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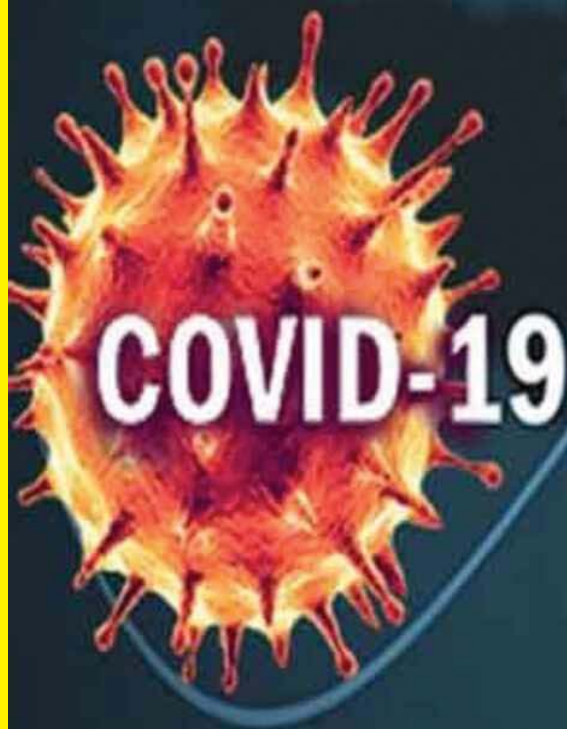
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## 'A coronavirus Tsunami We Had Never Seen Before'

**India faces Covid crisis as second wave sends infections spiraling**

**PM Modi in action mode, cancels Bengal visit, to chair series of meetings**



**SECOND WAVE**



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# Insurance

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# Candle light Vigil for the victims of the FedEx Minneapolis shooting held in New York

(By our staff reporter) New York : Candle light Vigil for the victims of the FedEx Minneapolis shooting held in Richmond Hill New York for the victims of the FedEx Minneapolis shooting in which eight people were killed including four Sikhs . Jenifer Rajkumar Member New York State Assembly and Jagdish Sewhani President The American India Public Affairs Committee , Harpreet Singh Toor at Candlelight Vigil in Richmond hill , NY , for the victims of the FedEx Minneapolis shooting in which eight people were killed including four Sikhs .



## IIT-Madras alumnus Bob Balaram, the man behind Nasa's Ingenuity Mars helicopter's historic flight



(Insider Bureau)-Nasa's research university ambitious miniature robot Rensselaer Polytechnic helicopter Ingenuity took flight above the dusty surface of his PhD from the Mars on Monday, making it the institute. The Apollo Moon landing mission had first powered flight on another planet. Significantly, Indian-origin engineer Bob Balaram is space and science. Bob Balaram is now working with Nasa at its Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a Chief Engineer for Mars Helicopter Scout Project. He has been associated with Nasa for 20 years. Previously, Bob researched precision landing methods for Mars and also worked on advanced simulation techniques for planetary entry, descent, and landing (EDL). While working with Nasa, Bob Balaram also led the team that developed a high-fidelity EDL simulator. The simulation was used in Curiosity and Perseverance America's oldest technological rover missions.

## 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



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



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## US 'very closely' tracking course of Covid-19 outbreak in India



(Insider Bureau)-The United States is tracking the course of the COVID-19 outbreak in India "very closely", the State Department has said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised Americans to avoid all travel to India. "We are tracking the course of the COVID outbreak in India very closely," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference. Responding to a question, he said, Secretary of State, Tony Blinken and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar discussed the issue during a phone call on Monday. "Whether it's India or any other country, we are committed to doing what we can both at present and going forward to see to it that this virus is brought under control," he said. According to the World Health Organization, from January 3, 2020 to April 20, 2021, India has reported 15.3 million COVID-19 cases and over 1,80,000 deaths. As of April 11, a total of 104 million vaccine doses had been administered, the WHO said.



Rotary Club of Hicksville South (RCHS) members recently celebrated their official 501(c)(3) status by IRS. President Ms. Nilima Madan, Rotary District 7255 Governor Miss. Jacquelyn Yonick, Club Founder President and PDG Mr. Kamlesh Mehta along with many Past Presidents and club members were present. All congratulated RCHS members for their accomplishment in earning the Charitable IRS Tax Exempt Status! Right Rotary District 7255 Governor Jaquelyn Yonick



## Candlelight Vigil against Asian Hate crimes



(Press Release) A virtual candle light vigil event against Asian Hate Crimes was recently organized by Indo American Community Voice (IACV) on Sunday 11th April 2021 at 4 PM led by its President Bina Sabapathy. Previously, IACV had their first successful event on Swastika Awareness.

The vigil started with American National anthem. The event was the first of a kind, an event which hosted many organizations on one platform and represented communities from India, Bangladesh, China, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan and Taiwan. The zoom event emphasized the need of a united front among

South Asians to join together and voice against any hate crimes or injustice done. The event helped to build bridges by sharing cross-cultural issues among South Asian ethnicities and organizations. For attendees, they saw this as an opportunity to stand up for their community. The vigil saw various leaders from various racial demographics speak at the event to denounce white hegemony and racial bullying. The organizers and participants of the vigil hoped to bring awareness to the frightening hate crimes committed against Asian Americans in the United States. Speakers of the day were Lionel

Chitty, Director of Minority Affairs, associated with or by the society Nassau County, Padmashree Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Dr. Uma Mysorekar, Ms. Kay Kim and Mr. Kamlesh Mehta. Religious leaders like Dr. Ravindra Goyal, Mr. Sridhar Shanmugham, Pundit Hemanth and Maa Chandra Bharathi and Organizational and community leaders like Mr. Sunil Hali, Dr. Jay

Sarkar, Mr. Fred Fu, Mr. Gopi Dhungwana, Mr. Qamar Bashir, Ms. Patsy Chen, Mr. Christopher Tung, Mr. Ajith Bhaskar, Mrs. Indu Jaiswal, Mr. Jasbir Singh, Dr. Anila Midha, Mr. Koshy Thomas, Mrs. Beena Kothari, Mrs. Jyothi Gupta and Mrs. Suhag Mehta and Mr. Y. J. Andy Cheng spoke.

Mrs. Bina Sabapathy, President of IACV led this event and she said that hate has no part in a peaceful society, Hate which creates fear in the heart and gives chill to the body is a learned behavior and it is instilled in the young minds either by parents, teachers, friends with whom they are

# Josh

## India WebTV



**Geeta Saxena**  
Show Host (Prime Time News)

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# "Enough Is Enough": Relative Of Sikh Woman Killed In US FedEx Shooting

**Brandon Scott Hole, 19, and a former employee at the facility in Indianapolis carried out the mass shooting on late Thursday before allegedly killing himself.**

(Insider Bureau)-The families of the Indian-Americans working at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana expressed their anger, fear and anxiety as they received the news of a mass shooting that killed eight people, including four Sikhs.

Brandon Scott Hole, 19, and a former employee at the facility in Indianapolis carried out the mass shooting on late Thursday before allegedly killing himself.

About 90 per cent of the workers at this delivery service facility are said to be Indian-Americans, mostly from the Sikh community. Late Friday night, the Marion County Coroner's Office and Indianapolis Metropolitan Police

Department (IMPD) released the names of the victims: Amarjeet Johal, 66, Jasvinder Kaur, 64, Amarjit Skhon, 48, and Jaswinder Singh, 68. The first three killed are women.

"Enough is enough — our community has been through enough trauma," Komal Chohan, grand daughter of one of those killed, Amarjeet Johal, was quoted as saying by the New York Post.

"I am heartbroken to confirm that my naniji (maternal grandmother), Amarjeet Kaur Johal, is among those killed in the senseless shooting at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis," Ms Chohan said.

She said that several of her fam-

ily members work at the particular facility and are traumatised.

"My nani, my family, and our families should not feel unsafe at work, at their place of worship, or anywhere," Ms Chohan continued.

For Kamal Jawandha, it was a miracle that both of his parents, who worked at the facility and were present there at the time of shooting, escaped unhurt.

Mr Jawandha said that his father had brought his mother food and was getting ready to go inside when the shooting started. His mother hid in the bathroom when the shooting started.

"She's in deep sadness. She could not sleep. She just can't



stop shaking. She can't believe this kind of thing would happen here," Mr Jawandha was quoted as saying by the New York Times.

This is the worst Sikh massacre in the US after the Oak Creek Gurdwara mass shooting in Wisconsin on August 5, 2012, where seven members of the community were killed.

Although Sikhs began settling in Indiana more than 50 years ago, the first gurdwara was established in 1999. In the last two decades, the Sikh population around Indianapolis has experienced significant growth. Now there are 10 gurdwaras across the state and an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 Sikh Americans who have made Indiana their home.

## As Sanjeev Gupta Rose From Trader to Tycoon, Several Banks Backed Away

**Four banks stopped working with British industrialist Sanjeev Gupta's commodity trading business, starting in 2016, after alleged paperwork problems in metal trades.**



(Insider Bureau)-British industrialist Sanjeev Gupta's companies seemed to be prospering until his main lender, Greensill Capital, imploded last month. But long before Greensill collapsed, several banks had cut off the commodity trading business of Mr Gupta's Liberty House Group. Four banks stopped working with Mr Gupta's commodity trading business, starting in 2016, after they became concerned about what they perceived to be problems in bills of lading - shipping receipts that give the holder the right to take possession of a cargo - or other paperwork provided by Liberty, according to interviews with 18 people directly involved in the trades, as well as internal communications seen by Bloomberg News. The banks include Sberbank PJSC, Macquarie Group Ltd, Commonwealth Bank of Australia and ICBC Standard Bank. Goldman Sachs Group Inc also stopped

working with Mr Gupta's companies around that time.

In 2018, Sberbank sent a team to scour the brightly colored containers stacked in the port of Rotterdam, looking for the ones full of nickel that the bank had financed on behalf of Liberty. Yet each time investigators located one of the containers, they found it had already been emptied, according to two people involved in the matter. After checking about

10 of them, they gave up, the people said. Sberbank confronted Sanjeev Gupta at a meeting weeks later. He promised that his company would pay back the roughly \$100 million it owed, the people said. "At some point certain discrepancies were spotted within documentation and logistical data, which made Sberbank discontinue all operations with the company," the bank said in an emailed statement. "The issue was settled in pre-trial format. Thanks to the existing control systems, we incurred no financial losses through these operations and managed to unwind all transactions in the spring of 2019." GFG Alliance, which is made up of the companies controlled by Mr Gupta and his fam-

ily, including Liberty, said in an emailed statement sent by a spokesman that it refutes any suggestion of wrongdoing.

"An internal investigation was conducted in 2019 by Liberty Commodities Limited (LCL)'s external legal advisors following enquiries regarding alleged rumours of double pledging," GFG Alliance said in the statement. "The investigation found no evidence to substantiate the rumours, nor was LCL ever subject to further complaints or proceedings."

Double pledging is the practice of improperly raising funds more than once using the same collateral.

As several banks dropped Mr Gupta's commodity trading unit,

GFG Alliance came to rely more on Greensill Capital for loans - ultimately racking up debts of nearly \$5 billion to Lex Greensill's trade finance company by March 2021, according to a presentation seen by Bloomberg News. Mr Gupta's commodity trading business alone has \$1.04 billion of debt, of which \$846 million is owed to Greensill, according to the presentation.

"LCL has ongoing banking relationships with separate financial institutions," GFG Alliance said in the statement. "Its reliance on Greensill was a natural consequence of the competitive nature of the trade finance market, which has been hugely challenging for all but the very largest commodities traders in recent years."

## India sees no logic in US putting it on currency watchlist

(Insider Bureau)-India does not see any logic in the United States putting it on a monitoring list of currency manipulators, a trade ministry official said on Tuesday.

"I don't understand any economic logic," Anup Wadhawan, India's commerce secretary told reporters. The Reserve Bank of India is following a policy that allows cur-

rency movements based on market forces, he said.

Last week, the U.S. Treasury Department put India along with 10 other economies including Singapore, Thailand and Mexico on the "Monitoring List" that it said required close attention to their currency practices.

The official said India's trade surplus with the United States had

gone up by nearly \$5 billion in the financial year 2020/21 that ended on March 31.

India's bilateral trade surplus in goods with the United States totalled \$24 billion in 2020, along with a services trade surplus of \$8 billion, the U.S. report said. Indian authorities should limit foreign exchange intervention to "circumstances of disorderly market

conditions, and refrain from excessive reserve accumulation," the report said, while citing higher purchases of dollars by the central bank on account of capital flows. Some economists said the latest move by the United States to put India on the watchlist may discourage the central bank from aggressive intervention in the for-



# Vaccine embargo: Why Modi needs to call Joe Biden

***A US embargo on the export of raw materials could upset India's plans to ramp up its Covid-19 vaccination drive***

(Insider Bureau)--While the Centre, ramping up its vaccine rollout, has made all Indians aged 18 and above eligible for Covid-19 vaccinations-and allowed vaccine manufacturers to sell much more freely by waiving restrictions-raw material shortages resulting from an embargo by the US may play spoilsport. The US's Defence Production Act (DPA), invoked this February, allows the US President to order US based manufacturers to prioritise the supply of output-in this case, the supply of Covid-19 vaccines and protective equipment-to the American domestic market. One immediate consequence is that the DPA has been used to restrict the vaccine sales of US based medical suppliers Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson's unit Janssen to the American market. This decision by the Biden Administration will impact medical companies and vaccine rollouts across the world, with India affected as well.

While the Serum Institute of India (SII) says the US's DPA embargo has not impacted its immediate production schedule for the Covishield vaccine, it says that the needed scale-ups of output could be interrupted or slowed. The SII currently makes 60-70 million doses of Covishield a month and aims to increase production to 100 million doses per month in a few months. The stockpiling of its second vaccine-in-the-making, Covovax-with US biotech firm Novovax, with a planned launch in September-will also be impacted, with current progress at only half of earlier estimates. American DPA restrictions may also impact SII's plan to help Novovax manufacture about one billion doses at Pune and at a facility in the Czech Republic, which SII sold to Novovax last year.

In an April 16 Twitter post, tagging the US President, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of SII, said, 'On behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request

you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production [elsewhere] can ramp up'. Sources say that Indian Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers like SII and Bharat Biotech will be impacted in a number of ways. The trade in many critical, basic items-medical bags, filters, vials, glass, cell culture media, plastic tubing, stoppers and some reagents for production-has been impacted by the US decision, with between 30-40 such products currently being sourced only from the US. It will not be easy to quickly replace suppliers, with manufacturers across the world facing a soaring demand. Vaccine industry experts say it is impossible for any one country to source all its raw materials domestically-the process of making a vaccine involves the use of thousands of raw materials and reagents. Many essential products across the production chain are



manufactured by US-based companies like Pall Lifesciences, Baxter, Millipore, ThermoFisher, Cytiva. Many of those products have patent protection. Many of are also not easy to substitute. Bharat Biotech says it has indigenised a key process to ensure that supplies are not restricted by the US embargo. Its vaccine works by using a proprietary chemical, Algel-IMDG, which stimulates the human body's immune response at a cellular level, provoking it into producing more antibodies to kill viruses.

This chemical was being sourced from a US company-Kansas-based ViroVax, which had proved it was an immunity booster in

cancer trials-and with the American DPA restrictions, trade had been interrupted.

"The synthesis and manufacture of the IMDG component has been successfully indigenised, and it will be manufactured at commercial scale in India. This is the first instance where [such a medical chemical] has been commercialised in India", says Bharat Biotech. It says that it has secured raw materials, packing materials and single use consumables to meet manufacturing requirements, and the immediate plan is to scale up production to 700 million doses per year. Currently, the company can manufacture 50-60 million doses per year.

## ***"Justice Served": Indian-American Politicians, Groups Welcome George Floyd Verdict***



lawmaker representing Silicon Valley in the US House of Representatives.

Indian-American Congressman Ami Bera tweeted: "Justice has been served."

"Grateful for justice. My heart goes out to the Floyd family," said Neera Tanden, president of Center for American Progress. The South Asian Bar Association of North America applauded the jury verdict that found Chauvin guilty on all counts.

"While this verdict was a step in the right direction, it is only one step in a broader fight against the systemic racism within our country," SABA said. "Justice was served today, but justice must be served every day," said Rippi Gill, president of SABA North America.

"We must not let our guard down, and we must continue to fight against the racism and violence plaguing our communities throughout the country," he said.

Several Indian-American lawmakers and groups have welcomed the decision of a federal grand jury in Minneapolis holding Derek Chauvin, a former police officer, guilty on all three counts in the death of African American George Floyd.

"Justice was served today, but convicting Derek Chauvin won't fix the system that continues to terrorise and kill Black lives. It won't bring back George Floyd," Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal said.

"Black lives matter - and we must keep fighting for them by passing the Justice in Policing Act and transforming policing," Ms Jayapal said.

Congressman Ro Khanna said: "This verdict brought accountability. I hope it will be the first of many. But it doesn't change the fact that George Floyd should still be alive today. We now must pass the Justice in Policing Act."

"My heart remains with the Floyd family. His life mattered. Black lives matter," said the

## ***Joe Biden On Indian-Origin Lawyer Vanita Gupta's Nomination To US Justice Department***



(Insider Bureau)-US President Joe Biden has said that he has nominated "eminently qualified and highly respected" Indian-origin lawyer Vanita Gupta to the Justice Department as she has spent her entire career fighting to advance racial equity and justice.

If confirmed, 46-year-old Gupta would be the first woman of colour to serve as Associate Attorney General, which is the third-ranking official at the powerful Department of Justice. President Biden, in his remarks on Tuesday on the verdict in the

trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin for the death of George Floyd, said that the State and local government and law enforcement needs to step up, but so does the federal government.

"That's why I have appointed the leadership at the Justice Department that I have, that is fully committed to restoring trust between law enforcement and the community they are sworn to serve and protect," he said. Biden said that he has complete confidence in the leadership and commitment of Attorney General Merrick Brian Garland.



# April Is "Sikh Awareness Month" In Illinois: Indian American Congressman

*"Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognise the month of April as 'Sikh appreciation and awareness month' in my home state of Illinois," Raja Krishnamoorthi said in a statement submitted into Congressional record.*

(Insider Bureau)-Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi has entered a statement into the Congressional record to recognise April as 'Sikh appreciation and awareness month' in his home state of Illinois.

Underscoring the importance of the recognition, Raja Krishnamoorthi said there has been a disturbing rise in hate crimes and violent acts perpetrated against the Sikh-American community.

"Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognise the month of April as 'Sikh appreciation and awareness month' in my home state of

Illinois," Raja Krishnamoorthi said in a statement submitted into Congressional record.

This recognition, he said, is timely, given the disturbing rise in hate crimes and violent acts perpetrated against Sikh-Americans, most recently on April 15 at a Federal Express facility located in Indianapolis in which four Sikhs, including three women, were killed.

The first followers of the Sikh religion emigrated to the United States over 125 years ago, where they found work on farms located in California and in the lumber mills of Washington state, he said. Despite suffering persecution and

discrimination, these patriotic Sikh-Americans persevered and found ways to participate in civic life, including service in the United States Army, he added.

"In 1918, Sergeant Bhagat Singh Thind was the first serviceman in the history of the United States Army allowed to wear a turban as part of his military uniform. Sikh-Americans continued to proudly serve with distinction in the Second World War, Korean War, Vietnam War, and in our conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq," Raja Krishnamoorthi said.

In addition to military service, Sikh-Americans have made countless contributions to our



common good, he said.

"They include scientists like Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, who is widely known as the 'father of fiber optic technology' and Dr. Gurtej Singh Sandhu, one of the world's most prolific inventors. They include artists and musicians like Grammy nominee Snamat Kaur Khalsa, and activist and award-winning filmmaker Valarie Kaur,"

Raja Krishnamoorthi said.

"They include entrepreneurs like Waris Ahluwalia, an actor, model, and businessman. And they include men and women called to public service like Dalip Singh Saund, who in 1957 became the first Asian-American, Indian-American, and member of a non-Abrahamic faith to be elected to serve in this House of Representatives," he added.

## Singapore Asks Travellers From India To Serve Additional 7-Day Isolation



*Those who are yet to complete their 14-day stay home period by that time will also have to serve the extra seven days, the report said.*

(Insider Bureau)-Singapore on Tuesday announced that travellers from India will have to serve an additional seven days Stay-at-Home Notice apart from the usual mandatory 14 days quarantine at a dedicated facility due to the steep rise in the

coronavirus cases and the emergence of new virus strain in the country.

The announcement by the Ministry of Health came as the entry approvals for non-Singapore citizens and non-permanent residents are being reduced

with immediate effect, in response to the worsening COVID-19 situation in India.

"From 11.59 pm on Thursday, all travellers from India will also have to serve an additional seven-day Stay-Home Notice (SHN) at their place of residence, following the usual 14-day SHN at a dedicated facility," a statement by the Singapore's Ministry of Health was quoted as saying in a report of The Straits Times. Those who are yet to complete their 14-day stay home period by that time will also have to

serve the extra seven days, the report said. The travellers will be tested for COVID-19 at the end of the initial 14-day stay home and at the end of the additional seven-days. Migrant workers arriving from India who work in the construction, marine and process sectors will continue to be subjected to a 21-day stay-home notice. These measures will minimise importation risks and protect public health, said the Ministry. Meanwhile, the Stay Home Notice period for travellers from Hong Kong will

be reduced from 14 days to seven days, as the situation there has improved, and the Stay Home Notice can also be served at one's place of residence if it is suitable. This will apply to travellers who have remained in Hong Kong in the last 14 consecutive days and who enter Singapore from 11.59 pm on Thursday. They will be subjected to Covid-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test upon arrival and another PCR test before the end of their seven-day home stay.

## Indian-Origin Billionaire Brothers Buy UK Fast Food Chain Leon

**The Issa brothers, whose parents moved to the UK from Gujarat in the 1970s, own the Euro Garages chain of petrol stations as part of their EG Group business.**

(Insider Bureau)-Indian-origin billionaire brothers Mohsin and Zuber Issa have acquired a popular British fast food chain, Leon, as part of what they described as their goal to grow their foodservice operations in Britain.

The Issa brothers, whose parents moved to the UK from Gujarat in the 1970s, own the Euro Garages chain of petrol stations as part of their EG Group business. Last year, they acquired leading UK

supermarket chain Asda from US owners Walmart as part of the strategy to expand their non-fuel business.

Leon, Founded by John Vincent, Henry Dimbleby and chef Allegra McEvedy in 2004, pitches itself in the category of "naturally fast food" with a focus on creating a healthy menu that tastes good, in a sustainable way. The acquisition is said to be worth an estimated 100 million pounds.

"Leon is a fantastic brand that we have long admired. As

established entrepreneurs in the foodservice retail market ourselves, we have a huge admiration for the business that John and the Leon team have built over the years, and firmly believe that their culture and values closely align with our own," said Mohsin and Zuber Issa, co-founders and co-CEOs of the EG Group.

"The acquisition of Leon presents EG Group with a fantastic opportunity to further develop the menu offer, the various



concession formats including drive-throughs, and will enable us to significantly build on the existing network by exploring opportunities across our own sites along with other strategic locations," they said.

With an extensive network of over 70 restaurants, Leon has 42 company-owned restaurants operated on leasehold locations, with a strong presence in London as well as other large cities across the UK.



# PM Modi cancels Portugal visit in May, France trip likely to be rescheduled

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cancelled his visit to Portugal for the India-EU summit while the France visit is also likely to be rescheduled in view of the Covid-19 crisis.**

(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cancelled his visit to Portugal for the India-EU summit while the France visit is also likely to be rescheduled in view of the Covid-19 crisis.

PM Modi was to travel to Portugal for the 16th India-EU summit that was scheduled for May 8, following which he was to travel to France for a bilateral visit. In March, PM Modi visited Bangladesh for his first foreign trip since the pandemic curtailed all travel.

India on Tuesday recorded 2.59 lakh fresh Covid-19 cases and over 1,700 deaths within the span of 24 hours. Over the past month, India has witnessed a massive second wave of Covid-19 cases that has hit hard.

While Delhi announced a week-long lockdown on Monday, Maharashtra had declared 'Corona Curfew' in the state, restricting all non-essential movement across the state.

Ten states, including

Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, account for 77.67 per cent of the new Covid-19 infections reported in a day, the Union Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

The daily Covid-19 positivity rate (7 day moving average) continues to show an upward trend and currently stands at 15.99 per cent, it said.

Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Rajasthan are among the other states in the list of 10.



## Rajnath Singh asks Army to be on war footing in Covid battle, provide medical help across states



**Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has urged the Indian Army to open up its medical facilities for civilians and asked top commanders in states to be in touch with the Chief Ministers to provide assistance in the battle against Covid.**

(News Agencies)-Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has urged the Indian Army to open up its medical facilities for civilians and asked top commanders in states to be in touch with the Chief Ministers to provide assistance in the battle against Covid.

"The defence minister spoke to Army chief Gen MM Naravane and asked him to instruct commanders in state capitals to reach out to chief ministers and provide all possible assistance," said a defence ministry official. Defence secretary Ajay Kumar

was also part of the discussions on Monday evening in which the decision was taken. Hospitals run by the Cantonment Boards across the country will be thrown open to civilians living in the areas and also coming from outside the Cantonment zones.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has already started a 250-bed facility in Delhi, which will be increased to 500. The DRDO is also setting up two hospitals in Lucknow, which has become a hotbed of a Covid-19 cases.

In addition to these facilities, efforts are on to ensure maximum assistance to civilians as the defence establishment has advanced medical facilities.

"The DRDO hospitals being set up may not be enough, considering the surge. Keeping this in mind, all possible help at military medical facilities is being planned," said a defence ministry official. Military hospitals are meant for personnel and families from the armed forces but in these unprecedented times whatever help can be provided

to civilians will be done.

The DRDO wound up its 1,000-bed facility to treat Covid-19 patients in February but the surging numbers has prompted them to reopen it with 500 beds. All beds are equipped with oxygen and a number of ventilators are also be available.

The facility began patient intake on Monday and on the very first day, all 250 beds were occupied. The facility is providing its services free of cost and will have testing and air-conditioning as per WHO standards.

## Those questioning India's Covid vaccine exports 'short-sighted', 'irresponsible': External Affairs Minister Jaishankar

(News Agencies)-External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar said on Monday that those who were questioning India's exports of the Covid-19 vaccines are "short-sighted", "irresponsible" and "non-serious" people. Speaking at a virtual event, Jaishankar said, "To question India's export of vaccine is so short-sighted. Only non-serious, irresponsible people can make that argument. And there are some around, as you may have noticed."

Taking a jibe at the "blame game wallas", Jaishankar explained further that a country cannot be expected to ask for raw materials from other countries whilst

denying them vaccines.

"The blame game wallas will have their attitude and their problem. But on a serious note, today, as a foreign minister, I am pushing other countries, particularly some big countries, to give them the raw material needed to produce the vaccine. Can I, on the one hand, ask for raw material and not give them the vaccine?" he asked.

Adding that the world understood India's problems when it cut down on exports because of the Covid situation in the country. "It is not like we are not prioritising our own people. As things got tough, we spoke to the world honestly

and said we tried to live up to our contractual commitments, but right now we have a serious situation at home and they understood," he said. ON INDIA-CHINA STAND-OFF

Jaishankar, on the continued tense situation at the border with China in Ladakh, said the Indian industry that has business with China cannot be normal until there is peace at the border.

Jaishankar said, "Last 40 years, we have had peace and tranquility. We have not solved the boundary question, but the fact is that relations got built because the assumption was that neither party will use force or threat against the



other. We had different enormous force to the border." He added: "The point is simple. You cannot disrupt the peace and tranquility at the border and carry on with the rest of the relationship.



# Covaxin neutralises UK, Brazil variants and double mutant SARS-CoV-2: ICMR

**The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has revealed that Covaxin is effective against multiple variants including the double mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2.**

(News Agencies)- Indigenous Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin is effective against multiple variants including the double mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said on Wednesday. The ICMR said the studies showed that Covaxin neutralised the UK and Brazil variants of SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid-19. In a major breakthrough, the ICMR study also showed that Covaxin neutralised the Indian double mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2. The double mutant variant, many experts believe, has fuelled the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic in India.

ICMR study shows #COVAXIN neutralises against multiple variants of SARS-CoV-2 and effectively neutralises the

double mutant strain as well. Covaxin was developed in a collaboration of the ICMR, the National Institute of Virology (NIV) and vaccine manufacturer Bharat Biotech. It was developed using a sample of coronavirus isolated by the NIV.

Thus, Covaxin is an inactivated vaccine. That is, the vaccine was developed using killed coronaviruses to make it safe for injecting into human body. Inactivated vaccine development is an old and time-tested technology.

Bharat Biotech is the manufacturing partner of this collaboration. When an inactivated vaccine is injected, the immune system of the body recognises the dead virus and prompts a response for suitable antibody production. So, if and when

live virus (SARS-CoV-2 in this case) attacks the body, the immune system is ready to produce enough antibodies to fight off the pathogen.

There were concerns about whether the vaccine would be effective against mutant variants of SARS-CoV-2 or not. Several mutant variants emerged as rapidly spreading versions of the coronavirus. The variants detected in the UK, Brazil and the double mutant variant found in Maharashtra emerged as bigger threats.

Now, the ICMR has said its study shows the Indian vaccine, Covaxin can neutralise the variants detected in the UK, Brazil, South Africa and much feared double mutant variant found in Maharashtra.

"ICMR study shows



#COVAXIN neutralises against multiple variants of SARS-CoV-2 and effectively neutralises the double mutant strain as well," it said in a post on Twitter. The medical research body said, "ICMR-National Institute of Virology has successfully isolated and cultured multiple variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus: B.1.1.7 (UK variant); B.1.1.28 (Brazil variant) and B.1.351 (South African variant). "ICMR-NIV has recently been successful in isolating and culturing the double mutant strain B.1.617

SARS-CoV-2 identified in certain regions of India and several other countries. "Covaxin has been found to effectively neutralise the double mutant strain as well." Several other countries have detected the Indian double mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2, which has been found to be more infective. This led to countries such as New Zealand, the UK, the US, Hong Kong, Singapore and Pakistan impose travel restriction from India in the past few days.

## MK Stalin asks if PM Modi worried only about Bengal, TN polls and not fighting Covid-19



**DMK president MK Stalin has blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the rapid surge in Covid cases and has asked if the PM is only worried about fighting the Bengal and Tamil Nadu elections**

neighbouring states, it is has diverted 45 metric tonnes Andhra Pradesh and Telangana hurtful to know that the Centre of Oxygen from Tamil Nadu to without prior notification.

## 'One-stop' shop for wedding fare now sells items for cremation in UP

(Insider Bureau)-DMK leader MK Stalin asked if Prime Minister Narendra Modi worried only about the West Bengal and Tamil Nadu elections and not fighting the second wave of Covid-19. "How did PM Modi, who is proclaimed as a 'world expert' in management, get defeated so badly in handling the corona crisis?" asked MK Stalin.

In a statement, MK Stalin blamed the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu for wasting Covid-19 vaccines. "Of the 44 lakh vaccines wasted across the country, 12.10% have been wasted by Tamil Nadu. This brings tears of blood to me. Whatever reasons given by the Tamil

Nadu government for so much wastage are unacceptable," said MK Stalin.

The DMK leader also said the state's handling of the second Covid-19 wave is condemnable. Stalin also questioned the Centre's decision to import 50,000 metric tonnes of Oxygen. "Until yesterday, the BJP government claimed to have adequate Oxygen, and now I see reports about the Centre deciding to import 50,000 metric tonnes of Oxygen. Did PM Modi only worry about Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal? Was he not bothered about the people who died in large numbers due to Corona?" asked Stalin.

Stalin said that though Tamil Nadu excels in helping

(Insider Bureau)-Hundreds of burning pyres, space crunch in cremation grounds, bodies lying on roads for last rites -- the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has left India struggling. What else is left to see in this pandemic? Shops, which earlier sold items for



wedding ceremonies, are now forced to sell items needed for last rites.

As people call off wedding plans, a shop selling materials for marriage processions has now stocked these items in its stores and started

selling items needed for last rites, the Times of India reported.

"The entire city is witnessing a record number of Covid-19 cases and the old city area and area adjoining Chowk are no exception. Although my family is in the business of the wedding items, we are now selling things needed for last rites," said Ankit Agarwal who runs a shop in the Chowk area of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh.

"This also helps people as there were no such shops in the area and customers had to go to different markets," he was quoted by the report as saying.

Meanwhile, a local was quoted as saying, "We knew these two shops for several decades no and they are famous as 'one-stop' shop for all items one needs for marriage ceremonies. The same shops are now selling goods needed for performing last rights."



# Indian Navy ship seizes narcotics worth Rs 3,000 crore from fishing vessel in Arabian Sea



**Indian Navy's INS Suvarna, while on surveillance patrol in the Arabian Sea on Monday, encountered a fishing vessel with suspicious movements. On search, the team of INS Suvarna seized narcotic substance worth Rs 3,000 crore from the vessel.**

(News Agencies)-Indian Naval Ship (INS) Suvarna on Monday encountered a fishing vessel with suspicious

movements while on surveillance patrol in the Arabian Sea. To investigate the vessel, INS Suvarna's team conducted boarding and search operation which led to the seizure of more than 300 kg of narcotic substances.

According to sources, initial investigation has revealed that it was a Pakistani fishing boat and the narcotics seized from it were meant for funding terror activities in India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. The boat, along with its crew, was escorted to the Kochi port in

Kerala for further investigation.

The approximate cost of the seizure in the international market is estimated to be Rs 3000 Crore. This is a major catch not only in terms of the quantity and cost but also from the perspective of disruption of the

illegal narcotic smuggling routes which emanate from the Makran coast and flow towards the Indian, Maldivian and Sri Lankan destinations, officials said. Further investigation is underway.

Over the past one year, the Indian Coast Guard has seized more

than 1.6 tons of narcotics worth approx Rs. 5,200 crore.

Last week, in a joint operation with ATS Gujarat, the Coast Guard apprehended a Pakistani boat off Jakhau on the intervening night of 14 and 15 with 30 kg of heroin.

Eight Pakistani nationals were also arrested from the boat after an intelligence input was received on April 13. On receiving the input, a coordinated operation was launched by the Indian Coast Guard in association with ATS Gujarat

## Maharashtra CM orders high-level probe in Nashik hospital tragedy

**Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray has ordered a high-level probe into the oxygen tank leak incident in Nashik hospital which led to the death of 22 patients.**

(News Agencies)-Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has ordered a high-level inquiry into the oxygen leak incident at the Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik which led to the death of 22 patients. The chief minister has also announced Rs 5 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

Uddhav Thackeray said, "This incident in Nashik is not only shocking for all of us but it also teaches the administration that we have to be very careful in this whole struggle. The available doctors and medical staff are working day and night to save the lives of the patients in such a

situation. Such incidents should not happen in the future. The administration should work very carefully to prevent any incidents that could erode the morale of the health system." Uddhav Thackeray said that he has instructed the chief secretary to immediately investigate the incident and to fix the responsibility so that such incidents do not happen under any circumstances.

The Chief Minister also directed that oxygen stock should be taken care of in every hospital and its proper use should be made a priority. He further added that the problems in getting

oxygen to the patients should be removed immediately. Meanwhile, as the incident sparked war of words between the BJP and the Congress, the chief minister pointed out that, "Whoever is responsible for this accident, will not be spared, but no one should politicize this unfortunate incident. This is an attack on the whole of Maharashtra. The whole of Maharashtra is in mourning over the tragedy in Nashik."

### NASHIK HOSPITAL TRAGEDY

At least 22 patients died after an oxygen tank leaked at Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik on Wednesday. As many as 171 patients were present in the



hospital at the time of the incident.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

and several Union ministers and leaders from different political parties have expressed their condolences over the tragedy.

## UK invites India as guest nation to first in-person G7 meeting of foreign ministers in two years



(News Agencies)-India has been invited to join parts of the first in-person G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' meeting in UK, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said on Tuesday. External affairs minister Dr. S.

Jaishankar is likely to represent India at the meeting.

This is the first in-person G7 meeting of foreign ministers in two years to be held in London. "The Foreign Secretary has also invited India, Australia, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, and

**The United Kingdom has invited India to the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' meeting in London next month. This is the first in-person meeting of the group in around two years.**

the Chair and Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to join parts of this year's G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' meeting as guests," the FCDO said.

"Their attendance will bring broader experience and geographic representation, and demonstrate the importance of the Indo-Pacific region," it further added. UK foreign secretary Dominic Raab announced on Tuesday that the meeting is scheduled to happen in London in a Covid-secure way between May

3 and May 5. It will be held in central London and strict Covid-19 control measures like daily testing and social distancing will be followed to ensure the wellbeing of all staff, attendees, and the public. The G7 which is made up of the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the US, and the EU is the only forum where the world's most advanced economies are invited to hold high-level meetings. This year, the UK Foreign Secretary has also invited

India, Australia, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, and the Chair

and Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to join parts of this year's G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' meeting as guests. "The meeting is a crucial opportunity to revitalize in-person diplomacy and will look to establish a shared approach among the world's leading democracies on equitable vaccine access, to agree global girls' education targets, rigorous goals on climate finance and new measures to prevent famine and food insecurity," said the G7 UK website.



## Centre should give money to migrants fleeing again, says Rahul Gandhi as thousands leave Delhi



(News Agencies)- Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took a jibe at the Centre over the emerging trend of migrant labourers once again fleeing Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities in a grim reminder of last year's migrant crisis.

In a tweet on Tuesday, Rahul Gandhi wrote, "Migrants are fleeing once again. In such a situation, it is the responsibility of the central government to deposit money in their bank accounts to help them. But will a government that blames the public for spreading corona take such a helpful step?"

The remark comes at a time when thousands of migrant

labourers were seen flocking the Anand Vihar bus terminus in Delhi to return to their native states after CM Arvind Kejriwal announced a week-long lockdown to check the Covid-19 spread.

According to PTI, police officials had said that over 5,000 people had gathered at Anand Vihar, including at ISBT as well as the railway station and the numbers were rising.

Thousands of men and women were seen rushing towards the bus terminus, crowding the pavements and bridges in scenes similar to 2020 when the nationwide lockdown had sparked a similar migration across states.

## Election Commission bosses Sushil Chandra, Rajiv Kumar test positive for Covid-19

(News Agencies)- Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, who took charge as the 24th CEC after the retirement of Sunil Arora, has tested positive for coronavirus along with his colleague Rajiv Kumar.



CEC Sushil Chandra and election commissioner Rajiv Kumar both have tested positive for Covid-19 at a time when India is witnessing a massive surge in coronavirus cases. On Tuesday, the country recorded 2.59 lakh fresh cases.

With the exit of Sunil Arora, it is

only a two-person bench at the Election Commission as the third spot is yet to be filled. Sushil Chandra assumed office as the CEC last week, the day Sunil Arora demitted office.

Chandra was appointed as an election commissioner on February 14, 2019, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. He would demit office on May 14, 2022. Under him, the Election Commission (EC) will hold assembly polls in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

The term of the assemblies of Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand and Punjab ends on various dates in March next year.

The term of the Uttar Pradesh assembly ends on May 14 next year. Chandra belongs to the 1980 batch of the Indian Revenue Service.

## 4 die in multiple elephant attacks in Odisha



(News Agencies)-As many as four people, including a senior citizen, were trampled to death in separate incidents of elephant attack in Odisha on Wednesday.

Three men were trampled to death after an elephant attacked them in Digoti village that falls

under Ghaisilot police limits in the Bargarh district on Wednesday morning.

The deceased were identified as Natha Pali (70), Mal Seth (50) and Biranchi Kumbhar (60).

In another similar incident, a farmer, Biranchi Sahu (55), was attacked by an elephant in

Darlipali village under Loisingha Forest Range of Balangir district on Wednesday.

Biranchi Sahu was at his farmland in the morning when he was attacked by the jumbo.

The villagers rushed to the spot and informed the forest officials.

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# Finally, the wind is at our back on the climate crisis

History will remember this decade as the climate turning point, the moment we finally woke up to the fact that despite (and because of) shocks like Covid-19, decarbonization -- the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions -- is now inevitable. The only question is how fast we will achieve it. I'm reminded of Ernest Hemingway's book, "The Sun Also Rises," when his character, Mike Campbell, describes how he went bankrupt: "Two ways. Gradually and then suddenly."

The "suddenly" part of climate action is at last beginning to blossom, evident in the early unfolding of the most exciting technological and economic transformation of our lifetime. Since 2005, 32 countries, including some developing nations, have successfully grown their economies without growing their emissions. Meanwhile, thousands of commitments to net-zero emissions have been announced in recent months from governments, companies and financial institutions large and small, putting the Paris Agreement goal to keep temperature rise within 1.5°C within reach. Even with their varying degrees of robustness, the collective message of these commitments is clear: We've crossed a new threshold, there's no going back to a high-emissions trajectory.

The challenge for global leaders now is to not get stuck. It's no longer practical to play both sides: putting one foot in the net-zero future while keeping the other in a high carbon past. It's a contortionism that can only end in the middle splits -- a very difficult position from which to move forward. The US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change, John Kerry, has recently visited Asia, meeting with representatives of the Indian, Chinese and South Korean governments to encourage their leadership in the net-zero future ahead of President Joe Biden's climate summit this week. This outreach recognizes the role of partnership and cooperation on climate as being in everyone's self-interest: It's much easier for all of us to move forward quickly when others are going in that direction too.

And move we must, decisively, today, with action to safeguard our climate. When the US economy sets a target of 50-52% emissions reductions from 2005 levels by 2030 it is not only transformational for the citizens of that country, it is influential on all other economies, small and large. When a government commits significant investments in favor of, for example, renewables, but continues to fund coal-fired power at home and abroad, I call that the decarbonization splits. When a company focuses on emissions reductions from energy use or transport, without also responsibly investing in protecting and restoring nature, that's just another version of the decarbonization

splits. In each case we get stuck, unable to travel in any direction, limiting shared cooperation for green growth. Inevitably, it's people who feel the pain. It's no wonder so many among us don't feel hopeful when we look into the future and see a climate-changed world. Climate impacts are already reaching worst-case scenario levels based on scientific predictions from just a few years back. The consequences are devastating lives and shattering livelihoods today. Despite this stark reality, too many of us see leaders apparently stuck in the splits when it comes to climate change. No leader should have to perform such gymnastics any longer. Capital is already flowing to support the future we need. Yes, to date this has been a gradual flow, but it's quickly accelerating and will no doubt enter the "suddenly" phase soon! BlackRock CEO Larry Fink has famously described the shift as tectonic, a fundamental reallocation of capital. When I took the job to lead the global climate negotiations ahead of what was to become the Paris Agreement, few people were hopeful that we could secure a global deal on climate. I was one of them. I even blurted out at my first press conference that I did not think we would achieve such a deal in my lifetime. But the moment those words left my mouth, I realized that if I fully committed to the opportunity that lay within the challenge others may join me -- and we could (and did) in fact achieve it. It's this full commitment to move forward into the future that we need to bring to life now, just as the stakes are at their highest and the hour is late. The evidence base is undeniable -- climate action is exactly how we will create the good jobs, better cities, cleaner air and more sustainable food supply urgently needed to improve human, economic and planetary health.

This is the moment for stubborn optimism -- the necessary mindset when embarking on any momentous task. And the good news is that we have an extraordinary wind at our backs. Recent developments show the momentum for change is far stronger than anything we had ahead of the Paris Agreement. Anyone who's sailed on the ocean will know that when one is traveling in the same direction as the wind, and at the same speed as the wind, a physical deception comes into play: It can feel as if there's no wind at all and that you're traveling quite slowly, when in fact you may be going the fastest your boat will ever go. I urge world leaders attending the virtual Biden climate summit to turn around just for a moment and feel the full force of the winds of change behind us: harness it, move forward, accelerate! The time for gymnastics is done -- let's get everyone's feet firmly into the future and show what's possible when we put our minds to it.

By Christiana Figueres,  
Courtesy CNN

## There is limited evidence to suggest that electoral rallies resulted in spread of the pandemic

**Till then, armchair experts should introspect and appreciate India's ability to conduct elections, with high voter participation, and do so in a pandemic.**

By Surjit S Bhalla,  
Courtesy The Indian Express

India is going through a tragic COVID crisis and our prayers are for those suffering in these frightening times. People are demanding answers. This is both fair and logical. We all would like to know what is going on, and the extent to which this crisis could have been prevented by timely proactive action. It is with this goal in mind that we revisited the issue we had examined in some detail on January 16, 2021 ('Is India nearing herd immunity?', IE). Those were happy and happier times - with the COVID data available then, we concluded, somewhat prematurely optimistically, that India was approaching herd immunity. We were wrong. Can we identify anything (in retrospect) that would have made the pain less, that could have prevented this explosive surge? India provides enough information on every "natural experiment" possible, e.g. different states going through different phases of the virus (waves and mutations) and we attempt to exploit that information. We do so via the use of the Gompertz curve. The Gompertz curve is likely the most efficient, and most accurate, representation of a time-series process like the diffusion of a virus. It was developed in 1825 to study trends in mortality (and to make forecasts of the

same). As we all have witnessed, the world is literally littered with wrong assessments, and wrong forecasts, of the determinants of COVID-19 and the optimal method to counter it. Infectious diseases are as old as humanity. What was new about COVID-19 was that countries, almost the entire world, chose the most extreme, and the most elitist method, of countering it via lockdowns. Despite its massive failure (see the paper 'Lockdown Vs Covid; Covid Wins' or 'COVID-19 India: Evolution and Performance'), it is sad to see otherwise humane experts recommending lockdowns again - and doing so across the world. Think about it. More than 130 countries recommended and implemented lockdowns. Can anybody point to success? The usual "successful" suspects, in this case, are a handful of countries geographically close to the country of origin of the virus, China. The assumed success also includes countries far away from China, for example, New Zealand. But less than 10 countries have "lockdown effectiveness" - and that is being recommended again? We agree with PM Modi who recently reiterated that "there is no substitute to testing, tracking and treatment." (Contd on page 12)



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# The law delivered justice to George Floyd.

## America's political leaders are up next

The conviction of Derek Chauvin showed George Floyd's life really did matter to a justice system on trial.

Now, millions of Americans wait to see whether a moment of rare hope will spur political leaders to deliver similar justice by reforming policing and eradicating systemic racism. A jury of 12 Minnesotans did more than convict ex-policeman Chauvin Tuesday on all counts of murdering Floyd by squeezing the life out of him with a knee to the neck. In a profound moment of modern American history, they offered a measure of optimism that Americans of all races will one day be treated equally and that malign police officers can be held accountable to the laws they are meant to enforce. The verdict will not bring Floyd back from an unnecessary death. Nor will it erase the millions of injustices faced by Black Americans not recorded on cellphone video, or the Black community's dread during encounters with police. Proof of that came in police shootings and harassment of Black Americans as the trial went on, in situations that might not have ended so tragically for Whites. But the moment when Chauvin was led to a jail cell, hands cuffed behind his back,

triggered relief and, in places, disbelief. It validated a social and political movement, championed by celebrities and athletes, that spanned the globe after Floyd's murder last May that sent citizens of all ethnicities into the streets during a pandemic to demand justice. "This is monumental, this is historic. This is a pivotal moment in history," Floyd's brother Philonese told CNN's Sara Sidner. Brandon Williams, Floyd's nephew, poignantly noted that many Black men and women still live in fear every day. "So when I say today is a pivotal moment, it is chance for America to take a turn in the right direction," he said.

All eyes turn to the Senate. "We can't stop here," President Joe Biden said at the White House, calling Tuesday's verdict "a much too rare" step forward for Black men. Vice President Kamala Harris said: "We are all a part of George Floyd's legacy and our job now is to honor it and to honor him." The method for making the most fundamental set of changes to policing in a generation, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, is already sitting in the Senate. Democrats say it would end racial and religious profiling, ban chokeholds on suspects, eliminate no-knock warrants on drugs cases, make

it easier to prosecute offending police officers and would overhaul police training to build trust with the communities in which officers serve. Yet its path is challenging given the opposition of many Republicans to the concept of Washington establishing federal standards for police. It was noticeable that -- amid a torrent of Democratic reaction to Chauvin's conviction -- there were few statements from Republicans, months after a general election in which former President Donald Trump sought to paint protests at Floyd's death as symptomatic of left-wing anarchy. His extremism is in line with what ex-Republican President George W. Bush Tuesday branded "nativist" sentiment in the party. Many Republicans, who can stop the bill with filibuster blocking tactics, are more keen to claim all Democrats agree with their most radical members on calls to abolish the police. As the jury wrapped up deliberations Tuesday, Republicans were fixated instead on a censure motion in the US House of Representatives accusing California Democratic Rep. Maxine Waters of inciting violence over the trial. Even more moderate Republicans may take the position that the justice



system worked in convicting Chauvin and that further changes may be unnecessary. "I have trust in our justice system and the great institutions that have always formed the basis of our society, obviously pleased that the temperature will hopefully be brought down a bit," Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, one of those moderate Republicans, told CNN. Rep. Karen Bass, one of the authors of the bill named for Floyd, said the verdict gave her hope for the legislation as she continues informal talks with GOP colleagues about a potential compromise. But there is still a wide gulf between Democrats and Republicans on reforming qualified immunity, which protects officers in civil court. And there's no guarantee yet that all Democrats in the 50-50 Senate are on board. With his speech following the verdict at the White House alongside Harris, and in his telephone call promising

action to Floyd's family that was captured on camera, Biden appears fully committed on police reform. There had been some question previously over how much political capital a new President with a massive agenda and a historic kinship with the police would commit to passing legislation with an apparently unpromising path. Perhaps in a nod to intense political pressure he faces, as a President who owes his victory in last year's election in large part to Black voters, Biden said publicly Tuesday that he was praying for the right verdict, all while the sequestered jury was still deliberating. It's possible nationwide reaction to Chauvin's conviction builds both elevated expectations for the President and a wave of momentum that could change the political atmosphere, if handled skillfully.

# The migrant crisis needs attention now



Restrictions imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19 infections have sparked the exit of migrant workers from cities, yet again. On Monday, thousands of migrant workers crowded Delhi's

interstate bus terminals. This happened even after Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's appeal to them to stay on, and promise that the government will address their needs. Similar stories of re-

***The pandemic has been brutal for all, but it has been the most brutal for India's poorest working citizens. Last year, India pledged that the migrant workers would never to have to go through the same human suffering again. It is time to redeem that pledge.***

verse migration are being reported from across the country, even as industries and traders have expressed their concerns over its economic consequences.

While the scale of the departure of workers is not like the exodus of last year, yet, the fact that migrants have been quick to move out, even at the cost of their health, shows their lack of faith in the Indian State. The government has failed to set up a strong social security net for migrant workers, despite serious proposals on the table. Niti

Aayog's 2021 policy framework on migrant labour has a range of workable recommendations. These include developing a central database for migrants; setting up a social security safety net - health cards, access to schools, extension of public distribution system (PDS) services, and provision of psycho-social assistance and adequate housing, among other steps.

While the pandemic presents a massive logistical challenge, and many of these recommendations may need time to be

operationalised, the State must do all it can to prevent humanitarian distress. It must consider universalising PDS, expanding the rural employment guarantee scheme to urban areas, and providing direct cash transfers. The pandemic has been brutal for all, but it has been the most brutal for India's poorest working citizens. Last year, India pledged that the migrant workers would never have to go through the same human suffering again. It is time to redeem that pledge.



# The choice no president ever wants to make



This week, President Joe Biden sent a bipartisan group of former senior government officials to Taiwan as a "personal signal" of his support for and commitment to the self-governing island. The move comes after weeks of escalating tensions between the governments of China and Taiwan, including earlier this week the largest breach of Taiwan's airspace by Chinese military jets since at least September of last year. Biden's actions may seem controversial from a national security perspective, but he's on sound political ground in his support for Taiwan. In recent years, this is the rare policy position that has broad appeal in both major US parties -- and the current state of US-China relations may only enhance this support.

The challenge for the Biden administration will be whether it can continue America's strong

support for Taiwan while also trying to mend relations with China. One senior US military official recently warned that China could take Taiwan by force within the next six years, precipitating a military showdown in the Indo-Pacific. That may require the US to choose between the two -- something that no president has wanted, or will ever, want to do. Taiwan (officially called the Republic of China) is a democratic society of nearly 24 million people that sits just 80 miles from the Chinese mainland. While it has a popularly elected president and legislative branch, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) considers Taiwan a renegade province. Beijing has insisted that the United States observe the so-called "One China" policy, which holds that the US recognizes the PRC as the sole

legal government of China and "acknowledges" the PRC's claim that Taiwan is part of China. This has resulted in a formal diplomatic relationship between the US and the PRC and only informal ties between America and Taiwan.

Yet, during a time when bipartisanship in Washington, DC, has been virtually nonexistent, support for Taiwan is the rare issue that has brought together Republicans and Democrats. In fact, members of the US House of Representatives and US Senate joined together in 2020 to unanimously pass the TAIPEI Act, which seeks to expand American support for Taiwan's participation in international organizations.

Caucuses in both the House and Senate dedicated to promoting closer ties between the US and Taiwan enjoy robust -- and bipartisan -- memberships. Former President Donald Trump deepened relations between the US and Taiwan, while Biden administration officials have emphasized America's commitment to ensuring that Taiwan can defend itself from potential Chinese aggression. What makes US support for Taiwan unique amongst issues in its ability to attract support from policymakers in both parties? First, Taiwan is perhaps the strongest example of a

vibrant, successful democracy in the Indo-Pacific region. It has free, fair and transparent elections for officials at all levels of government, has undergone peaceful transitions of power between institutionalized political parties with divergent views, protects political rights including the freedom of assembly and association, and features a vibrant and free press. The rule of law is both valued and promoted. In many ways, Taiwan is seen as a model for how democracies can mature and develop, since the island itself went through a transition from authoritarian rule over 30 years ago to the free society that it is today.

Taiwan's current president, Tsai Ing-wen, is a member of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which has generally sought closer relations with the United States, often times instead of with the PRC. In fact, many saw her reelection campaign in 2019-2020 as a referendum on whether Taiwan would continue to draw nearer to the US or, in the alternative, look to deepen economic and other ties with its neighbor across the Taiwan Strait. Tsai's resounding victory in the January 2020 presidential election was seen by many analysts as a sign that the Taiwanese people believed that the island's future would be more

closely tied to the fate of the United States.

Second, rising sentiments of unease and (in some cases) hostility about the actions of Chinese leader Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have created an opening for Taiwan. The contrast between China's authoritarian system and Taiwan's democratic one could not be clearer -- particularly so in light of China's continued suppression of the Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang province (which Beijing denies) and its forceful denunciation of pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong. The bipartisan support for Taiwan is almost certainly related to how voters and policymakers in both parties see the PRC skeptically. The Pew Research Center regularly measures public opinion about China and, in March 2021, reported that a strong majority of both Republicans and Democrats view China negatively, with nearly identical shares of respondents from both parties expressing the view that the US should work to promote human rights in China, even if it damages economic ties. The fact that Taiwan is so physically proximate to the PRC only emphasizes how different their political systems are, and how much more closely aligned Taiwan is with the US on a number of these core values.

## Joe Biden delivered the Chauvin verdict speech America needed

Here's what you are not going to get in a major address from President Joseph Biden: textured rhetoric woven with references to the classics; eloquent, poetic phraseology ringing like heavenly music and leaving its listeners with echoes of Shakespeare, Lincoln and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Here's what you are going to get in a major address from Biden: a torrent of phrases, some of them carefully clipped like a neighbor's hedge, most of them rolling and gushing like a river, all of them aimed not at the gut in the manner of his immediate predecessor, but directly towards the heart, whether to soothe or to rouse, keeping at bay any haste or incaution. The speech that Biden gave after a Minneapolis jury convicted ex-police officer Derek

Chauvin on all three charges in the murder of George Floyd decision was no different from any number of speeches Biden has given throughout his five decades in public life: so emotional, anecdotal and plain-spoken that it seemed more off-the-cuff than it likely was. In short, it wasn't a "presidential" address to the nation so much as it was a "Joe" talk to the folks. All the folks.

More to the point, it was a "Joe" talk that in its dual expressions of relief and resolve was well-suited to engage a verdict that, however logical and inevitable it may have seemed given the evidence and testimony leading up to it, took many people by surprise, especially African Americans whose expectations

for justice in the violent, often deadly use of excessive police force against unarmed Black people have been perpetually thwarted in court.

Biden promised in his election campaign last year that he'd help change things. So far, he's been doing so in his unfettered manner. And in phoning George Floyd's family almost immediately after the verdict -- and before appearing before the cameras to deliver his address -- the president submitted proof that it wasn't about scoring political points, but in sharing and healing others' intimate pain.

When Biden spoke about the emotional connection he'd made with Floyd's young daughter, even to the point of repeating and concurring with what she'd said to her father, "Daddy, you



changed the world," the unapologetic blatancy of appeal to the heartstrings somehow made him seem more sincere, more human -- and humane. More, if you will, "Joe." Consider also the wonder of a 78-year-old White president of the United States not only mentioning the words, "systemic racism," but insisting that it be

purged once and for all from American life. Among many things, it made you wonder whether this perspective was energized by the blatant and not-so-blatant bigotry directed against the first African American president during the eight years Biden served as Barack Obama's vice president.





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# The Pandemic Will Be More Deadly This Year - Look At India



On Sunday alone, 261,500 new infections were recorded. That's as bad as the U.S. during all but the worst five days of the pandemic in December and early January.

Covid-19 is going to kill more people in 2021 than it did last year. If you want to see why, look at what's happening in India.

Cases have been surging in the country of 1.37 billion people. On Sunday alone, 261,500 new infections were recorded. That's as bad as the U.S. during all but the worst five days of the pandemic in December and early January. Case counts are rising far more quickly, too. Average infection numbers over the past seven days have run at nearly three times the level two weeks ago, a pace of growth that the U.S. last saw in the early days of the outbreak a year ago.

The real numbers may be yet higher. The city of Bhopal used Covid-19 protocols to cremate or bury 84 people last Tuesday, according to the Hindustan Times, while declaring only five Covid

deaths. The B.1.617 variant, which isn't well understood yet, has features associated with higher infection rates and lower antibody resistance. It's turning up in more than half of viral samples taken in India.

As caseloads push medical facilities toward capacity, the health system itself is starting to crack. Vaccine stocks, hospital beds and even oxygen supplies are running short, leading to bitter arguments between the states and the federal government. In some places, the dead are being transported by truck because cities have run out of hearses. Elsewhere, crematoria have started to break down because of the sheer number of bodies being burned.

If things don't change soon, the country will be facing 3,000 deaths a day -- twice its current

level, and 10 times what was being seen through most of this year -- Bhramar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan, wrote last week.

As my colleague Mihir Sharma has written, arrogance, hyper-nationalism and incompetence helped foster a fatal sense of complacency amid India's apparent success against the outbreak earlier this year. Until a few weeks ago, lockdown restrictions had been progressively loosening for months. Cinemas were allowed to open to full capacity Feb. 1. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan declared the country "in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic" in early March, at almost precisely the point that cases started to surge again.

Worryingly, the clear signs of a second wave haven't prompted much course correction since. With elections underway in the states of Assam and West Bengal, the Twitter feed of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been interspersing updates about the virus with Trump-style footage of him, unmasked, addressing mass rallies. The other side isn't

necessarily doing much better, either. West Bengal's chief minister, an opponent of Modi's BJP, only got around to canceling her campaign rallies Sunday. Worse may be to come. The Kumbh Mela, a Hindu pilgrimage festival that's normally the largest mass gathering on earth, is now underway on the banks of the Ganges, attended by an estimated 3.5 million people. That's well down on the numbers in a normal year, and even Modi, far too late, urged over the weekend that the event be purely "symbolic" rather than physical. Still, it's far above the mere thousands allowed to other mass events like last year's Hajj in Saudi Arabia and Arbaeen pilgrimage in Iraq.

Even held outdoors, such events carry a profound risk of spreading the most infectious variants to every corner of the country. Close to 10% of people returning to Gujarat's largest city, Ahmedabad, from the festival tested positive for Covid over the weekend, the Press Trust of India reported Monday. Hitherto, the coronavirus has mostly hit the relatively affluent, urbanized parts

of the country that are best able to cope with it, such as the southern states of Kerala and Karnataka, the capital Delhi, and Maharashtra, home to Mumbai. If the Kumbh Mela seeds it in rural districts, where the majority of India's population lives, the death toll could be higher still.

There's a lesson in this for the world. The 1.2 million people who've died from Covid so far this year already represent about two-thirds of the 1.8 million fatalities in 2020. Yet people are behaving as if it's already over. That's removing the sense of unified urgency that led many nations to make such strides in turning around the pandemic last year.

Vaccine supplies for the richest (and, thanks to global initiatives, poorest) countries are relatively ample. Yet those for middle-income nations, where the majority of the planet's population lives, are grossly inadequate, blocked by restrictive patent rules. India, with one of the world's largest pharmaceutical industries, is far better placed than most midsize economies to cope, but even it is crumbling under the strain.

## The science of the second wave

**India has now taken the global spotlight as the worst hotspot for Covid-19**

India has now taken the global spotlight as the worst hotspot for Covid-19. The surge has triggered a key question. Is a variant of Sars-Cov-2 to blame? The question stems from the experiences of several other countries. The B.1.1.7 variant, first found in the United Kingdom, appears to trigger an entirely new wave of infections when it takes hold - this happened with England, then the rest of the island, followed by parts of Europe and the United States (US). Having gained an ability to spread more readily, B.1.1.7 has often required nothing less than a lockdown to slow it down. Now, a new variant has been spotted in India - B.1.617.

Where it was found and how frequently it has been spotted are worrying indicators for what it may be able to do. It arose in Maharashtra, which began bucking the national trend of flat case trajectories almost a fortnight before infections began to rise elsewhere. The state was eventually forced into a lockdown. The variant is now popping up in other countries, where calls are growing to ban flights from India. Western scientists spotted a tell-tale trend in genome sequences submitted from India to the global GISAID repository - the variant was popping up more frequently in samples. These patterns reinforce the fear that B.1.617

may be fuelling India's wave, although there is also a strong possibility the B.1.1.7 may have also taken hold. On March 24, health ministry officials said B.1.1.7 was found in large numbers in community samples in at least one state, Punjab. The answers to all these questions lie in better genomic surveillance. Till April 1, India sequenced only 0.67% of new cases recorded this year. The first of the clues from the sequences came not from Indian scientists but those from Scripps Research in US who spotted the growing footprint of B.1.617. Almost a month since the March 24 press conference by the health ministry, there is



little detail of when and where these were discovered - data that could unlock the mystery of India's second wave. If variants are a major factor, it has far-reaching consequences for how the country approaches containment (cities may need

tougher curbs sooner) as well as its vaccination strategy (the country may require doses that are more resilient to mutations). It is about time these questions are answered, beginning with information about when and where the variant samples came from.





# Covid-19: The nation is at war

*One of India's most respected army chiefs, who led the country to victory in Kargil, General Ved Malik, tweeted on Sunday morning, "Our nation is at war"*

One of India's most respected army chiefs, who led the country to victory in Kargil, General Ved Malik, tweeted on Sunday morning, "Our nation is at war." On Saturday, more than twice the number of Indians died due to Covid-19 than were killed in action in Kargil. As General Malik said, "Is the nation focused on this war? Election rallies, faith events, farmer agitation, infighting over resources going on...wake up India." The appeal comes in the wake of India confronting an unprecedented second wave of Covid-19 infections - hitting a record number of cases and deaths every day, even as there is an acute shortage of everything from hospital beds to oxygen to medicines to vaccines. Covid-19 has come home to India's urban centres, to middle class homes, to the elite, to the working class, in ways that diminish what happened last year when the pandemic first struck. There's a waiting list everywhere and for everything - for tests, admission to hospitals, even at crematoriums and graveyards (with on-ground reports suggesting a disjunction between official fatality figures and these). And there is a shortage of everything - oxygen, ICU beds, and remdesivir. And everywhere and for everything, getting care has become dependent on who you know, as public health systems collapse, automatically excluding the majority. It did not have to be this way. The government may have made an error of judgment in not anticipating the intensity of the second wave, though there were adequate warnings. But, the current situation does highlight a clear policy failure on varied counts - from not using the past year to boost India's health infrastructure enough to deal with current numbers to slipping into business-as-usual mode when it came to events (including large elections), from a painfully slow rollout of the vaccination (only absolute numbers as a proportion of the population, not relative to the rest of the world, matter here) to the delay in imposing curbs. What's important now is to fix the crisis, and be prepared in case there is another wave after this one (remember the United State's third wave was its worst, although it came before the vaccine drive began). This requires the State to pump all its resources into beat the second wave. It is war, and nothing short of a war effort is needed.

## Oxygen shortage is due to incompetence

***This postponement, which is leading to the loss of lives, was a result of administrative inertia, and a flawed tendering process that awarded contracts to companies that are ill-equipped to do the work required***



The second wave of oxygen. Last week, the Centre Covid-19 has led to a sharp surge in demand for hospital beds, medicines, and, crucially, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

directed authorities to ensure the movement of vehicles carrying medical oxygen. The government prohibited the supply of oxygen for industrial purposes to divert the stock for medical use, began a process to import 50,000 metric tonnes of medical oxygen, claimed that domestic production would double, and said that Indian Railways would run special trains to supply oxygen to

states and Union Territories that are facing a shortage. While this are welcome, the scarcity of oxygen could have been avoided with better planning and proactive governance. According to news portal, Scroll.in, it took the Centre eight months to invite bids for new oxygen generation plants after India declared the pandemic to be a "disaster" on March 14, 2020. Surprisingly, the delay was not due to a lack of

funds. The outlay for 162 oxygen plants is ₹201.58 crore, which had been allocated from the PM-Cares fund. However, only 33 plants are operational, according to the health ministry. This postponement, which is leading to the loss of lives, was a result of administrative inertia, and a flawed tendering process that awarded contracts to companies that are ill-equipped to do the work required.



# TINA. We Need Lockdowns

What a mess we have made. All of our own making. Each one of us has at some point been derelict. Avoided a mask, didn't observe social distance or worse, didn't report or test when we had mild Covid symptoms. So, we are all at fault for where we are today. We were so happy and proud thinking we had conquered the Everest of Covid that we did what we do best, relax, go bindaas and ignore all pleas and rules. It was party time; from Diwali to Holi we had a ball, the Great Indian Wedding was back, flights to Goa, Mauritius and the Gulf were packed. A lakh watched India play England in Ahmedabad. Tens of lakhs went to the Kumbh and thousands packed political rallies as the Election Commission set up the longest Bengal election possible. While we did all this, most of Europe and the US was in lockdown and trying to get vaccinated. They had second or third waves on, but we didn't want to watch or learn from what was happening elsewhere. After all, we know best. So instead of ramping up our health facilities; funding, procuring and distributing vaccines; driving genome sequencing; continuing the campaign for masks and distance; we played politics, which we are very good at. If the political machin-

ery of this country had spent as much time, money and effort in planning and preparing for a second wave, would we be where we are today?

Even now, we had the dichotomy of traders in Delhi asking for a lockdown and the government doing its best to avoid it. Strange that people whose life is about making money were happy to shut shop and the governments that are meant to take hard decisions were shying away from it. Why is that?

The Centre, after issuing orders late last year opening everything (including enclosed spaces like cinemas hall and malls!), washed its hands of Covid and said the states have to handle it. The problem for the states is that their money comes from GST (plus VAT of petroleum etc). If they have to do a lockdown, they lose their source of revenue, if they lose that they don't have the funds to fight the virus or do much else. Last year the centre pulled the plug of GST support since it was concerned about its finances. So financially strapped states are very shy of going for a lockdown. Take Goa - the government has not called a lockdown even though it is reporting almost 1,000 cases day (with a seven-day average positivity rate of 24%, one of the highest in the

country) because tourism is its biggest source of revenue and the state needs GST. There isn't even a basic check like a rapid Covid test on people visiting the state.

The fact is that the virus is out of control and the only solution for many states is to have a total lockdown -- either throughout the state like in Maharashtra and Delhi, or in districts where the pandemic is out of control, to break the chain. UP has announced a lockdown in five key cities including Lucknow and Varanasi. It is bizarre that governments have resorted to weekend lockdowns; they are meaningless. Even Delhi's six-day shutdown will not suffice. Given that the incubation can be more than seven days, it is unlikely to provide the break Delhi needs. Figures from Maharashtra, which has been in a lockdown for five days, show little abatement as yet. Which is why they have gone for a two-week lockdown.

There are many economic arguments against lockdowns. They were valid when daily Covid positive numbers were less than 5,000 to 10,000 (depending on the size of the state). When the virus is out of control, as they are now, there is no other option. With positivity rates raging and the health system saturated, there no beds, no medicines, no oxygen



and the staff is exhausted.

That is most critical. Health workers are stretched to the limit. There has to be some means of reducing their burden in the immediate term before they burn out. This not a repeat of September last year. Today India has three times the number of cases on the peak day last year. In Maharashtra the daily cases have been above last year's peak for a month. Yet the staff of these hospitals have not been augmented. The wave has taken an enormous toll on them, and it is unsustainable; they are the last defence against our system being completely overwhelmed. They need a break.

Secondly, commandeering medical facilities for Covid is to deny people with many other ailments medical treatment, especially emergency treatment. Everyone

recognizes that TB control has gone out of hand during this virus period.

Thirdly, let us recognize, as many doctors have pointed out, that the damage done by Covid to people can and does have long term consequences, including brain fogging and other neurological problems, lung damage. With the young now bearing much of the Covid attack, can we afford to have them so damaged and for how long? What is the economic cost of this? Deaths seem to have been low so far but how many more have to die before it has an economic impact?

Finally, we know we are amongst the most undisciplined people in the world. Look at the way we drive, ignoring all rules. To expect Indians to mask up, keep social distance are what dreams are made of.

## A shift in the vaccine strategy



From May 1, India will become one of the first large countries in the world to let all adults seek coronavirus vaccines, as well as allow doses to be sold through private channels. Experts and public health officials long sought decisive steps to open up recipient eligibility and availability of doses, and the government has taken the right call.

Allowing anyone who wants a vaccine to get it will improve uptake, and a greater private sector role will improve availability. India has a formidable pharma manufacturing and services industry it can leverage, leaving government resources to focus on containing and mitigating the outbreak. Monday's decision complements an earlier decision to expedite

***The onus will now be on the states to serve these populations. As a new - and welcome - vaccine strategy takes shape, it will be important to address concerns about equity, and ensure that the drive is free from profiteering and corruption.***

approvals for foreign vaccines authorised by credible health regulators, and signals a recognition that an unparalleled crisis needs steps that could involve breaking conventions. The two key conventions India breaks from next month are: First, making the programme decentralised and, second, letting the private sector choose how it sells and prices its doses (for India-based manufacturers, this prerogative extends only to 50% of what they produce in a month). This is important to tap into private networks and provide adequate incentives; letting India's

diverse states and market forces interact is good. But it also carries some risks - in particular, because of a crucial fine print in the announcement. Those in the 18-45 age bracket will need to pay for a vaccine, unless their state decides to sponsor it. The free doses available at present will continue to be available only for people above 45, frontline workers and health care workers. Experts have flagged concerns about the potential for vaccine inequity in such an approach. Consider Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla's comments that he expects to sell doses of

Covishield at the rate of ₹1,000 when private sales open up. This may be among the cheapest of prices, but will likely put the vaccine out of reach for the bottom 20% of households on the economic ladder (the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India released by the government in January estimated this category earns ₹25,825 per year - or ₹2,152 per month - per capita). The onus will now be on the states to serve these populations. As a new - and welcome - vaccine strategy takes shape, it will be important to address concerns about equity, and ensure that the drive is free from profiteering and corruption.





# NEW FORMS OF THE VIRUS, SAME FIGHT!

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# India's second Covid wave hits like a 'tsunami' as hospitals buckle under weight



(News Agencies)- Healthcare and other essential services across India are close to collapse as a second coronavirus wave that started in mid-March tears through the country with devastating speed.

Graveyards are running out of space, hospitals are turning away patients, and desperate families are pleading for help on social media for beds and medicine. India reported 295,041 cases of coronavirus and 2,023 deaths Wednesday, its highest rise in cases and highest death increase recorded in a single day since the beginning of the pandemic, according to a CNN tally of figures

from the Indian Ministry of Health. "The volume is humongous," said Jalil Parkar, a senior pulmonary consultant at the Lilavati Hospital

in Mumbai, which had to convert its lobby into an additional Covid ward. "It's just like a tsunami." "Things are out of control," said Ramanan Laxminarayan, director of the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy in New Delhi. "There's no oxygen. A hospital bed is hard to find. It's impossible to get a test. You have to wait over a week. And pretty much every system that could break down in the health care system has broken down," he said. To prove his point, at least 22 Covid-19 patients who were on

ventilator support died Wednesday waiting for oxygen supplies that were lost in an accident, a senior official from the Nashik district in the Indian state of Maharashtra said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation on Tuesday, acknowledging the country's "very big battle" against Covid-19. He appealed to states to "use a lockdown as their last option," even as the capital New Delhi entered its first full day of a week-long lockdown. On Monday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned that failing to halt

movement in the city could lead to "tragedy." "We don't want to take Delhi to a place where patients are lying in hospital corridors and people are dying on roads," Kejriwal said. On Tuesday, he warned that some Delhi hospitals were "left with just a few hours of oxygen," as authorities scrambled to convert sports complexes, banquet halls, hotels and schools into much-needed treatment centers, with the goal to add 6,000 additional beds within days.

## The last chance to save Alexey Navalny

(News Agencies)-Last summer, Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny narrowly survived an assassination attempt, widely believed to have been organized by Russia's security services, through a Novichok nerve-agent poisoning. Now, without concerted action, he may die from medical neglect in a Russian penal colony where

the authorities locked him up following a mockery of a trial. The botched nerve-agent attack, since exposed, was supposed to have been accomplished with deniability. If Navalny now dies in prison, the blame will lie unequivocally with the Kremlin. The Kremlin has already weathered a raft of Western sanctions imposed for misdeeds ranging from the

Novichok poisoning of Navalny and of a former KGB agent in Britain, to Russia's seizure of Crimea and hacking into US databases. It's reasonable to wonder what else at this stage could possibly be done to ensure that Navalny survives his monstrously unjust and politically motivated prison stint. Western leaders should make clear that Navalny's

health and freedom will be their personal mission, one that will not fade with the news cycle, until he walks out of prison gates. It's not hard to see why Russian authorities are now sparing no effort to make Navalny -- and his backers -- believe that political opposition is futile and to make them pay a very high price for their activism.

## NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



### PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- 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.



### REDUCE OVERCROWDING

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# The rift runs deep in Yadav citadel

(News Agencies)-All is not well in the family of Samajwadi Party (SP) patriarch and former chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. This year, the Holi festival on March 29 made public the fissures in the family. For the first time, an unwell Mulayam Singh Yadav did not reach his native village Saifai in Etawah district to celebrate Holi. Mulayam's son and SP national president Akhilesh Yadav was playing Holi with his supporters at his father's haveli in Saifai.

Meanwhile, Shivpal Singh Yadav, the patriarch's younger brother, was celebrating with his supporters at the local SS College a short distance away. The big news was that the Yadav first family was celebrating Holi separately in Saifai. The tussle within the Saifai clan has intensified since Mulayam's niece Sandhya Yadav declared herself a BJP candidate for the district panchayat member's post

from Mainpuri on April 7. Sandhya is the daughter of Mulayam's youngest brother Abhay Ram Yadav and elder sister of Dharmendra Yadav, a former Samajwadi MP from Badaun. This is the first time that a member of the Mulayam family



is fighting an election on a BJP ticket. Sandhya won the election for Mainpuri district panchayat president on an SP ticket in 2015. Her husband Anujesh Pratap Yadav's mother Urmila Yadav is a former SP MLA from Ghiror in Mainpuri. Anujesh's family has good ties with Shivpal Yadav. For this reason, in July 2017, the SP moved a no-confidence motion against Sandhya but the BJP state government came to her aid

and the motion fell through. Says an SP source, on condition of anonymity, "Sandhya's family got closer to the saffron camp after the incident."

In March 2019, Sandhya's husband Anujesh joined the BJP. After this, Dharmendra Yadav, her brother, declared in a letter that he was snapping all ties with Anujesh's family. Sandhya, however, maintained her ties with Saifai, going there often to take care of her unwell father. Dharmendra declined to comment on Sandhya's

latest move, saying only that his letter of two years ago said it all. Rajendra Chaudhary, the leader closest to Akhilesh and the chief spokesperson of the SP, says, "The BJP is scared of the SP. But if they believe that by splitting the Mulayam family, they can weaken the socialist movement, they are mistaken. We were sure that the BJP would pull a stunt like this before the 2022 assembly election."

## Sighs of relief at the Chauvin guilty verdict, but activists say the work on racial justice is far from over

(News Agencies)-While the nation paused for the reading of the guilty verdict against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin -- and many rejoiced -- activists say now is a moment to keep moving forward in addressing racial injustice.

"It's a relief, but the celebration is premature," the Rev. Jesse Jackson told CNN.

"We must break the backbone of legal lynching forever. Police killing people is getting away with legal lynching," Jackson said. "So, we still have a lot of work to do, this is a first down, not a touchdown."

The evidence of the work ahead can be found no more than 10 miles from the courthouse where Chauvin was convicted, Jackson said. In the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center, burial plans are underway for Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man who was fatally shot by a police officer during a traffic stop on April 11. Chauvin, 45, was convicted Tuesday of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter of George Floyd --

all three of the charges he faced. The jurors deliberated for more than 10 hours over two days before coming to their decision. The verdict reverberated throughout the US, where many cities saw large-scale demonstrations in the wake of Floyd's death in May 2020. Footage of Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes ignited weeks of protests -- as well as looting and unrest -- and refueled national conversations around policing and racial bias in the US. When the verdict was read Tuesday, a symphony of celebration sounded outside the government center where the trial was held, as well as 4 miles to the south, at the intersection where Floyd drew his last breaths.

Among crowds of hundreds, people cheered, shouted out in joy and raised hands skyward as car horns honked, while some cried in relief. Others strained to hear from their cell phones the rest of what the judge had to say as he adjourned the trial.

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# Bangladesh court allows police to question Islamist leader

(News Agencies )- A court in Bangladesh on Monday allowed police to continue to question an influential leader of an Islamist group that led violent protests against last month's visit by India's prime minister to the Muslim-majority nation.

Lawyers said Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Devdas Chandra Adhikari issued the decision after state counsels argued that Mamunul Haque of the group Hefazat-e-Islam was dangerous and investigators need to continue questioning him.

Haque was arrested Sunday and faces several charges, including hurting religious sentiment involving a case filed in Dhaka in 2020, state counsel Abdullah Abu said.

"He was a fugitive," Abu said.

Defense lawyers said Haque's arrest and the approval to keep him in custody for questioning for seven days in a year-old case were part of a conspiracy to undermine his popularity as an Islamic preacher.

"Why was he shown being arrested in an old case? Why was not he arrested during the past year?" said defense counsel Jainul Abedin Mezbah.

Security was tight at the court as Haque was escorted from an office in the Detective Branch where he was kept overnight for initial questioning. The law requires that arrested suspects be produced in front of a magistrate within 24 hours.

Haque, 47, is a leader of the Hefazat-e-Islam group, which has a strong network of Islamic

schools across Bangladesh. The group says it is not a political party, but its leaders regularly preach about the country's politics and advocate an Islamic revolution. Its leaders often challenge the constitution and legal system, which is based on British common law. Haque has strongly opposed the government's policy of building closer ties with neighboring Hindu-majority India.

The group criticized Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for inviting Modi to join a March 26 celebration of the country's 50th anniversary of independence. Critics accuse Modi's Hindu-nationalist party of stoking religious polarization in India and discriminating against minorities, particularly Muslims.



Modi's two-day visit was undermined by violence in which at least 17 supporters of Hefazat-e-Islam were killed in clashes with police as they attacked a police station and other government buildings and blocked highways. In Dhaka, they clashed with police outside the main Baitul Mokarram Mosque during the visit. In a

speech to Bangladesh's Parliament earlier this month, Hasina warned the group and its leaders that they would face consequences if they continue to use violence. Haque and his associates led a recent campaign against plans to erect a statue of independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina's father, saying sculptures are un-Islamic.

## 5 Killed During Protest at China-backed Bangladesh Power Plant



(News Agencies )- At least five people were shot dead when police opened fire on hundreds of laborers demonstrating over unpaid wages and working hours in Bangladesh. The shooting occurred at the construction site of a Chinese-financed power plant in the southeastern part of the country, police officials said. Anwar Hossain, a senior police officer in the city of Chittagong,

said that police on the site of the future coal-fired Chittagong Power Plant (CPP) in the Banskhali area were forced to open fire Saturday after the protesters attacked them.

"The agitating laborers set fire to vehicles and other machineries on the site. When policemen on duty tried to control the violence, the protesters surrounded them and attacked them with bricks and stones," Hossain

said. "Police were caught in a situation like a siege and were forced to respond with gunfire."

Azizul Islam, police chief of Banskhali, said that the protesters far outnumbered the officers who were on duty.

"There were around 50 policemen deployed at the site while the protesters who attacked them were over 2,000 [in number]. At least three policemen were injured," Islam said. He also said police opened fire in response.

A junior police officer who did not want to be identified because he is not authorized to speak to the media, said, "there are Chinese nationals working at the under-construction plant. Police had to take extra precautions for the presence of the foreigners on the site."

Some residents of Banskhali said the dispute over the wages

had been taking place for several days.

"The laborers were seeking a hike in their wages. They were demanding clearance of their overdue wages, half workday on Fridays and daily breaks for namaaz (prayer) and Iftar (evening meal with which Muslims end the Ramadan fast) during Ramadan. The laborers were protesting also because they were being forced to work 10 hours a day," Aminul Islam, a resident of Banskhali, who supported the demonstrating protesters, told VOA.

Islam said the clashes began with protesting laborers on one side and police and foreign workers on the other side.

"Soon, we heard the gunshots from the site of the clashes inside the complex of the power plant. Then we saw laborers with

bullet injuries being carried out of the complex on way to the hospital," Islam added.

Several doctors from Chittagong Medical College Hospital told local media that over a dozen people were lying in the hospital beds with gunshot wounds.

Chinese-based company A consortium of two companies - Bangladesh-based S. Alam group and China's Shandong Electric Power Construction Corporation III (SEPCOIII) - signed a deal in 2016 to jointly build the 1,320-megawatt power plant. The state-owned Bangladesh Power Development Board is to buy electricity from the consortium once the plant becomes operational.

The Chinese company has a 30% stake in the plant, which is one of a series of investment projects Beijing is pushing to build closer ties with Dhaka.

## Bangladesh calls on Southeast Asia to pressure Myanmar to take back the Rohingya refugees

Bangladesh hopes that Southeast Asian nations will put pressure on Myanmar to repatriate displaced Rohingya and bring them home, according to the foreign minister.

AK Abdul Momen said Bangladesh has been bearing the burden of the Rohingya Muslims, who have been seeking shelter in the South Asian country after a mass exodus due to a brutal crackdown by the Myanmar army in 2017.

The Rohingya are a persecuted Muslim minority from Rakhine

state in western Myanmar. While there have been large migrations of Rohingya to Bangladesh since the 1970s, none was as quick and massive as the August 2017 exodus.

"Around 1.1 million persecuted Rohingyas are now being sheltered in Bangladesh," Momen told CNBC's "Streets Signs Asia" on Monday. "Our priority is that these Rohingya persecuted people should go back to their home for a decent living," he said.

Bangladesh took in the Rohingya

out of humanitarian consideration, but the South Asian nation is now "facing difficulty with them," said Momen. He hopes that the member states of ASEAN - or the Association of South East Asian Nations - will play a strong role in the upcoming summit in getting Myanmar's military government to take back the refugees.

"Now that the Myanmar government has been invited by ASEAN (to) the summit in Indonesia, this is good news. At least they will go there and then maybe they will be pressurized by

ASEAN, hopefully, to take their people back," Momen said.

Myanmar is currently in a state of emergency, after a military coup on Feb. 1, which saw the powerful junta oust the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Momen's comments come as Myanmar's military commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing is reportedly going to attend the ASEAN summit in Indonesia on April 24. The 10-member regional bloc has been trying to find a way to defuse the escalating crisis in Myanmar, which has so far killed

700 civilians and detained more than 3,000, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Observers have warned that Myanmar may be on the brink of becoming a "failed state" and there needs to be greater international effort from the world's major powers to resolve the violence. While Bangladesh's foreign minister did not take a stance on the latest military coup, he emphasized that his government wants stability to return to Myanmar.





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# Pakistan Lawmakers Debate French Envoy's Expulsion

(News Agencies)- Pakistan's parliament began debating a resolution Tuesday on whether the French ambassador should be ordered to leave the country over the publication of anti-Islam caricatures in France.

The proposed resolution is the outcome of a deal Prime Minister Imran Khan's government negotiated in overnight talks with leaders of the radical Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) to defuse days of deadly, nationwide anti-France demonstrations. The TLP has agreed to call off its protests across the country, said Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed while sharing details of the understanding.

Ahmed added that all cases registered against activists of the group under anti-terror laws for their involvement in recent violent protests will also be withdrawn. The government, he said, has also agreed to withdraw last week's decision outlawing the TLP and to release leaders as well as activists of the group detained during the protests.

Attempts by police to disperse

the demonstrations sparked violent clashes, leaving four policemen and six protesters dead. Officials said more than 800 people, mostly law enforcers, were among those injured in the clashes. The resolution calls for the expulsion of the French envoy and it would be up to the lawmakers to vote in favor or against it.

The text of the resolution, however, stressed the (Pakistani) state alone is authorized to deal with foreign policy matters and "no

individual, group or party are allowed to exert undue illegal pressure regarding such matters." "The optics of tabling a resolution calling for the expulsion of the French ambassador are not good for Islamabad, as it's essentially caving in to the TLP's core demand," Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia program at Washington's Wilson Center, told VOA.

"That said, the Parliament has an opportunity to reject the



resolution, and that would be a major victory not just for the government, but also for a state that has repeatedly treated religious hardliners with kid

gloves," Kugelman said.

Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party holds a simple majority in the legislative house.

## Bangladesh cracks down on Islamist group after anti-Modi protests

Hundreds of members and supporters of an Islamist group, including its influential leader, have been arrested in Bangladesh over the past week, officials said, over deadly protests against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month for the country's golden jubilee celebrations of independence.

The protests across several districts in Bangladesh were mostly led by the Hefazat-e-Islam group, whose members accused India's Hindu nationalist leader of stoking religious polarisation and

discriminating against minorities, particularly Muslims, in his country. At least 13 Hefazat supporters died in police firing during the days-long demonstrations against Modi's two-day visit as they attacked a police station and other government buildings, and blocked highways elsewhere in the country. In the capital Dhaka, they clashed with police outside the country's main Baitul Mukarram National Mosque during the visit. On Sunday, the group's joint secretary, Mamunul

Haque, was arrested at a madrasa (Islamic school) in Dhaka's Mohammadpur neighbourhood, Harunur Rashid, a senior Dhaka Metropolitan Police official, said. Haque, 47, faces charges of instigating violence but police did not provide details on specific cases or whether the charges stem from Modi's visit. "We will investigate all allegations against him since Haque is accused in a number of cases related to inciting violence," Rashid told reporters. A further 298 Hefazat members and supporters

were arrested in the eastern rural district of Brahmanbaria where anti-Modi demonstrations were also held, police said on Sunday. "We arrested them by identifying them through video footage," Brahmanbaria police's deputy chief, Mohammad Roish Uddin, told the AFP news agency. Hefazat spokesman Jakaria Noman Foyezi told AFP that 23 leaders of his organisation had been detained by police, calling the police claims against them "false and fabricated".

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# 'No one can dare ask why'

## *What it's like to live in a town where everything is controlled by the Taliban*

(News Agencies)-

Women are banned from leaving their homes without a male companion and nobody dares ask about schooling for girls living here.

Taxation, that's sometimes fair and often on the rich but compulsory, can be prey to rival taxmen and lead to beatings and imprisonment for non-payment. Justice is dispensed in mobile courts with adulterers jailed or killed and some reoffending thieves hanged in public. Bread, clothing and even the occasional smartphone are gifts for fighters. This is 2021, in a Taliban stronghold: Musa Qala, a town in Helmand province that dozens of Americans, British and Afghan soldiers died fighting for over nearly two decades.

It is now entirely the type of backward, Islamist society the Taliban want. It's a crude form of order after more than 30 years of chaos, locals say.

In interviews with six male

residents of the town, CNN sought to establish what a society controlled by the Taliban is like for its citizens, given the growing nationwide sway of the militant group that ruled the country in the 1990s.

On Wednesday, US President Joe Biden is expected to announce plans to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by the twentieth anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Negotiations between the US and the Taliban are ongoing, with the Afghan government often left on the sidelines, and likely to pick up the pieces of any peace deal.

The fate of Musa Qala carries great symbolism for the NATO presence in Afghanistan. It is where some of the fiercest fighting occurred ten years ago, before US-led troops departed Helmand and Afghan troops left the area by 2016.

Britain lost at least 23 soldiers skirmishing around its verdant

riverbed, before US marines swept in with greater firepower in 2010. At least four US soldiers died in the town, along with many Afghan security forces. The lack of rights for women, and complete absorption of society by the Taliban, will raise questions about the ultimate purpose of the sacrifice of NATO nations.

While Kabul and the center of most main cities remain mostly under government control, vast swathes of rural Afghanistan are ruled by the fractious and varied units of the Taliban. For more than five years now in Musa Qala, they have imposed their rules despite still being in regular conflict with Afghan security forces further south in Helmand province.

"At the end of the day the Taliban have the power," said one resident. "It is not really possible to go against their will." "They are everywhere," a second resident added. "They have power and the court. They tell us what our Zakat, or tax, is." "They use it for



expenses and guns. They oppress those who do not pay." Residents speaking to CNN did so anonymously, for fear of reprisals from the Taliban.

The men broadly described Taliban rule as an improvement on the past decade, marred by a deeply backward treatment of women, and moments of brutality. The men said women are not allowed to work unless they are medical staff. "When they [women] go out, they need to dress according to Sharia. So, for them it is more important to take care of their homes than working outside," a third resident said. The second man we interviewed said women had been prosecuted by

the courts for leaving their homes. "Women are not allowed to go out; you can't find many women going out of their houses.

There is no school for girls in Musa Qala." The fourth man said: "No one can dare to ask why. Since we can't talk about it, people have accepted the reality." The residents spoke of a confident militant group able to move freely on motorbikes, with an established walkie-talkie warning system for Coalition attacks. They said US airstrikes had recently resumed, after a hiatus because of the ongoing peace negotiations between the US and the Taliban, expedited by the Trump administration.

## Mysterious blackout in Iran threatens to undermine nuclear talks

(News Agencies)-

Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has vowed revenge against Israel after an apparent attack on an Iranian nuclear site caused a blackout at the facility over the weekend.

The incident threatens to undermine recently revived diplomatic efforts between Washington and Tehran to revive the 2015 nuclear deal.

Newly inaugurated centrifuges at Iran's Natanz facility, a centerpiece of the country's contentious nuclear program, appeared to have been badly damaged in Sunday's incident, which Tehran has described as an act of "nuclear terrorism."

Israel's army chief hinted at possible Israeli involvement in the attack in comments on Sunday. Several Israeli media outlets, quoting unnamed intelligence sources, said Mossad, the national intelligence agency, was behind the operation but offered no other details.

The most high-profile condemnation from Tehran came

on Monday, according to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency, when Zarif reportedly accused Israel of seeking "revenge" over Iran's efforts to lift US sanctions on the country during last week's indirect negotiations to return to the nuclear deal.

"Our stance will be stronger, and our sides in the negotiations must know that our enriching installations were so far the first generation," Zarif said, according to IRNA. "But from now on, we will fill Natanz with further advanced centrifuges with many more folds of power of enrichment."

Zarif also tweeted on Monday a letter addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, which argued that "the deliberate targeting of a highly sensitive safeguarded nuclear facility-with the high risk of potential release of radioactive material-constitutes reckless criminal nuclear terrorism." It calls on the US to remove all sanctions imposed on Iran since the adoption of the JCPOA.

What actually happened?

The details of the incident at Natanz are murky. Iranian officials said Sunday that there was an act of "sabotage" that led to a blackout at the underground facility in the desert of Isfahan.

They also said this happened hours after Iran ceremoniously launched advanced centrifuges at the Natanz plant on Sunday.

The extent of the damage is unclear but Zarif's promise to replace the centrifuges indicates that material losses may have been extensive.

Iran denies there were casualties, but the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Behrouz Kamalvandi, was badly injured at the facility, according to state media, falling from a height of seven meters on the same day. Officials have not linked Kamalvandi's reported injuries to the incident. But on Monday, a video was released on social media showing him on a hospital bed vowing "to resist."

"Our nuclear industry is a time-



honored and resilient industry. Our battle will be continued. We will resist," said Kamalvandi in a video address.

This is not the first security issue at Natanz. The facility lost a building when a fire broke out last July, in an incident officials described as an attack on its nuclear program. In 2010, the facility was also the target of the Stuxnet cyberattack, which security experts believe was carried out by Israel and the US. What was going on at the plant at the time?

On Saturday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced new

advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges at Natanz, maintaining Iran's official line that its nuclear activities were for "peaceful and civil purposes" but touting the country's nuclear ability as stronger than ever before. The inauguration of the centrifuges came on the 15th anniversary of the Iran's National Nuclear Technology Day. The unveiling was yet show of defiance by Tehran as it begins new talks over the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which lifted US sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs on its uranium enrichment program.



# All homeless people on Los Angeles' Skid Row must be offered housing by the fall, judge orders



(News Agencies)- All federal judge ordered Tuesday. The order comes in response to a federal lawsuit filed last year by several citizens, business

owners, and community leaders who argue officials have failed to address the homeless crisis in Los Angeles, as tents line full city blocks and makeshift shelters cramp under street overpasses. "Los Angeles has lost its parks, beaches, schools, sidewalks, and highway systems due to the inaction of city and county officials who have left our homeless citizens with no other place to turn," US District Judge David Carter said in the 110-page brief. The judge's filing follows on Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announcing his budget for the next fiscal year in which he vowed to dedicate \$1 billion toward

homelessness. In 2020 alone, 1,383 homeless people died, and an estimated five more die each day, according to data from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). The order states specific actions for the public streets of Skid Row -- home to one of the nation's biggest concentrations of homeless people. According to the brief, city and county officials must offer and provide shelter to Skid Row's general population within 180 days, on or before October 18, 2021. Unaccompanied women and children must be offered housing within 90 days. Calling it an "unprecedented pace,"

Garcetti said Tuesday he would not comment on the order before fully understanding how the judge envisions the timeline successfully happening. Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer also withheld comment on the plan. "We just received this massive order from Judge Carter," Feuer said at a press conference. "We are reviewing it as I speak today, and we'll have more to say about it in the near future, but today I will just indicate that we're still analyzing the court's ruling." Carter's order is an urgent move to "restructure and reform" the housing needs in Los Angeles, according to the brief.

# Top military official warns China and Russia are modernizing nuclear weapons faster than US

(News Agencies)-The top US military official who runs the American nuclear arsenal warned that China and Russia are modernizing their nuclear weapons and capabilities faster than the US, saying during a congressional hearing on Tuesday that if it does not start investing more in nuclear defense and infrastructure, the US will be "at risk of losing credibility in the eyes of our adversaries." Russia is "aggressively engaged" in "conventional nuclear capability development and modernization, and are now roughly 80% complete while we are at zero," said Adm. Charles Richard, the head of US Strategic Command, which oversees the US nuclear

arsenal. "It is easier to describe what they are not modernizing -- nothing -- than what they are, which is pretty much everything," Richard said. Richard said China is modernizing its nuclear capabilities so quickly that he "can't get through a week right now without finding out something we didn't know about China." While China's nuclear stockpile is vastly smaller than the United States' and Russia's nuclear arsenals, it is undergoing an "unprecedented expansion," Richard said in his opening testimony. Russia and the US are limited to some 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed intercontinental ballis-

tic missiles, deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments, according to the latest START treaty. It is estimated that China has only about 320 warheads, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The Biden administration is currently carrying out a nuclear posture review, which is examining the total amount of money invested in the nuclear modernization program. The purpose of the review is to "reduce the goal of nuclear weapons in our defense strategy," Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat,



said during the hearing. "I agree with that goal, and I think it is incompatible with that staggeringly high level of spending. Every administration makes strategic decisions about our force structure and modernization, and when it comes to nuclear weap-

ons, those decisions carry tremendous weight," Warren said. Operations, interim upgrades and full modernization of the US nuclear weapons program could cost \$1.2 trillion, according to an October 2017 report from the Congressional Budget Office.

# A body with Covid washed ashore. Now this Pacific island nation isn't taking any chances



(News Agencies)-A Pacific island country has banned outward travel from its main island for three days after a body washed ashore that later tested positive for Covid-19, Radio New Zealand has reported.

The body of a Filipino fisherman was discovered April 11 on a Vanuatu beach a short drive from the main wharf of the capital, Port Vila, on Efate island, according to the report. That day, a United Kingdom-flagged tanker found one crew

member was not aboard as it sailed out of Port Vila, New Zealand public broadcaster RNZ reported last week. Vanuatu port authorities told the tanker to return to port and a search and rescue operation got underway. After the body of the crew member was found on the beach, authorities detained the tanker. The body was taken to a mortuary and later tested positive for Covid-19, according to RNZ. It's not clear from the RNZ report whether the man died from Covid-19 or how he came to wash ashore on the island. CNN has reached out to Ministry of Infra-

structure and Public Utilities which oversees the Department of Ports and Marine for more information. Most of the remote island nations of the South Pacific have reported very few coronavirus cases, and Vanuatu -- home to around 300,000 people -- is no exception. The country has reported just three Covid-19 cases, according to Johns Hopkins University. It reported its first case in November last year, and two more infections in March. According to Prime Minister Bob Loughman, the travel ban is in place while authorities conduct contact tracing, RNZ reported. As part of those efforts, 16 people have been put in quarantine -- most of them police officers who

went to the scene when the body was found, according to the report. The director-general of health, Russell Tamata, is urging the public to get tested, although he said the risk of community transmission was low, according to RNZ. The leader of the opposition, Ralph Regenvanu, said on Twitter that although Vanuatu had imposed "admirably strict quarantine protocols on all ports of entry into the country," they didn't foresee that a dead body with Covid-19 could wash ashore and be put in "the only mortuary in the country where people gather to mourn every day." CNN has reached out to Vanuatu authorities for comment.



# Lawmakers push PPP revamp as funding lapse looms



(News Agencies)-A bipartisan group of senators on Tuesday unveiled plans to offer more emergency pandemic relief to the country's tiniest employers, a last-minute revamp of Washington's nearly \$1 trillion small business rescue that is close to exhausting its funding.

The bill introduced by Senate Small Business Chair Ben Cardin (D-Md.) would allow thousands of self-employed Americans to qualify for more aid under the massive Paycheck Protection Program, which offers government-backed loans that can be forgiven if businesses maintain payroll. Cardin and the bill's co-sponsors - including Sens. James Lankford (R-Okla.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) - face a narrow window to pass the legislation because PPP funding is expected to run out in the coming weeks. Their bill would not appropriate additional money. As of last week, the program had \$44 billion to lend out of the nearly \$292 billion made available by Congress since December. It's unclear how many potential borrowers the bill will help without any more money being pumped into the program. And the legislation doesn't extend the May 31 deadline for loan applications either.

"No new PPP funding is currently proposed," said Paul Merski, executive vice president of the Independent Community Bankers

of America, which represents lenders that make PPP loans. "It is hard to see how all this can be implemented before the money runs out."

The last-minute proposal is the latest complication for the PPP, which policymakers have operated via ad hoc and ever-changing guidelines since creating it at the outset of the pandemic. The program has nonetheless been one of the most popular Covid-19 relief efforts, delivering nearly 9.9 million forgivable loans worth more than \$762 billion.

It was not immediately clear how quickly the legislation would move ahead. The bill's backers would need to try to obtain unanimous consent in the Senate to pass it on an expedited

basis. Otherwise, the legislation would be at risk of being bogged down in a lengthy floor debate. Congress is returning to the PPP after passing legislation less than a month ago that extended its application deadline from March 31 to May 31. At that time, lawmakers declined to appropriate additional funding, even as the Small Business Administration, which administers the PPP, warned that the program would be on track to run out of money well ahead of the new deadline.

This week, Congress is once again proposing changes to the program without appropriating more funds. While Cardin said earlier this month that he would be open to a bipartisan effort to add more money, sources

## CDC vaccine advisers will meet Friday to discuss the J&J vaccine. Here's what could happen next



(News Agencies) - Vaccine advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention meet Friday to make recommendations for use of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine after it was put on hold to investigate a potential link to serious blood clots. The CDC and US Food and Drug Administration recommended a pause on use of the J&J coronavirus vaccine last week following six reported US cases of a rare and severe type of blood clot.

They are investigating whether there are more cases and whether other types of blood clots might be associated with the vaccine. The pause was also intended to give experts time to inform doctors about how to look for and treat these clots.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices met on April 14, but members said they needed more information about the J&J vaccine and the blood clot cases.

Dr. William Schaffner, a non-voting ACIP member and infectious diseases professor at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, told CNN that the committee delayed making a decision because there will likely

be more reports of blood clots connected to the vaccine, and members need to understand the demographics of those cases. Schaffner said Friday's meeting could play out a few different ways. ACIP could recommend that use of the vaccine resume with no changes, or the committee could recommend that the US stop using the J&J vaccine altogether. Schaffner said it's more likely that ACIP will recommend that use of the vaccine resume with a warning about possible adverse effects -- and potentially, advice to the highest-risk populations to steer clear of this vaccine altogether. ACIP chair Dr. Jose Romero told CNN that the

committee also has the option to recommend the pause continue until more information is gathered -- though he believes enough data has been generated at this point for ACIP to make a decision. Romero said he has yet to examine the data that will be considered Friday but does not believe the committee will decide to recommend a complete stop to use of the vaccine in the US. "CDC scientists can make an estimate of what the benefit-risk analysis would be, and that's certainly going to inform us in our decision," said Romero. "Whoever uses the vaccine -- as with any vaccine in this country -- they should be informed about any risks associated with it."

## Justice Department to investigate Minneapolis policing practices after George Floyd's death

(News Agencies) - The Justice Department has launched a federal civil probe into policing practices in Minneapolis following the death of George Floyd and the murder convictions for ex-cop Derek Chauvin, Attorney General Merrick Garland announced Wednesday.

"The challenges we face are deeply woven into our history. They did not arise today, or last year; building trust between community and law enforcement will take time and effort by all of us," Garland said at Justice Department headquarters. "But we undertake this task with determination and urgency, knowing that change cannot wait."

ANALYSIS: The law delivered justice to George Floyd. America's political leaders are up next

The broad federal civil investigation will be to determine whether the Minneapolis Police Department has "a pattern or practice of unconstitutional or unlawful policing," he announced. It will include a "comprehensive review" of the department's "policies, training, supervision and use of force investigations."

It will assess whether the Minneapolis Police Department uses excessive force, including

during protests, or engages in "discriminatory conduct," and if "its treatment of those with behavioral health disabilities is unlawful," Garland said.

The announcement from the Justice Department comes after the guilty verdicts against Chauvin for Floyd's murder. A bystander video captured Chauvin kneeling on the neck and back of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, for 9 minutes and 29 seconds on May 25, 2020.

Chauvin could face up to 40 years in prison for second-degree murder, up to 25 years for third-degree murder and up to 10 years for manslaughter. Three other



officers facing charges in Floyd's death-- Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane -- are expected to go on trial in August.

The new civil investigation is separate from an

independent federal criminal investigation into the death of Floyd, which was first announced in May 2020 under the Trump administration and is still ongoing, according to the attorney general.



# Bollywood's Green Card Holders

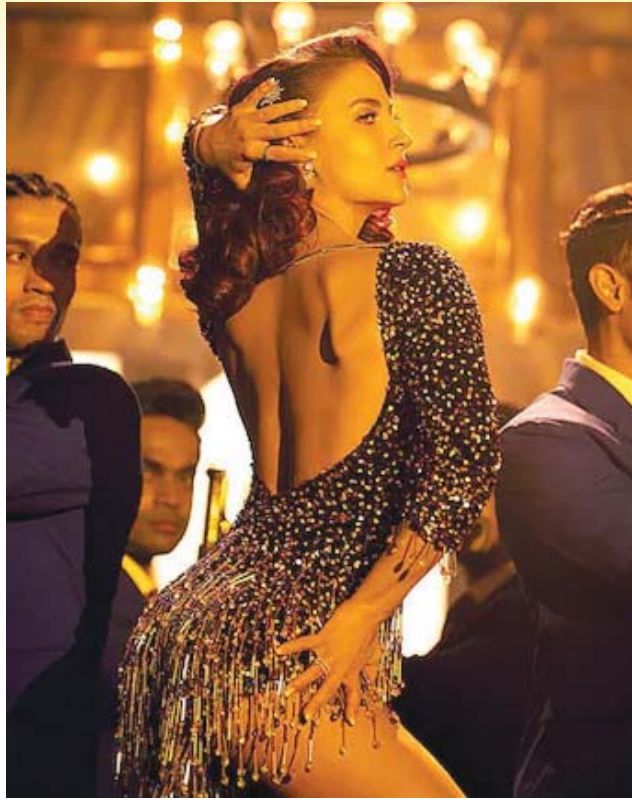
clients, Deepika, Katrina, Kareena, Alia, Anushka, Vaani and Kangana, now roll off his tongue smoothly. Be it fashion shoots, commercials or movies, Bauer's services are frequently sought.

A trailblazer no doubt, Bauer isn't the only foreigner to have made it in the Hindi film industry. There are others who have made India home and risen through the ranks: British-Indian Katrina Kaif, Bahrain-born former Miss Sri Lanka Jacqueline Fernandez, Pakistani-Czech US model Nargis Fakhri and Mexican actress Bárbara Mori, among others. Earlier, the industry had the bald Bob Christo, a villain in over 200 films, and the Myanmar-born iconic Helen. Like her, there are other expats trying hard to find a fine balance between dancing and acting. Elli AvrRam is one.

A year after she arrived in India, the Greek-Swede signed her first film, Mickey Virus (2013). "We all think that the biggest struggle happens until we get our first film, but the true one [begins] after," she says. AvrRam's love affair with Bollywood began in Sweden, where she was both floored and devastated by Sanjay Leela

Bhansali's Devdas (2002). She even remembers performing Hindi film songs with the Parsi Dance Group in Stockholm. With dreams of becoming a Bhansali heroine, AvrRam, then 22, arrived in Mumbai. "When I reached [India], I thought it would be filled with big bungalows and big families like in the films," she laughs. "How lame was I to think that?" Bauer, on the other hand, had a more exotic image of India in mind which the bustling Mumbai changed instantly. Its entertainment industry, he would learn, had a more spontaneous way of functioning, distinct from those in Europe and Australia, where he had earlier worked. "Living in India, no day is the same and rarely turns out as planned," he says. "I think as a foreigner you should let yourself

go and look at the situation with humour and positivity." Bauer is keen to give back to the land which has given him success. With his make-up academy, he is ensuring that Indians get a chance to learn the latest skills and techniques. "I want to prepare students for what working in the industry is really like," he says. "Our course is difficult and highly



intense, but it produces artists who can work anywhere in the world." It was Bigg Boss that gave AvrRam's career the fillip it needed. "I would not be sitting here if not for Bigg Boss," she says. "This industry is tough for an outsider, especially a foreigner. Reality shows are great platforms for both audiences and filmmakers to see you." Director duo Abbas-Mustan offered her a role in Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon (2015) after her Bigg Boss stint.

Canadian-Moroccan singer-actress Nora Fatehi also saw her career advance after she appeared on dance show Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa. "Given who I am and my lack of privilege, I always knew that every opportunity I get, big or small, would be a stepping stone," she says. She bagged two music videos after appearing on

the show, one of them directed by choreographer Remo D'souza. Four years later, he cast her in the Varun Dhawan-starrer Street Dancer 3D (2020). Her songs, like 'Dilbar', 'Saki', 'Garmi' and 'Naach Meri Rani', have all become runaway hits, garnering millions of views. "I don't want to be temporary here, 'that girl who had a good run'. If I do difficult things, I know I will leave an impact."

Today, the Hindi film industry employs several foreign professionals to work behind the camera, cinematographers like Carlos Catalan and Tetsuo Nagata, among others, but the problems faced by those on screen are peculiar. AvrRam's skin colour, for instance, has brought her unwanted attention. "You automatically get a little bit uncomfortable. I have been close to leaving everything and going home but I know the passion I have and what a badass I am." Looking at 'Har Funn Maula', a recent song featuring her and Aamir Khan, Sweden isn't getting her back anytime soon.

## Derek Chauvin is in a prison's segregated housing unit for his safety while he awaits sentencing

Chauvin on Tuesday was taken to a state prison -- the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Oak Park Heights -- to await sentencing, Department of Corrections spokesperson Sarah Fitzgerald said.

The correctional facility is in Stillwater, about 25 miles east of downtown Minneapolis. There, he was placed in an administrative control unit -- a housing unit that is separated from the general population, Fitzgerald said.

"He is on 'administrative segregation' status for his safety," Fitzgerald wrote to CNN in an email. "Administrative segregation is used when someone's presence in the general population is a safety concern."

He is at the prison through an agreement between the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and the Minnesota Department of Corrections, Fitzgerald told CNN.

The judge will consider these factors

Chauvin's sentence will depend on several factors, including the state's sentencing guidelines, and whether the judge decides to go beyond the guidelines because of certain circumstances.

Technically, Chauvin could face up to 40 years in prison for second-degree murder, up to 25 years for third-degree murder, and up to 10 years for manslaughter.

However, Chauvin has no prior criminal record. The state's guidelines say that for such a person, the presumptive sentence for both second-degree and third-degree murder is 12 1/2 years. The judge is given discretion to hand down a sentence between 10 years and eight months and 15 years for each.

Second-degree manslaughter carries a presumptive sentence of four years for someone with no record, according to the guidelines. The judge's discretion ranges from three years and five months to four



years and eight months. However, prosecutors are asking for a tougher sentence than the recommendations provide. In two filings last year, prosecutors said five aggravating factors warrant an increased sentence. Those factors include that Floyd was particularly vulnerable, that he was treated with particular cruelty, and that children were

present when the crimes were committed.

If the judge applies aggravating factors, it would shift Chauvin's sentence to a higher part of the legal range.

The sentences for all three crimes would likely be served at the same time, not consecutively. "Generally, when an offender is convicted of multiple current offenses... concurrent sentencing is

presumptive," according to the guidelines.

What about the other officers charged?

The three other officers facing charges in Floyd's death are expected to be tried together in August. Tou Thao, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng are all charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter.



# There is limited evidence to suggest that electoral rallies resulted in spread of the pandemic



This worked in India (and places like Vietnam and Japan) and will work again, especially now that a vaccine is available. There might be more to the lockdown story. It also might just be a coincidence, but the people most in favour of lockdowns were (are) those in the political opposition. Media in the most media-rich, and media-savvy country - the US - went strangely silent about the mismanagement of COVID within minutes after the close of polls on November 3, 2020.

The experience with COVID-19 should have taught us humility - the reality is that we just don't know.

We predicted herd immunity, and are surprised, and shocked, with what is happening.

Besides lockdowns, there have been several other favourite suspects. Let us take the example of seemingly the most intuitive recommendation to prevent infection - wearing masks. The one organisation mandated to analyse COVID-19, the WHO, has made several missteps. It has been analysing flu epidemics for decades, and yet came out with a recommendation in November 2019 - in the form of a detailed report - that masks were not very useful. Even an expert as expert as Dr Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has had to reconsider if not retract. In April 2020, Dr Fauci said that "there's no reason to be walking around with a mask"; he changed his stance later as the pandemic progressed. Recently (late 2020), Fauci advocated the use of double masks and added that this was "common sense".

So, what works? Possibly masks and social distancing - and meeting people in the open (we know, from painful

experience, that lockdowns don't work). In the recent assembly elections, people have been wondering and complaining that the reason we have the new wave is that people have let down their guard, are no longer washing hands after touching metal (now the WHO tells us we never had to do that!), and are not wearing masks, or keeping any social distance at political rallies, let alone the "scientifically" proven six feet. By being a large diverse country, India contains many natural experiments for statisticians to experiment with - and many conclusions to infer. Natural experiments include speculative frenzy that drove up the price of an NBFC that had oxygen in its name even though the nature of business had nothing to do with supplying oxygen.

We report in the Table a detailed analysis of all the large states in India, as well as an aggregation of small states. Actual cases (per 10,000 population) are reported in the second column. The Gompertz estimate (model estimated till January 31 to allow for out of sample forecasts assessment) is reported in the third column. The final column reports the percentage difference in the two. A priori, one would expect that the states which relaxed too early (letting activity happen) and/or states which held super-spreader events like election rallies, should have the largest deviation from what would be expected. In other words, states like West Bengal and Assam (especially the former) should have a massive uptick in "surprise" infections - the surprise being an excess over what was expected before the rallies, that is, the percentage gap between actual and predicted cases.

The worst performing state is Maharashtra - actual infections were 45 per cent higher (as of April 17) than predicted. Punjab reports the second-highest deviation - 42 per cent. This could be because of the farmer rallies without masks, but that took place in Delhi - a state which performs better (4 per cent fewer infections) than expected. But Delhi has the highest incidence of cases - 49 per thousand population. Maybe farmer rallies did cause a big uptick (but the glitterati was notably absent from objecting to the same, including international experts like Rihanna and Greta Thunberg). Kerala was supposed to be the best-

performing state, and not too many BJP rallies there. It has the second-highest incidence (after Delhi), and its recent performance is only marginally better than average. Most of the "expert" complaints against election rallies have been aimed at where the BJP is holding the most rallies - West Bengal and Assam. Both these states show infections below that predicted before the rallies began in earnest. Their absolute infection rate is also low. What happened (or is happening) - maybe being outdoors (the opposite of lockdowns) is better than remaining indoors? We don't know - but maybe we are beginning to understand. A

closer look at the Bihar elections (conducted between October and November 2020) supports the above result. It shows the lowest number of cases (only 3) per thousand population. And the recent surge there is equal to that of Kerala. Choose your conclusion. There is less than limited evidence to suggest that electoral rallies have resulted in an increased spread of the pandemic - and one may have to revisit this issue after a couple of months once more data are available. Till then, armchair experts should introspect and appreciate India's ability to conduct elections, with high voter participation, and do so in a pandemic.

## Indian American Community thanks Senators Keminski and Senator Thomas

Mr Jagdish Sewhani in his opening remarks thanked Senators for understanding the sentiments of two Billions Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikh. Mr Sewhani further said that Swastika is the most auspicious symbol of two billions Hindus Buddhists, Jain and Sikhs, which bring peace and prosperity. Hindus believe in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam which means World is one family. Hindus always Believe in Serve Bhavantu Sukhinah which means May all be happy, May all be free from illness and may no one suffer. India is the only place in the world where Jewish were welcomed like a family.

Hindus and hate don't go together, Swastika means peace and Love, So when this bill was planned to table in the New York State assembly, Hindus all over the world were devastated. Thanks to HSS the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh which mobilized the whole Indian American Community to fight this bill. Numerous calls and emails were sent to the concerned Senators. Thankfully the senators understood the concerns of Hindu Community and this bill was dropped.

Mr Sewhani further said that there is a small town in the up state of New York called Swastika. I spoke to the town supervisor Jon Douglass, he said the name was given to town by early settlers in 1800's. There was pressure on the town board to change the name but he and

his whole Committee didn't succumb to the pressure, he firmly told them that they were totally ignorant, Swastika means Well being. He also agreed to put the Plaque at the entrance of the town which will describe the meaning of Swastika.

Mr Sewhani also thanked American Jewish Committee for solidly supporting in this fight. He also thanked Jay Jacobs State Chairman of Democratic Party for his unwavering support.

This battle is not over yet, said Mr Sewhani, time has come to educate masses and political leaders about Hinduism and Swastika. To achieve this we will conduct seminars and conferences once the Covid situation Improves.

Consul General Randhir Jaiswal said "Thank you Senators Kaminsky and Thomas for your support and understanding on the issue of Swastika. Swastika is a sacred symbol of peace and prosperity for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

The United States is a country that believes in respect for diversity and multiculturalism. Your understanding on Swastika has further deepened that seminal facet of your vibrant culture and democracy. As a vibrant democracy, India truly appreciates your kind gesture. Our shared values, indeed, bring us close as two

democracies. India as a civilization and society has always welcomed people and ideas that came to its shore. I am delighted that our tradition, ethos and values are being met with the same warm embrace today in the US. Dr Uma Mysorekar President of Hindu Temple Society of North America thanked Senators Kevin Thomas and Todd Kaminsky for their efforts in stopping the NYS Hate Sign Bill - banning teaching of swastika in school from consideration so that this issue may not ever come up again. The call was participated by many Hindu leaders who collectively expressed gratitude to both the Senators for their efforts and understanding. All Hindus should be proud of this accomplishment. Dr Sudhir Parikh in his remarks said that as a Hindu, I have grown up with a deep sense of gratefulness. We express our gratefulness to mother earth as soon as we wake up. We believe in peace, harmony and consider the whole world as a big family.

Dr Sudhir Parikh said that Senator Kaminsky and Senator Thomas responded to the voice of Indian American community with openness and understanding. Swastika is a symbol of hope and growth and a sign of embracing truth.



# When India, The Pharmacy Of The World, Needs Prescriptions

Covaxin - are at capacity. New vaccines from new manufacturers need to hit the market

The shortage comes at a crucial time in the global fight against Covid-19 - and in India's until now impressive vaccine diplomacy. The shipments have gone from Asia to the Caribbean, from Africa to Latin America in boxes tagged with the Sanskrit phrase Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, "may all be happy." Bhutan has administered at least one dose to more than 60% of its population thanks to vaccines produced in India. New Delhi also supplied serum to Paraguay, which had been under pressure from Beijing to break its ties with Taiwan in order to secure China-made vaccines.

But the generosity of the diplomacy has earned the Modi government

domestic ire. The Indian vaccine stock is distributed to all the states, which administer the healthcare system. The just-in-time replenishment has led to stock running out in some cities, generating criticism of inequitable vaccine availability as the exports continue and as local inoculations are limited to people 45 years old and above.

Many of the country's more industrialized states are suffering a surge in infections and want vaccine priority as well as an exception to age eligibility in order to serve their younger populations. The Modi government has categorically refused to do so. It is, however, working to allocate larger supplies to cities that have become pandemic hot spots. There is potentially some relief ahead.

Russia's Sputnik V vaccine was approved on April 12 by an independent expert panel and received immediate certification by the Drugs Controller General of India. Hyderabad-based Dr. Reddy's Laboratories will become a manufacturing hub for Sputnik, producing 1 billion doses, with 250 million marked for local use. The Russian Direct Investment Fund is also in talks with other Indian manufacturers. A vaccine from Zydus Cadila, an Ahmedabad-based firm, may be next to get an approval. Johnson & Johnson may soon undertake a bridging trial for its single-dose vaccine to be manufactured for local as well as export market - though its current pause in the U.S. to assess fears of blood clotting may become an issue in India as well. On April 13, the government also

allowed the use of all vaccines certified by U.S., EU and Japanese regulators. There is much to admire about India's efforts: It has managed to scale its medical manufacturing efforts to global proportions and earn the title of pharmacy of the world. When the pandemic ends, it will be with the tremendous assistance of India's pharmaceutical industry. But, right now, we are nowhere near declaring that victory. Even if India fully vaccinates 300 million citizens by July, that's just about one third of the total population. Meanwhile, the pandemic is raging unabated, sparing not even younger people. For now, India's fight against Covid-19 hangs in balance. And so does the world's.

## Several countries put India on international travel ban list as second virus wave surges

The decision was taken after some Indian passengers from Mumbai tested positive for Covid-19 on arrival at the Hong Kong airport. First, Indian carrier Vistara was barred from flying there till May 2 and later, the restrictions were extended to all the other flights. Hong Kong had banned flights from India in four different instances, starting from August. Other than India, the administration has also prohibited flights from Pakistan and the Philippines.

Pakistan  
Pakistan on Monday imposed a ban on travellers from India for the next two weeks, citing the spread of a new variant of the novel coronavirus in the neighbouring country.

A statement issued by the National Command and Operation Centre

(NCOC) said the decision was taken during a meeting of the forum today, presided over by Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar. "The forum decided to place India on the list of Category C countries for two weeks. There will be a ban on inbound passengers coming from India via air and land route," the statement said.

United Kingdom A day after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson postponed his visit to India, UK authorities issued a fresh advisory putting India on their 'red list' for travel on Monday.

From April 23 onwards, UK residents arriving from India will have to quarantine in a hotel for 11 nights. Others from India will not be able to travel to the UK at all. A four-day grace period has also been accorded to those who need to travel

back to the UK without having to quarantine in a hotel.

Meanwhile, Air India has cancelled all the flights to and from the UK from April 24 to 30. "Passengers who were to travel between India and the UK, may kindly note that in view of recent restrictions announced by the UK, flights from/to the UK stand cancelled from 24th to 30th April '21. Further updates regarding rescheduling, refunds and waivers will be informed shortly. Post uplift of restrictions, flights schedule from Delhi and Mumbai to the UK are being planned. Information regarding this will also be updated on our Website and Social Media Channels," Air India said in a statement on Wednesday.

**United States** On April 20, the United States' Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) issued a travel advisory, asking all its citizens to avoid travels to India.

The US has put India in 'Level 4' category which says 'Very High Level of Covid-19 in India'. "Travelers should avoid all travel to India," the advisory said.

"Because of the current situation in India, even fully vaccinated travellers may be at risk for getting and spreading Covid-19 variants and should avoid all travel to India," it further said.

### New Zealand

New Zealand also imposed a ban on any travel from India after it detected 23 Covid-19 cases among passengers arriving from outside earlier this month. According to reports, 17 of the 23 cases were found positive for the Indian variant of SARS-CoV-2, prompting authorities to put a ban on travel from India.

Most countries are monitoring Indian nationals travelling to their respective nations and in case, passengers test positive, advisories are issued.

"And data provided by Health Canada reveals nearly all of the twice-daily flights between Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport and Toronto Pearson Airport carried passengers infected with Covid-19," the report said.

"Of the 106 Covid-infected flights that landed in Canada since March 4, 30 originated from Delhi - nine landing at Vancouver and 21 at YYZ," it added.

While UAE has not imposed a blanket ban or severe restrictions, Air India Express announced on Monday that starting April 22, all passengers travelling from India to Dubai must hold a valid negative Covid-19 test certificate that's issued within 48 hours from the time of collecting the sample.

With the decisions of various countries, India's air bubble arrangements with these countries could be affected in the period where travel is restricted or banned from India.

## Gaughran, Brooks, Kaminsky, Thomas stand up for American Water Ratepayers

(SAI Bureau)- (Albany, NY) - Today, Senators James Gaughran, John Brooks, Todd Kaminsky, and Kevin Thomas passed legislation to save Long Island ratepayers tens of millions of dollars each year on their New York American Water bills, while creating a path for a public takeover of the water system (S.989a).

The legislation, sponsored by Senator Gaughran, would eliminate American Water's special franchise taxes, which constitute between 31 and over 50 percent of a customer's monthly bill. Collectively, the bill is projected to exempt the utility from \$29.5 million in special franchise taxes, saving money for New York American Water ratepayers on Long Island. In addition, the measure would create the Nassau County Water Authority, a new public benefit corporation which would be authorized to take over public and private assets as well as the functions currently provided by American Water and begin the municipalization process.

Senator Jim Gaughran said, "In a modern society, there is no reason why a private

company should be profiting off the backs of Nassau residents for access to the most basic human necessity -- water. Public water option is the only viable path forward, and I am proud to have worked in partnership with the community to get rid of for-profit water companies once and for all. My legislation will remedy a deep inequity in Nassau County that has forced customers of NYAW to bear an unfair burden and pay exorbitant rates for the same water. Now that this legislation has passed the crucial step of passage in the State Senate, I urge the Public Service Commission to delay the pending May 1st rate hike."

Senator John Brooks said, "Water is perhaps the most essential resource for life and as such should never be a commodity for corporate profit. Today we have taken an important step towards creating a Nassau County Water Authority and providing a necessary public system that will bring significant savings and higher quality service to the heavily overburdened customers of NYAW. I am proud of the

collaboration between Senators' Gaughran, Kaminsky, and myself in working to save members of our communities from exorbitant rates, unfair taxation of water, and criminally high amounts being charged for such lifesaving utilities as fire hydrants in these districts. I join my colleagues in continuing to push for fair and equitable water service for all residents of Nassau County."

Senator Todd Kaminsky said, "American Water customers pay some of the highest water rates in the state - and that needs to change. By setting a path to rate-relief and municipalization, we can save real dollars for Long Islanders, and that is precisely what this bill does." Senator Kevin Thomas said, "All Long Islanders deserve quality, affordable public water. For too long, American Water customers have been burdened with skyrocketing water bills. This legislation will provide ratepayers with needed relief, and I thank Senator Gaughran, Senator Brooks, and Senator Kaminsky for their tireless advocacy on this issue."



# India's Second Covid Wave is Completely Out of Control



New Delhi - A lethal, fast-paced second wave of the coronavirus pandemic has brought India's health care systems to the verge of collapse and is putting millions of lives and livelihoods at risk.

On Sunday and Monday, the country recorded more than 270,000 and 259,000 cases, respectively, of Covid-19, a staggering increase from about 11,000 cases per day in the second week of February. Reported coronavirus infections shot up from about 20,000 per day in mid-March to more than 200,000 by mid-April.

The newspapers and social media are scrolls of horror and failure of the health system. There are reports of lines of ambulances with patients waiting outside the largest Covid facility in Ahmedabad in the western state of Gujarat because ventilator beds and oxygen had run out. On Friday in the northern city of Lucknow, Vinay Srivastava, a 65-year-old journalist, shared his falling oxygen levels on Twitter, tagging government authorities for help. Overburdened hospitals and laboratories wouldn't take calls from his family. The last tweet from Mr. Srivastava's handle described his oxygen saturation level at 52, way below the 95 percent, which is considered normal. Nobody helped. He died on Saturday.

At a crematorium in the central city of Bhopal, residents reported having not seen as many cremations since 1984, when a

gas leak from a Union Carbide pesticide plant in the city killed around 5,000 people. On Tuesday around 11 a.m. in Delhi, the national capital, with more than 18 million people, only 40 I.C.U. beds were available for Covid-19 patients.

India has had a total of 15.3 million reported coronavirus cases to date, with reported deaths to date of 180,000 people. A survey funded by the leading government body for medical research, indicated that there were roughly 30 infections corresponding to each reported case.

Most reports about the collapsing health care system are from major Indian cities. We know little about the devastation in rural India, where about 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people live and where there are far fewer hospital beds and medical personnel. Federal officials have acknowledged that the pandemic is shifting toward smaller cities and rural areas.

How did things change so dramatically between March and April?

India's rapid slide into this unprecedented crisis is a direct result of complacency and lack of preparation by the government. As the number of cases dropped significantly in mid-February, the Indian government and various policymakers, cheered on by a pliant, triumphalist media, prematurely declared victory against the pandemic. By early March, senior government ministers were speaking about the

endgame of the pandemic in India.

Cricket matches where tens of thousands of spectators filled stadiums were allowed, and movie theaters were opened. The government did nothing to prevent enormous religious gatherings such as the ongoing Kumbh Mela, a festival in Haridwar in the northern state of Uttarakhand, where millions of Hindus gathered for a dip in the River Ganges. Unsurprisingly, Covid-19 cases in Haridwar have soared.

India proceeded with elections in five states in multiple phases over a month. And one of the most charged political contests unfolded in West Bengal, where the polls are being conducted in eight phases between late March and late April. Despite the rising cases, numerous public rallies were held, with tens of thousands of people cramped together without masks. Although precise data on the correlation between political campaigning and the Covid-19 spike is unavailable, the number of cases in West Bengal increased tenfold from early to mid-April - several times the rates in the crowded cities of Mumbai and Delhi.

The mass political, religious and sporting events, which are extensively covered by the Indian media, sent mixed messages about the seriousness of the pandemic. Popular impatience to get back to earlier lives made things worse. Indians started mixing widely and playing down the threat also because there is an

unfounded sense among a large number of Indians that exposure to pollution and microbes had endowed them with superior immunity.

It was inevitable the virus would roar back. Indians turned out to be as susceptible to Covid-19 as everyone else. I was one of the researchers for the world's largest Covid-19 contact tracing study last year, covering over 660,000 people in two southern Indian states. We found that an early lockdown - it began when there were fewer than 1,000 reported cases - had kept the virus under control.

The risk of getting infected through exposure to someone with the coronavirus is no different in India. The proportion of people who died after a Covid-19 diagnosis is lower in India compared with many other countries. But that is simply because 65 percent of Indians are under 35 years old.

Indians with Covid-19 ages 40 to 70 were more likely to have died in India because of the high prevalence of comorbidities like hypertension, diabetes and respiratory disorders. Covid-19 patients in our study in their 40s in India were twice as likely to die as Covid-19 patients in the corresponding age group in the United States. The rate was 75 percent higher in India than in the United States when we compared patients in their 50s. The first wave of Covid was concentrated in poor urban areas, from which it dispersed to rural popu-

lation centers. Although we don't have hard data on the socioeconomic status of those infected during the second wave, cases now seem to have reached the middle class and rural India. Many Indian states, including Delhi and Maharashtra, have put in place degrees of lockdowns and curfews. India's drive to vaccinate its citizens is being threatened by supply shortages. By Tuesday, despite widening vaccine eligibility to those above 45 years old, only 1.3 percent of India's population had been fully vaccinated against Covid-19. The rate of vaccination slowed down in the past week and even stopped in some states because of lack of supply. At the current vaccination rate, it will take till the end of 2022 to fully vaccinate 70 percent of the Indian population, the approximate level needed for achieving herd immunity. India urgently needs investments to increase its vaccine production capacity to over 12 million doses a day. If the country achieves that, it can vaccinate 70 percent of its population in six months.

Finally, there is the uncertainty introduced by new variants and, with them, the risk of reinfections that might not be stopped by the vaccines. There is anecdotal evidence that the new wave of Covid-19 cases in India is attacking a younger population, including children, and resulting in more rapid disease progression than seen earlier.



# India's Devastating Outbreak is Driving The Global Coronavirus Surge

*Those on the country's front lines say the wave is worse than anything they have seen before.*

The coronavirus pandemic has left more than 3 million dead around the world. Cases are rising rapidly. In India this surge is not a wave, but a wall.

The spike is so steep that the increase looks almost vertical - infecting entire families and overwhelming hospitals.

Deaths per day are at record highs and climbing. In some cities, crematoriums are running their furnaces around-the-clock.

In Delhi, India's worst-affected city, the health care system has "reached its limit" and could collapse if action is not taken, said Arvind Kejriwal, a top official.

On Monday, the city announced a six-day lockdown to stem galloping infections.

Yet in other parts of the country, religious gatherings and election rallies have continued.

New Delhi - More than a year after the pandemic began, infections worldwide have surpassed their previous peak. The average number of coronavirus cases reported each day is now higher than it has ever been.

"Cases and deaths are continuing to increase at worrying rates," said World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday.

A major reason for the increase: the ferocity of India's second wave. The country accounts for about one in three of all new cases.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this. Earlier this year, India appeared to be weathering the pandemic. The number of daily cases dropped below 10,000 and the government launched a vaccination drive powered by locally made vaccines.

But experts say that changes in behavior and the influence of new variants have combined to produce a tidal wave of new

cases.

[More than three million have died from the coronavirus worldwide]

India is adding more than 250,000 new infections a day - and if current trends continue, that figure could soar to 500,000 within a month, said Bhramar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan.

While infections are rising around the country, some places are bearing the brunt of the surge. Six states and Delhi, the nation's capital, account for about two-thirds of new daily cases. Maharashtra, home to India's financial hub, Mumbai, represents about a quarter of the nation's total.

In Delhi, many hospitals had shrunk their coronavirus wards - believing the worst was past - when the second wave struck. On April 9, the city added 8,500 cases, a record in the pandemic. Four days later, it was 13,500. Four days after that, the number jumped to more than 24,000.

The soaring number of cases has overwhelmed hospitals. The city is facing an acute shortage of oxygen and nearly all its intensive care beds are full, Kejriwal said Monday.

Mohammad Shahzad, a 40-year-old accountant, was one of many desperately seeking care. He developed a fever and grew breathless on the afternoon of April 15. His wife, Shazia, rushed him to the nearest hospital. It was full, but staffers checked his oxygen level: 62, dangerously low.

For three hours, they went from hospital to hospital trying to get him admitted, with no luck. She took him home. At 3:30 a.m., with Shahzad struggling to breathe, she called an ambulance. When the driver arrived, he asked if Shahzad truly needed oxygen - otherwise he would save it for the most serious patients.

The scene at the hospital was "harrowing," said Shazia: a line of ambulances, people crying and pleading, a man barely breathing. Shahzad finally found

a bed. Now Shazia and her two children, 8 and 6, have also developed covid-19 symptoms.

The streets are quiet across Maharashtra, where authorities have told people to stay inside and have shut nonessential businesses until the end of the month.

The stillness is deceptive.

Oxygen is in such short supply that tankers are hauling it in from other states. Patients still face a scramble to find available hospital beds. From early morning until late at night, Prafulla Gudadhe's phone does not stop ringing. Each call is from a constituent and each call is the same: Can he help to arrange a

hospital bed for a loved one?

Gudadhe is a municipal official in Nagpur, a city in the interior of Maharashtra. "We tell them we will try, but there are no beds," he said. About 10 people in his ward have died at home in recent days after they couldn't get admitted to hospitals, Gudadhe said, his voice weary. "I am helpless." In the western state of Gujarat, the second wave has swamped hospitals and crematoriums.

Outside the main covid-19 hospital in the city of Ahmedabad, ambulances carrying sick patients have waited for hours. Every day, newspapers carry stories about the appar-

ent mismatch between official figures and the actual death toll.

Kamlesh Sailor knows how bad it is. Worse than the previous wave of the pandemic, like nothing he's ever seen. Sailor is the president of a crematorium trust in the city of Surat. Last week, the steel pipes in two of the facility's six chimneys melted from constant use. Where the facility used to receive about 20 bodies a day, he said, now it is receiving 100. "We try to control our emotions," he said. "But it is unbearable." The body of a covid-19 victim is ready for last rites at a crematorium in Delhi.

By Joanna Slater, Courtesy Washington Post

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# Covid crisis: PM Modi in action mode, cancels Bengal visit, to chair series of meetings

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cancelled his visit to the poll-bound West Bengal on Friday as he will be chairing a series of high-level meetings over the Covid situation in the country. The Prime Minister was scheduled to address four election rallies in Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Kolkata, but all these stands cancelled as he will now be addressing public meetings virtually tomorrow.

The Prime Minister will address a series of meeting with top officials to review the coronavirus situation in the country as it goes through the second wave, dealing with shortage of oxygen, key medicines at the same time.

Taking to Twitter, PM Modi said, "Tomorrow, will be chairing high-level meetings to review the prevailing COVID19 situation. Due to that, I would not be going to West Bengal."

PM Modi chairs high-level meeting on oxygen production

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister chaired a high-level meeting to review oxygen supply across the country. He asked top officials to work rapidly on increasing its production, boosting the speed of



distribution and using innovative ways to provide oxygen support to health facilities.

PM also said that states must act against any hoarding of oxygen and directed officials to ensure that the oxygen supply to various states happens in a smooth, unhindered manner and called for fixing responsibility with the local administration in cases of obstruction.

PM discusses boosting vaccine availability

In the meeting that also

discussed ways and means to boost oxygen availability amid demands from many states for an increase in its supply, Modi was told that the supply of life-saving gas to states has been steadily increasing.

Against the present demand from 20 states of 6,785 MT/day of liquid medical oxygen, the Centre has from April 21 allocated 6,822 MT/day to these states, a statement said.

High demand for liquid medical oxygen

It was noted that in the

last few days, the availability of liquid medical oxygen has been increased by about 3,300 MT/day with contributions from private and public steel plants, industries, oxygen manufacturers as well as through prohibition of supply of oxygen for non-essential industries.

Railways ensuring quick transportation of medical oxygen

Modi said states should come down heavily on hoarding and stressed the need to ensure faster

transportation of oxygen. The statement said railways is being used for rapid and non-stop long-distance transport of tankers.

The first rake has reached from Mumbai to Vizag to transport 105 MT of the liquid medical oxygen. Similarly, empty oxygen tankers are also being air-lifted to oxygen suppliers to reduce one-way journey time in oxygen supply.

The prime minister was informed that an elaborate exercise is being done in coordination with states to find their demand for oxygen and ensure adequate supply accordingly, the statement said.

Work underway to operationalise PSA oxygen plants

Top officials representing various ministries informed Modi that they are working together with the states to operationalize the sanctioned PSA oxygen plants as soon as possible.

"PM directed the officials to ensure that oxygen supply to various states happens in a smooth, unhindered manner. He spoke about the need to fix responsibility with the local administration in cases of obstruction. He also asked ministries to explore various innovative ways to increase production & supply of oxygen," it said.

Various measures are being undertaken to rapidly increase the availability of cryogenic tankers through conversion of nitrogen and argon tankers, import and airlifting of tankers as well as manufacturing them, it added.

Representatives from the medical community also spoke about the need for judicious use of oxygen and how an audit in some states has decreased oxygen demand without affecting the condition of patients. The meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to PM, Home Secretary, Health Secretary and officials from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Ministry of Road Transport, Pharmaceuticals and NITI Aayog.

## India's Covid-19 crisis has gone from bad to catastrophic in just a fortnight

In just two weeks, India's second wave of Covid-19 has become disastrous.

The country, which was reporting less than 15,000 cases a day just last month, has been seeing over 200,000 Covid-19 infections a day since April 15. Yesterday (April 19), India reported 273,810 new Covid-19 infections and 1,619 deaths-both highest single-day spikes. That takes the active Covid-19 caseload tally up to nearly 2 million.

The current wave started in the western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat and has now engulfed almost the entire country.

Delhi, for instance, had only around 2,800 new infections on April 1, and active infections stood at 10,498. Yesterday, it recorded 25,462 infections and an active caseload of 74,941. That amounts to a 900% increase in new infections and a 700% increase in active cases in just



18 days. What is perhaps most alarming is that nearly 30%-one in three Delhiites-of those who take the Covid-19 test are now testing positive.

Given this surge, the Delhi government has announced a week-long curfew today (April 19). Almost all commercial establishments and public places, except those offering essential services, will be shut till April 26. Across the country, though, this unprecedented and sudden rise in infections has brought India's health infrastructure to its knees.

A dire shortage of oxygen Several Indian states have been raising the alarm over oxygen shortage, a basic necessity, which left unfulfilled could lead to significantly more deaths. The chief ministers of Delhi and Maharashtra have asked the central government to ramp up the supply. Deaths have been reported from states like Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh because patients could allegedly not be oxygenated on time. Vinay Srivastava, a 65-year-old journalist in Lucknow, Uttar

Pradesh, live-tweeted on April 17 his dipping oxygen level and the fact that he had no access to a hospital bed with oxygen. His family later confirmed his death. Indian social media is currently flooded with such tragic appeals for oxygen support, ICU beds, and beds with ventilators. With a stark shortage of hospital beds across the country, Covid-19 patients have been advised to try and find cylinders and machines to oxygenate themselves at home. The state response to the shortage Meanwhile, India's railway minister Piyush Goyal yesterday said that states "must control" the demand for oxygen. He said he heard reports where oxygen was being administered even to patients who did not need it. India is now proposing to import 50,000 metric tonnes of oxygen in the face of this shortage.



# India's COVID tsunami leaves bodies piling up as oxygen, medicines, vaccines and hospital beds run short

Most hospitals are full. In some cases, two patients share a bed. Stocks of oxygen, medicines and vaccines are all running out. Doctors and nurses are overworked. Thousands of patients are dying every day, leaving bodies to pile up outside crematoriums and graveyards. There's panic in the air as coronavirus cases multiply across India at the most fearsome rate since the pandemic struck more than a year ago. India's second wave really started gaining steam this month, with the daily count of new infections repeatedly setting new records throughout April. The total number of COVID-19 cases reported in India now stands at over 15 million. More than 1.5 million of those infections have been reported in the last seven days alone. The daily average is now about 220,000 new cases - the fastest rate of COVID-19 spread in the world. The second wave started in mid-March, and was underestimated on many levels: Many Indians had lowered their guard and stopped taking precautions, including wearing masks and maintaining social distancing;

the government took several missteps, including allowing massive election campaign events and a huge religious gathering; even many experts predicted the second wave wouldn't be as bad as the first. Over the winter, as many countries struggled with third waves of infections, the numbers in India were coming down. Some experts suggested India might not even see a second wave. But it hit, and as of right now, government data show it to be about three-times worse than the first wave. With the pace of new infections still climbing, there's no indication yet that the top of this wave has even been reached. Hospitals overwhelmed Many doctors are calling this second wave a tsunami, and it's stretching India's already-lean healthcare infrastructure beyond its limits. Coronavirus patients often can't even find space to be admitted to a hospital. There simply aren't enough beds. Maithili Badriprasad, 50, a healthcare practitioner, had to wait four days to get admitted to a hospital in Bengaluru, one of the top tech hubs in the world. She tested positive on April 5 and

was recommended hospitalization as her condition worsened. But there were no beds. She was lucky to get an oxygen tank to use at home until April 9, when she was finally admitted to a local ward. There was no stretcher or wheelchair, I was asked to walk downstairs to get myself admitted. I was about to pass out," Badriprasad told CBS News. She was discharged after a week of what she called a "shocking and unbelievable experience." Her lungs still haven't recovered fully. "I told my daughter it's like a Jurassic world out there," Badriprasad said of the scenes she witnessed inside the strained hospital. "The doctors and nurses, who work like robots and get very little sleep in their PPE kits, get no time to listen to patients. They don't look at you, they look at your reports alone to make sure your COVID is treated... I am disillusioned with how things are happening without accountability." "We waited two days for a hospital bed for my uncle," Manoj Bagle, a resident of Mumbai, told CBS News. "By the time he got

one, his condition had deteriorated... he couldn't be saved." Mumbai, home to Bollywood, is India's richest city, but its healthcare system is straining as new cases mushroom. Maharashtra, where Mumbai is located, is India's hardest-hit state with 35% of the country's total active cases. The entire state has been put under lockdown until the end of April, with restrictions expected to get even stricter this week. Double mutant strain Some public health experts suspect a new, Indian-origin "double mutant" coronavirus variant - called B.1.617 - is behind the rapid spread of the disease in India. "But we can't say that for sure at this stage; more analysis is needed," Dr. Prabhakaran Dorairaj, a senior cardiologist and Director of Centre for Control of Chronic Conditions at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), told CBS News. "It's affecting a lot of young people and children, too, and the symptoms are different from what we saw last year," said Dorairaj. "This is a variant of interest we

are following," Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's technical lead officer on COVID-19, said on Friday. "Having two of these mutations, which have been seen in other variants around the world, is concerning." The double mutant, which, like other variants that have emerged around the world, is suspected to be more infectious than the original strain of the disease, has now been discovered in at least 10 countries, including the U.S. and the U.K. Drugs and oxygen running out At least 11 of India's 29 states, including Maharashtra, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh, have notified the national government of shortages of hospital beds, medical oxygen and key drugs used to treat COVID-19, seeking immediate help. Sonia Gandhi, leader of India's principal opposition party, the Indian National Congress, has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of "gross unpreparedness... in foreseeing, evaluating and managing the crisis."

## Why the U.S. should care about India's second COVID-19 wave

India is currently the world's hardest-hit country by COVID-19, with 273,810 new cases in one day. With a lack of widespread testing in the nation, the case numbers could be much higher. Across the country, hospitals are struggling with a shortage of oxygen supplies and hospital beds. Yahoo News Medical Contributor Dr. Kavita Patel explains what could be behind the recent surge and why the United States should care what's happening in the second most populated country in the world. KAVITA PATEL: India is now experiencing a surge that's on a level that we have not seen before. Certainly, even in India over the last year, they were relatively luckier than most countries of their size. There are a lot of theories behind that. However, in the last 24 hours alone, they've had 300,000 cases. And that's most certainly an undercount, because there is not widespread testing. So the fact that we're seeing, in some parts of India, like Bombay or Mumbai and New Delhi, as high

as 1 in 3 or 1 in 4 people testing positive is actually, again, an underestimate. There is very little public health infrastructure in India. And certainly, in most of the country, you see incredibly crowded and cramped environments. It is virtually impossible to exhibit social distance. And because of the lack of public health infrastructure, really very little testing and tracing. In the beginning of the pandemic, there was a conscious effort to try to have contact tracing and people going door to door and doing tests. But that was when the country was under a lockdown. Even a lockdown was really difficult to enforce in India. When you're dealing with a country of a billion people, it just becomes logistically impossible. MARIA VAN KERKHOVE: This virus variant, it's a variant of interest, the B1617 lineage. This was first detected and reported by India having two mutations, the E484Q and the L452R. Those are specific mutations within the genome. This was reported by sci-

entists out of India. KAVITA PATEL: So in particular, the World Health Organization has flagged-- and so have other health authorities-- the B1617 variant, a variant of concern, which means that it does have significant clinical risk and that it could be not just more infectious, but potentially more deadly. And it's of real concern because it has something called the double-mutant virus, or double-mutation virus, and that it has a series of mutations in two parts of the spike protein that make it easier to attach, infect, and replicate. It is the newest iteration of the virus's mutations that could potentially put even vaccinated populations at risk. The fact that we have very, very smart variants with mutations that are incredibly infectious in a country where you cannot keep people isolated, quarantined, or 6 feet apart, reasonably, and on top of that, a nonexistent kind of health or public health infrastructure, that is why we're seeing cases skyrocket. Why now as compared to before?



Lots of hypotheses. Lots of theories. But at a minimum, this tells us that this was an opportunity for the virus, which in other parts of the world does not have a host because people are getting vaccinated, has turned to places like Brazil and India, where there are not as many vaccinated people. And as a result, India's hospitals are completely full. There is now rationing of everything, including doctors, nurses, oxygen, beds supplies. And in fact, many Indian Health officials are telling people, especially in New Delhi and other places, that if you can get resources in your own home, you'll be better off than trying to come into a hospital where you will

likely not be able to receive oxygen or attention. That's translated, of course, to tens of thousands of deaths over the last several weeks. And that number is certain to climb over the next weeks. Because India had had a lockdown previously. There is no desire, politically, from a country, or even at a state level, to lockdown. India had rebuffed deals with kind of the leading vaccine manufacturers, such as Pfizer, but instead now, in light of its cases, is importing vaccines, such as the Sputnik V vaccine from Russia, as well as the CanSino vaccine from China.



# Covid-19: India's response to second wave is warning to other countries

The blindspots in India's response to its second, devastating wave of coronavirus infections serve as a stark warning to other countries.

In retrospect it was clear that the figures for new infections that India was reporting in January and February were probably too good to be true, with a country of more than 1.3 billion people seeing its caseload drop from its first peak last year of over 100,000 cases a day to under 10,000.

Then, it was reported in terms of being almost miraculous.

As Jishnu Das, a health economist at Georgetown University in the US, told NPR in early February: "It's not that India is testing less or things are going underreported. It's been rising, rising - and now suddenly, it's vanished! I mean, hospital ICU utilisation has gone down. Every indicator says the numbers are down."

Except it had not vanished. The reasons for that illusion are likely to take years to unpick, but it is clear that India's surveillance of the virus missed its real prevalence earlier this year, even at a point when people were celebrating its decline, until it was too late. While there has been much focus on the most recent Indian variant of Covid-19 as much of the latest wave is also probably down to a combination of social behaviour,



weaknesses in India's health system and policy decisions.

Told that the virus was conquered (or that some areas were approaching herd immunity); that vaccination was imminent, making it controllable, some of those who might earlier have sought a test will not have pursued that option especially if confronted with less than serious symptoms.

With a median age of 26.8 it seems likely too that - as elsewhere - the resurgence may have been driven in large part by younger cohorts less concerned about a disease perceived as being one that hits the oldest and less healthy disproportionately hard, marking a now familiar recent pattern of transmission

among the younger spreading to the older.

For many others, finding a test in a country with areas of profound poverty and poor healthcare will not have been a viable option. Others still, as the head of one of India's largest laboratory networks made clear this week, have struggled to find tests.

The reality, it appears, is that India made similar errors to other countries, including the UK, after the first wave peaked - suggesting a return to a degree of normality even at a time when it was clear that other countries had already been hit by serious second waves. As Dr Chandrakant Lahariya wrote in an opinion piece for India Today last week: "The second wave of Covid-19 has come a few months after the second wave in

other countries, which had a similar situation somewhere in the mid- to late 2020. There was no reason to believe it would be any different in India.

"Though the laxity in people's behaviour was being noted, but from February to April 2021, the government too did not show its resolve to enforce public health measures. While customary guidance on Covid-appropriate behaviour was issued, it was policymakers and elected leaders who tacitly encouraged crowding in festivals (Holi at end March 2021), election rallies in five states (March-April 2021) and religious congregation (Kumbh Mela in Haridwar; March-April 2021)."

Some of it too seems like complacency.

The world's major vaccine producer, India has replicated mistakes made also in the US and elsewhere of assuming that vaccination alone would suffice to control Covid-19, an error compounded on Tuesday by Narendra Modi's insistence that lockdowns should remain a measure of "last resort".

The reality, as the UK's experience appears to have demonstrated, is that a combination of aggressive vaccination, lockdowns and surveillance offers the best chance of mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Perhaps most of all it reinforces three key lessons. First, without an emphasis on effective monitoring, coronavirus will exploit those blindspots to spread again. Second, that even in the midst of a vaccination campaign such as India's, while large numbers remain unvaccinated Covid-19 remains a powerful threat, able to overwhelm health systems.

A third and final lesson is one for the political leaders.

Boosterism (like Modi's around India's vaccine production) and the encouragement of normalcy bias (which leads people to minimise threats when confronted by serious risks) have real impacts in public health emergencies that rely on encouraging people to be careful.

## Covid-19 in India: Why second coronavirus wave is devastating

Rajeshwari Devi, 58, died on Sunday after waiting for two days to get uninterrupted oxygen, an ambulance and a bed in a Covid-19 hospital.

She kept waiting and gasping but it was too late by the time help arrived. She was taken to a hospital emergency room on 16 April after her oxygen saturation level dropped. Her CT scan showed that she had developed severe pneumonia.

But without her Covid report the hospital refused to admit her. She spent around 36 hours in the emergency room on oxygen support in the northern Indian district of Robertsganj. The staff there told her family they were running out of oxygen and she needed to be moved to a bigger hospital but there was no ambulance or any promise of a

bed. The desperate family took her in their car to a hospital where a bed had become available after the intervention of a politician. She had no oxygen support in the car - she died minutes before she could be admitted to hospital. Ashish Agrahari, her son, says his mother "would have had a chance at survival if treatment was given in time".

Heartbreaking stories such as this are coming in from across India as a second Covid wave wreaks havoc. Data suggests that this wave is proving to be more infectious and deadlier in some states, although India's death rate from the virus is still relatively low.

But the country's healthcare system is crumbling amid the surge in cases - doctors say it's

hard for them to "see the light at the end of the tunnel this time".

Sharp rise in cases

The rise in case numbers has been exponential in the second wave.

On 18 June last year, India recorded 11,000 cases and in the next 60 days, it added 35,000 new cases on average every day. On 10 February, at the start of the second wave, India confirmed 11,000 cases - and in the next 50 days, the daily average was around 22,000 cases. But in the following 10 days, cases rose sharply with the daily average reaching 89,800.

Experts say this rapid increase shows that the second wave is spreading much faster across the country. Dr A Fathahudeen, who is part of Kerala state's Covid taskforce, said the rise was not

entirely unexpected given that India let its guard down when daily infections in January fell to fewer than 20,000 from a peak of over 90,000 in September.

Big religious gatherings, the reopening of most public places and crowded election rallies are being blamed for the uptick. Dr Fathahudeen said there were warning signs in February but "we did not get our act together". "I said in February that Covid had not gone anywhere and a tsunami would hit us if urgent actions were not taken. Sadly, a tsunami has indeed hit us now," he added.

"A false sense of normalcy crept in and everybody, including people and officials, did not take measures to stop the second wave."

Shortage of beds

Many Indian cities are reporting a chronic shortage of hospital beds. It's also evident in the desperate cries for help on social media platforms. Disturbing reports of people dying without getting timely treatment are coming from all over the country.

Several state governments say they are creating new facilities but experts say it's going to be hard to keep up with the pace of the rising number of infections.

India has been consistently reporting more than 150,000 cases for days now. It reported 273,810 cases on Monday - the biggest daily spike since the pandemic began. Badly-affected cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad have almost run out of hospital beds.



# Swiss robot bartender mixes cocktails and tells jokes at bar amid coronavirus pandemic

**Barney is a bit different from your usual Swiss bartender. He is fully automated, mixes dozens of cocktails and even makes terrible jokes.**

Developer F & P Robotics says it is seeing rising interest in "The Barney Bar" and hopes it will be a hit among hotels, bars and shopping centres looking to reduce human contact during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Barney can mix 16 different spirits and eight different sodas for customers who place their orders via their mobile phones, as well as offering beer and prosecco. The robot, who can disinfect his own robotic arm, tells them their

drink is ready via a large video display above the bar.

A barista version making different coffees has also been developed. Both versions can be loaded up with conversations, so Barney can make "jokes" about being offered a role in the latest Terminator film, for example.

"We are getting quite a bit of interest," Chief Sales Officer Gerry Colombo told Reuters.

"We think Barney can be a fun attraction, that can bring people

to a bar because he's constantly moving and is so different," Gerry said.

Although the expected clientele, restaurants and hotels, were initially not in spending mood because of the crisis, the situation is slowly changing, Gerry added.

Each model costs around USD130,719 (approximately Rs 98,64,840). We are getting double the amount of enquiries compared with last year. It could definitely



be an advantage for customers who want a barman who can work 24 hours a day, can serve exactly the drinks customers want while also reducing human contact," he said.

The Zurich company, which makes the robot and its operating software, has so far sold robots to China and Oman, where a mocktail-making robot works in a shopping mall.

## DRDO develops supplemental oxygen delivery system for treatment of Covid patients



**Amid a massive oxygen supply crunch in the country due to growing coronavirus cases, the Defence Research and Development Organisation has created supplemental oxygen delivery system.**

Amid a massive shortage of oxygen cylinders in the country due to resurgence in coronavirus cases, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed SpO2 (Blood Oxygen Saturation) supplemental oxygen delivery system.

The device can be used by soldiers posted at extreme high-altitude areas and also help Covid-

19 patients.

"Being ever in the forefront to support the Indian Soldier in most difficult terrain and adverse circumstances, the (DRDO) has developed yet another system, which is of great value not only to the Indian Army soldiers fighting in the Extreme High Altitudes Areas but also would be a boon to the country in this extreme crisis of Covid 19 pandemic,"

DRDO said in a statement on Monday.

The system is a boon in the current pandemic as it can be used in the household for moderate/mild Covid patients as it provides oxygen flow therapy, it said.

Developed by the Defence Bio-Engineering & Electro Medical Laboratory (DEBEL) in Bengaluru, the system delivers supplemental based on the SpO2 levels and prevents the person from sinking into a state of Hypoxia, DRDO said.

Hypoxia is a condition in which the human body is deprived of adequate oxygen supply at the tissue level. This is exactly the

situation that gets repeated in a Covid-19 patient due to the virus infection. In serious cases, oxygen is critical to treat a coronavirus-infected patient.

Various states in the country -- Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and others -- have been facing severe shortage of oxygen cylinders due to the steep increase in daily coronavirus cases.

To tackle this, the newly developed supplemental oxygen delivery system will be a great boon and would help to treat a number of coronavirus patients across the country, the DRDO said.

"This automated, easy to use

Oxygen Delivery System now available is a great boon particularly in these critical times when medical resources are stretched to their limits. Its proliferation would mitigate the crisis in management of such a huge number of covid patients in many ways all across the country," DRDO said in the press note.

DRDO said the system reads SpO2 levels of the subject from a wrist-worn pulse oximeter module through wireless interface and controls a proportional solenoid valve to regulate the oxygen supply to the subject.

## Why WhatsApp users in Europe can opt-out of New WhatsApp privacy policy but users in India cannot?



WhatsApp's new terms of service will go into effect from May 15, 2021. The new privacy policy alters how the Facebook-owned app accesses user data when interacted with a business account. The new terms of service essentially will change

how WhatsApp service will process your data, how businesses can use Facebook-hosted services to store and manage their WhatsApp chats and how WhatsApp partners with Facebook to offer integration across Facebook company

**WhatsApp users in Europe can opt-out of the new privacy policy owing to the laws in the EU called the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which shield them from sharing data from Facebook or grant them the power to say no to WhatsApp's new terms of service.**

products. WhatsApp faced severe criticism since the announcement of the new policy and even extended the date of the new privacy policy from February to May 2021. Now, as the days inch closer, WhatsApp has again started sending reminders to users to accept the privacy policy, failing which they will lose access to the account, eventually. However, users all over the world do not have to accept the new terms of service. WhatsApp users in Europe can opt-out of the new privacy policy owing to the laws in the EU called

the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which shield them from sharing data from Facebook or grant them the power to say no to WhatsApp's new terms of service. The GDPR's primary aim is to give individuals control over their personal data. The GDPR also spells out certain grounds for processing personal data. These include compliance with the law, consent, vital interest, public interest, legitimate interests, contract performance, and self-motivated publication by the principal,

according to oneDPO. In India, WhatsApp users do not have a choice and have to comply with the new privacy policy. However, its intentions were questioned by the Supreme Court in February 2021. "You (Facebook and WhatsApp) may be a \$2-3 trillion company but people value their privacy more than money," the Supreme court had told Facebook and WhatsApp in February this year when it was hearing an application seeking directions to be issued to WhatsApp to not lower the privacy standard for Indian users.



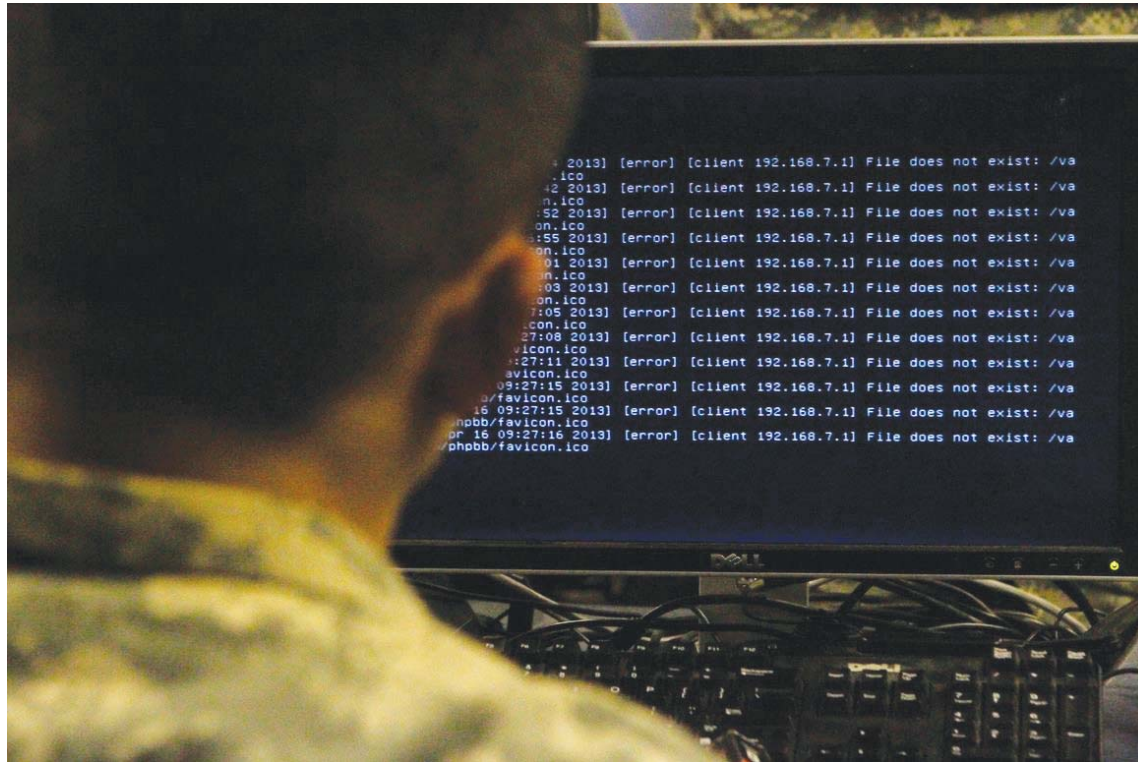
# There's a Big Gap in Our Cyber Defenses. Here's How to Close It.

## *Foreign adversaries who use U.S. servers are hiding in plain sight, but we can unveil them without violating the Constitution.*

The foreign hackers behind the massive cybersecurity failures dominating recent headlines had one critical strategy in common - they leased computers in the United States to burrow into their victim's networks. Because U.S. cybersecurity systems don't regard domestic connections as inherently suspect, the attackers were able to hide in plain sight. Like secretive investors deploying a series of shell companies and trusts to mask true ownership, Russia, China and other sophisticated nations effect cyber-maliciousness through a series of intermediary, innocuous-looking internet servers.

Using a server in the United States is not just an attempt to look routine. As made clear in last week's hearings before the Congress' intelligence oversight committees, it's a calculated strategy that takes full advantage of a gap in the U.S. cyber surveillance system. No government agency - even our powerful spy agencies - currently has a sufficiently agile legal authority to catch foreign cyber malefactors in the act of co-opting U.S. computer networks. The National Security Agency is allowed to surveil only foreign actors; pursuing them on the home front is the job of the FBI. But by the time the NSA notices suspicious foreign activity and hands the case off to the FBI, it's often too late. The foreign malware might well have been injected into American networks, and the FBI investigation simply confirms that now-dormant internet servers in the U.S. were used by foreigners to stage their attacks.

For important legal and organizational reasons, we've had a long-standing and sharp delineation of governmental responsibilities for keeping tabs on foreign versus domestic cyber activity. That arrangement, however, isn't effective when it comes to tracking wrongdoing unconstrained by national boundaries. Designed to protect the civil liberties guaranteed to Americans by the U.S. Constitution, the system is now deliberately exploited by sophisticated foreign cyber



adversaries.

The problem is well known. The difficulty lies in resolving deeply felt concerns over any increase in government surveillance authority, no matter how important the purpose. We are also paralyzed by a sense of fatalism that cyber vulnerabilities are simply the price we pay for being online, and an erroneous belief that the Constitution stands in the way of any solution.

Most cybersecurity experts agree an effective public-private cyber information-sharing system is essential in stopping foreign cyber maliciousness before it causes too much damage. But information sharing isn't enough; it would be hamstrung from the start if the government cannot seamlessly and quickly track malicious cyber activity from its foreign source to its intended domestic victims. If some government agency had that legal power, then it could, for example, quickly check out a domestic IP address after an alert from the NSA that the address was communicating with a suspicious overseas server. If that IP address showed questionable activity, the government and the private sector jointly could take steps to reconfigure firewalls or otherwise curtail the hack. Admittedly, this wouldn't prevent hacks and attacks that were based on previously unknown software bugs (so called zero-day exploits). But the reality is that most large-scale hacks by

foreign countries rely on already known software imperfections and hardware deficiencies.

The issue is that almost any kind of domestic cyber inspection, even in hot pursuit of a foreign adversary, would be considered a "search" within the Constitution's Fourth Amendment, which requires searches and seizures by the government to be not "unreasonable" and in many (but by no means all) cases to be based on a search warrant issued by a judge. The notion that searches could possibly be electronic was of course not in the framers' minds when adopting the amendment in 1792, but the "reasonableness" standard has allowed courts over the years to apply it to new techniques and technologies, including cyber surveillance.

To track foreign cyber malevolence in a new domestic legal framework, we would need a cyber monitoring capability that was so limited and safeguarded that it didn't trigger the Constitution's warrant requirement. The judicial cases tell us this should be possible. After all, for over half a century, courts have approved a range of "not unreasonable" warrantless electronic surveillance under the Fourth Amendment, taking into account various subjective factors, including the exigency of the surveillance, whether the information had already been revealed to third parties, the level

of personal sensitivity of the data, whether the surveillance is broad or tailored, how likely it is that information about nontargets will be scooped up in the surveillance, and whether there are effective oversight mechanisms.

Like a property owner who has put up a fence a few feet inside his property line just to be safe, Congress has established more restrictive structures and rules in our current system than what the Constitution would require for reasonable, warrantless monitoring. The task is to see whether a legislative solution can be crafted in that intervening space. The goal is to not change the property line; there should be no weakening of the Fourth Amendment's limits.

Here's what an effective new legal authority, fully consistent with the Constitution, might look like:

o Any domestic inspection or monitoring would be expressly limited by the type of both target and information collected. It would be restricted to specifically identified IP addresses or other communications equipment located in the United States that was linked (by the U.S. intelligence community or the FBI) to a foreign person or country suspected of specific cyber wrongdoing. No other targets could be examined; there would be no bulk or indiscriminate collection of data. The activity might be limited to simply a traffic analysis - seeing

which U.S. or foreign IP addresses were communicating with the target - or examining its logbook to look at historic connections. The government would not be allowed to look at emails or otherwise collect the substance of communications, except in the rare case (perhaps with additional approvals) when it was actually necessary for cybersecurity purposes.

o Internal governmental approvals would be needed, with a senior official certifying the underlying facts as to why the domestic inspection was required. The requirement would depend on the circumstances, but would need to be explicit. For example, there could be evidence that a server known to be controlled by a foreign nation was communicating with a U.S. IP address, or that certain malware or techniques that the intelligence community knew were unique to foreign cyber malefactors were being tracked to U.S. internet servers.

o Housing the legal authority in the FBI, rather than the NSA, might make sense. The countries with values closest to ours, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, have all placed their domestic cyber monitoring authorities within their foreign signals intelligence agencies (or in new affiliates). Locating this new legal authority in the NSA would follow that pattern, but the political reality is that this would be problematic. The FBI, which sits within the Department of Justice and already investigates malicious foreign cyber activity seems like a logical and acceptable alternative. Whichever agency is chosen, a governmental partnership is critical, with the NSA supplying technical expertise and foreign intelligence insights, the FBI bringing its longtime relationships with internet service providers and other communications infrastructure owners, and the Department of Homeland Security assisting with coordination and communications with the private sector, which should be equally engaged in the process.



# ASEAN's Myanmar Crisis

With the situation in Myanmar disintegrating into chaos, and Myanmar possibly becoming a potential failed state, some regional powers, including the United States and Australia, have taken significant actions against the junta government. Australia has suspended military cooperation with the Myanmar military, and the Joe Biden administration has implemented a broad range of targeted sanctions against the junta and many of its businesses. Taiwan, which has significant investments in the country, has passed a parliamentary motion condemning the situation in Myanmar and calling on the junta to restore democracy. (Japan, historically reticent to take a tough approach toward Naypyidaw, has taken a more passive approach, calling on the Myanmar junta to restore democracy and having its defense head join a call rejecting the coup but so far not taking stronger moves.)

But Southeast Asian states, which have some of the greatest leverage over Naypyidaw-and certainly among the most to lose if Myanmar becomes totally unstable, with refugees flowing out of the country and conflicts possibly spanning borders-have done little about the crisis. Many



regional states have remained silent on the coup and the atrocities, or have expressed mild concern. Indonesia has been an important exception, with President Joko Widodo condemning the violence and pushing for an emergency Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit, which seems in the works, but with no fixed date yet even as Myanmar unravels.

Regional states claim they want

to keep communication lines to Myanmar open, which is reasonable, but they have taken few other measures to address the crisis. As in many other crises, ASEAN remains torn, and with so many of its states now run by outright authoritarians or illiberal leaders who came to power in democratic elections, most of the region does not want to take a tough approach to the crisis. The Association of

Southeast Asian Nations could suspend Myanmar, as some analysts like Elina Noor have suggested, because of the coup-the African Union has suspended countries like Mali after coups-but ASEAN is highly unlikely to take such a step, and is unwilling to abandon its principle of noninterference. If ASEAN does not suspend Myanmar, many leading democracies may decline to join meetings with ASEAN, like

the East Asia Summit, where Myanmar junta representatives attend. The organization will seem powerless to affect events in its region, a further sign of ASEAN's diminishment-even though, as others have noted, many countries outside Southeast Asia have looked to ASEAN to mediate in the crisis and help come up with solutions. There are virtually no signs the situation in Myanmar is going to improve any time soon. The junta recently refused to allow the UN special envoy for Myanmar to visit the country, the civilian death toll is spiraling, and a new criminal charge has been laid against Aung San Suu Kyi. The prospect of a national civil war, much broader than the existing conflicts in Myanmar, seems high. This is now almost surely ASEAN's greatest crisis since the war in then-East Timor in the late 1990s and the financial crisis that rocked Southeast Asia at around the time. Since then, ASEAN has had triumphs, like building the ASEAN Economic Community. If individual ASEAN member-states, and the organization, continue to do virtually nothing as Myanmar becomes a failed state, what credibility will the organization have left?

## Lava Jato: See How Far Brazil's Corruption Probe Reached

Brazil's largest-ever corruption probe, known as the Lava Jato (Car Wash) investigation, exposed a web of graft across Latin America and beyond, rocking the political and economic establishment in more than a dozen countries. What began in 2014 as a money-laundering investigation soon unearthed corruption at the highest levels of Brazil's government and at companies including state-owned oil firm Petroleo Brasileiro (Petrobras) and construction giant Odebrecht, now called Novonor, which offered bribes in exchange for contracts in Brazil and abroad. Lava Jato resulted in nearly 280 convictions, returned about \$800 million to Brazilian state coffers, and sparked offshoot investigations around the world. Forty-one countries have formally



asked Brazilian authorities for legal cooperation, and multiple former and current heads of state, most notably in Brazil and Peru, have been implicated. Nonetheless, Brazil shuttered the

task force behind Lava Jato in February 2021, with President Jair Bolsonaro arguing that graft within the government had been eradicated. (Some analysts contend that the real reason is

the embattled Brazilian president feared he or his family members could be imprisoned.) Bolsonaro isn't the only one to criticize the probe, which has been undermined by allegations of

political motivation. In 2019, leaked messages indicated Sergio Moro-the primary judge for Lava Jato cases and who later became Brazil's justice minister-colluded with prosecutors. Brazil's Supreme Court recently annulled former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's convictions and ruled that Moro exhibited bias in Lula's case. The annulments clear the highly popular Lula to seek another presidential term; however, they do not affirm his innocence.

Experts say Lava Jato's downfall deals a blow to anticorruption efforts across Latin America. To give a sense of its unprecedented breadth, here are some of the major political and business leaders implicated in, investigated for, or imprisoned as a result of Lava Jato and related probes.





# 'Showgirls of Pakistan' Doesn't Need Your Victim Narrative

In a new documentary about mujra dancers, Saad Khan escapes the Western documentary complex to give his subjects the chance to speak in their own words.

When Saad Khan decided to make a documentary about Pakistan's mujra, or theater, dancers, he didn't expect the near-decade journey that would ensue. For him, making *Showgirls of Pakistan* started out with a couple of impromptu days of filming. Over seven years later, the project emerged as a feature-length documentary released globally this past January. To get the film out, he had to take on both the world's predominantly white-run documentary industry and Pakistan's mechanisms of social control at the same time. Khan's film follows the lives of three mujra dancers, who practice an art form dating back to the Mughal Empire. For centuries, mujra dancers entertained pre-colonial Indian courts and their royals with evocative dance performances. Mujra was a respected art form, and the dancers were considered an important part of the cultural and social fabric of the Mughal Empire—not just because of their proximity to royalty, but because of their value as cultural assets. But after the British colonized India, things changed. The British colonists' efforts to impose their attitudes toward sex and sexuality on the local populations grew into a larger wave of conservatism. Mujra was eventually restricted and then outlawed.

"Mujra dancers were high taxpayers to the Mughal Empire, they had wealth and land," Khan, 31, said from his apartment in Brooklyn, New York, in March. "It made sense for a colonizing force to dismantle that support through laws, by force and propaganda. It was a means to seize their power." Eventually, Khan continued, "mujra was conflated with sex work and dancers with prostitutes, a supremely generalized narrative that exists and affects the lives of women in the business till now."

Mujra dancing still exists in what are now Pakistan and India, but in Pakistan, especially, it exists in a hypercommercial setting. Modern mujra performances can be seen in government-operated theaters, complete with ramshackle theatrical sets and props. A typical show would consist of comedic skits and scenes interpolated with high-energy dance numbers. The modern mujra audience consists of primarily working-class men, who come to be entertained by what many Pakistanis consider "vulgar" dances. Mujra is also often performed at private functions, where dancers are hired as the main form of entertainment.

The women of the mujra universe have to work hard to survive. And

they face plenty of violence and death threats in real life and online while doing it. In 2016, for example, Kismat Baig, a dancer, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Lahore. The film highlights her and many others who have been shot, maimed, or killed.

But whereas another documentary might romanticize the image of suffering South Asian women as its main focus, Khan didn't want to fall into the

a performer in Lahore who is steadily rising to fame. The second looks at Uzma Khan's life as she fights the patriarchal grip of the men who "manage" her career, and lastly, we see Jaan's hardships as a veteran theater star and a part of Pakistan's khwaja sara (third gender) community.

Khan's unflinching and empowering look at how these women actually live their lives has led to some criticisms of the film

as resembling "PakPorn," referring to a hashtag used on porn sites for fetishizing South Asian Muslim women. "Ironically, the opening night film" at a festival where the director pitched *Showgirls of Pakistan* "was about mostly white showgirls in Vegas,

who were topless and wearing tassels," Khan said. "That was not deemed as porn—in fact, there was a huge party for it. I was there, so was ... the entire documentary industry, celebrating. But when it comes to Muslim women 'suggestively' dancing, in bodysuits mind you, it was somehow labeled as pornographic." There is an element of colonialism in all this, Khan believes, with the funding determining what portrayals of Pakistani women get made: "Who are the gatekeepers? What are their limiting views about the world?" He points to a time when "white people would come to

Pakistan to make films and do lousy translations and generalizations." That's why, he continued, "the media produced in the last few decades is so Orientalist, myopic, and always from a security lens. Security of whom? My team and I had to spend so much time deprogramming the commissioners before we could even get to what we had to offer." Undoing all that was exhausting, but the work shows. As Khan pointed out, "unlike many documentaries produced in Pakistan by Western channels, there is no call to action and nothing to 'save' in *Showgirls of Pakistan*."

And that can be empowering. The film gives more control to these women in how their narratives are portrayed, because it contains plenty of footage they shot of themselves. In the final moments of the film Afreen Khan even tells the viewer herself: "Don't worry that I dance for a living or about what I do on the stage. Worry about yourself instead." Beyond the Western gaze, there's also the reception at home to contend with. Khan and his team started shooting the film in 2014 but had to halt production almost a year later when the first trailer of the documentary emerged. The crew received threats from extremist groups in Pakistan, so things went on hold for a while until it was safer to continue. But *Showgirls of Pakistan* has an answer for the extremists, too. There is a moment in the film when Afreen Khan is watching a video of herself on stage.





***China-India tensions remain high. To reduce the threat of conflict, Daniel S. Markey recommends the U.S. boost aid to India and begin working with like-minded partners to develop a coordinated response strategy.***

## Preparing for Heightened Tensions Between China and India

### Introduction

After a tumultuous year that featured the deadliest China-India border clashes in over four decades, the two sides agreed in early 2021 to a simultaneous military disengagement from one part of their contested border in the region of Ladakh. That accord reduced the immediate risk of an armed confrontation, but tensions remain high and warning indicators for conflict continue to blink red. As Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar noted, 2020 left the China-India relationship "profoundly disturbed."

A 2015 Contingency Planning Memorandum (CPM) highlighted the risk of armed confrontation between China and India to U.S. security interests. That risk remains and needs to be addressed. The Joe Biden administration should use the breathing room offered by recent de-escalatory initiatives in South Asia to calibrate its growing strategic partnership with India in ways that lessen the risk of renewed border tensions and potential conflict with China.

### New Concerns

The 2015 CPM assessed that China-India relations were sufficiently stable that no single issue or crisis was likely to provoke a violent clash between them. Both sides appreciated the need to insulate their growing ties

of trade and investment from other disputes and proved themselves deft managers of routine border dustups. Yet the CPM also found that multiple, overlapping disputes would pose a special challenge for peaceful crisis management by Beijing and New Delhi: a wider context of serious bilateral tensions would raise the political and strategic stakes associated with backing down or appearing weak in any single dispute, and overlapping crises would complicate the mechanics of timely intelligence gathering, decision-making, and signaling required to avoid violence.

In 2020, the stage was set for deadly conflict by over a half-dozen years of increasingly tense China-India border standoffs that featured aggressive patrolling tactics and provocative military construction projects along and near their contested territories. Starting in early 2019, these circumstances were aggravated by a sharp deterioration in India's relations with Pakistan, a hostile neighbor and one of China's closest partners. In August 2019, India's surprise revision of the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir, including territories contested by China and Pakistan, exacerbated regional tensions and placed new demands on Indian security forces. The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that spread from China

in 2020 hit India's economy especially hard, leading to mutual recriminations and raising questions about the future of China-India commercial and diplomatic relations.

Looking ahead, the likelihood of persistent China-India tensions and simultaneous disputes remains high. Along their land border, the jockeying for tactical advantage will continue even assuming they abide by the painfully negotiated terms of their recent disengagement deal. Both sides remain fully committed to military strategies and tactics that will bring heavily armed forces into closer and deadlier contact. At the height of tensions in 2020, tens of thousands of troops massed on either side of India's northern border. As one indication of how India assesses the future threat posed by China, its army announced plans in early 2021 to reorient a Pakistan-facing strike corps toward the China front.

India will also remain wary about China-Pakistan strategic collusion despite an early 2021 India-Pakistan cease-fire declaration that suspended artillery exchanges along their disputed border in Kashmir. Prior to the truce, shelling had escalated to peaks not witnessed since 2002. A string of conciliatory statements by top leaders on both sides has followed the cease-fire, but the

potential for an India-Pakistan conflict that implicates China directly or indirectly will remain high for the foreseeable future. Current conditions in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Pakistan make it impossible to rule out another inciting terrorist attack against India by groups with ties to Pakistan, such as Jaish-e-Mohammed. The last major terrorist incident in 2019 led to a tit-for-tat series of air strikes that broke with past practice when Indian jets bombed a target inside Pakistan for the first time since 1971. Amid Pakistan's retaliatory air strikes and the downing and capture of an Indian pilot, senior Indian officials reportedly threatened the use of nuclear-capable missiles. Although two sides found a mutually face-saving way out of that crisis, the experience appears to have left each believing it could successfully escalate threats and use force to achieve its aims in the next dispute.

Any future India-Pakistan conflict is more likely to implicate China because Beijing's strategic embrace of Islamabad has tightened in recent years. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is delivering tens of billions of dollars in Chinese infrastructure investments to Pakistan, including in territories claimed by India. Rather than urging restraint from both India

and Pakistan in their 2019 crisis, Beijing accepted Islamabad's position that it needed to escalate the conflict to deter future Indian aggression. Also, like Pakistan, China contests Indian control over parts of Kashmir and has criticized India's August 2019 revocation of Kashmir's special constitutional status. If ongoing India-Pakistan peace overtures falter, as they have so many times in the past, an overlapping crisis that pits both China and Pakistan against India simultaneously poses a realistic threat.

Adding to the complexity of crisis management, in 2020 both China and India extended their land border confrontation into other areas of their bilateral relationship. The moves were intended to signal resolve and communicate the costs of escalation. Indian signaling included its June 2020 deployment of a warship to the South China Sea, which immediately drew Chinese objections; a ban on fifty-nine Chinese web apps, including WeChat and TikTok, from Indian markets; and new barriers to participation by Chinese companies in a variety of Indian infrastructure projects, such as highway construction. Chinese signaling included engineering a brief but debilitating October 2020 electrical blackout in Mumbai through a cyberattack by Chinese hackers.



# Pigs and the city



With municipal elections soon to be held in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri, a long-simmering problem faced by the city authorities, how to address the safety risks posed by stray pigs, may acquire a political dimension. Following a petition by an animal rights activist, on March 19 this year, the division bench of the Gwalior High Court ordered the Shivpuri Municipal Council (SMC) to abandon its current method of

controlling the stray pig population, hiring sharpshooters for culls, and find a new solution. This has pleased members of the city's 12,000-strong Valmiki community, who make a living as scavengers and sanitation workers and raise pigs to help them with their work.

In 2012, Dr Rajendra Gupta, a resident of Shivpuri, had filed a petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court highlighting the menace posed by stray pigs in

the city. Saying that they were being reared locally and being used unofficially in sanitation work, Gupta had pointed out that the pigs were animal hosts for disease vectors and pleaded with the court to issue an order to the SMC to rid the city of them. In 2014, the HC instructed the SMC to ensure that pig farming was moved out of the city limits, failing which stray animals were to be culled. Soon after, the SMC worked out an

***The Valmiki community in Shivpuri, while welcoming the decision to halt the culling of pigs, is not on the same page as Dogra when it comes to waste management, as they fear the loss of livelihood.***

agreement with sharpshooter Nawab Shafath Ali Khan to cull Shivpuri's stray pigs. (Shafath has taken on similar jobs across India, including the controversial killing of tigress Avani in Maharashtra in 2018.) According to data from the corporation, he shot 4,559 pigs in Shivpuri between 2014 and 2017, and was paid Rs 240 per kill. Following this, on July 31 last year, the SMC issued a new tender to recruit shooters. However, on March 19 this year, after hearing a petition filed by animal rights activist Sangeeta Dogra challenging this plan, the Gwalior HC ordered the state to find an alternative solution, such as sterilisation, to control the pig population. Dogra's petition also proposed that scientific methods be employed for waste management, such as bio-methanation, aerial composting or incineration. The Valmiki community in Shivpuri, while welcoming the

decision to halt the culling of pigs, is not on the same page as Dogra when it comes to waste management, as they fear the loss of livelihood. "Pigs are used to clean half the town," says Sudhir Kode, state president of the Safai Mazdoor Congress. "If the government claims to be pro-Hindu, it should also remember that the pig is an avatar of God," he adds, referring to Varaha, believed by many Hindus to be one of the avatars of Vishnu. Kode says if the SMC were serious about shifting pig farming beyond the city limits, it would have arranged for land for the Valmikis. "The community traditionally rears pigs," he says. "It is fine for people to say that the community should do something else, but the caste system is still a reality, no one supports our community members when they get into other businesses or [seek other] employment."

# A better deal for farmers?

***In Punjab, the total market charges for trade in agricultural produce is about 9.5 per cent of the crop value, including the 2.5 per cent commission paid to arthiyas.***

Faced with pressure from the Centre, Punjab is moving towards direct benefit transfer (DBT) to farmers for grain procured for the national granary this season. Fifteen other states that procure grain and other agricultural produce for central agencies, too, have started paying farmers directly or have agreed in principle to do so. This replaces the age-old system of paying farmers through 'arthiyas' or procurement agents.

Arthiyas facilitate trade in APMC (Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee) mandis for a fee. In Punjab, the total market charges for trade in agricultural produce is about 9.5 per cent of the crop value, including the 2.5 per cent commission paid to arthiyas. The state's farmer unions, which are agitating against the new central farm laws, want the arthiya system to continue.

Amid pressure from the Centre, Haryana's Manohar Lal Khattar government launched the DBT system on April 1, but the Amarinder Singh regime in Punjab was dithering for fear of annoying the farmer unions and arthiyas. On April 8, Union consumer affairs, food and public distribution minister Piyush Goyal, in his meeting with Punjab food minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu and finance minister Manpreet Badal, refused to make further allowances, forcing the state to switch to the DBT model. Punjab's Arthiya Association threatened to boycott wheat procurement during the rabi marketing season, beginning April 10, though many agents came around after assurances from Amarinder.

The situation is less complex in Haryana. The FCI (Food Corporation of India), till now,

directly transferred payments to the bank accounts of some of the state's farmers. This year, MSP (minimum support price) will be credited to the accounts of all farmers selling produce to the FCI. For procurement of mustard, bajra and other crops for their own granaries, Haryana's agencies paid MSP to farmers partly into their bank accounts and partly through arthiyas. Punjab officials say last season's database of 1.2 million farmers in the Punjab Anaaj Kharid Portal will be used to make the DBT transfers. Punjab and Haryana get a cash credit limit (CCL) from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and make payments on the Centre's behalf, which include a commission to the arthiyas. On April 6, the RBI cleared Rs 21,658 crore towards CCL for procurement of wheat in Punjab during the ensuing season. The



Centre aims to procure 13.3 million tonnes of wheat at an MSP of Rs 1,975 per quintal, Rs 50 more than last year.

Union food ministry officials say when stocks are procured on the Centre's behalf, state agencies are technically part of the value chain and must make full direct payment to all stakeholders in the chain, including farmers and arthiyas. Some Union ministers believe most farmer unions are funded by wealthy arthiyas, who fear that the new farm laws will attract private capital and end their virtual monopoly on farm produce.

Senior BJP leaders in Delhi argue that small and marginal farmers in Haryana and Punjab welcome DBT, and that DBT has been a longstanding demand of several farmer unions.

Agriculture economists like Tajamul Haque say APMC monopoly denies farmers of both states the benefits of competition, which could ensure better prices for their produce. Umendra Dutt, executive director of the Kheti Virasat Mission (KVM), Punjab, adds that this forces farmers to stick to MSP-assured crops such as paddy and wheat.



# Time to say Tata

*With Cyrus Mistry losing the legal battle against the Tatas, all eyes are now on the drama of the separation, how the SP Group will restructure its debt and how the Tatas will buy out the Mistry stake*

Nothing seems to be going right for Cyrus Pallonji Mistry, 52, the former chairman of Tata Sons and scion of the Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) Group. On March 26 this year, the Supreme Court upheld his ouster as chairman of the Tata Group in October 2016, barely three years after he had succeeded Ratan Tata at the helm of one of India's largest private sector conglomerates. This could mark the beginning of the end of the Mistry family's storied association with the Tatas, an 84-year-old affair that began with Shapoorji Pallonji buying a 12.5 per cent stake in Tata Sons from the heirs of financier F.E. Dinshaw in 1936. The significance of this development is not just pecuniary; the business families were so close that Cyrus's father, Pallonji Mistry, was once described as the 'Phantom of Bombay House' (the headquarters of the Tata Group) for the quiet influence he wielded over the Tata business empire. The apex court's judgment ends a three-plus-year battle between Cyrus Mistry, whose family, the largest

shareholder in Tata Sons after Tata Trusts, owns an 18.4 per cent stake in the firm, and the Tata Group. After being ousted from the board of Tata Sons, Mistry was subsequently removed from individual company boards as well, a process that also saw the exit of supporters like Nusli Wadia, chairman of the Wadia Group, from Tata Group companies.

## SOURD RELATIONSHIP

Now that the case has been closed in favour of the Tatas, the focus is on the way forward. Since it is abundantly clear that the relationship between the Tata and Mistry families has reached a nadir, it is likely only a matter of time before the two part ways, with the Mistrys selling their stake in Tata Sons to the Tatas, who have the right of first refusal. This may prove essential, the SP Group is battling mounting debt, with its core businesses in engineering, construction and real estate having suffered during the pandemic. It has approached lenders for a one-time debt-restructuring exercise. According to ratings agency ICRA, the total debt repayment obligation in

2020-21 of Shapoorji Pallonji and Company (SPC), the flagship of the 150-year-old SP Group, is about

Rs 5,320 crore on a standalone level and Rs 10,000 crore at a consolidated level. The consolidated debt of the SP Group rose from Rs 19,981 crore in FY2017 to Rs 31,035 crore in FY2019. (Cyrus's brother, Shapoor Mistry, is the chairman of both the SP Group and SPC.) Even before the SC verdict was pronounced, the Mistrys had complained that they were not being allowed to pledge their shares to raise capital. The SP Group had pledged half of its 18.4 per cent stake in Tata Sons to Axis Bank and IDBI Bank for Rs 5,074 crore. However, Tata Sons moved the Supreme Court, restraining the SP Group from pledging further shares, even as the SP Group was reportedly in talks with Toronto-based Brookfield Asset Management to raise another Rs 3,750 crore. Pledging their stake in Tata Sons had never been the first option for the Mistrys. Over the past two years, SPC has pledged shares in operating firms such as Forbes



& Company, Sterling & Wilson, Afcons Infrastructure and Sterling & Wilson Solar, and had also approached various lenders for capital. Reports say that the first sign of trouble came when the promoters failed to repay dues to group company Sterling & Wilson Solar in June last year.

## THE MISTRYS' TROUBLES

The manner in which the SP Group, which was one of India's foremost engineering and construction companies, has become steeped in debt forcing it into a debt-restructuring exercise is a classic case of the dipping fortunes of Indian businessmen and their highly leveraged companies. Driven by cheap debt, a host of

engineering, infrastructure and real estate firms in India planned massive expansions over the past few years, only to see many projects run aground as the economy slowed down and the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent restrictions throttled businesses further.

In October 2020, ICRA downgraded SPC on account of its constrained finances after the apex court put a stay order on its pledging of Tata Sons shares to raise capital. The downgrade also reflects the impact of Covid-19 on the construction and real estate sectors. In its report, ICRA said SPC missed its repayment obligations due to its weak finances.

## Why the hills are burning?



Locals say the standing oak trees are also burning this time, besides the pines, which catch fire more easily.

In the first week of April, India hosted US special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry, in New Delhi as a precursor to the Leaders' Summit with President Joe Biden later this month and COP-26 (the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference) in November. Around the same time, barely 300 km away in hill state Uttarakhand's capital Dehradun, chief minister Tirath Singh

Rawat was huddled in an emergency meeting to deal with the spreading forest fire in the state. His state, along with neighbouring hill state Himachal Pradesh, is witnessing unprecedented wildfires. The situation is getting worse by the day as the region has had a prolonged dry spell, leaving the forest floor "tinder dry".

Uttarakhand and Himachal see the most forest fires in India every year. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has identified the woodlands along the south, west and southwest regions of Uttarakhand, including

Dehradun, Haridwar, Garhwal, Almora, Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar and Champawat districts, as the most vulnerable in terms of the frequency and intensity of wildfires. This year, Nainital, Almora, Tehri and Pauri districts have been the worst hit.

Locals say the standing oak trees are also burning this time, besides the pines, which catch fire more easily. They say this means the earth is completely dry. The lack of soil moisture is a key factor, the last two monsoons in 2019 and 2020 were rain deficient by 18-20 per cent of the seasonal average. Generally, forest fires happen when the ground has large quantities of dry wood, leaves, stumps, dry grass, all of which can easily go up in flames if there is a trigger. Last year, human movement was also restricted because of the lockdown and Covid restrictions, so the forests were in better shape. Increased access to LPG

cylinders as cooking fuel has also led to drastic reduction in use of forest waste in the hill states. Even so, the trigger for the fires could be natural or man-made.

A bigger problem is that Indian environment and climate change policymakers do not factor in forest fires as carbon emitters, nor does the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) consider it a natural disaster. Based on analysis of satellite images, the European Union's Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service (CAMS) says the Uttarakhand fires have already emitted 0.2 mega tonnes of carbon in the past month, the highest since 2003. On paper, two-thirds of the state is under forest cover, but its own data shows that in the past two decades, roughly 48,000 ha. has been lost to development activities as well as fires. The locals are used to wildfires in the spring, but it usually peaks in May, and they fear the worst is

yet to come. Meanwhile, Rawat has roped in two MI-17 helicopters from the Centre to fight the fire. Deployed in Kumaon and Garhwal regions, they are using 5,000 litre buckets filled with lake water to douse the flames. Some 12,000 state and central forest personnel are also deployed in the fire-fighting operations but with little success so far. The fire has already destroyed 700 ha. of forest land.

In January 2019, the FSI upgraded their monitoring system by sourcing satellite images from NASA and ISRO for real-time data on fires in the Himalayan states. A long-standing complaint in the region has been that the Forest Act, 1988, dissociates the local community from the forests. Environmentalist and author Shekhar Pathak has been arguing for long that the "van panchayats must be given rights and incentives to protect the jungles".





# Biden's 9/11 Withdrawal From Afghanistan: What to Know

President Joe Biden will announce that all U.S. troops in Afghanistan will be withdrawn by September 11, 2021, after more than twenty years of U.S. involvement in the country's war. But the withdrawal comes with major risks: the Taliban could expand its control over Afghanistan, and the ongoing peace process between the group and the Afghan government could collapse.

What are the most important aspects of the withdrawal plan? The most important aspect is that it is not conditions-based. Previous U.S. presidents have generally said they would make redeployment decisions in Afghanistan and Iraq based on the threat posed by local enemies and the capabilities of local allies. Even the Donald Trump administration, which set a May 1 deadline for withdrawal in last year's negotiations with the Taliban, insisted that the Taliban denounce al-Qaeda (which it has never done) and refrain from attacks on U.S. troops (which it has generally done). The Taliban is currently on the offensive, and peace talks between the group and the Afghan government are stalled. But Biden announced a withdrawal anyway. By ditching any conditions for withdrawal, Biden has made it possible to pull out the remaining 3,500 U.S.

troops-but at considerable risk. The U.S. intelligence community has assessed that the Taliban could take over much of Afghanistan within two to three years of a U.S. withdrawal. Could U.S. or other foreign forces remain in Afghanistan beyond September 11?

This seems very unlikely. Biden has said he is pulling all the U.S. forces out, with no exception for Special Operations Forces, and the roughly seven thousand other international troops will likely follow them out the door because they rely on U.S. enablers. The question now is whether the United States will even be able to keep its embassy open. Will the Taliban expand its control?

Yes. It is now virtually certain to expand its control in southern and eastern Afghanistan, where insurgents have long held considerable sway in the countryside. What happens in the rest of the country, particularly in the cities, remains unclear. With the help of American airpower and other enablers, government forces were able to secure all of Afghanistan's cities. Maintaining that control could become impossible. The first city to fall to the Taliban could be Kandahar, which is already encircled by insurgents. That could start a chain reaction that

eventually leads to the Taliban marching on Kabul. The danger is that the Afghan security forces will splinter and that Afghanistan will be plunged into civil war, with northern warlords resisting the Taliban's advance just as they did in the late 1990s.

What is the likelihood that Afghanistan again becomes a terrorist haven?

The congressionally chartered Afghanistan Study Group warned earlier this year that "a precipitous withdrawal could lead to a reconstitution of the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland within eighteen months to three years." It will be hard for the United States to conduct over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations because it will lose visibility on the threat: a U.S. military withdrawal also means the withdrawal of many intelligence personnel. And even if threats are detected, it will be hard to eradicate them-long-range air strikes are likely to be inaccurate and commando operations risky.

But the most immediate threat posed by the U.S. withdrawal will not be to the United States-it will be to the people of Afghanistan, especially its women, most of whom have no desire to be ruled by the Taliban.

What's next for the intra-Afghan peace process?

The peace process has already stalled and is unlikely to progress now. The Taliban has zero incentive to compromise now that U.S. troops are leaving.

In early March, the Biden administration tried to turbocharge the negotiations by unveiling a plan for an interim government and inviting the parties to finalize an accord. But the Taliban showed little interest; it said it will not join a conference in Turkey that was set to begin

this week.

Taliban leaders believe they have already won the war. As the Taliban's deputy leader, Sirajuddin Haqqani, recently said: "No mujahid ever thought that one day we would face such an improved state, or that we will crush the arrogance of the rebellious emperors, and force them to admit their defeat at our hands. Fortunately, today, we and you are experiencing better circumstances."







## Find out which countries are welcoming international tourists back

There have been more than 142 million Covid-19 cases worldwide and vaccination roll outs have been much smoother in some countries than others. This pandemic is far from over, even though many of us are now itching to make plans to travel or to reunite with loved ones. In the end, it's up to you to decide whether travel to international destinations is a good idea. The health risks are obvious. Variants of the virus have emerged. Nations might change their rules at any time. You may have to adhere to strict curfews and mask mandates. Violations could involve big fines and even jail time. Local health services may

be under strain.

If you want expert input into your decision, the US State Department and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide Covid-19 risk assessments by country. If you're reading this elsewhere, please consult your local government advice.

Keep in mind that not only must you pay attention to the guidance regarding countries you wish to visit or transit through, your home country may have Covid testing or mandatory hotel quarantine you'll have to undertake on your return. Meanwhile, new CDC guidance says fully vaccinated people can travel at low risk to

themselves but still recommends against it because of rising numbers of coronavirus cases. What follows is an alphabetical list of countries and territories where it's still possible for most international passport holders to go for a vacation:

**Albania**

Set on the Adriatic Sea, Albania remains open. While there's no Covid-19 test requirements or quarantine to enter, expect a health screening. More info: [albania.al](http://albania.al).

**Anguilla**

This British territory in the Caribbean is accepting international visitors. You must be approved first. Click here to start

the process and read up on extensive Covid-19 testing requirements, including the specific type of test you must get, as well as mandatory quarantines and insurance. More details: [escape.ivesitanguilla.com](http://escape.ivesitanguilla.com).

**Antigua and Barbuda**

Travelers 12 and older to Antigua and Barbuda arriving by air must present a negative Covid-19-RT-PCR (real time polymerase chain reaction) test result, using a nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal swab. It must be taken within seven days of the flight.

Visitors are subject to monitoring by health officials for 14 days and another Covid-19 test may be required, which could mean

quarantining while waiting for the result. More info: Antigua and Barbuda government website.

**Armenia**

From the historical capital of Yerevan to wild national parks, Armenia is open to international tourists. Armenia was in a brief war last year with neighboring Azerbaijan, but a peace treaty was signed in November. To enter, you must have a negative result from a Covid-19 test taken within 72 hours of arrival or take a test upon arrival for about \$40 and self-isolate until you get your result. More info: Armenia's official Covid-19 travel website.

**Aruba**

Scroll down to the "Dutch Caribbean" entry below for information on Aruba and other islands in this group.

**The Bahamas**

Visitors 11 and older must have a negative Covid-19 PCR test result no more than five days old before arrival. Once you have the negative result, you can apply for a Bahamas Travel Health Visa here, where you must opt in for Covid-19 health insurance. You must also take a rapid test on day five of your stay unless you're leaving. Get updates: Bahamas' travel website.

**Barbados**

New protocols will start May 8. Until then, all travelers must complete an online travel form and submit it 24 hours before leaving. You must present a valid negative Covid-19 PCR test result, taken within 72 hours of arrival. All travelers must take a rapid antigen test on arrival.

## Sri Lanka Seeks To Launch Indian Travel Bubble

Sri Lanka is hoping to launch a travel bubble with India to revive the country's tourism industry. The bubble would allow travelers to visit both countries without quarantines, a first for either nation. However, any such bubble has been delayed until India has contained its second wave of cases. Restart According to The Hindu, Sri Lanka is pursuing a travel bubble arrangement with India in the near future. The island nation has seen its tourism numbers fall rapidly since last March and with a minimal domestic market to cater to, is looking to reopen its international borders.

India is the biggest source of tourists for Sri Lanka and given the proximity between the countries, it is a prime target for a bio-bubble. Indians accounted for 18% of all tourist arrivals in

January 2020, the last month before the pandemic disrupted global travel, making it key to the economy.

It is important to note that Sri Lanka is looking to create a bio-bubble with India and is already a part of India's "travel bubble agreements." The country joined this list last week, allowing flights to resume after a long halt.

If successful, it would be the first bio-bubble in South Asia and could mark the restart of international travel in the region. Not yet

While there have been ongoing discussions about the bio bubble in recent weeks, all the plans will have to wait. India is currently in the midst of a second wave of COVID-19 that is proving to be far more powerful than the first. With daily cases well over 250,000 and deaths quickly

rising, more and more countries have been banning travel from India in recent weeks.

Sri Lanka has also clarified that it will be waiting for the second wave to die down before opening up a bio bubble between the countries. The country has also been battling rising cases since October, pushing up the total cases to over 97,000 currently. For SriLankan Airlines, India is effectively the airline's de-facto domestic market. The carrier flew to a whopping 14 destinations in India prior to the pandemic, making it the single most important market for now. Colombo serves as an important hub for connecting flights as well, flying to China, Australia, and beyond.

Soon

While any bio bubble date has been delayed, both governments



insist this is just a postponement rather than a cancelation. The coming months will provide more clarity about when such a bubble will be feasible and what requirements will be in place. Testing will likely continue to be mandatory for any bubble considering both countries have active cases.

Globally, only a few bio bubble agreements have rolled out smoothly. New Zealand and Australia kicked off their long-awaited bubble this week, after months of deliberations. However, both countries have near-zero COVID-19 cases and there are no additional requirements for travel.



# Here's why Indian businesses should not ignore 'pollution pandemic'

**The alarming rise of air pollution in India is not just bad for health, but it has severely impacted the profitability of businesses. The loss suffered by Indian businesses each year is equal to 40 per cent of the country's outlay on managing the Covid-19 pandemic.**

The rising level of air pollution in India is not just bad for health, but equally harmful for businesses operating in the country. A study conducted by consulting firm Dalberg Advisors in partnership with Clean Energy Air Fund and Confederation Indian Industry (CII) estimates that Indian businesses suffer a cumulative loss of Rs 7 lakh crore or \$95 billion, equivalent to 3 per cent of India's GDP, annually. The report, titled 'The Silent Pandemic', suggests that India is "in the midst of a pollution pandemic" citing a World Air Quality report from 2019.

According to the report, India ranked 5 out of 98 countries in 2019 based on weighted average PM2.5 concentration levels, behind Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mongolia, and Afghanistan. "Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the worst air pollution are in India. New Delhi has the poorest air quality among cities globally, with PM2.5 concentration levels nearly ten times the WHO target. PM2.5 levels have remained alarmingly high over the last five years," the report noted.

"Air pollution costs Indian businesses Rs 7 lakh crore or

\$95 billion every year," it added. **IMPACT OF AIR POLLUTION ON BUSINESSES**

The report indicated that air pollution hurts Indian businesses in six primary ways - lower labour productivity, lower consumer footfall, premature mortality, lower asset productivity, increased health expenses and welfare losses.

"The cost of air pollution manifests in 6 ways - lower labour productivity, lower consumer footfall, premature mortality, lower asset productivity, increased health expenses and welfare losses. Out of these, employee



productivity, consumer footfall and premature mortality impact businesses directly," it noted. It also highlighted that at least 1.3 billion days working days were lost in India in 2019 due to pollution, the report said. Air pollution also impacts employees' physical and cognitive performance. "Business heads estimate that as children and the elderly, who are more vulnerable to air pollution," the report said. Air pollution also impacts employees' physical and cognitive performance. "Business heads estimate that as employee productivity decreases pollution rises, employees fall by 8-10 per cent on high pollution days, costing \$24 billion in 2019," it said.

## Netflix's pandemic-fueled subscriber growth slows, shares drop sharply

**Popular video-streaming platform Netflix's subscriber growth has slowed as it added 4 million more worldwide subscribers from January through March. The shares of the company have dropped sharply as a result.**

Netflix added nearly 16 million subscribers. That came just as governments around the world imposed lockdowns that created a huge captive audience for the leading video-streaming service.

Signaling that the trend is continuing, Netflix forecast an increase of just 1 million worldwide subscribers in the current April-June period, down from an increase of 10 million subscribers at the same time last year.

"It's just a little wobbly right now," Netflix co-CEO Reed Hastings said during a discussion of the

company's results streamed Tuesday.

### INVESTORS RATTLED

The poor showing to start the year rattled investors, causing the Los Gatos, California, company's stock to drop by more than 8% in extended trading, even though Netflix's revenue hit analyst targets and its profit exceeded estimates.

Netflix earned \$1.71 billion, or \$3.75 per share, more than doubling from a year ago. Revenue climbed 24% from the same time last year to \$7.16 billion.

The inevitable slowdown in subscriber growth had been widely telegraphed by Netflix's management in repeated reminders that its gains were a pandemic-driven anomaly.

Now that a large swath of the U.S. population has been vaccinated, people are able to move around more freely and are finding other diversions besides watching TV series and movies on Netflix.

"It all boils down to COVID," Spencer Neumann, Netflix's chief financial officer, said Tuesday.



Netflix's pandemic-fueled subscriber growth is slowing far faster than anticipated as people who have been cooped at home are able to get out and do other things again. The video-streaming service added 4 million more worldwide subscribers from January through March, its smallest gain

during that three-month period in four years.

The performance reported Tuesday was about 2 million fewer subscribers than both management and analysts had predicted Netflix would add during the first quarter. It marked a huge comedown from the same time last year when

## Economic impact of 2nd Covid-19 wave could worsen in coming weeks. Here's why

A sharp surge in daily cases during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to stricter lockdowns in most states. Brokerage firm Nomura recently said in a report that the pace of business activity resumption has taken a huge knock due to the mobility restrictions across Indian states. Business activity in India has started plummeting since the second week of April and the economic situation could get worse, added the Nomura report.

The Nomura India Business Resumption Index, which

tracks a set of high-frequency economic indicators including mobility, has fallen nearly 16 percentage points below the pre-pandemic level.

The index had slipped to 83.8 for the week ended April 18 compared to 88.4 a week ago. The index suggests that business activity is rapidly declining in India due to stricter lockdowns.

While India has not yet announced a national lockdown, stricter localised lockdowns are impacting businesses just as much, especially micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). **ECONOMIC IMPACT COULD WORSEN**

Two Nomura economists who have authored the report indicate that the economic impact of the second wave could intensify in the next few weeks due to lower mobility.

Nomura economists Sonal Varma and Aurodeep Nandi said in the report there is also a risk of the mobility curbs spreading to the wider economy. However, they suggest that power demand and the labour participation rate has remained "largely unaffected" till now.

Businesses from sectors like aviation, automobile, tourism, hospitality, restaurant and others are facing already losses due to



the fresh restrictions imposed by states to contain the second wave.

More sectors are likely to be impacted as states are left with no choice but to tighten restrictions in the wake of sharp rise in deaths and cases in the country. On Monday, India reported its

highest-ever death toll in a single day due to Covid-19.

Many migrant labourers are also returning home from urban centres like Delhi and Maharashtra fearing a repeat of 2020. This is likely to dampen key economic activities like construction and infrastructure development.



# What is intermittent fasting?

**One of the most popular trends observed for losing weight, intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating.**

There are several routines that health-conscious people follow to lose weight but intermittent fasting, in all honesty, tops the list. In fact, celebrities including Sameera Reddy, Kourtney Kardashian as well as Jennifer Anniston swear by intermittent fasting. Do you want to try it as well? If yes, read on.

**WHAT IS INTERMITTENT FASTING?**

One of the most popular trends observed for losing weight, intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating. There is no particular diet chart that is required to be followed while practicing intermittent fasting. Instead, it is

about a set time period during which you should eat. These are also known as eating patterns.

**HOW TO DO INTERMITTENT FASTING?**

If you plan to follow intermittent fasting, you have to select a time period, for example, from 11 am to 6 pm. Now, you can eat your meals within this set time frame. To simplify this further, select three points within this period, for example - 11 am, 2 pm and 6 pm - and consume your meals sharp at these timings.

Conclusively, you are not supposed to eat anything between 6 pm and 11 am. But, do drink loads of water. Black tea or coffee also works within the no-food window.

No dairy products and sugar though.

If you are new to the concept of intermittent fasting, start with a longer eating window, for example, from 10 am to 8 pm. With practice, proceed to the 11 am - 6 pm window.

This is the most common pattern of intermittent fasting but you can also follow the patterns mentioned below.

**WHAT ARE THE EATING PATTERNS?**

There are several patterns that you can follow while practicing intermittent fasting with the most popular being the 16/8 method. You may also follow the 5:2 Diet or the Eat Stop Eat routine or Al-



ternate-Day Fasting.

**THE 16/8 METHOD**

The 16/8 method is basically the eating pattern mentioned above. It involves fasting every day for 14-16 hours and restricting your eating window to 8-10 hours. You can consume around three to four meals in your eating window.

**EAT STOP EAT**

In order to follow this pattern, you are required to fast for 24 hours

once or twice a week. For example, stop eating after dinner one night. The next meal that you will consume is dinner the next day.

**THE 5:2 DIET**

This is slightly complicated because it involves calorie calculations. Consume around 500-600 calories on two non-consecutive days of the week. Follow your normal diet on the other days of the week.

## Has Covid Second Wave hit your mental health? What you can do, according to doctors



**The sudden spike in Covid-19 cases has gotten the better of most people. We spoke to psychologists and therapists about how mental health issues must be dealt with in times like these.**

The sheer unexpectedness of the rise in Covid-19 cases has caused a lot of distress and chaos all over the country. Mental health has been compromised, once again. Stress levels are running high. In circumstances like these, a sense of all-pervasive doom and helplessness is not unusual. So what to do?

We spoke to psychologists and counsellors to get insights about dealing with mental stress as the Second Wave wreaks havoc all across the country. Here's what they had to say.

**IT IS OKAY TO FEEL UPSET**

Dr Lubhana Malik, who is a psychotherapist, shared how this new wave has brought about a bigger mental strain with it than

last year did, "The Second Wave has not only seen a spike in Covid-19 cases, but also anger levels, frustration and low feelings in individuals. Even people who had been championing and coping with the stress, are really feeling pulled down now. This is because we often deny our feelings and push them under the carpet. Instead, we need to accept that it is okay to feel upset, it is okay to take some time off. It is important to validate one's feelings. Change always brings discomfort; however, all change is not bad".

"Things will get better, but you

shouldn't force yourself into thinking it will happen in the blink of an eye. Find comforting techniques for yourself," she suggested.

"For some people it could be reading, or a quick chat with a loved one. Another important thing is to not let uncertainties overwhelm us. We must stick to what is in our control and act accordingly. As human beings, we adapt very quickly to a new normal after a small period of discomfort. For instance, despite fatalities related to air/road travel, we knowledgeably accept them and minimise the risk by taking pre-

cautions such as using seat belts, following speed limits. Similarly, being responsible citizens, we must follow all Covid protocols and get vaccinated when our turn comes. Fear of fatality is bogging people down. However, one needs to realise that fear itself raises our physiological responses and reduces our immunity, leading to a Catch-22 situation. Instead, we need to remain as calm as possible and cross the bridge when we get there. Remember, as a society, we are all in this together, and we shall make it through."

## The golden key to healthy living

**Note:** This article was created with valuable inputs from Dr. Dipak Shah (Consultant Gastroenterologist), MBBS, MD, MRCP (UK).

In the new normal of social distancing and remote working, taking on healthy living is very important. Enhancing your physical, mental and emotional well-being by consciously making small changes in your lifestyle, developing healthy habits and continuing with them is necessary. To

solve your problems in life, you need to change your thinking. So, it's time to sit back and think what steps you need to take in the current situation in order to ensure that you enjoy a healthy living.

**Pros and Cons of the new normal**

The new normal has come with its own pros and cons. Looking at the positive side, it has allowed us to spend more time with family which was hardly being done

before in this fast-paced, competitive world. Getting more time for ourselves, avoiding the stress of daily travel to work, getting time to connect with old friend the digital way, learning new hobbies, getting more well-versed with technology and many more. At the same time, the new normal has also made us compromise on our work out schedules, eating habits, etc. and the sedentary lifestyle of working from home even adds to that. If one

does not have to go anywhere, it's easy to put on weight. Also, social distancing has resulted in a decline in social activities which were rather common in earlier times. So, maintaining our mental health in these times needs to be emphasised.

**Staying healthy a way of life**

Life is beautiful and no one wants to get hassled with unnecessary health issues. For that, taking care of our body and mind is crucial. A good health is not just

about healthy eating and exercise - it's also about having a positive attitude, a positive self-image, and a healthy lifestyle.

Consider a few of these points for a healthy living.-  
**Consume plenty of water:** Water is essential for most of our body functions. Drinking adequate amount of water in a day not only helps to flush out toxins from your body, it also helps in maintaining the gut flora.



## Ajeeb Daastaans movie review:

# Neeraj Ghaywan saves Karan Johar's uneven Netflix film from disaster

**Ajeeb Daastaans movie review: For his latest Netflix offering, Karan Johar has produced an uneven anthology film that is redeemed by Neeraj Ghaywan and Kayoze Irani's segments, starring Aditi Rao Hydari, Konkona Sensharma, Shefali Shah and Manav Kaul, respectively.**

Ajeeb Daastaans

Directors - Shashank Khaitan, Raj Mehta, Neeraj Ghaywan, Kayoze Irani

Cast - Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat, Nushratt Bharuccha, Abhishek Banerjee, Konkona Sensharma, Aditi Rao Hydari, Shefali Shah, Manav Kaul

Anthology films - especially these recent ones on Netflix India - have always been plagued by an unevenness. But Ajeeb Daastaans is so inconsistent that it borders on self-sabotage. In both Lust Stories and Ghost Stories, it was Karan Johar's short that stuck out like a sore thumb. Johar sits this one out as director, having restricted himself to producing duties. In Ajeeb Daastaans, the uncle pushing his way into an already-full elevator is one of his many proteges, Shashank Khaitan. His film is the weakest of the four, and I'm not sure how wise it was to have the anthology open with

it. Starring Jaideep Ahlawat and Fatima Sana Shaikh as a couple trapped in a loveless marriage, Majnu is a largely incoherent story that is concerned more with pulling the rug from under your feet than crafting compelling characters or a plausible plot. Khaitan, seemingly bitten by the auteur bug, has not only written and directed the short, but also co-composed music and penned the lyrics to a song. He builds towards a twist that comes across as trite, and potentially problematic.

It's the sort of film in which a man's genitals are deep-fried as punishment 10 minutes in. And things get consistently more improbable with every passing minute. So potent is its sourness that the aftertaste can be felt well into the second short, directed by another graduate from the Dharma school of storytelling, Raj Mehta.

He uses a similar plot-driven approach in his Big Little Lies-

inspired film, Khilauna, starring Nushratt Bharuccha and Abhishek Banerjee. They're both very good, but once again, all nuance has been erased from the story by the heavy-handed direction, and a seemingly tacked-on twist at the end.

Unlike most anthology films, Ajeeb Daastaans isn't bound by thematic tissue, beyond, of course, a vague idea of 'weirdness'. Each of the four shorts ends in a shock reveal, but only two of them feel earned. Neeraj Ghaywan's film, starring Konkona Sensharma and Aditi Rao Hydari, is astonishingly good. Unlike the first two shorts, Geeli Pucchi is driven by its characters, not by its plot. And yet, it might be the most densely structured film of the lot.

In the span of roughly 40 minutes, Ghaywan addresses caste and gender politics; patriarchy and privilege. And he does this with an intense empathy for his characters, both



of whom display morally questionable behaviour. It's remarkable how Ghaywan has been able to craft such a distinctly lyrical style, before having even directed his second feature film.

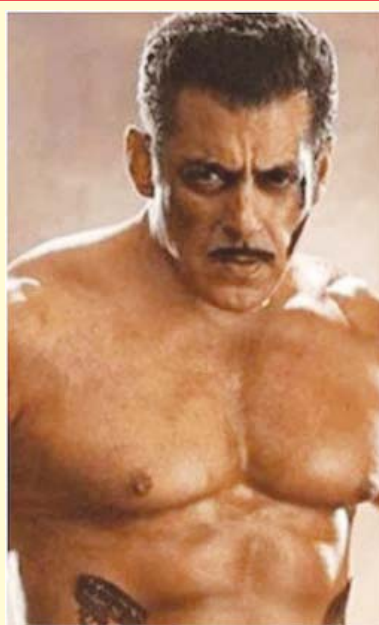
Notice how he captures the emotional isolation of Sensharma's character, Bharti. Here's a person who belongs to a minority within a minority within a minority. We meet her when she finally decides, not unlike Nawazuddin Siddiqui's character in Serious Men, or Song Kang-ho's character in Parasite, that it is time for the gloves to come off. Ghaywan's a real filmmaker. Surprisingly, Kayoze Irani appears to be quite gifted as well.

In the final short, the sheer magnificence of the two central performances - by Shefali Shah and Manav Kaul - overpowers all else. Set in a romantically lit and whimsically scored Mumbai, Ankahi is a tonal juggling act - Irani balances the harsh, Malcolm & Marie-like disintegration of a marriage with an almost La La Land-esque tale of new romance. This is by no means an easy task, and as terrific as the actors are - Shah's final shot is as good as any piece of acting you're likely to see - it takes a skilled director to maintain such tonal consistency. As has been evidenced in Ajeeb Daastaans alone, not everyone is up to the task.

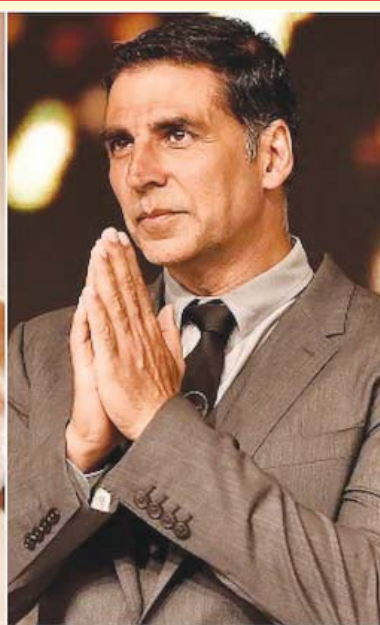
## Can Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, John Abraham defeat Thanos-like Corona at the box office?

The film industry is in a strange predicament - a karein toh karein kya situation. 2021 brought with it a promise of revival, as it were. Theatres opening up meant movies would release on the big screen once again and not on an OTT platform, which, in turn, would translate to business, perhaps just enough to break even last year's losses. Theatre owners were happy, the audience just wanted to go watch a movie and spend some money on over-priced popcorn and the Akshay Kumars and Salman Khans of Bollywood just wanted to entertain us once again, bade parde par. But then, deja vu!

April 2021 looks exactly like April 2020, if not scarier. Rising Covid-19 numbers are once again deterring movie releases. No, theatres aren't shut. Yet. But who knows? The 2021 movie release calendar was already a bottleneck with too many films eyeing the too few Fridays the



year has to offer. Even then, a sort of agreement was reached. We'll release the small-to-medium-range films first to test the water - Indoo Ki Jawaani, Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari, Ramprasad Ki Tervi, Shakeela made way for Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar, Roohi, Mumbai Saga, Saina, and the likes.



And then Covid caught up. Last we heard, the release dates of at least 5 films were pushed, of which 3 are big-ticket flicks, Bunty Aur Babli 2, Chehre and Haathi Mere Saathi, the Hindi version, even as the Tamil and Telugu versions released down South.

So, now what?



MAY MAY BRING A RAY OF HOPE

With the April calendar almost wiped clean after Chehre (April 9) and Bunty Aur Babli 2 (April 23) were postponed, the month of May looks promising, that is, of course, if theatres aren't declared shut (once again) by then. Salman Khan's Radhe is

set for an Eid release on May 13, while John Abraham's Satyameva Jayate 2 and Akshay Kumar's Bell Bottom sit on May 14 and May 28, respectively. Yes, there's a clash and potential risk of eating into each other's business. But the question remains if the trio has it in them to get the desired footfall.

Down South, things are quite different. Several big films have opted for a theatrical release, unlike Bollywood, which seem to still continue testing waters. Vijay's Master released as early as January and to 100 per cent theatre occupancy. Ravi Teja's Krack also followed suit. Uppena, though considerably smaller, also had a theatrical release and did well. Nagarjuna's Wild Dog, another huge project, released today, April 2 (Friday) and had the audience thronging the theatres.



## Priyanka Chopra misses Nick Jonas, shares pic from the place where time stands still

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas often set couple goals with their mushy posts for each other on social media. Now that Priyanka is in the UK working on her upcoming projects and Nick is back home in the US, the actress is missing her love. She took to Instagram to share a romantic picture with her hubby and wrote that she is missing her heart.

### PRIYANKA CHOPRA SHARES ROMANTIC PIC WITH NICK JONAS

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas are seen sharing a romantic moment in a garden decorated with fairy lights. The two are dressed in winter clothes as they stare into each other's eyes. Priyanka

added "The Place Where Time Stands Still" to the location tag. Her caption read, "Miss you so much my (sic)," followed by a heart.

### NICK AND PRIYANKA AT BAFTA AWARDS

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas attended the 74th British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards this year. Priyanka was also a presenter at the event. The couple looked their stylish best at the award show.

**WHAT'S ON THE WORK FRONT?** Priyanka Chopra has been shooting for Citadel in

London. The spy series also stars Richard Madden and is backed by Amazon Prime Video. Besides this, Priyanka has wrapped up the shoot of Text for You. The film also stars Sam Heughan, Celine Dion, Russell Tovey and Omid Djalili. Priyanka will be also seen in an Indian wedding comedy with Mindy Kaling, which she will star in as well as co-produce. Apart from these projects, the actress has Matrix 4 and a film based on the life of Maa Anand Sheela in the pipeline.

## Sardar Ka Grandson trailer out. Arjun Kapoor is determined to fulfil Neena Gupta's wish



The trailer of Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet Singh-starrer Sardar Ka Grandson is out. The film also features Neena Gupta, Soni Razdan, Aditi Rao Hydari, John Abraham and Divya Seth in important roles.

### SARDAR KA GRANDSON

### TRAILER OUT

In the trailer, we see Neena Gupta talk about her wish of visiting her home in Lahore, Pakistan. Since she couldn't get permission to travel to Pakistan, her grandson (played by Arjun Kapoor)

pledges to bring her Lahore home to Amritsar.

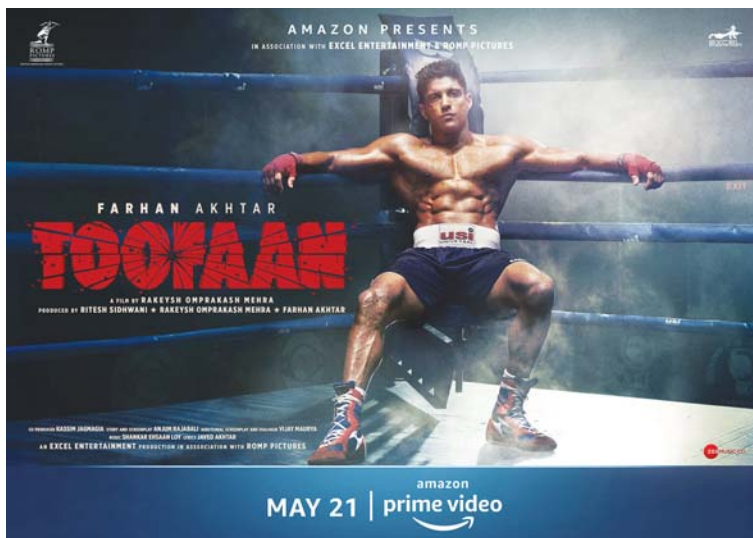
### ABOUT SARDAR KA GRANDSON

Sardar Ka Grandson is directed by Kaashvie Nair and scripted by Anuja Chauhan. Talking about the film, Arjun said, "Working alongside such a talented ensemble cast was an enriching experience for me. We are hoping that the story will resonate with people across the globe with the raw & real emotions that it shows through a loving grandmother-son relationship."

Sardar Ka Grandson will release on Netflix on May 18.



## 'Toofaan' is a universal story says filmmaker Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra!



Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's Entertainment and ROMP 'Toofaan' presented by Amazon Pictures is among the most in association with Excel anticipated films in the country

today. The makers, however, do believe that the sports drama will appeal to a wide diaspora of the global audience, thanks to its subject and underlying message that transcends regions.

Starring Farhan Akhtar, Mrunal Thakur, Paresh Rawal and a talented ensemble starcast, 'Toofaan' is a universal story with mass appeal, qualifying it as world cinema.

Talking about the film, director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra says, "Toofaan is a story of an underdog and most importantly, it's a story about spreading love rather than creating differences. Every country, whether rich or

poor, is going through some issue or the other and we all carry wounds. Toofaan is not an attempt to scratch those wounds, but to apply a soothing balm. Anybody from any part of the world will identify with that." Adding that, "Boxing is one of the most famous sports in the world - America, South America, Russia and Europe among others are all boxing countries.. So there is identification with the film all over the world." Apart from shedding light on the indomitable spirit of people and taking on the subject of a global sport like boxing, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra also explains how the film

exemplifies women empowerment. He adds, "Toofaan also has a very strong and assertive role of the female protagonist. While we've seen the emergence of female power in the last decade, there are miles to go. We have to question and shed our beliefs of how we look at the other sex and our biases and Mrunal's role as Ananya does just that. The diaspora around and especially women will relate to it." 'Toofaan', the inspirational sports drama produced by Ritesh Sidhwani, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra & Farhan Akhtar will premiere on Amazon Prime Video - 21st May 2021.



# When India, The Pharmacy Of The World, Needs Prescriptions

(SAI Bureau)- On April 11, India recorded almost 170,000 Covid-19 cases, a record for the country since the start of the pandemic. The day before, India crossed a different kind of milestone: Vaccinating 100 million people. It is this seesaw of despair and hope that India rides today, battling the outbreak with a healthcare system operating on the brink even as its pharmaceutical industry tries to fill the world's prescription for vaccine doses.

India reached the 100 million vaccination mark in 85 days, faster than the U.S. and China, which took 89 and 102 days respectively. But the task ahead is formidable: the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a target of fully vaccinating 300 million individuals



by July. The arithmetic alone is daunting. India started with a stock of 100 million vaccine doses at the beginning of the year. Its two manufacturers - The Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech- are equipped to produce 66 million doses per month through June, adding 396 million to the total. But they also have obligations to supply Unicef's COVAX program and export agreements elsewhere to the tune of 80 million doses. That leaves 416 million doses for local use: 184 million doses short of the 600 million needed to reach the July goal. Already, Pune-

based Serum Institute - which makes the AstraZeneca shot, called Covishield in India - and Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech - which makes the locally developed

(Contd on page 31)

## Several countries put India on international travel ban



(SAI Bureau)- With a severe spike in Covid-19 cases, countries across the world are putting India on their travel ban list. The US, Australia, Hong Kong, the UK, Pakistan and New Zealand have already released fresh travel advisories for their citizens, asking them to avoid travelling to/from India.

The Hong Kong government late Sunday activated an "emergency circuit breaker" and banned passenger flights from India for 14 days, starting April 20, raising concerns over the mutated coronavirus variant.

(Contd on page 21)

## Derek Chauvin is in a prison's segregated housing unit for his safety while he awaits sentencing



(SAI Bureau)-Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was put into a prison's segregated housing unit for his own safety, a prison spokesperson said, after Chauvin was found guilty of the murder of George Floyd on Tuesday. Sentencing will be in eight weeks Chauvin will be sentenced in about eight weeks -- so, around the second week of June -- Judge Peter Cahill said Tuesday, with a precise date to be announced. Although Chauvin had been out on bail since October, Cahill revoked Chauvin's bail after the verdict. Chauvin will now await sentencing while behind bars. He is being held in a segregated unit

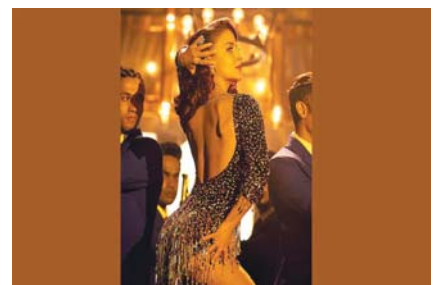
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## Indian American Community thanks Senators Keminski and Senator Thomas



(Press Release by Jagdish Sewhani) Indian American Community thanks Senators Keminski and Senator Thomas for Dropping the Swastika Bill The American India Public Affairs Committee in cooperation with various Indian organizations and temples organized a zoom Meeting to thank Senators Todd Kaminski and Senator Kevin Thomas. (Contd on page 31)

## Bollywood's Green Card Holders



(SAI Bureau)-Born in Australia and raised in Germany, Daniel Bauer, like most foreigners who arrive in India, wasn't well-versed with Hindi. It's also why the hair and make-up artiste had difficulty pronouncing his first celebrity client's name, Aishwarya Rai. "To avoid embarrassment and [causing] offence, I called her Aish," he says. After 12 years in Mumbai, Bauer's Hindi has improved. The names of his

(Contd on page 29)