamophobia nor a bias against Muslims.

Why is it then that sections of the Islamic ummah are troubled by India's emerging orientations? This was not witnessed during Modi's first term when, building on past policies, he strengthened relations with mutually-antagonistic West Asian nations. Hence, the Modi 2.0 government's policies and actions that impact or are perceived to impact on India's Muslims have to be examined. It must also be examined how Pakistan has sought to exploit these issues.

Four developments stand out: The constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA and fear of Muslims that it would be the precursor to the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Delhi riots, and the reaction to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation.

The constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir were looked upon in the peninsular Arab countries as political and within India's domestic jurisdiction. Pakistan's accusations of India violating international law, United Nations resolutions, seeking to change the demographic structure of the Valley and disregarding human rights found no traction. Its diatribe against the Modi government and its ideological Hindutva roots was also ignored.

The exclusion of Muslims from CAA was premised on the consideration that the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afghan polities being theocratic are inherently discriminatory and sometimes persecutorial. The Modi government correctly asserted that the CAA did not impact Indian Muslims. However, large numbers of Muslims were alarmed because they felt that it was the precursor of NRC, which could make many of them stateless.

The long agitations which followed were noticed in the

Muslim world, including the Gulf countries. While international liberal opinion was further alienated because of religion becoming a factor in granting nationality, despite Pakistan's best efforts, the Gulf countries did not become hostile. However, Malaysia and Turkey did.

The Delhi riots and, in some cases, the inflammatory reactions to the Tablighi Jamaat's actions which contributed to the spread of Covid-19 soured sections of Gulf opinion. This was on account of reports in the international media that Muslims were particularly and violently targeted.

Some reprehensible comments made against Muslims in general in the wake of the Tablighi Jamaat's conduct, and some irresponsible demands that Muslims be boycotted, caused dismay and anger among some in the Gulf. This was heightened by the objectionable social media comments of a few Indian expatriates living in Gulf countries. This somewhat

fertile setting has given Pakistan the opportunity to fan anti-Indian flames through bogus social media accounts and also by dredging up its entire litany of charges against the Modi government. Its current specific endeavour is to make the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) pass strictures, at a high level, against India for officially encouraging Islamophobia.

A few days ago, in a four-page note to OIC countries, it stressed that the BJP rose to power on the "central plank" of "hatred for Muslims" and has fostered it thereafter.

Clearly, these charges of Islamophobia have to be challenged and combatted. It is true that Islamic countries as theological polities are basically discriminatory. They are also not condemning China's oppression of its Uighur Muslims. Making these points may work in a school debate but not in the world of diplomacy, which, in any event, is not about scoring points but securing national interest.

Open up after May 17

Give states more authority and relax restrictions

As India enters the final week of its extended lockdown, there is a paradox confronting policymakers, which was visible in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with chief ministers on Monday. The lockdown was imposed when the country had just over 500 cases. Today, India has close to 70,000 cases. The lockdown has not flattened the curve, though it has slowed the spread of the infection. Is this, then, the right time to end the lockdown? The answer is yes — but with caveats.

Each phase of India's lockdown has looked different, with varying degree of relaxations introduced in red, orange and green zones since May 4. But given the intricate ways in which supply chains are tied together, urban spaces are organised, and the difficulties in implementation, it is clear that while sound in principle, this has been too complex and nuanced a policy framework to be implemented smoothly. It has also not led to the adequate opening of the economy. The government seems to recognise this, and has increasingly begun preparing citizens to learn to live with the virus. Opening up of rail travel, even if in a limited manner, is another hint at the resumption of

activities. At the same time, as the PM indicated, the Centre wants to ensure a degree of control over activities to prevent an unmanageable spread of the disease. While opinion among the states is divided on the lockdown, there is a consensus on the need for more economic activities.

Given the economic distress, the fiscal pressure on the states, and the fact that the lockdown is yielding diminishing returns on the health front, the government now needs to open up India. This should be accompanied with five measures. One, give states the authority to declare red, orange and green zones and let them decide on the restrictions they may want, particularly in containment zones — even as the Centre provides them whatever support they need. Two, allow inter-state travel — but primarily by road, while keeping rail and air travel limited, meeting social distancing norms. Three, allow opening up of offices — but with an advisory, not a directive, that work from home should be preferred where possible. Four, keep educational institutions and recreational public places shut for another month. And five, each time a case is reported, institute a firm drill of testing, contact tracing, and isolation. It will be difficult, but India can't remain closed anymore.

A shift in labour markets

The north and east must create opportunities for workers

In his meeting with the chief ministers on Monday, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi — for the first time — spoke about the crisis of migrant workers that has engulfed the country since the lockdown was imposed. He said that the government had urged the workers to stay where they were, but it was "human nature" to want to go home. But the PM, correctly, flagged two major challenges that will now crop up. The first is for states which the migrant workers have left. As economic activity resumes, there will be a severe shortage of labour in these regions. The second is for the home states, to which workers are returning. These regions, the PM acknowledged, did not have enough jobs — which is why migration had happened in the first place. They will now have to create opportunities. These states also will have

to ensure that the return of workers does not lead to the spread of the disease, particularly in rural areas.

What the PM underlined is a hugely significant moment in the political economy of labour markets in India. There is a view that these are unusual times; and workers who have gone home or are now returning will eventually come back, given economic compulsions. This may be true. But what is undeniable is that the past month has been a scarring experience for millions of workers. The relationship between businesses and workers has broken down — with the latter resentful about how employers did not provide requisite food and cash to help them tide over the crisis. The relationship between the State and workers has also got undermined — with the latter losing faith in the ability of governments to provide

them a social safety net at a time of crisis. In this backdrop, all that they feel they can rely on are their families and community networks back home. They may live with less, but getting them back to cities will not be smooth.

There is a clear geographical dimension to this too. It is southern and western states which have been the recipients of the workers in larger numbers. And it is the northern and eastern states which have sent these workers. This, in a way, is the key economic faultline in India, for the northern and eastern states have more exploitative agrarian relations, low industrial growth, and absence of opportunities. While this is a crisis, the north and east must use this as an opportunity to rebuild their economies even as the south and the west find new innovative ways to grow.

The SC should have been more proactive in tackling the migrant crisis

India's poorest need help. The government has to do its bit. But the courts can help, with more sensitivity and direction.

Besides handling the rising number of Covid-19 cases, and taking steps to mitigate the economic distress caused by the pandemic and the lockdown, the single most pressing issue for India at the moment is the fate of its migrant workers. For over 50 days now, millions of stranded workers, facing an acute shortage of food and cash, have desperately tried to return home. Tragic tales of families walking hundreds of kilometres abound. Five weeks after the lockdown was imposed, the government finally introduced measures to enable stranded migrants to return home — a process which is ongoing, but which has not stopped thousands of others from continuing to walk back home.

While the political executive has been correctly held accountable for its failure in addressing the plight of migrant workers in a timely and sensitive manner, it is also important to look at the role of another institution which should have done more in this period, to



address this crisis — the judiciary. On Friday, dismissing a petition which asked that the Centre be directed to identify and then provide food and shelter to migrant workers returning home, the Supreme Court said it was a matter for

the states to decide. The Court, it added, could not monitor who was walking or not walking, neither could it stop them. Referring to the Aurangabad incident, where 16 migrant workers sleeping on railway tracks were mowed down by a

train, the court observed that there was little that could do done if people were sleeping on the tracks. Irrespective of the merits of the petition in question, the observations fit into a larger pattern of the court's attitude

towards the issue. It has accepted the claims of the executive too willingly; it could have done more to order relief and protective measures; and it should have ensured strict court monitoring of the entire process of identification of migrant workers, provision of food and shelter either where they are based on during their travel, and their transport. To their credit, in the backdrop of workers having to wait for as long as 19 hours to board trains, the Gujarat high court observed that there was lack of coordination among government departments on the issue and asked the government to be more sensitive to the plight of the most "downtrodden, underprivileged and weaker sections of society", and instil confidence in them. The Karnataka high court has also done well in observing that workers can't be deprived the opportunity of travelling home because of their inability to pay fares. India's poorest need help. The government has to do its bit. But the courts can help, with more sensitivity and direction.

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बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक

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12:30PM to 1PM

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The Significance of Prayer to MOTHER KALI



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Under Trump, American exceptionalism means poverty, misery and death

No other nation has endured as much death from Covid-19 nor nearly as a high a death rate as has the United States. With 4.25% of the world population, America has the tragic distinction of accounting for about 30% of pandemic deaths so far.

And it is the only advanced nation where the death rate is still climbing. Three thousand deaths per day are anticipated by 1 June. No other nation has loosened lockdowns and other social-distancing measures while deaths are increasing, as the US is now doing.

No other advanced nation was as unprepared for the pandemic as was the US.

We now know Donald Trump and his administration were told by public health experts in mid-January that immediate action was required to stop the spread of Covid-19. But according to Dr Anthony Fauci, "there was a lot of pushback". Trump didn't act until 16 March. Epidemiologists estimate 90% of the deaths in the US from the first wave of Covid-19 might have been prevented had social distancing policies been put into effect two weeks earlier, on 2 March.

No nation other than the US has left it to subordinate units of government—states and

cities—to buy ventilators and personal protective equipment. In no other nation have such sub-governments been forced to bid against each another.

In no other nation have experts in public health and emergency preparedness been pushed aside and replaced by political cronies like Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who in turn has been advised by Trump donors and Fox News celebrities.

In no other advanced nation has Covid-19 forced so many average citizens into poverty so quickly. The Urban Institute reports that more than 30% of American adults have had to reduce their spending on food. Elsewhere around the world, governments are providing generous income support. Not in the US. At best, Americans have received one-time checks for \$1,200, about a week's worth of rent, groceries and utilities. Few are collecting unemployment benefits because unemployment offices are overwhelmed with claims. Congress's "payroll protection program" has been a mess. Because funds have been distributed through financial institutions, banks have raked off money for themselves and rewarded their favored customers. Of the \$350bn

originally intended for small businesses, \$243.4m has gone to large, publicly held companies. Meanwhile, the treasury and the Fed are bailing out big corporations from the debts they accumulated in recent years to buy back their shares of stock.

Why is America so different from other advanced nations facing the same coronavirus threat? Why has everything gone so tragically wrong? Some of it is due to Trump and his hapless and corrupt collection of grifters, buffoons, sycophants, lobbyists and relatives.

But there are also deeper roots. The coronavirus has been especially potent in the US because America is the only industrialized nation lacking universal healthcare. Many families have been reluctant to see doctors or check into emergency rooms for fear of racking up large bills. America is also the only one of 22 advanced nations failing to give all workers some form of paid sick leave. As a result, many American workers have remained on the job when they should have been home.

Adding to this is the skimpiness of unemployment benefits in America—providing less support in the first year of

unemployment than those in any other advanced country.

American workplaces are also more dangerous. Even before Covid-19 ripped through meatpackers and warehouses, fatality rates were higher among American workers than European.

Even before the pandemic robbed Americans of their jobs and incomes, average wage growth in the US had lagged behind average wage growth in most other advanced countries. Since 1980, American workers' share of total national income has declined more than in any other rich nation. In other nations, unions have long pushed for safer working conditions and higher wages. But American workers are far less unionized than workers in other advanced economies. Only 6.4% of private-sector workers in America belong to a union, compared with more than 26% in Canada, 37% in Italy, 67% in Sweden, and 25% in Britain. So who and what's to blame for the worst avoidable loss of life in American history? Partly, Donald Trump's malfeasance. But the calamity is also due to America's longer-term failure to provide its people the basic support they need.

Midwesterners were already doubting Trump. Covid could seal his political fate

The genius may think we are suckers, but in Iowa we don't ruin good corn liquor with Clorox

Drake Custer is a union man who, along with about 30 of his buddies, had an Old English "K" tattooed on their chests about 15 years ago. It stands for "Keokuk", a deflated Mississippi River manufacturing town of 10,000 tucked into the south-east corner of Iowa that Washington and Des Moines forgot.

"We know who we are," said Custer.

They make syrup from corn starch, steel wheels and rubber seals at an average wage of \$18 per hour. People keep leaving in search of something better—in 1960, the town was 60% bigger. It's the story of the midwest, decline and depopulation, frustration and anxiety.

"A lot of voters wanted to believe Trump—that out there in Washington it's all BS, and that a savvy businessman could straighten it out," Custer said.

It's hard for many to admit that it didn't work out. A tragic comedy of lawlessness mixed with buffoonery nears its epilogue. About 10 of those 30 branded Keokuk men voted for Donald Trump. This year, Custer figures maybe five of them will.

"The vibe is: a lot of people figured out that the boss isn't worried about them. My veteran

friends, they don't like what's going on. They're looking for leadership in government and the workplace. Really, everybody is."

Folks from Milwaukee to Muskegon were having their misgivings before the pandemic shut us down in March. Trade wars with China, Mexico, Canada and Europe knocked the wind out of steel wheels and soybean prices. Workers at John Deere, the huge tractor builder, were getting pink slips in Davenport. Ethanol plants were idled. Farmers in north-west Iowa's Sioux county, where Trump took 90% of the vote, said last fall they would not vote for him again. The Iowa Corn Growers proclaimed they were "fed up" after Trump's Environmental Protection Agency allowed 31 petroleum refineries to shun ethanol blending requirements. Ethanol comes from corn. Corn is a religious totem in these parts.

Trump's approval ratings sank underwater in key midwestern swing states he won: Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa. Any number of polls showed Trump and Joe Biden in a dead heat in about a dozen purple states, or with Biden in a comfortable lead. Bluster and blunder were coming home to roost.

Then the pandemic that

Trump ignored hit and the bottom dropped out. Corn prices dived 19% since January. Meatpacking plants are exploding with the coronavirus—60% of the pork plant workers in Perry, Iowa, are infected. The sheriff for Waterloo, Iowa, said he wanted to stomp a boot on Tyson's plant. The mayor of Sioux Falls argued with the South Dakota governor to shut down a Smithfield pork facility overrun with the virus. About 65% of people polled think folks should stay home and not dine in at the restaurant buffet. Although the Iowa governor allowed churches to reopen, they aren't taking her up on the offer with Sunday services. They would just as soon wait until we can get some tests done around here. Republican leaders are not in tune with voters.

The Michigan governor, Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat on Biden's VP shortlist, held forth ably against armed men in the capital lobby and remains far more popular than Trump. In Wisconsin, Democrats were outraged when Republicans forced a primary election involving a key state supreme court race. Voters stood up for democracy, in line for hours braving Covid-19 infection to cast their vote. The Democratic-backed court candidate won. Wisconsin unseated the Republican

governor, Scott Walker, in 2018 and elected a gay woman to the US Senate, Democrat Tammy Baldwin, before that. It is the land of La Follette, after all.

Trump hopes to flip Minnesota in November. He can forget about the land of Hubert H Humphrey if he can't swing Wisconsin. Iowa is on the pink side of purple but clearly is in play if the Democrats don't just fly over again as Clinton did. The Iowa Republican senator Joni Ernst has an approval rating near 37% for joining at the cranium with Trump while he routed ag markets. The Democrats doubtless could screw this up, but...

A reckoning is due for incompetence and neglect. Farmers are disconsolate. Every dairy worker suicide resonates. Hogs are backed up when one of the huge, consolidated slaughterhouses goes down for lack of healthy help. Producers are left to shoot them and bury them. People in nice SUVs line up for free food. It makes everyone nauseous. Everyday people can't understand why NBA players can get tested but packinghouse workers ordered to keep the pork loins rolling can't. Rural communities prone to vote Republican live under a cloud of fear that virus from immigrant workers will spread to them—

that the health of your neighbor is in fact your health. Immigrants become human, and their treatment is realized as shameful. We're waking up, all right. When 30 million people can't get through to the unemployment system, and half of them lose their health insurance by fall, incumbents should cover their flanks.

Polls show that in the upper midwest, blue urban voters are more motivated to vote than rural red voters by fair margins. Armed people of color escorted an African American legislator into the Michigan capitol last week in response to the white armed men. Talk about stuff getting real. Do you think every African American in Flint is not motivated?

"The iron is hot," Custer said. "This is the time to make permanent change." Even while sitting in his basement unheard, Biden is winning the midwest for all Trump's blather. The genius may think we are suckers, but in Iowa we don't ruin good corn liquor with Clorox. The gig is up. Art Cullen is editor of the Storm Lake Times in north-west Iowa, where he won the Pulitzer prize for editorial writing. He is a Guardian US columnist and author of the book: Storm Lake: Change, Resilience, and Hope in America's Heartland

Needed: A law to protect domestic workers

It is evident that there needs to be put into place a detailed legislative framework that ensures that domestic workers are treated with dignity and respect.



The nationwide evidence reveals, however, that these pleas have fallen on deaf ears. There are reports of household help being fired without pay, or in some cases, households requiring domestic workers to continue coming in to work. Altruism is not a strong enough force to protect the interests of workers, who constitute some of the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of society. The pandemic has made evident something that has been on the margins of public discussion for too long — the gap in India's legal framework when it comes to the rights of domestic workers. The reason for this is that traditionally, domestic work has not been counted as "work"

Politicians and civil society leaders of all hues have made appeals that domestic workers be given paid leave until the pandemic passes, and until housework is a safe activity again. Anecdotal

as is commonly understood, in terms of contribution to the economy. Our traditional understanding of "worker" has revolved around factories or the shop floors, or — more recently — high-end office complexes, and has relegated domestic work to the margins, whether it is performed by spouses and homemakers, or by hired help. This is why labour laws — designed to protect the interests of workers — apply only to industries or establishments that employ a certain number of people; they do not apply to households.

This, however, creates a strange paradox. As Mihika Chanchani wrote recently in *The Wire*, statistics show that there are 50 million domestic

workers in India, predominantly women. Their weak bargaining position subjects them to regular harassment, discrimination, and exploitation. Domestic work, by its very nature, is a fragmented industry, with unionisation being difficult, and where the difference in power and status between employers and employees is particularly stark. However, it is these people most in need of legal protection, who are left without it. It is, therefore, evident that there needs to be put into place a detailed legislative framework that ensures that domestic workers are treated with dignity and respect. In June 2019, there were reports that the labour ministry was drafting a

national policy on domestic workers, which would ensure the payment of minimum wages, social security, and safe working conditions. This is in addition to various state government initiatives towards mandating minimum wages for domestic workers and instituting domestic worker welfare boards.

A proposed law, however, will need to go beyond this, and accord full recognition to the importance and centrality of domestic and care work to the national economy.

The International Labour Organization has called for "fair terms of employment" for domestic workers that ensure that they are treated in a manner that is at least as favourable as other workers. This would require a range of workers' rights — including caps on working hours, bonuses for overtime work, maternity benefits, the prohibition of unfair dismissal (to name just a few). Any such law, of course, ought to be drafted with the participation of domestic workers themselves, as they will be the ones most affected by it. Even more than that, there needs to be a societal change that views domestic workers through the lens of equality, rather than subordination.

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- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



STAY HOME IF SICK

- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



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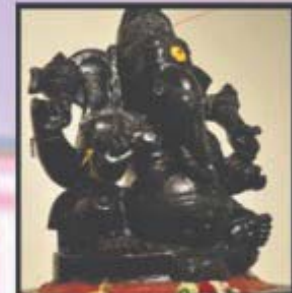
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Chinese choppers spotted near Ladakh LAC prompt alert, IAF fighters rushed in: Report



In what appears to be a multi-front deliberate ploy by China to keep India on its toes the Indian Air Force was forced to rush its fighter jet patrols in Ladakh after Chinese military choppers were found to be flying close to the Line of Actual Control.

(News Agencies) After the scuffle between the Chinese People's Liberation Army troops and Indian troops along the LAC in North Sikkim which led to injuries on both sides, China appears to be continuing on the path of belligerence towards India, this time along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh. In what appears to be a multi-front deliberate ploy by China to keep India on its toes, the Indian Air Force was forced to rush its fighter jet patrols in Ladakh after Chinese military choppers were found to be flying close to the Line of Actual Control. This incident happened last week, around the same time the PLA troops and Indian army forces came to blows in the upper reaches of North Sikkim. "The Chinese military helicopters were flying very close to the Line of Actual

Control. After their movement was picked up, the Indian Air Force fighter jets flew patrols in the area," government sources told ANI here.

Government sources who requested anonymity due to knowledge of frontline operations, informed that the Chinese choppers did not cross the LAC into Indian territory in that particular area, they said. The Indian Air Force frequently flies its Sukhoi 30MKI fighter aircraft fleet from Leh air base in Ladakh along with other planes. This latest development comes soon after the Indian security establishment noticed that Pakistani Air

Force increased its patrols of F-16S and JF-17s along its Eastern Border with India, especially night sorties, after the Handwara terror attack that led to the death of 5 Indian security personnel. A fear of retaliation by Indian forces was cited as the reason by Indian security establishment sources for this ramping up of PAF air patrols. The Indian Air Force has two main bases in the Ladakh union territory including the Leh and the Thoise airbase where fighter jets are not deployed permanently but detachments from combat aircraft squadrons are operational throughout the

year. There have been several occasions in the past when Chinese military helicopters have entered Indian airspace in the Ladakh sector and deliberately left behind tell-tale signs to stake claim on areas which are part of India. The LAC in this location, like in other parts of the India-China border in the country, is poorly demarcated, hence incursions sometimes are inadvertent as well. However, the scuffle with Indian troops in North Sikkim was a new front opened up by China which was a cause for concern. Ever since the outbreak of Covid-19, Chinese President Xi Jinping is under

immense pressure to increase transparency in his country and reveal the real origin of the virus, which some have speculated emanated from a lab in China's Wuhan. Trade wars with countries like USA and Australia have intensified and most multi-national companies have actively begun looking for manufacturing alternative, India being one such preferred destination.

Security sources speculated that this could be the reason behind China's new aggression. Similar muscle flexing was also seen recently when PLA Navy boats entered into disputed waters in the South China Sea.

Second Navy ship INS Magar bringing back Indians from Maldives amid Covid-19 pandemic

INS Magar reaching Kochi today with 202 passengers. These include 24 women - two of them pregnant - and two children, the Navy said in a statement.

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Pakistan military seeks nearly Rs 64 bn for salary hike of personnel

(News Agencies) Islamabad: Pakistan's military has sought an additional outlay of Rs 63.69 billion to cover a 20% increase in the salaries of the personnel of the army, navy and air force amid cost-cutting and austerity measures by the civilian government. A memorandum submitted to the finance division by the defence ministry on May 8 stated the increase in salaries during fiscal 2020-21 is needed because of various factors that have "affected the fiscal space and livelihood of armed forces personnel". The memorandum further stated that the joint staff headquarters, in consultation with the

headquarters of the three services, believes government employees, including military personnel, have been hit by a price rise due to the devaluation of the Pakistani rupee, increase in utility bills and inflation. It added that in the current fiscal, the salary of officers up to the rank of brigadier had been increased by 5%, junior commissioned officers and soldiers were given ad hoc relief of 10% of their basic pay.

However, it states, no increase was given to general officers, while the ad hoc relief granted to officers had been marginalised by enhanced income tax, thereby resulting in their salary decreasing.

In Pompeo's 7-nation concall, focus on China over accountability, dependency

China's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has amplified the urgency to take a hard look at the dependence on Beijing

(News Agencies) At a 75-minute video conference initiated by United States secretary of state Mike Pompeo, foreign ministers of seven countries including India, Israel and South Korea on Monday evening discussed the coronavirus pandemic, its fallout on the world economy and the way ahead. The conference, which is being described as 'experimental online diplomacy', also discussed resilience in supply chains, diplomatese for dependence on only one country for

supplies. In this case, China. The Trump administration has spoken about plans to move industrial supply chains out of China for some time. Beijing's handling of the outbreak and the subsequent response appears to have amplified the urgency. As one US official recently described it, the pandemic has turned out to be the 'perfect storm' that crystallised the worries that countries have had about dependence on China. Mike Pompeo had alluded to Monday's video

conference on April 29 when he declared that the US government was working with Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Vietnam to "move the global economy forward" and explore restructuring "supply chains to prevent something like this from ever happening again". Monday's video conference is seen to be the first big step, joined by India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar, Australia's Marise Payne, Israel's Yisrael Katz, Japan's Taro Kono,

Brazil's Ernesto Araújo and South Korea's Kang Kyung-wha. To be sure, the video conference wasn't a single-agenda initiative. Jaishankar tweeted the conversation covered pandemic response, global health management, medical cooperation, economic recovery and travel norms. "Look forward to continuing this engagement," he said. People familiar with the development told Hindustan Times that more friendly countries were expected to join similar engagements in future.

New York father and his pregnant girlfriend are shot dead in front of their two-year-old daughter

(News Agencies) A man and his pregnant girlfriend were shot dead while their two-year-old daughter was nearby and another woman was wounded in a home invasion on Staten Island on Monday afternoon. The New York Police Department detained a Staten Island man in connection with the fatal shooting of Alafia Rodriguez, 46, and his girlfriend, Ana DeSousa, 33. Philip Moreno, 43, an ex-convict from Port Richmond, was taken into custody by police as he was leaving the home at 376 Grandview Avenue just after 5pm, according to The Staten Island Advance. Investigators also discovered a silencer at the location. Officers responded to reports of gunshots fired from inside the home.



When police arrived, they found the bodies of Rodriguez and DeSousa on the floor in the living room, WNYW-TV is reporting. Both were pronounced dead at the scene after sustaining multiple gunshot wounds, according to investigators. DeSousa was believed to have been pregnant, according to police. The two had been dating for some three years, according to reports. A two-year-old girl believed to be the couple's daughter, Blue, was found uninjured inside the home. She was rushed to a nearby hospital. An unidentified 43-year-old woman was shot in the back, though she is expected to survive.

UK court played video of Nirav Modi's threats to 'dummy directors'

Threats of being implicated for theft and even being killed are among the allegations caught on camera in a video recorded by so-called "dummy directors" associated with companies linked to Nirav Modi, which was submitted by the CBI to the UK court hearing the extradition case against the diamond merchant charged with fraud and money laundering. A group of six Indian men can be heard in the video played at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London during the trial this week, with each of them making

allegations of being forced to leave Dubai and come to Cairo, Egypt, where their passports were confiscated and were allegedly made to sign dubious documents against their will by Modi's brother, Nehal Modi. "My name is Ashish Kumar Mohanbhai Lad, I am the namesake owner of Sunshine Gems Limited, Hong Kong, and Unity Trading Fze, Dubai," says one of the men on the recording from June 2018. "Nirav Modi phoned me and told me that he would implicate me for theft."

ED arrests Wadhawan brothers in money laundering probe related to Yes Bank

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday arrested DHFL promoters Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhawan in connection with its money laundering probe against Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and others, officials said. The brothers were remanded to 10-day ED custody by a special court in Mumbai, they said. The Wadhawans are presently in jail after being arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is also probing the same case. They were arrested under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the officials said.

The Wadhawan brothers, also being probed by the ED in another money laundering probe linked to late gangster Iqbal Mirchi, were summoned by the agency multiple times in the Yes Bank case but they had cited the ongoing COVID-19 travel restrictions to skip the summons. Five vehicles of the Wadhawan brothers were seized by the ED in April after they and their family members were reported to have unauthorisedly travelled to Mahabaleshwar from Lonavala in Maharashtra during the nationwide coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Afghan attack: Babies killed as gunmen storm Kabul maternity ward

Two babies and 12 mothers and nurses were killed in a militant attack on a hospital in the Afghan capital Kabul on Tuesday morning.



(News Agencies) Another 15 people, including a number of children, were injured in the attack by several gunmen, officials said. Meanwhile, in the east, a bombing at a funeral killed at least 24 people. In the wake of the attacks, President Ashraf Ghani said he was ordering the resumption of offensive operations against the Taliban and other groups.

He accused the militants of ignoring repeated calls for a reduction in violence. The Islamic State (IS) group said it was behind the attack on a police commander's funeral in Nangarhar, in the east of the country. It is still not clear who carried out the attack on the hospital, and the Taliban have denied any involvement. A maternity ward in the hospital is

run by the international medical charity Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and some of those working there are foreigners. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the attack on the hospital "sheer evil" and an "unconscionable assault". In a statement he urged the Afghan government and the Taliban to cooperate to "bring the perpetrators to justice".

What happened at the hospital?

The attack began at about 10:00 (05:30 GMT), and locals described hearing two blasts then gunfire. One doctor who fled during the assault told the BBC about 140 people were in the hospital when the gunmen attacked. Another doctor told AFP news agency that "total panic" took hold as the assault

unfolded. Ramazan Ali, a vendor who saw the attack begin, told Reuters news agency: "The attackers were shooting at anyone in this hospital without any reason... It's a government hospital, and a lot of people bring in their women and children for treatment." Afghan special forces rescued 100 women and children, including three foreigners, an official told the BBC. The attackers, who reportedly had gained access dressed as police officers, were all killed by security personnel after a battle lasting hours. Images from the scene showed soldiers carrying one newborn baby to safety, swaddled in a blood-stained blanket. Many foreign staff live in a guesthouse behind the Dasht-e-Barchi Hospital and a doctor who fled the building told the BBC he saw an explosion there too. In the past, similar attacks in this mostly Shia area of the capital have been attributed to IS. The group's leader in South Asia and the Far East was arrested in Kabul on Tuesday, with two other high profile members, Afghan intelligence said.

In 2017, IS gunmen disguised as medical staff attacked Kabul's main military hospital, prompting widespread shock and anger and

raising questions about security. The authorities later confirmed about 50 people had been killed. But the Taliban also attack hospitals. Last September, 20 people died after a truck packed with explosives was detonated by militants from the group outside a hospital in southern Zabul province.

On TV, Mr Ghani said: "In order to provide security for public places and to thwart attacks and threats from the Taliban and other terrorist groups, I'm ordering Afghan security forces to switch from an active defence mode to an offensive one and to resume their operations against the enemies."

Even in a country which has seen the worst of the worst, this savage attack on newborn babies and their mothers has shocked, and shaken fragile hope this would be the year Afghanistan would finally start to turn towards peace. Images of special forces in bulky body armour, carrying infants to safety, will remain long in the memory of those who have repeatedly called for a ceasefire - especially when Afghans are battling another deadly enemy in Covid-19.

Despite Taliban denials that this ghastly attack was their work, President Ghani's denunciation

reflects the anger and frustration of many. Some worry that groups like Islamic State, trying to drive an even greater wedge between Taliban and the government, have also killed for now what were slow uncertain steps toward peace talks. And for those who have never trusted the Taliban's commitment, this latest attack solidifies their resolve to keep fighting.

What happened at the funeral?

According to survivors, thousands of people had gathered for the local police commander's funeral, and the bomb detonated about half-way through. Ataullah Khogyani, a spokesman for the governor, said 68 people were injured. A member of the provincial council was among the at least 24 killed. Tuesday's attacks were widely condemned by countries around the world and human rights groups, with Amnesty International saying: "The unconscionable war crimes in Afghanistan today... must awaken the world to the horrors civilians continue to face." On Twitter, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said: "I'm horrified by the appalling terrorist attacks in Afghanistan today - including on a maternity hospital."



Coronavirus: Wuhan in first virus cluster since end of lockdown

Shulan?

Chinese state media reported that 11 domestically transmitted cases had been recorded in Shulan on Saturday. A day later, the city declared martial law and went into lockdown, with the government ordering all public places to be temporarily shut, said a Global Times report. Shulan has been upgraded to high-risk, the only city in the country with this designation. All residents have been told to stay home and only one family member is allowed out each day to buy essential products. All public transportation has been suspended and taxis are not allowed to leave the city. It comes after China had last week declared that all regions in the country were designated as low risk. Nearby Jilin city has also upgraded its risk level from low to medium after seeing two new cases - and

there are now fears that the wider province could be in danger. Other cities in the province are now on high alert. The nearby Changchun city and Dongfeng county says all those returning from Shulan will have to be quarantined for 14 days. Train services from Shulan to several cities have also been suspended. The neighbouring province of Liaoning reported one new case on Sunday - a 23-year-old who had recently returned from Jilin.

What led to the new infections in Shulan?

The infections were all linked to a 45-year-old who is a laundry worker at a local public security bureau. She later went on to infect her husband, three sisters and other family members. But it's unclear how the woman herself might have become infected. Reports say she had no recent travel history outside the province, and no known contact with anyone

that's known to be exposed to the virus. A total of 276 of her close contacts have been placed in quarantine, reported China Daily. But it's possible that the location of the province might have played a part - it borders both North Korea and Russia. Officially, there have been no reported cases from North Korea though Russia has seen over 200,000 cases, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

In recent weeks, the neighbouring border province of Heilongjiang has seen a spike in the number of imported cases, mainly made of Chinese citizens travelling back from Russia. Similarly, eight people returning from Russia to Shulan between 8 - 30 April tested positive for the virus, according to one local government official. Some 300 other people who returned within this time frame were put into quarantine. The secretary of

the Jilin Provincial Committee has said that the city will trace every close contact, every suspicious person and every clue, adding that the actions of every infected person would be traced in an attempt to find the source.

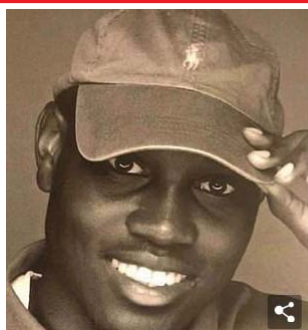
What's the situation elsewhere in China?

China has seen declining cases for weeks and has been gradually easing restrictions. Some people have gone back to work, some schools have reopened and on Monday Disneyland in Shanghai welcomed visitors for the first time after three and a half months. But also on Monday, China reported 17 new cases nationally - the highest daily increase since 28 April - bringing the total number of cases to 82,918, with the death toll at 4,633. As more parts of Europe and the US begin to ease restrictions, governments and health experts have warned that the pandemic is far from over.

(News Agencies) New 89-year-old man who coronavirus clusters have been reported in Wuhan city - where the virus first emerged - and the north-eastern province of Jilin in China. Wuhan reported five new cases on Monday, after confirming its first case since 3 April on Sunday. Authorities said the small cluster of cases were all from the same residential compound. China has been easing restrictions in recent weeks and cases had been declining. Health authorities and experts have warned that as countries emerge from strict lockdowns and people move around more freely, a rise in infections is likely. The small Wuhan cluster is the first to emerge since the end of the strict lockdown on 8 April. One of the five cases reported on Monday was the wife of an

Neighbor says he's 'not proud' of filming Ahmaud Arbery's killing on his cell phone

(News Agencies) The neighbor who filmed Ahmaud Arbery's killing said on Tuesday that he is 'not proud' of recording it on his cell phone but that without his video, there may never be justice for the unarmed 25-year-old's death as he insisted again that he is not a vigilante and just happened to be there. William 'Roddy' Bryan captured the moment Arbery was shot dead by Travis McMichael, 34, on February 23 while his former cop father, Gregory, watched from the cargo load of their pick-up truck with his own shotgun poised. The McMichaels had followed Arbery - whose family says he was out for a jog - down their street in Brunswick, Georgia, allegedly because they thought he was a burglary suspect. They told police there had been a number of break-ins in their neighborhood and that Arbery had been caught on



surveillance cameras entering homes. Footage has since emerged of the 25-year-old walking into an under-construction home shortly before he was killed then leaving empty handed. While he had prior arrests for shoplifting and assault, there is no proof he ever broke into homes. After a botched handling of the case over three months, during which time it has been passed between four prosecutors - some of whom used to work with Gregory McMichael - the father and son vigilante duo were last week arrested and charged with murder and aggravated assault. Now, the Department of Justice is



weighing federal hate crimes against them. The arrests came after Bryan's cellphone video of the incident went viral. On Tuesday, he appeared on Good Morning America to insist that he does not know the McMichaels and that he was not part of a vigilante mob going after Arbery. His house is not on the same street as the McMichaels' but sits along the intersection where Arbery was killed. He says he saw the commotion happening near him and decided to film it. 'I wish I hadn't have been there but if I hadn't have been there, there wouldn't have been no video. 'If the video wasn't there, I don't



think there would be an outcome that anybody would be satisfied with. 'I'm not proud that I shot the video but maybe it helps in the end,' he said. He went



on to say he had 'tons' of regrets, including that Arbery died. 'Tons of regrets, yes. Can I sit here and tell you what they are? No. I regret that family lost a loved one. 'That's just not something that should have happened,' Bryan told Good Morning America on Tuesday. Gregory McMichael is

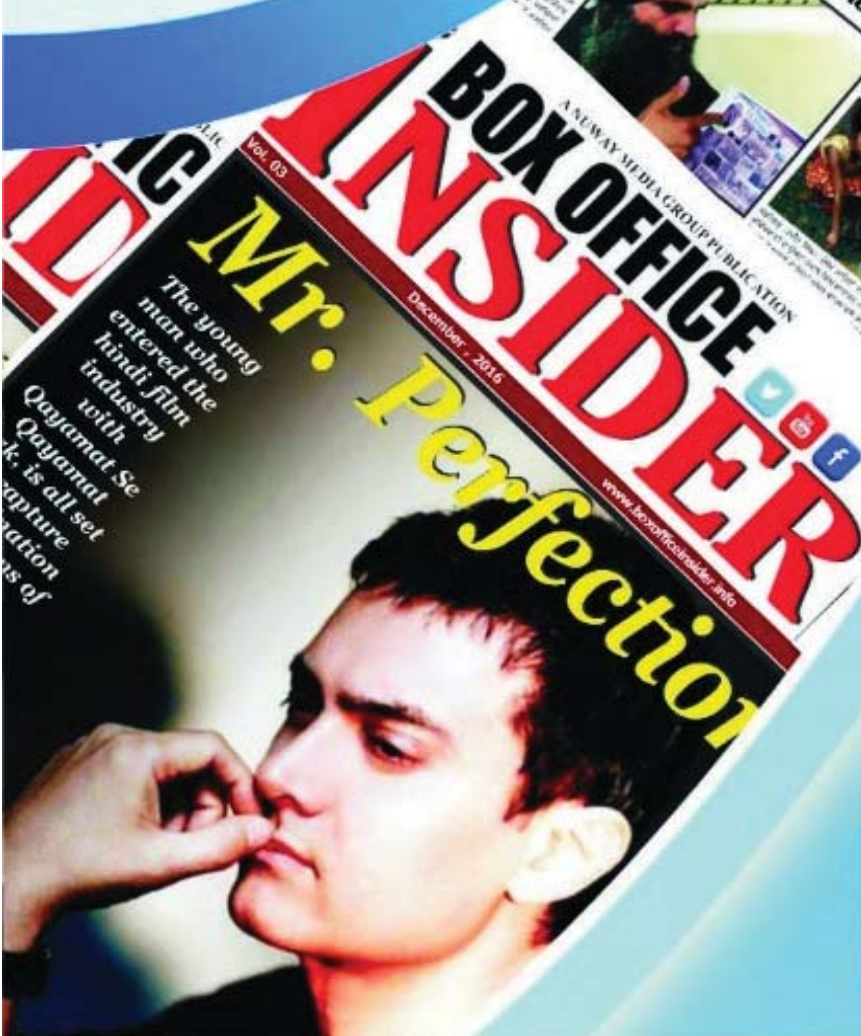
believed to be the only person who called 911. Two calls were placed to dispatchers before Arbery was shot dead, including one where the caller described a 'black guy running down the street' claiming he'd been caught on surveillance cameras entering homes in the neighborhood.





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Indiana Attorney General has his law licence suspended for 30 days over claims

(News Agencies) Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill, who has sought national attention as an anti-abortion and tough-on-crime crusader, will have his law license suspended for 30 days over allegations that he drunkenly groped a state lawmaker and three other women during a party, the state Supreme Court ruled yesterday. The unanimous court decision said that the state's attorney disciplinary commission 'proved by clear and convincing evidence that (Hill) committed the criminal act of battery.' But the court gave the Republican attorney general a less serious punishment than a suspension of at least 60 days recommended by a hearing officer for his actions during a party marking the end of the 2018 legislative session. Hill, who has resisted calls for his resignation from Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb and other

state GOP leaders, said in a statement he accepted the court's decision with 'humility and respect.' He named his chief deputy to oversee the attorney general's office until his suspension ends 17 June. Gabrielle McLemore, the Indiana Senate Democrats' communications director, told The Associated Press that she decided to go public partly out of frustration with Hill's denial. At the time, the two women also said they acted because they wanted to give other women the courage to confront inappropriate conduct. Reardon described Hill's behavior as 'deviant' when she encountered him in the early morning hours after the legislative session ended for the year. She says he leaned toward her, put his hand on her back, slid it down and grabbed her buttocks. The Munster lawmaker says she told Hill to 'back off,' but he approached again later in the

night, put his hand on her back and said: 'That skin. That back.' Hill said in October that he had no intention of stepping down despite calls to do so. 'I am not resigning. The allegations against me are vicious and false,' he said in a statement Friday. 'At no time did I ever grab or touch anyone inappropriately.' That's at odds with the accounts of both Candelaria Reardon and McLemore. Hill's statement released by his office made no mention of the allegations or the women who accused him of groping them. 'I offer my deepest gratitude to my family, friends and the entire staff of the Office of the Attorney General,' Hill said. 'My staff has worked tirelessly and without interruption and will continue to do so on behalf of all Hoosiers.' Reardon's buttocks. Reardon testified that Hill, smelling of alcohol and with glassy eyes, was holding a drink in his right hand and put his left



hand on her shoulder, then slid his hand down her dress to clench her buttocks. 'A squeeze, a firm grasp,' she said. Hill, 59, also refuted testimony from three female legislative staffers - ages 23 to 26 at the time - that he inappropriately touched their backs or buttocks and made unwelcomed sexual comments during the party. The court agreed with a finding from the hearing officer, former state Supreme Court Justice Myra Selby, that Hill crossed a line. 'The long, lingering, and meandering touches described by the four women and others, the various

reactions of those who experienced or observed those touches, and the numerous other accounts of (Hill's) conduct at the bar, all offer ample support for the hearing officer's ultimate finding on this point,' the ruling said. Hill's attorneys questioned whether his actions were misinterpreted during the party, where alcohol was flowing along with loud music and conversation. They also argue that he didn't do anything improper as a lawyer and shouldn't face law license sanctions because a special prosecutor declined to file criminal charges against him.

Bill Gates says he urged Trump to get the nation ready for a pandemic weeks



(News Agencies) Bill Gates urged Donald Trump to make national preparedness for a pandemic a priority just weeks before he entered the White House, the Microsoft co-founder claims. Gates met with then-President-elect Trump at Trump Tower in New York City in December 2016. The billionaire philanthropist said that he made his pitch to Trump as well as his opponent in the presidential race, Democrat Hillary Clinton, according to The Wall Street Journal. DailyMail.com has reached out to the White House for comment. Trump's response to the coronavirus pandemic has been widely criticized as the nation's death toll and case count continue to rise while readily available testing appears far off. More than 33 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits while Americans have become accustomed to images of miles-



long lines of cars waiting outside food banks. More than 80,000

Americans have died of COVID-19-related illness - with the death toll expected to surpass 100,000 in the next few weeks. The president, meanwhile, has claimed that his administration is testing more than any other country in the world, though statistics do not bear this out. Trump has also touted a travel ban he imposed on China, which he claims saved millions of lives. The president has also been on the defensive amid reports that he was warned about the dangers of a pandemic as early as

January. Trump is reported to have dismissed Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar as 'alarmist' after he tried to warn the president of the seriousness of the situation. Peter Navarro, Trump's top trade adviser, wrote two memos - one in late January and another in late February - also warning of a pandemic reaching American shores. Trump has denied the reports that he ignored early warnings of the pandemic's arrival. Meanwhile, Gates on Monday lamented that he did not do more to alert the world of the

dangers of a fast-spreading infectious disease - even though he gave a famous TED talk in 2015 warning that humanity was not ready for a pandemic. 'I wish I had done more to call attention to the danger,' Gates told the Journal. 'I feel terrible.' The second-wealthiest man in the world added: 'The whole point of talking about it was that we could take action and minimize the damage.' During that TED Talk, Gates predicted a global pandemic would kill many people and grind the world economy to a halt.

University of Arkansas professor is arrested for fraud for 'hiding his secret ties to the Chinese government while asking for \$5m in US grant money'

(News Agencies) A professor from the University of Arkansas has been arrested on charges of wire fraud over alleged close links to China. Simon Saw-Teong Ang, 63, who worked as a professor at the Fayetteville campus, reports KNWA. Ang allegedly had close ties to the Chinese government and Chinese companies, and failed to disclose those ties when required to do so in order to receive grant money from NASA, the complaint reads. A press release from the FBI revealed that Ang is alleged to have made 'materially false representations to NASA and the University of Arkansas' resulting in a number of wires that facilitated Ang's scheme to defraud. The charge says Ang received more than \$5 million in federal funding for

research projects but failed to disclose payment from Chinese universities and Chinese companies in violation of UA policy.

The charge also stated that he failed to disclose this outside income. Ang did disclose some of his work in seeking Chinese scholars, but not all. The University says he should have disclosed potential conflicts from outside contacts with UA, particularly with Chinese companies. Ang's arrest came after collaboration between the Acting United States Attorney for the Western District of Arkansas David Clay Fowlkes, Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, and FBI Special Agent in Charge Diane Upchurch of the FBI Little Rock Field Office. 'These

materially false representations to NASA and the University of Arkansas resulted in numerous wires to be sent and received that facilitated Ang's scheme to defraud,' said the DOJ in a statement.

If Ang is convicted, he could face a maximum jail term of 20 years behind bars although the overall length of his penalty will depend on a number of factors including whether Ang has a criminal record. The FBI is still continuing to investigate the case. Ang has taught at UA since 1988 and was director of the High Density Electronics Center in the Department of Electrical Engineering. He received the Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching in 1994 from the Arkansas Alumni Association.

FTC Seeks Comment as Part of Review of Health Breach Notification Rule

(News Agencies)The Federal Trade Commission is seeking comment on whether proposed changes should be made to a decade-old rule that requires certain companies that provide or service personal health records to notify consumers and the Commission of a data breach.

The Health Breach Notification Rule, which went into effect in 2009, requires vendors of personal health records and related entities that are not covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to notify individuals, the FTC, and, in some cases,

the media of a breach of unsecured personally identifiable health data. Currently, the Rule requires such entities to provide notifications within 60 days after discovery of the breach. If more than 500 individuals are affected by a breach, however, entities must notify the FTC within 10 business days.

The Health Breach Notification Rule review is part of the FTC's periodic review of its rules to ensure they are keeping pace with changes in the economy, technology, and business models. In addition to standard questions about the Rule's

effectiveness and benefits, and whether it should be retained, changed or eliminated, the FTC also is seeking comment on such issues as:

whether the Rule has resulted in under-notification, over-notification, or an efficient level of notification; whether the Rule's definitions should be modified to reflect legal, economic, and technological changes; whether the timing requirements and methods for reporting a breach are adequate; the implications for enforcement raised by direct-to-consumer technologies and services such as mobile health apps,

virtual assistants, and platform health tools; and whether and how the Rule should address any developments in health care products or services related to COVID-19. The FTC will be accepting comment on these questions for 90 days after the Rule review notice is published in the Federal Register. Instructions on how to file comments can be found in the Federal Register notice. Once processed, the comments on the Rule review will be posted to Regulations.gov. The Commission voted 5-0 to publish the Rule review notice in the Federal Register.

Economic stimulus by governments may be exploited by terrorists, says FATF

It warns that terrorists and criminals will use this economic downturn to move to new cash-incentive and high-liquidity lines of business in developing countries – both for laundering of proceeds as well as fund their terror operations.

(News Agencies)Global money laundering watchdog – Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – has claimed that the stimulus measures and international financial assistance announced by various countries to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic are likely to be exploited by the terrorists and criminals by posing as genuine businesses seeking assistance, according to report released by it.

It warns that terrorists and criminals will use this economic downturn to move to new cash-incentive and high-liquidity lines of business in developing countries – both for laundering of proceeds as well as fund their terror operations.

"In an economic downturn, criminals may seek to invest in real estate or troubled businesses to generate cash and mask illicit proceeds. Criminal groups can also introduce illicit proceeds

into the financial system by restructuring existing loans and lines of credit. In addition, corporate insolvency proceedings can free up illicit cash contained in businesses whilst masking the funds' origins," FATF says in the first such report since the pandemic forced worldwide shutdowns in February-March this year.

Tax evasion and related crimes may increase as individuals and companies facing economic difficulties look to reduce their fiscal burdens, the report adds.

Many countries are reporting an "overall" increase in banknote withdrawals, which the FATF claims is likely to be used by criminals/terrorists to cover their illicit funds with "redeposit funds" when the markets stabilise. "Banknotes can be used to purchase safe haven assets (e.g. gold), which are less easily traceable," the FATF states.

Some of the countries have also reported an increase in fundraising scams where criminals posing as international organizations or charities circulate emails requesting donations for Covid-19 related fundraising campaigns (purportedly for research, victims and/or products), according to the report.

The health crisis, the Paris-based body says, is also impacting the government and private sectors' abilities to implement anti-money laundering measures and counter terrorist financing as well as international cooperation. Formal cooperation, such as mutual legal assistance and extradition are already impacted by the crisis due to limitation or suspension of court operations, and the delayed execution of orders caused by travel restrictions.

Venezuela detains 40 suspects after failed Maduro 'kidnap attempt'

(News Agencies)Nicolás Maduro's security forces have continued their roundup of alleged participants in last week's botched attempt to capture him, with the arrest of three Venezuelan men just west of the capital.

The trio was reportedly seized in Carayaca, 35 miles from Caracas in the early hours of Monday, taking the number of detentions to more than 40. The official Twitter account of Venezuela's Bolivarian national guard claimed the men were "terrorists who entered the country intending to provoke violence".

On Sunday the army chief, Remigio Ceballos, announced the capture of another eight "enemies of the fatherland" who were pictured kneeling down before a cluster of rifle-toting troops. Eight people were reportedly killed when a group of about 60 mercenaries, including two United States citizens, launched their botched sea raid on 2 May. One of the captured American attackers, Airan Berry, last week claimed, possibly under duress, that the group had been tasked with raiding Maduro's presidential palace and seizing a local airport in order to spirit him out of the country. Many of the group are reportedly being held in El Helicóide, Venezuela's most notorious political prison.

China cuts beef imports from Australia after push for probe into origin of coronavirus

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian blasted Australia's demand for a coronavirus inquiry as "erroneous words and deeds" and warned against "using the epidemic to engage in political manipulation".

(News Agencies)China suspended imports from four major Australian beef suppliers Tuesday, just weeks after Beijing's ambassador warned of a consumer boycott in retaliation for Canberra's push to probe the origins of the coronavirus. Analysts said the move raised concerns of a possible standoff between Australia and its most important trading partner that could spill over into other crucial sectors as it struggles to navigate the disease-induced economic crisis.

Federal Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said shipments of meat from

four abattoirs had been suspended over "minor technical" breaches related to



Chinese health and labelling certificate requirements. "We are concerned that the

suspensions appear to be based on highly technical issues, which in some cases date back more than a year," he said. "We will work with industry and authorities in both Australia and China to seek to find a solution that allows these businesses to resume their normal operations as soon as possible." The four abattoirs account for around 35 per cent of Australia's beef exports to China in a trade worth about Aus\$1.7 billion (US\$1.1 billion), according to national broadcaster ABC. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing that the suspension was due to violations of "inspection and quarantine requirements". Zhao also blasted Australia's demand for a coronavirus inquiry as "erroneous words and deeds" and warned

against "using the epidemic to engage in political manipulation". But he denied a link between the suspension and the inquiry, saying they are "two completely different things". Beijing has also flagged major tariffs on Australian barley over allegations it is dumping the grain in China -- selling it for less than it costs to produce. The Australian Financial Review newspaper cited confidential documents as saying Beijing is considering duties of 73.6 per cent. Tensions between the two have increased since Australia started calling for an independent investigation into the origin of the coronavirus outbreak, which began in China before spreading around the world, killing more than 280,000 people, infecting millions and shattering the global economy.

'Dengue kills too'

Latin America faces two epidemics at once



(News Agencies) BOGOTA - As the coronavirus kills thousands and dominates government attention across Latin America, another deadly viral infection is quietly stalking the region. Dengue - colloquially called breakbone fever for the severe joint pain it causes - is endemic in much of Latin America, but COVID-19's arrival has pulled crucial attention and resources away from the fight against it, doctors and officials say.

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) expects 2020 to be marked by high rates of dengue, which can fill intensive care units and kill patients even absent the pressures of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Around the world, COVID-19 has affected other diseases in different ways. Though in Europe measures to stop the coronavirus have banished seasonal flu, in Africa border closures have

stopped transportation of measles vaccines and other supplies. In Latin America, a dengue epidemic which started in late 2018 is still being felt. Dengue infections in the Americas surged to an all-time high of 3.1 million in 2019, with over 1,500 deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the PAHO. Cases of the disease should begin to decline in the second half of the year, the organization said. Spread by mosquitoes, dengue outbreaks typically occur three to five years after the previous epidemic. And with four strains of dengue in circulation, people may catch it more than once, with second cases more likely to be severe. "COVID is the star right now, so all of the attention is being put on COVID, but there are still problems with dengue," said Doctor Jaime Gomez, who works at a hospital in Floridablanca, in Colombia's Santander province. Although dengue is not usually fatal and can be treated with

painkillers, some sufferers deal with persistent symptoms like fatigue, weight loss, and depression that affect their ability to work. Severe dengue is treated with intravenous fluids and those who do not get tested are at risk of dangerous complications.

Such medical intervention cannot be given if patients stay home, worried about contracting the coronavirus, or if overcrowded hospitals have to turn them away. With relatively few cases of COVID-19 in the province where he works, Gomez said his clinic had seen hospitalizations fall by half, as people were fearful of venturing outdoors.

'SYSTEM COLLAPSED'

Paraguayan lawyer Sonia Fernandez avoided seeking care when she and her two daughters, ages 11 and 8, got sick with dengue at the beginning of April. "All three of us had dengue, we had all the symptoms, the pain, the rash, but we didn't go to a clinic

or a health center so as not to expose ourselves (to COVID-19)," Fernandez said. All three have since recovered. Dengue cases in Paraguay have exploded this year. In the first 18 weeks of 2020, the country reported 42,710 confirmed cases and 64 deaths, compared to 384 confirmed cases and six deaths in the year-earlier period.

In Ecuador, where the coronavirus outbreak has hit hard and hospitals in the largest city of Guayaquil been overwhelmed, an apparent fall in the number of dengue cases could mask other issues. According to Ecuador's health ministry, dengue cases peaked at 888 in the week ending March 14, two weeks after the country confirmed its first case of COVID-19. For the week of April 4, they fell to 257. "Very clearly dengue is being under-reported," said Esteban Ortiz, global health researcher at Quito's University of the Americas. "Cases haven't decreased, the diagnosis of

cases has decreased, which confirms the system has totally collapsed," he added. Ecuador's health ministry said in a statement that the country was no more exposed to the double impact of COVID-19 and dengue than any other in the region, adding it has sufficient supplies to treat cases of the mosquito-borne disease. Dengue has also spiked sharply in Central America. Cases in Costa Rica nearly tripled through May 1 compared with a year ago, to over 2,000. "We are going through a difficult moment dealing with COVID-19 but unfortunately other diseases continue their cycle," Rodrigo Marin, director of Costa Rica's health surveillance agency, recently told journalists. In Panama, where dengue has caused at least two deaths this year, Panama City health official Yamileth Lopez also sounded the alarm in an interview with Reuters. "Dengue kills too," she said.

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Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular

Faith is on the rise and 84% of the global population identifies with a religious group. What does it mean for the future?

(News Agencies) If you think religion belongs to the past and we live in a new age of reason, you need to check out the facts: 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group. Members of this demographic are generally younger and produce more children than those who have no religious affiliation, so the world is getting more religious, not less – although there are significant geographical variations. According to 2015 figures, Christians form the biggest religious group by some margin, with 2.3 billion adherents or 31.2% of the total world population of 7.3 billion. Next come Muslims (1.8 billion, or 24.1%), Hindus (1.1 billion, or 15.1%) and Buddhists (500 million, or 6.9%).

The next category is people who practise folk or traditional religions; there are 400m of them, or 6% of the global total. Adherents of lesser-practised religions, including Sikhism, Baha'i and Jainism, add up to 58m, or well below 1%. There are 14m Jews in the world, about 0.2% of the global

population, concentrated in the US and Israel.

But the third biggest category is missing from the above list. In 2015, 1.2 billion people in the world, or 16%, said they have no religious affiliation at all. This does not mean all those people are committed atheists; some – perhaps most – have a strong sense of spirituality or belief in God, gods or guiding forces, but they don't identify with or practise an organised religion. Almost all religions have subdivisions. Christians can be Roman Catholic (the biggest group with almost 1.3 billion adherents), Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Anglican or many other sub-denominations. Muslims might be Sunni (the majority), Shia, Ibadi, Ahmadiyya or Sufi. Hinduism has four main groups: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism. There are two main traditions in Buddhism – Theravada and Mahayana, each with subgroups. Jews can be Orthodox (or ultra-Orthodox), Conservative, Reform or belong

to smaller groups.

Geography is important in religion. Asia-Pacific is the most populous region in the world, and also the most religious. It is home to 99% of Hindus, 99% of Buddhists, and 90% of those practising folk or traditional religions. The region also hosts 76% of the world's religiously unaffiliated people, 700m of whom are Chinese.

Three-quarters of religious people live in a country where they form a majority of the population; the remaining quarter live as religious minorities. For example, 97% of Hindus live in three Hindu-majority countries: India, Mauritius and Nepal, while 87% of Christians live in 157 Christian-majority countries. Three-quarters of Muslims live in Muslim-majority countries. Among the religiously unaffiliated, seven out of 10 live in countries where they are in the majority, including China, the Czech Republic and North Korea.

In contrast, most Buddhists (72%) live as a minority in their home countries. There are seven countries where Buddhists form

the majority of the population: Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Which religions are growing, and where?

The short answer is religion is on the wane in western Europe and North America, and it's growing everywhere else.

The median age of the global population is 28. Two religions have a median age below that: Muslims (23) and Hindus (26). Other main religions have an older median age: Christians, 30; Buddhists, 34 and Jews, 36. The religiously unaffiliated come in at 34.

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world – more than twice as fast as the overall global population. Between 2015 and 2060, the world's inhabitants are expected to increase by 32%, but the Muslim population is forecast to grow by 70%. And even though Christians will also outgrow the general population over that period, with an increase of 34% forecast mainly thanks to

population growth in sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity is likely to lose its top spot in the world religion league table to Islam by the middle of this century.

Hindus are set to grow by 27%, and Jews by 15% mainly because of the high birth rate among the ultra-Orthodox. The religiously unaffiliated will see a 3% increase. But proportionately, these religious groupings will be smaller than now because their growth is lower than the increase in the overall global population. And Buddhists are forecast to see a 7% drop in their numbers.

It's mainly down to births and deaths, rather than religious conversion. Muslim women have an average of 2.9 children, significantly above the average of all non-Muslims at 2.2. And while Christian women have an overall birth rate of 2.6, it's lower in Europe where Christian deaths outnumbered births by nearly 6 million between 2010 and 2015. In recent years, Christians have had a disproportionately large share of the world's deaths (37%).

Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific "sick room" and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
 - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
 - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.



- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.

- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

CS 174120-A 03/20/2020

STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

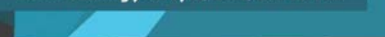
Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



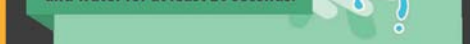
Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

174120-A March 16, 2020 1:02 PM

New solar panels suck water from air to cool themselves down

(News Agencies) Like humans, solar panels don't work well when overheated. Now, researchers have found a way to make them "sweat"—allowing them to cool themselves and increase their power output. It's "a simple, elegant, and effective [way] to retrofit existing solar cell panels for an instant efficiency boost," says Liangbing Hu, a materials scientist at the University of Maryland, College Park. Today, more than 600 gigawatts of solar power capacity exists worldwide, providing 3% of global electricity demand. That capacity is expected to increase fivefold over the next decade. Most use silicon to convert sunlight to electricity. But typical silicon cells convert only 20% of the Sun's energy that hits them into current. Much of the

rest turns into heat, which can warm the panels by as much as 40°C. And with every degree of temperature above 25°C, the efficiency of the panel drops. In a field where engineers struggle for every 0.1% boost in power conversion efficiency, even a 1% gain would be an economic boon, says Jun Zhou, a materials scientist at Huazhong University of Science and Technology. Decades ago, researchers showed that cooling solar panels with water can provide that benefit. Today, some companies even sell water-cooled systems. But those setups require abundant available water and storage tanks, pipes, and pumps. That's of little use in arid regions and in developing countries with little infrastructure.

Enter an atmospheric water collector. In recent years, researchers have devised materials that can suck water vapor from the air and condense it into liquid water for drinking. Among the best is a gel that strongly absorbs water vapor at night, when the air is cool and humidity is high. The gel—a mix of carbon nanotubes in polymers with a water-attracting calcium chloride salt—causes the vapor to condense into droplets that the gel holds. When heat rises during the day, the gel releases water vapor. If covered by a clear plastic, the released vapor is trapped, condenses back into liquid water, and flows into a storage container.

Peng Wang, an environmental engineer at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and

his colleagues thought of another use for the condensed water: coolant for solar panels. So, the researchers pressed a 1-centimeter-thick sheet of the gel against the underside of a standard silicon solar panel. Their idea was that during the day, the gel would pull heat from the solar panel to evaporate water it had pulled out of the air the previous night, releasing the vapor through the bottom of the gel. The evaporating water would cool the solar panel as sweat evaporating from the skin cools us down. The researchers found that the amount of gel they needed depended primarily on the environment's humidity. In a desert environment with 35% humidity, a 1-square-meter solar panel required 1 kilogram of gel to cool

it, whereas a muggy area with 80% humidity required only 0.3 kilograms of gel per square meter of panel.

The upshot in either case: The temperature of the water-cooled solar panel dropped by as much as 10°C. And the electricity output of the cooled panels increased by an average of 15% and up to 19% in one outdoor test, where the wind likely enhanced the cooling effect, Wang and his colleagues report today in *Nature Sustainability*. "The efficiency increase is significant," Zhou says. But he points out that rain could dissolve the calcium chloride salt in the gel, sapping its water-attracting performance. Wang agrees, but notes the hydrogel sits beneath the solar panel, which should shield it from rain.

Giant 18-tonne piece of a Chinese rocket crash-lands in the Atlantic



(News Agencies) An 18-tonne piece of a Chinese rocket used to launch an experimental spacecraft that could send people to the Moon has crash-landed in the Atlantic Ocean. The core stage of the Long March 5B rocket that was sent into space on May 5 fell to Earth at 16:34 BST on Monday, just off the coast of West Africa. Astronomers say the rocket part, which was 93ft long and weighed 17.8 tonnes, is the most massive object to make an uncontrolled reentry in decades. Astronomer Jonathan McDowell of the Harvard Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics said the last major uncontrolled descent was the 39 tonne Salyut-7 in 1991. The Chinese Long March CZ-5B rocket was used to launch a cargo capsule and a new-generation spaceship designed to send astronauts to the Moon. Its descent was confirmed by the 18th Space Control Squadron, a unit of the US Air Force that tracks space debris in Earth's orbit. The force said it was notable not just for the size of the rocket but also the extent of the window of its uncontrolled descent. This uncontrolled descent left trackers guessing exactly where it would eventually land—with speculation it could be in the ocean or on land in Africa, US or Australia. Before it splashed down in the waters off the west coast of Mauritania the rocket core flew over Los Angeles and New York City. It was launched from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in China's Hainan province on May 5 and spent several days in orbit before making its descent. While it is described as 'uncontrolled', the descent wasn't unplanned—space launches are planned with the re-entry of parts of rockets or launch vehicles—sometimes in controlled and sometimes uncontrolled descents back to Earth.

How your smart home devices can be turned against you

They can make our lives easier and more convenient, but can devices such as smart light bulbs and voice-controlled assistants also be used against someone as a form of domestic abuse?

(News Agencies) For billions of people around the world, life at home has taken on a new significance this year. Flats and houses have become workplaces, gyms, schools and living spaces all rolled into one by national lockdowns.

It has also meant that many of us are spending more time than ever with the gadgets we have welcomed into our homes—so-called "smart" devices connected to the internet that can be controlled with our voices or via apps on our phones.

In 2017, there were an estimated 27 billion IoT connected devices and this

network is expected to grow by 12% every year to reach more than 125 billion devices by 2030. The hope is that smart devices can save us time and effort in the home by helping us digitise and automate our lives. It is hard not to enjoy the convenience of requesting a world news update, turning lights on and off with a simple command, or having a thermostat that can learn by itself when to heat your rooms based on your daily movements. They are designed to make our lives more convenient, save us time and keep us safe.

Take the internet-connected video doorbells that

many people now have beside their front door. They make it possible to see who has come to call and even talk to them without having to open the door and risk exposure to the coronavirus. Automated devices inside the home, meanwhile, reduce the risk of viral transmission. According to the global technology market firm ABI Research, the sales of smart devices is set to increase by as much as 30% (compared to the same time last year) as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. "A smarter home can be a safer home," a research director at ABI Research recently said. But there are

some who fear smart devices like these may actually pose a risk to the very people who share their home with them—that these tools of convenience are being turned into weapons of domestic abuse. From virtual assistants like Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri and Google Home, to smart light bulbs, kettles, security cameras and thermostats, they are collectively known as the Internet of Things (IoT). Many of our household appliances now come embedded with sensors and the ability to connect to wireless networks, allowing them to gather data about how we use them, and communicate with other devices in our homes.

Securing the Aarogya Setu app

(News Agencies) The Aarogya Setu application was born out of a need to bring a 21st century technology-based solution to an unprecedented problem. India is not alone in deciding to leverage the ubiquitous smartphone for tracking outbreaks, a strategy that fundamentally involves a compromise with privacy. But it is the only democracy which has, without the requisite legal architecture in place, made the app almost mandatory for mobility and to resume work. This compromise is evidence of how the Sars-Cov-2 has upended conventional disease containment efforts, with a higher degree of government supervision, and even control, over the lives of citizens than usual. But it is crucial that this necessity does not lead to a lasting change in how we approach privacy. By design, the app goes a step further than most such tools developed around the world. It tracks where people have been, instead of

merely determining who they were in close contact with. While such functionality can theoretically help identify disease hotspots, it will need to be corroborated with the exactness of physical contact tracing. The other concern stems from the nature of computer programmes. They are prone to vulnerabilities, particularly in early iterations. This was proved by a French programmer who demonstrated the possibility of accessing parts of the Aarogya Setu app that store a person's contact records. Common cybersecurity and hacking techniques have proven capable of reverse engineering such data to dig out information that was meant to be hidden. What the researcher demonstrated was the penultimate step before someone can be traced without the need to break into a government database. An increasing number of countries are discovering flaws—in design or code—

and are going back to the drawing board. The United Kingdom's National Health Service is considering abandoning its version of a centralised contact-tracing app, where data is sent to government servers, to switch to the decentralised platform being developed by Apple and Google, where data is matched on phones. As the approaches around such tools evolve, India must look at the experiences and experiments in other countries. One of the main demands by privacy as well as cybersecurity experts around the world is to throw open the code behind these contact-tracing applications so that they can be audited for design and programming flaws. At the very least, the developers of Aarogya Setu must consider doing this, since it will not only be a step toward transparency but also help quash bugs. After all, the current gold standard of such tools, Singapore's Trace Together, is an open-source programme.

Covid-19's Third Shock Wave: The Global Food Crisis

Many people are already going hungry in the United States; many more will face hunger or starvation in other parts of the world.

In San Antonio, 10,000 families began arriving before dawn on April 9 to receive free boxes of food at a shuttered mall; in a normal week, 200–400 families might show up. In Nairobi, Kenya, thousands of desperately poor people seeking government food aid on April 10 were beaten back by the police, causing multiple injuries. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, thousands of unpaid garment workers defied stay-at-home orders on April 13 to block roads and demand their wages, saying they'd rather risk contagion than go without food. "We are starving," said one protester. "If we don't have food in our stomach, what's the use of observing this lockdown?"

Even as people around the world grapple with the medical and economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, many are also facing yet another great calamity: food scarcity. Either for lack of funds or lack of supply (or both), poor and newly jobless families are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain the food they need. With both economic contraction and joblessness expected to accelerate in the coming months, the number of families facing food insecurity and starvation is bound to soar.

Major world disasters produce multiple ripple effects. Like a powerful tsunami, they trigger one shock wave after another, each producing injury and mayhem. In the case of Covid-19, the first wave was the global health crisis, still spreading around the world. Next came the stay-at-home requirements and the resulting shutdown of the world economy, resulting in massive job layoffs everywhere. These, in turn, are producing a third wave, possibly even more catastrophic in its outcome: the collapse of global food-supply systems and widespread human starvation.

SUPPLY CHAINS AT RISK

Covid-19's assault on global food availability is coming from two directions: On the supply side, farmers and distributors are cutting back on production as major customers—schools, restaurants, hotels, airlines—cease operations and as food industry employees become sick; on the consuming side, poor and unemployed households are running out of money and are unable to buy food, even when it is still available in local markets.

As is true of other key commodities, such as oil and iron ore, the availability of food products is

highly reliant on global supply chains, with most countries depending on imports for at least some vital foodstuffs. This is true even in large countries with extensive agricultural industries of their own, such as Canada and the United States. These supply chains are vast and well-organized, but nevertheless vulnerable to disruption from storms, wars, droughts, and other systemic shocks—pandemics included.

"The continued globalisation of modern food networks is introducing an unprecedented level of complexity to the global food system," insurance giant Lloyd's of London observed in a 2015 report on global food insecurity. "Disruptions at any one point in the system would be likely to reverberate throughout the food supply chain. Volatile food prices and increasing political instability are likely to magnify the impacts of food production shocks, causing a cascade of economic, social and political impacts across the globe."

Lloyd's drew this conclusion from a "food system shock" exercise its analysts conducted, akin to a Pentagon war game, and from its analysis of the Arab Spring protests of 2011, which were triggered, in part, by rising food prices across North Africa and the Middle East—a phenomenon widely attributed to severe droughts over previous months in Russia, China, and Australia that sharply reduced global grain supplies. As one producing country after another banned wheat and rice exports, worldwide grain prices soared—causing misery for poor families in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and other countries that depend on bread for a large part of their diet.

Although current conditions have not yet reached this degree of distress, it appears as if such a breakdown is beginning. "The self-defeating drive by countries to impose export controls on medical gear in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic has spread like an infection to foodstuffs," noted Cullen Hendrix of the Peterson Institute for International Economics on April 6. So far, Russia, Kazakhstan, Thailand, and Cambodia have banned the export of processed grains, and Vietnam has put a moratorium on new export contracts for rice. Such steps, Hendrix warned, "augur poorly for global hunger and political stability."

The curbs on international trade



CALIFORNIA



TEXAS

and travel imposed by governments around the world in response to the pandemic have also played havoc with global supply lines. Many ships and planes remain idle because of such restrictions (or because key employees are sick or afraid to show up for work), slowing the delivery of vital supplies and adding to a surge in food prices. In East Africa, international efforts to combat a historic plague of crop-devouring locusts are being hampered by a slowdown in the delivery of pesticides. In the United States, food delivery has been deemed an essential activity, and state and federal authorities are doing what they can to keep supply lines intact. Nevertheless, significant disruptions are already beginning to occur. Food processing and packaging—a key step between farm production and delivery to local markets—often involves close interaction among numerous (and typically low-paid) workers, and so is at high risk for the spread of the coronavirus. Large meat processing plants employing hundreds of workers are at particular risk: As of April 25, coronavirus outbreaks at 30 such plants had sickened over 3,300 workers and killed at least 17. Workers at these and other such facilities say they were pressured into working without adequate protective gear even after state and national guidelines called for such measures. Now, with the number of Covid-19 cases soaring, the major meat processors—Tyson Foods, JBS USA, and Smithfield Foods—are closing their facilities, punching a big hole in the US supply chain. Industry leaders say meat production is now down by at least 25 percent and is likely to contract

further in the weeks to come. On April 28, President Trump invoked emergency powers to keep meat processing plants open, but union officials say it is nearly impossible to establish a safe environment for workers at these facilities. "Using executive power to force people back on the job without proper protections is wrong and dangerous," said Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO.

Meanwhile, farmers report that they cannot find customers for their crops as restaurants close and processing plants go idle—resulting in vast surpluses on the farm and scarcities in many towns and cities. Many dairy farmers in Wisconsin, for example, are dumping thousands of gallons of fresh milk into lagoons and manure pits every day, since their regular customers—schools, restaurants, and hotels—are not buying their products (but the cows still must be milked). Elsewhere, farmers have had to plow under ripe vegetables in order to make way for new crops. Some surplus produce is being provided to local food banks for distribution to the poor, these farmers report, but they lack the capacity to do this on a large scale. As a result, perfectly good food is being destroyed while people go hungry.

FOLLOW-ON EFFECTS

Even where supply chains remain intact, many poor countries lack the funds to pay for imported food. This has long been a problem for the least-developed countries, which often depend on international food aid to finance essential imports; it is becoming even more severe as the number of people without jobs multiplies and donor countries balk at higher aid ex-

penditures. Many poor countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, already reeling from the collapse in employment, now face the heartbreaking challenge of feeding millions of their hungry and starving citizens. The pandemic has posed a particularly harsh challenge for the oil-exporting countries of the Global South. Typically, these countries—including Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela—rely on oil-export revenues to help pay for imports and finance food subsidies for the poor. In recent years, oil prices have averaged around \$55–60 per barrel—less than historic highs, but enough to keep most governments afloat. With the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic contraction, however, the worldwide demand for oil has plummeted and prices have fallen to less than half their January 2020 average. (A price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, now temporarily halted, also contributed to the price decline.) This, in turn, has decimated the producing countries' budgets and left them unable to finance essential food imports—with devastating consequences for their poorer citizens, who must now pay inflated prices for whatever food is available, or go hungry.

Venezuela is at particular risk from this turn of events. Food supplies were already hard to come by in local markets before the pandemic as a result of corruption, economic mismanagement, and US sanctions against the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

(The Nation,
By Michael T. Klare)

Soaring Prices, Rotting Crops: Coronavirus Triggers Global Food Crisis

Processing and transportation breakdowns, panic buying threaten vulnerable nations; 'a food crisis with lots of food'



The coronavirus pandemic hit the world at a time of plentiful harvests and ample food reserves. Yet a cascade of protectionist restrictions, transport disruptions and processing breakdowns has dislocated the global food supply and put the planet's most vulnerable regions in particular peril.

"You can have a food crisis with lots of food. That's the situation we're in," said Abdolreza Abbassian, a senior economist at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or FAO.

Prices for staples such as rice and wheat have jumped in many cities, in part because of panic buying set off by export restrictions imposed by countries eager to ensure sufficient supplies at home. Trade disruptions and lockdowns are making it harder to move produce from farms to markets, processing plants and ports, leaving some food to rot in the fields.

At the same time, more people around the world are running short of money as economies contract and incomes shrivel or disappear. Currency devaluations in developing nations that depend on tourism or depreciating commodities like oil have compounded those problems, making imported food even less affordable.

"In the past, we have always dealt with either a demand-side crisis, or a supply-side crisis. But this is both—a supply and a demand crisis at the same time, and at a global level," said Arif Husain, chief economist at the UN's World Food Program. "This makes it unprecedented and uncharted." The WFP has warned that up to three dozen nations could face famines by the end of the year, potentially pushing an additional 130 million people to the brink of starvation.

In self-sufficient farming nations such as the U.S., the fallout so far has been limited. While the variety on supermarket shelves has diminished somewhat, and the meat-processing industry has experienced some interruptions, there are no major food shortages. Other countries, rich and poor, are facing critical challenges in how to make sure their populations get enough to eat in coming months and years.

South Sudan, where a new unity government was formed recently to end a long-running civil war, is one of the nations most at risk. Data published by the FAO show that prices for wheat in the capital city of Juba have shot up 62% since February. Prices for cassava, a local staple otherwise known as tapioca, are up 41%. "I don't even want to imagine how bad it's going to be," said Mabior Garang, the African country's deputy interior minister-designate. "The borders have been closed, and we don't have any local production of food in our country. We were already facing a famine pre-corona. If you add corona to the equation, it's crazy."

Potato prices are up 27% since February in Chennai, India, according to the FAO data. In Yangon, Myanmar, prices for gram, a type of chickpea, have climbed 20%. In the Pakistani city of Lahore, van driver Muhammad Asif said his family used to cook chicken twice a week before the pandemic, and mutton once a month. Now, he said, they are eating as little food as possible, subsisting on basic staples as his income declined by 60%, while food prices in local groceries increased by at least 25%.

"The virus has made life very difficult for people like us. If the situation continues like this for another couple of months, people will start snatching food from others and stealing to meet their needs," Mr. Asif said. Food shortages have caused political upheavals throughout human history. In the years after the 2008 financial crisis, a surge in food prices world-wide helped unleash a wave of turmoil and insurgencies in many parts of the Middle East and Africa. The Arab Spring's series of rebellions was in part caused by a Tunisian vegetable seller setting himself on fire in 2010. Today, many governments worry that breakdowns of the food supply could inspire similar upheaval. "Food security is key in maintaining socio-economic and political stability. We can ignore this only at our own risk," President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, the world's biggest rice importer, told last month's summit of Southeast Asian leaders. "Our most urgent priority is ensuring a

sufficient supply of rice for our people." As economies world-wide come out of lockdown, logistical issues could be resolved, borders could start to reopen and food trade would pick up, alleviating some risks. Yet, it is unclear how many months that would take—a variable that depends on the future course of the pandemic itself.

The biggest danger going forward, economists say, is that the pandemic's dislocations will affect not just existing food stocks but planting and harvesting in coming months. That already is occurring in parts of the world, just as a swarm of locusts is eating its way across swaths of Africa and Asia. In India, which has been under a nationwide lockdown since March 25, Minati Swain's crop of tomatoes and bananas went to waste in the fields last month because restrictions on movement made it impossible to get the produce to local markets in the eastern state of Orissa. Then, heavy rains destroyed the 33-year-old farmer's remaining crop of eggplant. "Now, we don't even have money to buy food from the market," she said. "And if there is no money, how can we plant for the next season?"

Around the world, shipping disruptions have made it prohibitively expensive or impossible to move many perishable items, especially fruits, vegetables and fish, from producers to consumers. Between Jan. 1 and April 10, the capacity of container ships moving goods fell 30% because of canceled sailings. Those that do reach ports face new delays due to quarantines and shutdowns of customs and other facilities in many places. Sometimes that results in spoiled cargoes. About 85% of passenger flights world-wide have been canceled, reducing global air-cargo capacity by about 35%, according to consulting firm McKinsey & Co. India is the world's biggest exporter of rice, helping feed nations across Africa and Asia. These days, New Delhi-based rice exporter Shri Lal Mahal Group is shipping only 15% to 20% of its normal volume. "There is plenty of rice in India," said company Chairman Prem Garg. "It's just that we can't export it because of logistics issues." Among the obstacles: While there used to be an

available vessel to European markets every two or three days, now there's just one every two weeks. Some of the other top 10 rice-selling nations compounded the disruptions with export restrictions. Vietnam, the world's third-largest rice exporter, stopped all shipments in March. Myanmar and Cambodia also imposed curbs. The world's biggest wheat exporter, Russia, last month halted exports until July. Major wheat suppliers Romania, Ukraine and Kazakhstan also capped sales. Turkey restricted the export of lemons, Thailand of chicken eggs, Serbia of sunflower seeds.

Though some restrictions have since been relaxed, and Vietnam is resuming rice exports, this threat of protectionism has fueled a global rise in prices for some staple commodities despite bumper crops. Thai rice was up 14% in April, reaching a seven-year high. Black Sea wheat is up 7%. Though global prices for feed grains are down, that is largely because of problems in the meat industry. Amid this uncertainty, major food importers are responding by hoarding vital staples, which could further drive up prices. Egypt, the world's biggest wheat importer, rarely purchases foreign wheat during its own harvesting season, which is now under way. Yet, last month, it bought large quantities of French and Russian grain, part of Cairo's new plan to stockpile up to eight months' worth of reserves. Those transactions, traders said, helped drive up global wheat prices. "If you ask governments what they want to do, they want to accumulate stocks, which is a big problem because, first, the price will be lower tomorrow, and, second, they don't have the capacity to manage them properly," said Maximo Torero Cullen, chief economist at the FAO.

Russia, the world's biggest wheat exporter, halted exports until July. Combines harvesting

wheat outside the village of Ogor. Wealthier importers such as Japan, Taiwan and the United Arab Emirates can outbid poorer countries that already face shortages. It is in these poorer nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, that food inflation is hitting the hardest. Nigeria is home to 200 million people and one of the world's largest rice and wheat importers. It is suffering from the combined shocks of more expensive imports, disruptions of local production and transport, and the collapse of global prices for its main export, oil. Haresh Keswani, whose Artee Group operates 15 SPAR hypermarkets across Nigeria, said he had to shut down five outlets because he couldn't get enough inventory or workers. "The farmers have increased the prices of food products because of the lockdown and the lack of access to their farms, and we the buyers are now at the receiving end," said Sadiq Usman a laborer in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. "It's not been easy feeding my family, and now we're eating just once a day." Some of the world's wealthier food importers have been preparing for disruptions since the previous crisis a decade ago. Taiwan, which imports two-thirds of its calorie needs, has amassed 900,000 metric tons of rice in a government stockpile, three times the amount its Council of Agriculture is legally mandated to have. Those stocks were built up before the pandemic. Now, Taiwan says its farmers will produce an additional 1.2 million metric tons in the next six months, leaving it with enough rice reserves to feed its population for 21 months. "Suppliers either don't have the goods, they are not manufacturing, or they don't know how to get the goods to us," he said. "What is not getting through is a huge list. Are the fruits and vegetables getting through? No. Are the meats getting through regularly? No. There is not enough."

(The Wall Street Journal)



'Instead of Coronavirus, the Hunger Will Kill Us.'

The world has never faced a hunger emergency like this, experts say. It could double the number of people facing acute hunger to 265 million by the end of this year.

NAIROBI, Kenya — In the largest slum in Kenya's capital, people desperate to eat set off a stampede during a recent giveaway of flour and cooking oil, leaving scores injured and two people dead. In India, thousands of workers are lining up twice a day for bread and fried vegetables to keep hunger at bay. And across Colombia, poor households are hanging red clothing and flags from their windows and balconies as a sign that they are hungry. "We don't have any money, and now we need to survive," said Pauline Karushi, who lost her job at a jewelry business in Nairobi, and lives in two rooms with her child and four other relatives. "That means not eating much." The coronavirus pandemic has brought hunger to millions of people around the world. National lockdowns and social distancing measures are drying up work and incomes, and are likely to disrupt agricultural production and supply routes — leaving millions to worry how they will get enough to eat. The coronavirus has sometimes been called an equalizer because it has sickened both rich and poor, but when it comes to food, the commonality ends. It is poor people, including large segments of poorer nations, who are now going hungry and facing the prospect of starving.

"The coronavirus has been anything but a great equalizer," said Asha Jaffar, a volunteer who brought food to families in the Nairobi slum of Kibera after the fatal stampede. "It's been the great revealer, pulling the curtain back on the class divide and exposing how deeply unequal this country is." Already, 135 million people had been facing acute food shortages, but now with the pandemic, 130 million more could go hungry in 2020, said Arif Husain, chief economist at the World Food Program, a United Nations agency. Altogether, an estimated 265 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation by year's end. "We've never seen anything like this before," Mr. Husain said. "It wasn't a pretty picture to begin with, but this makes it truly unprecedented and uncharted territory." The world has experienced severe hunger crises before, but those were regional and caused by one factor or another — extreme weather, economic downturns, wars or political instability.

This hunger crisis, experts say, is global and caused by a multitude of factors linked to the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing interruption of the economic order: the sudden loss in income for countless millions who were already living hand-to-mouth; the collapse in oil prices; widespread shortages of hard currency from tourism drying up; overseas workers not having earnings to send home; and ongoing problems like climate change, violence, population dislocations and humanitarian disasters. Already, from Honduras to South Africa to India, protests and looting have broken out amid frustrations from lockdowns and worries

about hunger. With classes shut down, over 368 million children have lost the nutritious meals and snacks they normally receive in school. There is no shortage of food globally, or mass starvation from the pandemic — yet. But logistical problems in planting, harvesting and transporting food will leave poor countries exposed in the coming months, especially those reliant on imports, said Johan Swinnen, director general of the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington. While the system of food distribution and retailing in rich nations is organized and automated, he said, systems in developing countries are "labor intensive," making "these supply chains much more vulnerable to Covid-19 and social distancing regulations."

Yet even if there is no major surge in food prices, the food security situation for poor people is likely to deteriorate significantly worldwide. This is especially true for economies like Sudan and Zimbabwe that were struggling before the outbreak, or those like Iran that have increasingly used oil revenues to finance critical goods like food and medicine. In Venezuela, the pandemic could deal a devastating blow to millions already living in the world's largest economic collapse outside wartime. In the sprawling Petare slum on the outskirts of the capital, Caracas, a nationwide lockdown has left Freddy Bastardo and five others in his household without jobs. Their government-supplied rations, which had arrived only once every two months before the crisis, have long run out. "We are already thinking of selling things that we don't use in the house to be able to eat," said Mr. Bastardo, 25, a security guard. "I have neighbors who don't have food, and I'm worried that if protests start, we wouldn't be able to get out of here." Uncertainty over food is also building in India, where daily-wage workers with little or no social safety net face a future where hunger is a more immediate threat than the virus. As wages have dried up, half a million people are estimated to have left cities to walk home, setting off the nation's "largest mass migration since independence," said Amitabh Behar, the chief executive of Oxfam India. On a recent evening, hundreds of migrant workers, who have been stuck in New Delhi after a lockdown was imposed in March with little warning, sat under the shade of a bridge waiting for food to arrive. The Delhi government has set up soup kitchens, yet workers like Nihal Singh go hungry as the throngs at these centers have increased in recent days. "Instead of coronavirus, the hunger will kill us," said Mr. Singh, who was hoping to eat his first meal in a day. Migrants waiting in food lines have fought each other over a plate of

rice and lentils. Mr. Singh said he was ashamed to beg for food but had no other option. "The lockdown has trampled on our dignity," he said. Refugees and people living in conflict zones are likely to be hit the hardest.

The curfews and restrictions on movement are already devastating the meager incomes of displaced people in Uganda and Ethiopia, the delivery of seeds and farming tools in South Sudan and the distribution of food aid in the Central African Republic. Containment measures in Niger, which hosts almost 60,000 refugees fleeing conflict in Mali, have led to surges in the pricing of food, according to the International Rescue Committee. The effects of the restrictions "may cause more suffering than the disease itself," said Kurt Tjossem, regional vice president for East Africa at the International Rescue Committee. Ahmad Bayoush, a construction worker who had been displaced to Idlib Province in northern Syria, said he and many others had signed up to receive food from aid groups, but that it had yet to arrive. "I am expecting real hunger if it continues like this in the north," he said.

The pandemic is also slowing efforts to deal with the historic locust plague that has been ravaging the East and Horn of Africa. The outbreak is the worst the region has seen in decades and comes on the heels of a year marked by extreme droughts and floods. But the arrival of billions of new swarms could further deepen food insecurity, said Cyril Ferrand, head of the Food and Agriculture Organization's resilience team in eastern Africa. Travel bans and airport closures, Mr. Ferrand said, are

interrupting the supply of pesticides that could help limit the locust population and save pastureland and crops. As many go hungry, there is concern in a number of countries that food shortages will lead to social discord. In Colombia, residents of the coastal state of La Guajira have begun blocking roads to call attention to their need for food. In South Africa, rioters have broken into neighborhood food kiosks and faced off with the police. And even charitable food giveaways can expose people to the virus when throngs appear, as happened in Nairobi's shantytown of Kibera earlier this month. "People called each other and came rushing," said Valentine Akinyi, who works at the district government office where the food was distributed. "People have lost jobs. It showed you how hungry they are." To assuage the impact of this crisis, some governments are fixing prices on food items, delivering free food and putting in place plans to send money transfers to the poorest households. Yet communities across the world are also taking matters into their own hands. Some are raising money through crowdfunding platforms, while others have begun programs to buy meals for needy families. On a recent afternoon, Ms. Jaffar and a group of volunteers made their way through Kibera, bringing items like sugar, flour, rice and sanitary pads to dozens of families. A native of the area herself, Ms. Jaffar said she started the food drive after hearing so many stories from families who said they and their children were going to sleep hungry. The food drive has so far reached 500 families. But with all the calls for assistance she's getting, she said, "that's a drop in the ocean."

(NY Times)

Free food grain supply for 8 crore migrants for next 2 months: Nirmala Sitharaman

"Free food grains supply to all migrants for the next 2 months-- for non-card holders, they shall be given 5kg wheat or rice per person and 1 kg chana per family per month for the next 2 months. About 8 crore migrants will benefit from Rs 3,500 crore to be spent on this by the Centre," Sitharaman said. An initiative of 'One Nation One Ration Card' will also be implemented for about 67 crore beneficiaries in at least 23 states covering 83% of the Public Distribution System (PDS) population and that will also be covered by national portability by August 2020, the finance minister said.

PDS ration cards will be made portable to allow migrant workers to use those same ration cards across states, she said. The Union government has earmarked an amount of Rs 3,500 crore for giving free food grains to those 8 crore migrant workers who do not have either

Central or state PDS cards, Sitharaman elaborated.

This is the second phase of announcements by the Union Finance Ministry elaborating on the Centre's Rs 20 lakh crore economic stimulus package. A day earlier, Sitharaman had said that over the next few days, the finance ministry would hold daily media briefings to put forth Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision and share more details on the economic package meant to revive the industry grappling with a 51-day nationwide lockdown. The lockdown had been imposed towards the end of March to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The finance minister on Wednesday had announced a slew of measures under the huge economic package of Rs 20 lakh crore that she said would infuse vigour in the economy and benefit various economic and industrial sectors.

What does the US-China rift mean for the world?

The international system may not revert to Cold War era blocs. But some tough choices lie ahead for countries

The rhetoric between the world's two largest political powers — the United States (US) and China — has heated up. The trend began several years ago, during Barack Obama's presidency. But it grew under Donald Trump's tenure, and intensified following in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Chinese diplomats have adopted a more strident tone, described as "wolf warrior" diplomacy after a popular Chinese action film. US officials like Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Deputy National Security Adviser Matt Pottinger have shot back. The blame game caters to the domestic constituencies of both countries, but also complements the intensifying geopolitical competition between Washington and Beijing. The hardening language and policies by the US and China have worried observers

elsewhere, including in Southeast Asia, Europe, and indeed in India. For more than two decades, many had grown accustomed to a comfortable arrangement that involved bolstering economic relations with China, preserving a stable defence partnership with the US, and enjoying cordial political and diplomatic relations with both. For some countries, defence cooperation with Washington facilitated a beneficial economic partnership with Beijing by mitigating the perceived risks and justifying lower defence expenditures. Now, many are openly worried about the prospect of having to make starker choices.

The appeals to Washington and Beijing to not force others to choose are unlikely to be received sympathetically. Beyond a point, the US and China will do what they want, and

other countries' concerns will be but an afterthought. It is also a self-serving narrative, perpetuating the notion that it is possible to benefit economically from China and security-wise from the US — to have one's cake and eat it too. Consider Malaysia's lukewarm response recently when the US navy opted to defend Malaysia's use of it exclusive economic zone from Chinese intimidation.

Furthermore, it creates a false equivalence between the US and China. China has compelled countries to overlook its island building and militarisation in the South China Sea, and asked them to sign on to a unilateral Chinese political project in the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing also promoted trade groupings such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and multilateral lending agencies such as the

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) that deliberately excluded the US.

By contrast, the US has argued that it has promoted a more open international order, one that is less exclusionary. After all, it was Washington that advocated for China's entry into the UN Security Council, World Bank, and World Trade Organization between 1971 and 2001. More recently, even projects like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) — from which the US eventually withdrew — opted to compete with China by raising standards, leaving open the possibility of expanded membership. But while the US did not generally compel others into adopting exclusionary practices directed at China, there have been some notable exceptions.

For example, in 2004 and 2005, the European Union (EU) — led by certain member-states and

lobbied by defence companies — considered lifting its arms embargo on China. This resulted in a sharp disagreement with the US, which shared both technology and defence supply chains with Europe, at a time when transatlantic ties were already under strain following the 2003 Iraq invasion. Under considerable pressure, and internally divided, the EU eventually opted not to lift its embargo. In hindsight, it is interesting to imagine the counterfactual scenario in which Brussels had stayed the course. A less successful attempt by Washington to get countries to pick sides occurred in 2015, when public pressure was mounted on European allies — and especially the United Kingdom — to not join the China-led AIIB. The decision by the White House to turn the AIIB into a Rubicon was confounding, given that it was an instance of China largely abiding by international standards and that its creation was compelled by US intransigence over institutional reform. This attempt proved an embarrassment for Washington. Many US allies ignored American warnings and joined AIIB anyway. A third, and ongoing, attempt by the US to draw a red line in its competition with China involves allowing Chinese companies to compete for 5G telecommunications contracts. The US is somewhat hamstrung by not being able to provide 5G infrastructure itself, with the beneficiaries of a Chinese boycott likely to be South Korean or European firms. So far, US allies such as Japan and Australia have been at the vanguard of disqualifying Chinese companies, while the UK has openly considered breaking with Washington on the issue. Unlike the previous episodes, which appeared to be aberrations in an otherwise more cooperative international environment, the tussle over 5G may signal the beginning of a new trend. While China drew lines in the sand — both literally, as in the South China Sea, and metaphorically at international institutions — the US has felt compelled to selectively but increasingly do so as well. The world may never revert to the kinds of blocs that characterised the Cold War. But in a more interdependent era, some tough choices are on the horizon.

Chronicling the economic costs of the lockdown

From daily wage workers to businesses, all segments are devastated. India can't afford the lockdown now

The coronavirus disease (Covid-19)-induced pandemic has brought with it days of dark gloom. But last Friday, this feeling was exacerbated with the shocking news that 16 people were run over by a train in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Having lost their livelihood, they were making the painful trek home from their workplace. It was heartrending to see pictures of their meagre possessions and food scattered on the tracks on which they lost their lives. Just two days before the Aurangabad incident, hundreds of kilometres away, there was a horrific incident, in which a poor migrant couple died. Unable to find work and faced with hunger and poverty, Krishna Sahu, a daily wage labourer set off on his bicycle to his village in Jharkhand. He could find no other form of conveyance. Travelling with his wife and two children, he was hit by a speeding vehicle. He and his wife died of injuries and the children are being treated in a hospital. We can only hope that they survive. But what will happen to them? Who will care for them after they are discharged? I am filled with fear for these two children who have lost everything they knew and loved. The image of blood-stained rotis on the rail tracks in Aurangabad will stay with us for a long time. Those who died came from their distant homes to earn enough to be able to eat these and send whatever was left to their families who depended on them. Krishna Sahu undertook his fateful journey in the hope of getting help in his village. A day before Sahu and his wife died, we saw photographs of Sion Hospital in Mumbai where patients were in beds alongside dead bodies that had been

sealed in bags. But then, this is what happens when a country spends less than 2% of its GDP on health. It is clear that however hard the Centre might try, it is not able to manage the crisis brought on by the pandemic. It needs all the help it can get and it must engage civil society in this battle.

The situation in many parts of the country is worrying. In Kathua (Jammu and Kashmir), when workers had to undergo a salary cut, they began rioting. Army vehicles on the roads became a target of their anger. In Haldwani (Uttarakhand), dozens of daily wage workers staged a dharna. Their grievance was that despite being deprived of their livelihood, they were being prevented from going home even though they were willing to make the long journey using their own means. Some migrant workers blocked a road near Agra when they were stopped by the security personnel. Such incidents are being witnessed in several places.

Several state governments have appealed to factory owners and businessmen not to cut salaries or terminate employment for poor workers. In fact, some district magistrates raised this issue with some businessmen.

Their explanation was that they had paid the full wages to their workers for March and it was not possible to go forward with no income coming in from their businesses and no support from the government. When the administration tried to arm-twist them into paying, their reply was that they were willing to go jail as they had no means to pay their workers.

Many big corporate houses are not in favour

of laying-off workers, but the circumstances brought about by the prolonged lockdown and stalled economic activity might force their hand.

Indeed, joblessness has been growing rapidly. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy says that when the lockdown was declared, the unemployment rate in the country was around 7%; and 50 days into the lockdown, it has already touched 27%. Another study suggests that 10 million agricultural labourers in Maharashtra are now jobless. 7.5 million workers in Uttar Pradesh, 6.8 million in Tamil Nadu, 5.2 million in Gujarat, and 4.7 million in West Bengal are also out of work. International agencies predict either a sharp slowdown in growth or an outright recession. The big question now is whether to prolong the lockdown or to get the wheels of the economy moving. The lockdown is saving lives. But it is like riding a tiger which is impossible to dismount. We have to work out a way to save lives and livelihoods at the same time. How can we do this?

One approach that is fraught with danger is to adopt the course suggested by United States President Donald Trump. While announcing his plan to lift the lockdown, he said, "There'll be more deaths, ... the virus will pass, with or without a vaccine". Then he added, "People are losing their jobs. We have to bring it back, and that's what we're doing. We can't sit in the house for the next three years." Some European countries have also adopted this approach. Sweden had refused to implement any lockdown, except for some safety measures.



FBI raid home of Senator Richard Burr and seize his cellphone amid probe into sale of \$1.7M stock

FBI raid home of Senator Richard Burr and seize his cellphone amid probe into sale of \$1.7M stock Burr, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the health committee, sold a large percentage of his stock portfolio in February shortly before the market slumped and just after he began receiving daily briefings on the coronavirus.

The obtaining of the warrant marks a significant escalation into the Justice Department's probe into whether he violated a law that prevents members of Congress from trading on insider information gained from their official line of work. To have acquired the warrant, both federal agents and prosecutors would have needed to prove to a judge they have probable cause to believe criminal wrongdoing had taken place. The Times' source said the Justice Department is examining Burr's communications with his broker.

Across 33 different transactions on February 13, Burr sold off between \$628,000 and \$1.72 million of his holdings, according to ProPublica who first reported on the senator's sell off in March.

Just 24 hours earlier, the health committee received a briefing on the virus. Much of the stock had been invested in businesses that were subsequently hit hard by the plunging market in the weeks that followed.

Before his sell-off, Burr had assured the public that the federal government was well-prepared to handle the virus.

In a February 7 op-ed that he co-authored with another senator, he said

'the United States today is better prepared than ever before to face emerging public health threats, like the coronavirus.'

That month however, according to a recording obtained by NPR, Burr had given a VIP group at an exclusive social club a much more dire preview of the economic impact of the coronavirus, warning it could curtail business travel, cause schools to be closed and result in the military mobilizing to compensate for overwhelmed hospitals.

A spokesperson for Burr declined to comment. The Republican senator, who does not plan to run for reelection in 2022, has previously denied using any information he gained as a senator to benefit him financially in the stock market.

After the stock sales were made public two months ago, Burr said he would ask the Senate Ethics Committee to review them.

And Burr is not the only senator to come under scrutiny for his stock market activity as the COVID-19 outbreak neared the US.

Between late February and early March, Sen. Kelly Loeffler sold stocks valued between \$1.25 million and \$3.1 million in companies that values later dipped significantly, such as ExxonMobil.

Loeffler and her CEO husband Jeffrey Sprecher, who heads the New York Stock Exchange, also purchased stocks valued at between \$450,000 and \$1 million, including in Citrix, a company that benefits when people are working from home.

Following the backlash,

Loeffler and Sprecher liquidated all their stocks.

In an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal, Loeffler argued she'd done nothing wrong and was not required to sell but did so to end the 'distraction' it was causing.

'Although Senate ethics rules don't require it, my husband and I are liquidating our holdings in managed accounts and moving into exchange-traded funds and mutual funds. I will report these exiting transactions in the periodic transaction report I file later this month,' she wrote.

'I'm not doing this because I have to,' she added. 'I've done everything the right way and in compliance with Securities and Exchange

Commission regulations, Senate ethics rules and U.S. law. I'm doing it because the issue isn't worth the distraction. My family's investment accounts are being used as weapons for an assault on my character at a time when we should all be focused on making our country safe and strong.' She later called the mounting scrutiny 'a socialist attack' in an interview with Fox News.

Also ensnared in the scandal is Burr's brother-in-law, Gerald Fauth, who sold between \$97,000 and \$280,000 worth of stock on the same day Burr sold his.

Fauth avoided between \$37,000 and \$118,000 in losses by selling off when he did, considering how steeply the companies' shares fell in weeks after, according to an analysis by Luke Brindle-Khym, a partner and general counsel of Manhattan-based investigative firm QRI.

Brindle-Khym obtained Fauth's financial disclosure from the Office of Government Ethics and shared it with ProPublica. Government forms only require that the value of stock trades be disclosed in ranges. After the February sales, the total value of Fauth's individual stock holdings appears to be between \$680,000 and \$2 million.

A review of Fauth's financial disclosure forms since 2017 show that he is not a frequent stock trader, but that he also had a major day of sales in August 2019.

On Feb. 13, Fauth or

his spouse sold between \$15,001 and \$50,000 of Altria, the tobacco company; between \$50,001 and \$100,000 of snack food maker Mondelez International; and between \$1,001 and \$15,000 of home furnishings retailer Williams-Sonoma.

He also sold stakes in several oil companies, which have been hit particularly hard, including between \$15,001 and \$50,000 of Chevron; between \$1,001 and \$15,000 of BP and between \$15,001 and \$50,000 of Royal Dutch Shell. Burr has denied

coordinating his stock market trading with his brother-in-law.

Congress prohibited lawmakers from acting on privileged intelligence they obtain in their public office positions, such as during briefings with high-level federal officials, in 2012.

Known as the STOCK act, lawmakers must disclose their stock market activity, but are however allowed to own stock, even in industries they may be responsible for overseeing.

The law passed the Senate in 2012 in a vote of 96-3. Among the three opposing senators was Richard Burr.

U.K. High Court rejects Vijay Mallya's plea for permission to move Supreme Court

against the dismissal of his appeal challenging the lower court's approval of his extradition to India in the IDBI Bank fraud case. "The High Court has dismissed Mr. Mallya's request to appeal in the Supreme Court. The UK government's Home Office may soon issue a directive allowing his extradition. We have to bring him back within 28 days after he exhausts all legal avenues," said a senior Enforcement Directorate (ED) official. Mr. Mallya may be brought on board a special plane, as international flight operations have been suspended due to the global lockdown.

Following a hearing in February, a division bench of the High Court of Justice, on April 20, turned down Mr. Mallya's appeal against the Senior District Judge's order on December 10, 2018, for his extradition. The High Court concluded that a prima facie case was made out

against the businessman for fraud, misrepresentation to the bank in securing credit facilities, conspiracy and money laundering, as adjudged by the lower court. The CBI and the ED have alleged that between September 1, 2009, and January 24, 2017, Mr. Mallya conspired with A. Ragunathan, S. Borkar, A. Nadkarni, A. Shah, Y. Agarwal, B. Batra, O. Bundellu, S. Srinivasan, R. Sridhar and others to commit cheating.

Sanction of loans
The accused fraudulently got loans sanctioned from the bank to the now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines (KFA) in the order of (a) Rs.1,500 million on October 7, 2009, (b) Rs.2,000 million on November 4, 2009, and (c) Rs.7,500 million on November 27, 2009, with the intention not to repay them. Mr. Mallya was allegedly involved in false representation to the bank on KFA's financial condition and

the value and/or availability of securities to be relied upon. The funds raised through loans were diverted and laundered.

The probe agencies have accused Mr. Mallya and others of wilful loan defaults to the tune of Rs.9,000 crore. He had flown out of India on March 2, 2016. After the CBI filed a charge sheet in the IDBI Bank case, the Indian government made an extradition request on February 9, 2017. Subsequently, the UK police arrested him. He was released on conditional on April 18, 2017.

Following the ED's request for extradition in the money laundering case, Mr. Mallya was rearrested on October 3, 2017, and again bailed. The ED attached assets worth Rs.13,000 crore in connection with the cases against him. On its request, a Mumbai court declared him a fugitive under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.

Operator of Deceptive Crowdfunding Scheme Banned from Future Crowdfunding as Part of FTC Settlement

(News Agencies)The operator of a deceptive crowdfunding scheme will be banned permanently from engaging in crowdfunding activities as part of a settlement with the Federal Trade Commission over allegations that he used contributors' funds on himself rather than to deliver the high-tech backpack he promised. In its complaint, the FTC alleged that Douglas Monahan, operating through his company, iBackPack of Texas, LLC, raised more than \$800,000 from consumers through four crowdfunding campaigns. According to the FTC, Monahan falsely claimed the funds would be used to develop a

handful of products, including an "iBackPack" that would incorporate batteries for charging laptops and phones, cables, and a Bluetooth speaker. Despite his reassurances to contributors and the crowdfunding platforms Indiegogo and Kickstarter, the FTC alleged Monahan never delivered any of the promised products and instead used the money he raised for personal expenses and marketing. "Crowdfunding is a legitimate way to raise money for your business venture, so long as you use that money for the business and not yourself," said Andrew Smith, Director of the FTC's Bureau of

Consumer Protection. "When companies like iBackPack misuse the money they raise, that's when the FTC steps in." As part of the settlement, Monahan is permanently banned from engaging in any future crowdfunding activities and from misrepresenting his ability to deliver any good or service or the terms on which he will provide a refund. In addition, he has agreed to a judgment totaling nearly \$800,000, which will be suspended due to Monahan's inability to pay. The entire amount will be due if he is found to have misrepresented his finances. The Commission vote approving the

stipulated final order was 5-0. The FTC filed the proposed order in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Galveston Division. NOTE: Stipulated final orders have the force of law when approved and signed by the District Court judge. The Federal Trade Commission works to promote competition, and protect and educate consumers. You can learn more about consumer topics and file a consumer complaint online or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357). Like the FTC on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, read our blogs, and subscribe to press releases for the latest FTC news and resources.

FTC Halts Online Subscription Scheme that Deceived People with "Free Trial" Offers

Marketers of cosmetics, supplements defrauded consumers out of \$74.5 million, agency alleges

(News Agencies)The operators of an online subscription scheme agreed to settle a Federal Trade Commission complaint alleging that the defendants duped consumers out of more than \$74.5 million by luring them with supposedly "free trial" offers for cosmetics and dietary supplements, then enrolling them in subscriptions and billing them without their consent. The court orders settling the FTC's complaint ban the defendants from negative option marketing, in which the absence of affirmative consumer action constitutes consent to be charged for goods or services. The orders require the defendants to get consumers' consent before billing them. The orders also impose financial judgments, which the FTC may use to send refunds to affected consumers.

"These companies promised free products for only the cost of shipping, but then charged consumers for expensive subscriptions," said Andrew Smith, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "The FTC will continue to go after companies that offer supposedly 'free' trial offers, but hide the real terms and conditions in the fine print." According to the FTC's July 2019 complaint, since at least April 2016, AH Media Group, LLC (AH Media) and the company's owners, Henry Block and Alan Schill, pitched at least eight different product lines to consumers. The defendants

primarily sold cosmetics and dietary supplements with claims that they promote younger-looking skin or weight loss. The FTC alleged that the defendants used deceptive websites to charge consumers for both the "trial" product and ongoing monthly subscription plans. The defendants claimed consumers would have to pay only a small shipping and handling fee for the trial, while hiding the actual cost. After two weeks, the defendants charged consumers \$90 for the

trial product and enrolled them in unwanted and costly negative option subscription plans. The defendants allegedly used a network of shell companies and straw owners to process consumer payments. By using dozens of nominally distinct companies, the FTC alleges the defendants circumvented underwriting requirements and monitoring programs and made it more difficult to be detected by consumers and law enforcement. In October 2019, the FTC filed an

amended complaint adding Zanelo, LLC as a defendant, alleging it also was active in the AH Media scheme. In addition to the ban on negative option marketing, the proposed settlement order against Schill and Zanelo, LLC bans the defendants from misrepresenting any fact material to consumers concerning any good or service, and requires the defendants to provide clear and conspicuous disclosures regarding fees and refunds. That order also requires the defendants to obtain

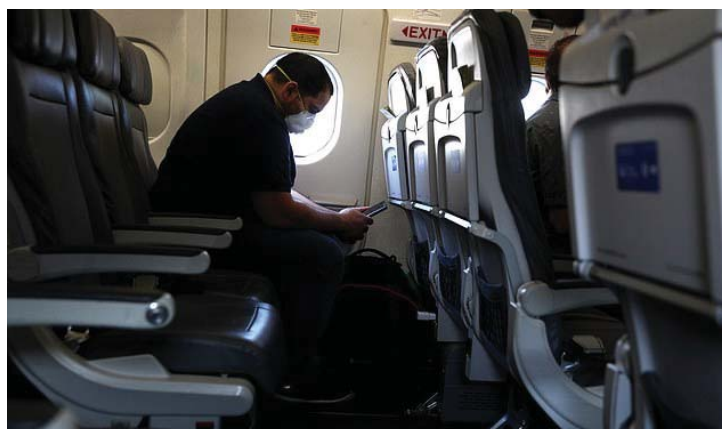
the express consent from consumers before charging them or debiting money from their bank accounts, and requires that they get preauthorization before making any electronic fund transfers. Finally, the order imposes a \$74.5 million judgment against the defendants. The proposed order against AH Media and Block contains the same conduct provisions as the Schill and Zanelo, LLC order, but imposes a \$67 million judgment against the defendants.

Boeing CEO predicts a major US airline will fold by the end of the year and says it will take 3-5 years for the industry to bounce back from coronavirus pandemic

(News Agencies)Boeing's CEO is predicting that a major US airline will go under by the end of the year and says it will take between three to five years for the industry to bounce back as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. In an interview with NBC's Today on Tuesday, CEO Dave Calhoun said the threat of COVID-19 on the airline industry was 'grave'. When asked if he thought a major US airline would fold as a result of COVID-19, Calhoun said: 'Yes, most likely.' Calhoun, who did not name any specific airlines, predicted that something would happen by September, which is the month when the US government's payroll aid to the airline industry is set to expire. When that aid expires, it could result in widespread layoffs among various airlines.

Calhoun said he doesn't expect passenger traffic to reach even a quarter of its pre-pandemic levels by September, creating the need for airlines to make 'adjustments' as they weather the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. 'Traffic levels will not be back to 100 percent. They won't

even be back to 25 percent. Maybe by the end of the year we approach 50 percent,'



he said. 'So there will definitely be adjustments that have to be made on the part of the airlines.' Calhoun said the situation was 'grave' but the airline and aviation would bounce back. 'pocalyptic does actually accurately describe the moment but I don't think it describes the recovery and I don't think it describes the medium or long term for the airline or aviation industry,' Calhoun said. 'We believe we will return to a growth rate similar to the past but it might take us

three to five years to get there.' Calhoun said his view of the future of the industry differed from that of billionaire Warren Buffet who sold off his entire \$4 billion stake in major US airlines earlier this month. Buffet, at the time, said the 'world has changed' for the airline industry. 'I don't happen to share the view,' Calhoun said. 'I share the near-term turmoil. Near-term for me doesn't mean a few months. I believe it's three full years before we return to the traffic levels that we had just in 2019, and then probably another two before we begin to return to the growth rates that we used to have. 'I'm hopeful that somewhere between here and there, there's a vaccine, and that the moment of high anxiety begins to really subside. But I still believe in the future of the industry.' Calhoun acknowledged that the air travel experience would be very different, saying that face masks would likely be required as well as temperature checks in airports. He said the interior of a plane with its air circulation was designed to 'prevent transmission of exactly this kind of airborne carrier'.

ਗੁਰਮੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਗਿੱਲ

President, Indian Overseas Congress USA (Punjab Chapter)

ਨੂੰ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦਾ ਕੋਆਰਡੀਨੇਟਰ ਨਿਯੁਕਤ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾਣ 'ਤੇ

ਬਹੁਤ ਬਹੁਤ ਮੁਬਾਰਕਾਂ

ਇਹ ਸਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਮਾਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਗੱਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਪੰਨਵਾਦੀ ਹਾਂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ

ਕੈਪਟਨ ਅਮਰਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ

ਮੁੱਖ ਮੰਤਰੀ, ਪੰਜਾਬ

ਰਾਣਾ ਗੁਰਮੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੋਢੀ

ਐਨਆਰਆਈ ਖੇਡਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਯੁਵਕ ਮਾਮਲੇ ਮੰਤਰੀ,
ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਰਕਾਰ



ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਵਿਚ ਕਾਂਗਰਸ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਦੇ ਝੰਡਾ ਬਰਦਾਰ (ਪੰਜਾਬ) ਚੈਪਟਰ ਯੂ. ਐਸ. ਏ

ਗੁਰਮੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਗਿੱਲ

ਨੂੰ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਦਾ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਕੋਆਰਡੀਨੇਟਰ ਨਿਯੁਕਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਅਸੀਂ ਆਸ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਅੱਗੇ ਵੀ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਪਾਰਟੀ

ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਰਹਿਣਗੇ

ਅਤੇ ਸੌਂਪੀ ਗਈ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਪੂਰੀ ਲਗਨ ਅਤੇ ਤਨਦੇਹੀ ਨਾਲ ਨਿਭਾਉਣਗੇ।



Rajinder Singh
Happy



Harwider
S. Walia



Ulisses Xavier is used to seeing death up close. It comes with the territory when you're a gravedigger. But it had never come at him at the speed and scale seen since Manaus, his hometown in the Brazilian Amazon, got swept up in the coronavirus pandemic. "When I first saw how fast the number of burials was going up, I got scared," said Xavier, 52, who works at the public cemetery in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state in northwestern Brazil. "Now I've gotten used to it. I just hope it will be over soon." Before the pandemic, this city of 2.1 million people registered 30 deaths per day on average. Now, the number has risen to about 100. Brazil is the hardest-hit Latin American country in the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 11,000 deaths so far. And Manaus is the Brazilian city with the highest mortality rate, with 680 deaths from 7,198 confirmed infections. Xavier's workday has changed



Long hours, mass graves, PPE

A Brazilian gravedigger's daily odyssey in the times of Covid-19

After the hospital network in Brazil's Manaus hit maximum capacity due to the Covid-19 outbreak, gravediggers started digging trenches to bury multiple victims at once.

dramatically: long hours, some suspected he digs individual graves, He and his colleagues earn a little extra money making wooden crosses on the side, an option for mourning families that cannot afford a tombstone. They paint each

one sky-blue, with the deceased's name, dates and grave number in black. Sales have doubled to about six per day since the start of the crisis. With courage reminiscent of his namesake — the hero of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey* — Xavier says he is not afraid for himself, even though he has lost friends to the pandemic. "I'm afraid of bringing the virus home," he told AFP however. He has developed a sacred routine to keep his family safe after he arrives home on his bicycle each day. "As soon as I get back to the house, I strip down, take a shower, wash my clothes. I only give my daughter and granddaughters a kiss after that," he said. His brother, Hercules, 53, has symptoms resembling COVID-19, and suspects he may have it. The brothers, who are also neighbours, now greet each other only through the wall between their houses. Ulisses' wife, also 53, has meanwhile moved out of the house temporarily to avoid getting sick.

Migrants and governments: A Covid-19 story of mismatch

Migrants are in news during coronavirus lockdown for all wrong reasons. Despite the government's assurance, the lot of migrant workers has not improved.

India always had an internal problem of migrants. The Covid-19 pandemic has only made it look worse. More than 10 crore people are estimated to be migrant workers in India. A vast majority of them have been pushed out from poorer states to more developed ones. With the country going under a lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, the migrant workers are in desperation to go back home. The railways on Monday said it has run 468 Shramik Special trains so far, ferrying over 5 lakh migrants. They are but a fraction of those who wish to go home. That the migrants carry the burden of India's GDP growth on their shoulders is evident from their labour in construction industry, farms of agriculturally developed states, sprawling offices in the services sector, vendors lining up vegetable and fruit markets in big urban clusters, milk and food delivery boys, newspaper hawkers and factories in manufacturing hubs

of the country. That the migrant workers have never been the focus of serious policy making of governments is also evident from the fact that there is no concrete number of migrants in India. States have looked clearly clueless in having an effective SOP for sending back migrant workers home in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. If the government had accurate data about the number of migrant workers, their average monthly income, their family size and their cost of living, it would have known how much they had in their pockets when Shramik Special trains were allowed to run for those stranded in camps. Had there been data, the railways would not have charged fare plus an additional Rs 50 from the migrant workers after 40 days of lockdown. No government likes to have a policy that tests principles of humanity.

Railways charges regular sleeper class fare, Rs 30 as superfast charges and an

additional Rs 20 from each passenger on the Shramik Special trains. The passengers are also charged to ferry them from camps to railway stations; for example, Karnataka charges Rs 140 per head. This happened despite all the governments saying that they were trying to find a way to reach out to migrants. Had there been enough data in the government's information network, the impoverishing migrants would have been served food at their doorsteps not only by government agencies but also the NGOs. Since needed relief from the government did not reach the migrants, they took the most extreme steps along highways and railways lines in the hope of reaching home. Some of them died enroute due to exhaustion, dehydration or heart attack. More unfortunate of them were hit by goods trains or trucks. Had there been a system in place that could connect the lifeline of Indian economy and the

government, many a life could have been saved. What the governments central or any of the states have not admitted is that they are clueless about the migrants' problems. Some steps are being taken now, especially by those states which sustain their growth stories with the supply of migrant workforce. Karnataka, for example, announced a relief package for migrant workers last week.

The plan is direct cash transfer to workers engaged in construction sector. This follows meetings between Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa and builders, who opposed the state's decision to send migrant workers their home states. But there is a problem with the one-time cash transfer relief plan. The government said the money would go to only registered workers of the construction industry. While the construction sector in Karnataka has about 16 lakh workers, only

2.5 lakh have registration cards. This also means that most of the inter-state construction workers are ineligible for the relief package brought out "to prevent construction workers from leaving" Karnataka.

While over 2 lakh migrant workers have registered themselves for tickets in the Shramik Special trains, the number is over 4 lakh in neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Before the railways modified its Shramik Special guidelines, Tamil Nadu would have required 350 trains to ferry all those registered for the programme. Maharashtra, perhaps the biggest home for migrants and also the worst coronavirus-affected state, last week sent back tens of migrants who had walked miles to board a special train asking them to first get online passes. The migrant workers were at fault of not knowing the order for the same that was issued in Marathi. Not all migrants learn the language of the state they work in.



Why are Trump and Obama in a new spat over Flynn?

The Justice Department's surprising decision to drop all charges against Donald Trump's former national security adviser has set off a cascade of accusations and counter-accusations. And at the centre of it are the present and previous presidents.

Michael Flynn was forced to resign early in the Trump presidency for lying to Vice-President Mike Pence about his contacts with Russian government officials.

He had also pleaded guilty to lying to FBI agents investigating ties between Russia and the Trump campaign.

After years of legal wrangling, however, the former three-star general is now a free man.

What are Trump and Obama saying?

Obama has largely held his tongue about the actions of his successor but on Friday in a call to 3,000 former aides and officials that was leaked to the media, he let loose. "There is no precedent that anybody can find for someone who has been charged with perjury just getting off scot-free," he said. "That's the kind of stuff where you begin to get worried that basic - not just institutional norms - but our basic understanding of rule of law is at risk." Trump, who has never been shy about criticising - or blaming - his predecessor, responded with a flurry of social media posts and retweets on Sunday, accusing Obama and his aides of engaging in a criminal effort to undermine his presidency. He amplified the assertions of right-wing commentators and

lashed out at Obama, former Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe, former Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, late-night television host Jimmy Kimmel and numerous reporters and media outlets.

"The biggest political crime in American history, by far!" the president wrote, retweeting a conservative talk-radio host who accused Obama officials of sabotaging Trump in the days before he took office.

Why did it take off?

The president frequently used the term "Obamagate" - a reference to the Nixon-era Watergate scandal - in connection with his allegations, and prominent conservative activists and Trump-affiliated support groups quickly picked up the hashtag.

Although the term predates Trump's usage, on Sunday it received more than two million tweets - further evidence of the power of the president's social media platform. The hashtag had

been in use in obscure and fringe right-wing circles for a while, particularly amongst a minority of MAGA and QAnon users, but it never went beyond those small circles.

The new spike in its traffic began early Sunday in the US, and about 86% of that was in the form of retweets, suggesting there was some degree of coordination. But there was no evidence of botnets being involved.

Why were the charges dropped?

The decision to drop the charges of making a false statement to the FBI were made by a US government lawyer who Attorney General Bill Barr appointed to review the prosecution. Because the FBI investigation into Flynn and his contacts with Russian officials had no basis "at that stage", Barr said, Flynn should not have been charged for lying about it.

Flynn had been included in the FBI's counter-intelligence inquiry that ran through much of 2016, but he became a focus of

the agency's efforts after he publicly denied he had discussed US sanctions on Russia with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak after Trump's election. The FBI had surveillance recordings of Flynn's conversation that proved the contrary. Flynn was not yet part of the new administration when he was discussing the softening of sanctions. The move to drop the charges has provoked a firestorm of criticism, including from Democrats in Congress.

"The current leadership of the department has taken extraordinary steps to protect the president's allies and punish his enemies, real and imagined," they wrote. "In our view, these cases represent a systematic breakdown of impartial justice at the Department of Justice and suggest overt political bias, if not outright corruption."

Do Trump's accusations against Obama have any merit?

The president has long viewed the entirety of the investigation into

Russian efforts to meddle in the 2016 US election as an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of his presidency. As evidence emerged that some of the FBI Russia-probe team privately expressed criticism of Trump as a presidential candidate, he has felt validated.

These views have been further compounded as former FBI Director James Comey, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and now Obama himself have all roundly criticised Trump, his policies and his presidency. In the latter months of 2016, the US government was receiving increasingly dire warnings from its intelligence agencies of Russian efforts to disrupt the 2016 presidential election - efforts that the Robert Mueller special counsel investigation further detailed.

He also unearthed evidence of contact between members of the Trump campaign and Russian nationals. The FBI counter-intelligence investigation was initiated to probe these contacts and activities. Obama-era officials in the intelligence community, the FBI and the White House continue to view the actions they took based on this evidence as fully justified. Trump and his supporters only see their assertions and indignity as further evidence of wrongdoing and cover-up. "I wouldn't be surprised if you see a lot of things happen over the next number of weeks," Trump said in the Oval Office on Thursday after learning of the Flynn news. The acrimony in the fight over Flynn could be just getting started.



Coronavirus is spreading under the radar in US homeless shelters

Close living quarters and a lack of testing among homeless people across the United States threaten the nation's ability to control the pandemic, researchers say.



Researchers are beginning to test homeless individuals in the United States for the virus that causes COVID-19 — and are discovering that the situation is out of control: tests are rare and outbreaks are spreading below the radar.

The lack of testing and assistance for people living in group settings — such as those in homeless shelters, nursing homes and prisons — threatens their lives as well as the nation's ability to curb COVID-19 because these communities can rapidly become the epicentres of new outbreaks that will spread, say researchers. Scientists are now scrambling to collect data and model the transmission of coronavirus under different group-living situations in hopes of guiding strategies to curb outbreaks.

Evidence-based solutions might protect not only the roughly 1.4 million people who use a homeless shelter or transitional housing in the United States each year — a growing population as unemployment soars and prisons release people to ease crowding — but also other people who don't have the luxury of separating themselves from others. "What we're seeing in this first wave in the US is that the largest clusters are in populations where people don't have a lot of agency," says Gina Neff, a sociologist at the University of Oxford, UK. "These populations will become the sources of new outbreaks, even when we feel like we kind of have it under control." Current testing policies are missing a significant amount of infections in at-risk groups. In one recent study, researchers found that only one individual out of 147 who tested positive in a homeless shelter in

Boston, Massachusetts, would have met the official criterion for testing — a fever¹.

Missed cases are a major problem because the disease has been shown to spread like wildfire in communal spaces. Singapore, for example, seemed to have successfully controlled the epidemic, until thousands of cases were discovered among migrant workers living in over-crowded dormitories.

In the United States, surveying homeless populations is hampered by a lack of resources available for people living below the poverty line. Private rooms are hard to come by, as are funds for medical care and contact tracing. "The moment you get a positive test, there's a spider web of decisions to make," explains Shana McDevitt, a researcher working on COVID-19 testing at the University of California, Berkeley. "We are in a period of time where the policies need to catch up to the tests."

Shelters given space

Before COVID-19 was reported in China, Helen Chu, an infectious-disease specialist at the University of Washington in Seattle, and her colleagues were studying how the influenza virus spread through homeless communities. "We wanted to develop a strategy that could be implemented for treatment and prevention in case a pandemic hit," she says. Coronavirus swooped in before they could finish. In March, Chu's team began surveying its study participants for the new coronavirus, too. So far, she says, most of those who have tested positive don't have obvious COVID-19 symptoms.

Researchers found something similar in Boston. In the study of 147 people testing positive at one shelter, just 11 reported a cough¹. That study is changing practices at the network of shelters affiliated with the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, says Travis Baggett, director of research at the programme and an author on the study. "Until that point, we were screening people by checking their temperatures, and using that as the basis for testing," he explains. "But our data shows that if we aren't more proactive, we'll be too late to prevent an outbreak." But most shelters still reserve tests for people with symptoms—or they only test broadly after an outbreak has occurred. The results of this policy are troubling. By the time a person from a shelter in San Francisco had been diagnosed with COVID-19 in April, for example, more than 90 other residents and 10 people who worked there were already infected. To influence policies, Baggett is running computer simulations to work out how many people will become infected, hospitalized or die from COVID-19 if the situation remains as it is — compared with the result if people are tested on a regular basis, regardless of symptoms. Costs are taken into account, too. "We're trying to inform policymakers about different ways of doing things," he says.

Towards a similar aim, another team of researchers from three US universities released a report in late March that lays out some minimal needs that might slow the spread of COVID-19 among homeless people, such as providing rooms for individuals at high risk of

severe disease because of underlying health conditions. In projecting the "costs of inaction", they find that, without further interventions, more than 21,300 homeless people in the United States will need to be hospitalized for COVID-19, and 3,400 will die. The authors assume a higher rate of transmission than that in the general population, and more-severe cases because of the prevalence of underlying diseases. Although the average age of homeless individuals in several cities is around 50, studies have found that they experience strokes, falls and other health issues typical of people in their 70s and 80s. Canaries in the coal mine Health departments in the United States have started implementing interventions, such as relocating homeless people to stadiums, where beds are spaced two metres apart. And in San Francisco, Seattle and other cities, officials have reserved hotels as places in which to isolate people with COVID-19 who don't have homes. Yet the vast majority of homeless individuals still remain in group facilities or in tents on the street, says Margot Kushel, a researcher-clinician who studies homelessness at the University of California, San Francisco. She points out that many of the people sleeping in shelters have low-paid 'essential jobs', such as those in grocery

stores or warehouses. This means they could become infected at work or in the shelters, and spread the virus to others. "I'm not going to stop advocating for the use of hotels and dorms," she says, "but I'm also pushing for a harm-reduction approach based on science." Kushel says that, with data on how many people are infected in different settings, her team can estimate how often to screen, how far apart people need to be, whether distributing face masks helps, and whether encampments are safer than indoor options. This last aspect matters in California, because about 91,000 people there live outside. But these comparisons require much more data on rates of infection. The shortcoming is not necessarily because ample tests don't exist. For example, McDevitt says that her team at the University of California, Berkeley, has extra testing capability, but doctors and health officials are reluctant to recommend that everyone in a shelter is screened because officials lack plans for how to follow-up on the results when infected people have no health insurance, money or housing. Furthermore, she says, a positive result means that the health department must work out who else the person might have been in contact with — and screen them. It's a laborious task, but one McDevitt wants to see done.

She says surveillance of homeless populations can also inform policymakers about whether an outbreak is waxing or waning in their communities, because people there are so vulnerable to infections. "They're kind of a canary in the coal mine," she says. Many social workers await a stronger public health response, too. Donald Frazier, the executive director of Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, a non-profit organization based in Berkeley, says he cannot let new individuals into the shelters in his network without tests to reveal their coronavirus status. A related problem, he says, is that California is releasing thousands of inmates from prisons and jails to decrease the risk of outbreaks there, but they aren't testing them first — and many have nowhere to go. "It's a mess," he says. "I want to make sure my employees and our folks are safe, and there's no way to know that." Researchers working to dampen the toll of COVID-19 in other crowded spaces, such as nursing homes and meat-packing plants, worry that policymakers aren't concerned enough about outbreaks among marginalized populations. Kushel says, "As scientists, it's our role to raise up these issues and help the public understand how viruses do discriminate since we live in an inequitable world."



New cases of HIV rise in Eastern Europe, decline in the West

Almost 160,000 people were diagnosed in Europe with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, according to data from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional office for Europe.

More than 130,000 people were newly diagnosed with HIV last year in Eastern Europe, the highest rate ever for the region, while the number of new cases in Western Europe declined, global public health experts said on Wednesday. European Union and European Economic Area countries saw a reduction in 2017 rates, mainly driven by a 20% drop since 2015 among men who have sex with men. That left Europe's overall increasing trend less steep than previously.

All told, almost 160,000 people were diagnosed in Europe with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, according to data from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional office for Europe. "It's hard to talk about good news in the face of another year of unacceptably high numbers of people infected with HIV," said Zsuzsanna Jakab, director of the WHO regional office. Calling on governments and health officials to recognise the seriousness of the situation, she urged them: "Scale up your response now." The United Nations AIDS agency UNAIDS warned in July that complacency was starting to stall the fight against the global epidemic, with the pace of progress not matching what is needed. Some 37 million people worldwide are infected with HIV.

Stay Healthy And Super Fit With Dried Fruits And These Healthy Bars

Dried fruits contain little to no fat. They also contain significant calories per serving, making them a natural source of energy for athletes. They are also a good supplement for people seeking to gain weight in a healthy way.



As healthy living has become a catchword these days, people have taken to eating dried fruits and health bars. Experts say these can give natural nutrients. V.V. Mani, Director, Operations, Unibic, and Suhasni Sampath, Co-Founder, Yoga Bars, explain how dry fruits and nuts used in health snack bars help the cause of healthy living:

Dried fruits generally contain more fiber than the same-sized serving of their fresh counterparts. Fiber helps in keeping your digestive system running smoothly.

The various dry fruits are packed naturally with a mix of nutritional elements like potassium, calcium, magnesium, zinc, iron, carotenoids, antioxidants, vitamins, dietary fiber, flavonoids, selenium and more apart from the good quality fat and protein that these provide. Dried fruits generally contain more fiber than the same-sized serving of their

fresh counterparts.

These help in various ways like increase of good cholesterol, reduction in bad cholesterol, maintaining blood pressure, blood sugar control, thyroid control, improving heart function, bowel

movement, skin health, hair control, cancer fighting properties, improving bone health, improved vision, easing digestion and fighting anaemia to name a few. Many of the dry fruits are low in glycemic index, and so, they help slow release of energy and control blood sugar.

Because most of the water is extracted from fruits, their nutrients are condensed into a small package. Dried fruits like apricots, raisins, prunes and figs contain high amounts of beta carotene, vitamin E, niacin, iron, magnesium, potassium and calcium. Dried fruits contain little to no fat. They also contain significant calories per serving, making them a natural source of energy for athletes. They are also a good supplement for people seeking to gain weight in a healthy way. Dried fruits like apricots, raisins, prunes and figs contain high amounts of beta carotene, vitamin E, niacin, iron, magnesium, potassium and calcium.



Obese children more likely to develop asthma than kids of a healthy weight, warns study

Parents, please take note. Your child's weight plays an important role in determining his or her asthma risk. Obese or overweight children are at an increased risk of asthma, a new study has found.

US Researchers say it is likely to develop the lung condition than children of a healthy weight. The findings suggest that the incidence of an asthma diagnosis among children with obesity was significantly higher than in those in a normal weight range and that 23-27% of new asthma cases were directly attributable to obesity.



asthma is among the most prevalent childhood conditions and comes at a high cost to patients, families and the greater health system," said co-author Terri Finkel from Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando. "There are few preventable risk factors to reduce the incidence of asthma, but our data show that reducing the onset of childhood obesity could significantly lower the public health burden of asthma," Finkel added. For the study published in the journal Paediatrics, the research team analysed medical records of more than 500,000 children. The

"Paediatric

researchers reviewed data of patients aged two to 17 without a history of asthma, receiving care from six paediatric academic medical centres between 2009 and 2015. Overweight or obese patients were matched with normal weight patients of the same age, gender, race, ethnicity, insurance type and location of care. The researchers found that



obesity among children with asthma appears to increase disease severity. Being overweight was identified as a modest risk factor for asthma, and the association was diminished when the most stringent definition of asthma was used.

Usha Uthup, other artists power India's new song in fight against Covid-19

The song combines English lyrics with notes and beats of Indian classical music and spreads the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, or the world is one family.

The external affairs ministry released the song "United We Fight", featuring musicians such as Usha Uthup, Joe Alvares, Pandit Rakesh Chaurasiya and Ustad Faisal Qureshi, to convey a message of hope for the fight against Covid-19.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the ministry's autonomous organisation for building cultural relations with other countries and projecting India's soft power, brought together composers, musicians and singers from across India, who made

recordings in their homes, for the song.

"United We Fight" was written and composed by Joe Alvares, and features vocals by Usha Uthup, Salim Merchant, Shefali Alvares Rashid, Benny Dayal, Sonam Kalra, Chandan Bala Kalyan, Joe Alvares, Salome and Samira. It also features musical contributions from Tubby, Pandit Ravi Chari, Pandit Rakesh Chaurasiya and Ustad Faisal Qureshi.

The song combines English lyrics with notes and beats of Indian classical music and spreads the message of Vasudhaiva

Kutumbakam, or the world is one family. It carries a "message of hope, joy, resilience, fighting spirit and never-say-die attitude of all in our collective fight against Covid-19", according to a statement from the ministry. The coronavirus has had a "huge impact on humanity, cutting across all boundaries, physical and social, of nations, caste, class, colour, religion and belief systems, bringing the world to its knees", but people have stood united, helping, sharing knowledge and coordinating with each other, cutting across

boundaries in the fight against Covid-19, the statement said.

"This composition is an expression of our deep appreciation and gratitude to all brave Covid warriors the world over, risking their lives to protect ours. It is a homage to all the artists and performers who represent the cultural legacy of our countries and who contribute to keep our cultural heritage vibrant and alive, especially in these difficult times," it added.

The song is also a tribute to the countless individuals silently helping neighbours,



strangers and people around the fight against the them in these times of Coronavirus and many such distress. It is also a challenges that humanity "message to the world that and the human race face", together we shall surely win the ministry said.

James Cameron claims Avatar 2 could still be ready for release by December 2021 thanks to New Zealand's COVID-19 response



While studios and fans are still dealing with movie theaters around the world being closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak, James Cameron is still confident Avatar 2 can hit its intended date.

The 65-year-old filmmaker has been shooting both Avatar 2 and Avatar 3 for the past few years, with Avatar 2 currently slated for a December 17, 2021 release. While Cameron admits the COVID-19 shutdown has 'put a major crimp in our stride,' the director admitted to Empire that he still thinks the sequel will arrive on time. I want to get back

to work on Avatar 2, which right now we're not allowed to do under state emergency laws or rules. So it's all on hold right now,' Cameron said from his home in Malibu.

The filmmaker added that, just before everyone went into quarantine, he was getting set to, 'shoot down in New Zealand, so that got pushed. We're trying to get back to it as quick as we can.' Although the filmmaker is not quite working the way he had hoped to on the sequel, he hopes that New Zealand's aggressive response to the virus could mean there will be no release date delays. 'On the bright

side, New Zealand seems to have been very effective in controlling the virus and their goal is not mitigation, but eradication, which they believe that they can do with aggressive contact tracing and testing,' the director said.

'So there's a very good chance that our shoot might be delayed a couple of months, but we can still do it. So that's good news,' the filmmaker added. While plans for principal photography have been pushed back, digital work is still being done by visual effects artists working from home.

Lara Dutta on not being taken seriously as producer

Lara Dutta, who turned producer with Chalo Dilli in 2011, feels women are not trusted with the business aspect in the Hindi film industry.

ctor Lara Dutta said that the Hindi film industry is still male-driven and doesn't take women as actors and producers seriously. The actor said it has been over 15 years since she joined movies and the wide-ranging conversations around pay disparity and gender inclusivity have started only recently.

"Our industry has always been male-driven and male-dominated. There have been interesting conversations that have started in the last few years, including pay disparity, more inclusion. But as a woman, I've faced (not being taken seriously) on many

different levels, as an actor and especially as a producer," Lara told PTI.

The actor, who made her debut as a producer with Chalo Dilli in 2011, said people in showbiz don't invest their trust in women producers, specifically when it comes to the business aspect. "No commercial actors were producing their own films when I started. That trend caught on later and today, you have a lot more turning producer, like Anushka (Sharma), Deepika (Padukone). But a lot of times I feel people are very happy to listen to the creative ideas that you have, but not necessarily the business

side of things. So they're constantly looking over your shoulder. You face it pretty much every day," she said. Lara said it was this battle with sexism that was also one of the reasons why her character as a cop in Disney+ Hotstar VIP's series Hundred resonated with her.

"In the police force, especially the women police officers I interacted with... it's not just dealing with this kind of stuff for them. A lot of the women told us that there was no space left for any kind of femininity. The last thing we want them to say is 'oh she's grumpy because she's on her periods.' So they actually become like one of the guys

in their thinking or mannerisms. To live like that day in and day out, I can imagine is harder than we go through," she added. While her debut web series is currently streaming, the actor said work on her production slate is also "on" amid lockdown.

"I'm an extremely hands-on producer. I love to be involved in all aspects, so for me, the last year has been super hectic. Hundred was being shot for four-and-a-half months, I also launched my entrepreneurial line. The work on the production front is still on, a lot of the projects are being done internationally so the writing takes a lot more time



there than what happens place, it's just about rolling here. It's a long process of 9-10 months. So all that is in said.

What does the US-China rift mean for the world?

The international system may not revert to Cold War era blocs. But some tough choices lie ahead for countries



(Story on Page 31)

Free food grain supply for 8 crore migrants for next 2 months: Nirmala Sitharaman



(News Agencies) Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday announced the second tranche of the Rs 20 lakh crore economic stimulus package focussing on migrants, street vendors, traders, self-employed people and small farmers. The minister announced free food grain supply to all migrants who are non-card holders amounting to an expenditure of Rs 3,500 crore by the Centre for the next two months. At least 8 crore migrant workers will be given free food grains of 5 kg of rice or wheat and 1 kg of chana or pulses, for all those migrants who do not fall under the Food Security Act, the finance minister said.
 (Contd on page 30)

FBI raid home of Senator Richard Burr and seize his cellphone amid probe into sale of \$1.7M stock



(News Agencies) FBI raid home of Senator Richard Burr and seize his cellphone amid probe into sale of \$1.7M stock FBI officers seized a cellphone belonging to Senator Richard Burr on Wednesday night as part of the Justice Department's investigation into controversial stock trades he made at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.
 (Contd on page 32)

Chronicling the economic costs of the lockdown

From daily wage workers to businesses, all segments are devastated. India can't afford the lockdown now



(Story on Page 31)

U.K. High Court rejects Vijay Mallya's plea for permission to move Supreme Court



(News Agencies) Vijay Mallya's plea was against dismissal of his appeal challenging lower court's approval of his extradition to India in IDBI Bank fraud case The UK High Court on Thursday rejected a plea of businessman Vijay Mallya for permission to move the Supreme Court
 (Contd on page 32)

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