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Vol. 16

Issue 44

Friday 27 March to 02 April 2020

\$1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Coronavirus Pandemic Raises Serious Questions About China's Conduct

Coronavirus pandemic is, beyond reasonable doubt, an outcome of criminal negligence on the part of Chinese authorities.



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China claims it beat coronavirus but does anyone believe it? **Page :19**



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Surgeon General says US could be WORSE than Italy if people do not follow coronavirus social distancing rules

(News Agencies)

Surgeon General Jerome Adams warned on Wednesday night that the US could become 'worse' than Italy if people do not start taking social distancing seriously.

In the US, there are 73,939 cases of coronavirus and the death toll is 1,074.

The country is 11 days behind Italy in terms of the virus spreading but already has a higher number of infections. In Italy, there are 74,000 infections but 7,000 people have died.

The number of new cases each day in Italy is slowing down but its death rate is not.

Dr. Adams told Fox News that people in the US must start staying indoors if they are not already if they want a chance at beating the virus.

'I'm heartened by the people around the country who are doing



the right thing, but we're still seeing far too many pictures of people out there doing the wrong things.

'Playing basketball, out on beaches. We need America to understand that we still could be like Italy.

'We could be worse than Italy if we don't

participate in these 15 days to stop the spread,' he said during an

appearance on The Ingraham Angle. Dr. Adams said there were encouraging numbers coming out of New York where despite the growing case count, the rate of hospitalization is 'leveling off' which might give healthcare workers a chance to get ahead.

There are still going to be enough cases of people requiring hospital care to overwhelm the

system.

However, Dr. Adams said Americans were two thirds of the way through the 15 days of advice that the government issued.

'I feel actually pretty good that if we continue to lean into this, we will actually flatten our curve even more. We'll start to come down and we won't reach those horrific projections.

'And we've said constantly that every place is going to have a different curve.

'So New York's going to have a different curve than Washington, than Boise, Idaho. And what the president, in my mind is doing is trying to help people understand that there is a light at the end of this tunnel. We will get through this.

'And as you

mentioned earlier, we're seeing New York cases level off,' he said.

'We're seeing their hospitalizations start to level off. And when you look at China, when you look at South Korea, their curve was about two to two and a half months.

'So there is hope that if we continue to lead into the mitigation efforts and we're two-thirds of the way through this 15 days to stop the spread initiative, that we can flatten the curve and that we can get to the end of this more quickly,' he said.

He previously said 15 days would not be enough but that the country would 'reassess' at that point on what to do next.

President Trump had said that he wanted an Easter deadline to reopen the country.

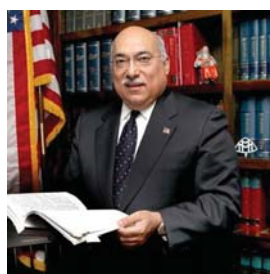
He has since softened that and says he will consult medical experts.

Unique Crime need Unique Punishment

An OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT DONALD JOHN TRUMP Kabul Gurudwara attacked by ISIS during Covid 19 National Emergency

Respected President Donald J. Trump: First, I have Grief for the innocent worshipers, the dead, the wounded, and a fractured families, including the human family across the world.

Second, my thanks to Afghan and security forces, who bravely swung into action to protect and limit the carnage, even as they had little or no role in the recent Jello gelatin Peace process, which I support. Third, this Crime of Terror - reaches new evil. As the world know we are all in a fight to survive against an enemy that remains attractively



punishment I propose, with a heart heavy of pain embedded in history, to the Hon President of the United States, H E Donald John Trump, is to identify all ISIS Centers, mark them for immediate destruction, and if there be a main one, for that mother load of evil, we go back to WWII decision-making, and for even better reasons now, roll out our Nano Nuke and eviscerate this evil. We can then continue to fight and beat Covid. It is a liberal lunacy to think compassionately about terrorists who have none.

Right now, Mr. President, your job is to defend the public safety, and the greater good. The deterrence of the punishment I propose will leave you free to address the national emergency that you are.

I, along with my family in New Rochelle, are Covid19-positive and in quarantine and individual isolation. Today is Day 12 of my Fever War.

Respectfully,
Ravi Batra

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AG Bill Barr issues \$15m REWARD for Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro after he is charged in the U.S. with narco terrorism



(News Agencies) The United States and US Department of Justice announced Thursday that it has indicted Venezuela's president Nicolás Maduro and several key aides on charges of narcoterrorism. Attorney General William Barr announced the charges against Maduro, who already faces US sanctions and has been the target of a US effort aimed at pushing him from power.

The indictment of a functioning head of state is highly unusual and is bound to ratchet up tensions between Washington and Caracas as the spread of the coronavirus threatens to collapse a health system and oil-dependent economy driven deep into the ground by years of corruption and US sanctions. Analysts said the action could boost Trump's re-election chances in the key swing state of Florida, which he won by a narrow margin in 2016 and where Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans fleeing authoritarian regimes have political muscle.

But its unclear how it brings Venezuela any closer to ending a 15-month standoff between Maduro, who has the support of Russia and China, and the US-backed opposition leader Juan Guaidó. It also could fragment the US-led coalition against Maduro if European and Latin American allies think the Trump administration is overreaching. 'This kind of action does nothing to help a negotiated solution—something that's already really difficult,' said Roberta Jacobson, who served as the State Department's top diplomat for Latin America until 2018.

Maduro, a 57-year-old former bus driver, portrays himself as an everyman icon of the Latin American left. He's long accused the US 'empire' of looking for any excuse to take control of the world's largest oil reserves, likening its plotting to the 1989 invasion of Panama and the removal of Gen Manuel Noriega to face drug trafficking charges in Florida. Barr and Elliott Abrams, the State Department's special envoy on Venezuela, are driving the hawkish US stance toward Maduro much as they pushed for Noriega's ouster in the late 1980s — Barr as a senior Justice Department official and Abrams as assistant secretary of state for Latin America. US officials see other parallels as well. Noriega transformed Panama into a playground for violent, international drug cartels while the Trump administration has accused Maduro and his

stealing hundreds of billions of dollars from the state coffers, much of it from state oil giant PDVSA, which has seen its production plunge to a seven-decade low. Still, charging Maduro was no easy task. Sitting foreign leaders normally enjoy immunity from prosecution under US law and international norms. But the US is among 60 countries that no longer consider Maduro a head of state even if he does hold de facto power.

military henchmen of harboring drug traffickers, guerrillas from Colombia and even Hezbollah, a designated terrorist group. They also have accused government officials together with well-connected businessmen of

stealing hundreds of billions of dollars from the state coffers, much of it from state oil giant PDVSA, which has seen its production plunge to a seven-decade low. Still, charging Maduro was no easy task. Sitting foreign

leaders normally enjoy immunity from prosecution under US law and international norms. But the US is among 60 countries that no longer consider Maduro a head of state even if he does hold de facto power.



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Saudi Arabia just won control of the oil market



When Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de facto leader and most influential member, decided at its latest meeting in Vienna to break its recent strategic oil partnership with Russia and adopt a new policy to maximize production levels, oil prices crashed — posting their biggest slide since the Gulf war in 1991.

But even more importantly, this new policy recalibrated global oil markets, giving Saudi Arabia the long-term advantage. This move marks a big change for the world's largest oil exporter, which has in recent years attempted to manage the global oil markets by altering production levels, while garnering the difficult cooperation of Russia. Crown Prince Mohammed

bin Salman has finally decided to pursue a long-term policy that not only preserves and ultimately increases the kingdom's market share, but also may signal the end of OPEC as a united functioning organization.

This decision is very unpopular with most oil exporting countries, international energy companies and American shale producers because collapsing prices will drastically decrease their revenues and, in some cases, force them into bankruptcy.

There are several reasons why the kingdom is finally taking this aggressive approach.

First, the successive Saudi monarchs have all recognized the strategic

importance of spare production capacity to manage the global markets because it provides the vital indicator of the world's oil market's ability to respond to sudden crises that jeopardize the free flow of oil supplies.

Saudi Aramco, the state's gargantuan oil and gas company, spent over \$35 billion since 2012 to maintain a 12 million barrels-per-day sustained production capacity with a 1.5 to 2 million barrels-per-day spare capacity cushion that can be called upon at short notice. And that's exactly what the Saudis will be doing over the next several weeks. Saudi Aramco is expected to be pumping a staggering 12 million barrels per day by April 1, 2020, with exports reaching between 9.5 to 10 million barrels per day.

On April 1 or shortly thereafter, Saudi Arabia will most likely surpass Russia to become the world's second largest producer. But this oil price war won't end until Saudi Arabia takes back the global production crown from the United

States, which should happen within the next two years.

No country other than Saudi Arabia, including Russia, has had the political and financial will to invest so heavily in upstream production capacity. This provides the Saudis with the means to go it alone and inflict insurmountable chaos on the vast majority of their conventional and shale oil producing competitors around the world. To emphasize this point, a new directive was issued last week by the kingdom's energy minister, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, to increase Saudi Aramco's sustained production capacity to 13 million barrels per day in about 24 months.

From an internal Saudi perspective, lower oil prices are manageable for the next decade. According to Aramco CEO Amin Nasser, "In a nutshell, Saudi Aramco can sustain the very low price and can sustain it for a long time." Saudi oil is the cheapest to produce (gross taxes, capital spending, production and transportation costs) in the

world at \$8.98 per barrel, according to the Aramco IPO prospectus of last year.

In comparison, US shale oil costs \$23.35 per barrel (and \$20.99 for non-shale), while Russian production costs average \$19.21 per barrel, according to the Energy Information Administration.

In fact, with new drilling technologies, Saudi production costs have decreased even further at some fields, such as at the world's largest offshore oil field, Shaybah.

Second, the Saudis have over \$500 billion in net foreign assets, so their public finances are shielded to a sudden drop in revenues from petroleum sales. The new Saudi policy suggests that sustained lower prices will help them maintain, and with time, increase their market share in the face of the shale oil production boom in the US. Hydraulic fracturing for shale oil has already added several million new barrels of oil per day to the global market. However, shale oil is expensive to extract, so lower prices averaging

between \$20 to \$25 per barrel for the US benchmark will mean several important US producers will find their business models unsustainable soon enough and completely insolvent over the long term.

Saudi Arabia holds about 25% of the world's oil reserves, about 70% of global spare production capacity, and it is the world's largest crude exporter by a large margin.

Through various revenue model projections based on different oil price averages and export levels, the Saudi finance ministry and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) are designing financial government expenditure plans that can sustain oil prices falling as low as \$30 per barrel on average for at least the next five years, with temporary dips as low as \$15 per barrel, according to various government financial projections. Aramco CFO Khalid Al Dabbagh re-emphasised this point by saying "We Aramco are very comfortable we can meet our shareholders' expectations at \$30 a barrel or even lower."

The mechanics of the lockdown

The State must minimise pain, ensure basic needs are met

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday, announced the most radical, disruptive measure taken anywhere globally to battle the coronavirus pandemic. He announced a three-week lockdown for the entire country, and warned citizens strictly not to exit their homes for the

next 21 days. Given that this applies to over 1.3 billion citizens, in all states and Union Territories, spans all sectors except essential services, the scale of the lockdown is unprecedented, not just in India, but the world. Other countries have resorted to lockdowns which have been more limited either in

space or duration.

The lockdown is essential. As Mr Modi said, there is no way to battle the pandemic but through strict social distancing. In India, relying on only voluntary distancing is insufficient — it needs to be backed by State authority. It is also true that once the virus spreads, given India's poor

health infrastructure, it will be very difficult to contain. It is important to temper expectations though. India will continue to see an increase in cases for now, as testing increases and many — who slowly developed symptoms — turn out positive. But if the lockdown is successful, as the PM said, India may succeed in breaking the chain of human transmission — and flattening the curve.

But while the onus rests on citizens to follow the government's directive, the government has to do the following. One, the lockdown cannot be enforced with extra legal measures. This has been visible in the form of police brutality across the country or in Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao suggesting shoot-at-



sight orders against violators. Respect the law, and be proportionate and sensitive in responses. Two, law enforcement authorities need to be clearly instructed to allow the supply of essentials, and not impede movement. Three, the government needs to communicate more clearly with citizens — and assure them that it will ensure that basic needs will be met. Four, it needs to immediately come up with an economic plan for daily wage workers, migrant workers, and those in the unorganised

sector, who have no means to sustain themselves for such a long duration given the disruption to their livelihoods. Five, it needs to use this time to ramp up health systems — by enhancing testing, creating dedicated facilities, providing protective equipment for health workers, and sourcing ventilators and other medical essentials. And finally, it needs to draw up a medium-term economic plan since incomes and jobs will be severely hit. As citizens fulfil their duties, it is time for the State to do its bit.



Universal basic income is the best way to help the self-employed

I'm tearful every day and not sleeping," Mish Kimani, a seamstress in Kidderminster, Worcestershire, tells me. "My future feels very bleak." Her sewing shop has been trading for more than a year but, two weeks ago, the customers vanished. Her business outgoings are £800 a month; her incomings are now zero, and she has no savings. A diabetic, she fears not only contracting coronavirus, but dying from it. "I'm feeling very much abandoned by the government," she says.

The welfare state always had sizeable cracks which were only widened by a decade of austerity. In the age of the coronavirus, they are now yawning chasms, and there is a long way for people like Kimani to fall. Millions of British workers earn their keep through the gig economy or self-employment; for some, it's because they value a sense of freedom; for others, it's because it suits companies to be able to opt out of paying workers a guaranteed minimum wage or offering rights like occupational sick pay or holiday pay.

Indeed, these sectors have been nurtured as a deliberate strategy: in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, the Confederation of British Industry – the bosses' spokespeople – suggested the crisis was an opportunity to expand a "flexiforce" of precarious workers, with a reduced core workforce of permanent workers with full rights. In 2016, it was reported that self-employed people earned less than two decades earlier. As Covid-19 overwhelms the economy's immune system, all remaining vestiges of security for these workers has been stripped away. Their specialisms are varied indeed: they are gas engineers, plasterers, pet sitters, carpenters, hairdressers, construction workers, bouncers, comedians, yoga instructors, chefs, sports coaches, delivery drivers, wedding florists, animators and theatre directors – you name it.

They are Uber drivers like Ray Thomas, whose income has fallen to zero but has a taxi insurance worth £200 a month and car payment of £120 a week to pay, alongside rent, bills and food. He has anxiety and depression and told me he had "a bit of a breakdown the other day when I found out the only thing available was the £94.25 universal credit".

They are kayak coaches like Chris Shaw, who taught Boris Johnson's children and says he now feels "hung out to dry" by him. He has two young sons to feed and just £2,000 worth of savings from his grandfather's inheritance.

They are jewellery designers like Jess Jones, who is five months pregnant and now has an income that is all but

gone, leaving her feeling "completely forgotten about".

There are no weddings, and so Hannah Millard's photography skills are no longer required: her eldest son has a rare illness that last year left him in hospital for four months. "Without financial help, my successful business will fail and I will go bankrupt," she tells me. "I feel absolutely crushed."

For now, their supposed lifeline has been the government's bungled universal credit scheme, offering £94.25 a week with a five-week wait: the number of applicants nationally is 10 times higher than usual. In Wolverhampton jobcentre, a universal credit work coach tells me that normally they deal with 70 claims; it's now up to 1,200 and yet staff numbers are down to a third because of self-isolation. The services are simply overwhelmed.

Rosie Parsnips, a hairdresser in Hayfield, Derbyshire, tells me that when she called the selfemployed helpline, she wasn't even placed in a queue. Many are private renters and the government's much-vaunted no-evictions policy in practice means giving tenants three months' notice before they get the boot instead of two, all while building up rent arrears.

Belatedly, the government is poised to offer help; its proposals must be scrutinised to ensure every single self-employed and gig economy worker has the income they require to support themselves and their dependants. But government briefings to sympathetic newspapers suggest such support wouldn't be available until the end of May, and that ministers are concerned about any system that "took away the incentive to work", which is the entire point.

There is a more straightforward solution, one that has even been touted by that well-known Trot, the Conservative MP for Gainsborough, Sir Edward Leigh. It is a universal basic income, where everyone is granted a sum of money by the state as a right of citizenship and with no strings attached.

At the very least, it should be offered immediately and without preconditions not just to precarious and self-employed workers who fear what their plight will be next week – let alone next month – but to those who have suffered cuts to their hours and therefore pay, and the ever-surging numbers being cast into redundancy despite the government's wage-subsidy programme. The Royal Society of Arts has come up with a plan: a one-off immediate payment of £1,500 and then additional monthly payments of £450, combined with universal credit and housing costs.

Lessons on enduring coronavirus crisis from these heroes of Vietnam

New heroes are emerging as America faces its latest crisis. Some ensure our sick receive care. Others sustain vital supply chains. Some simply wear pajamas, doing their small but important duty to combat the spread of COVID-19.

American heroes have worn pajamas before. In fact, the men I admire most did their duty by enduring isolation, communicating without speaking face-to-face, and yes, wearing pajamas – scratchy, pink-striped pajamas. Their example becomes especially important today.

During the 1960s, North Vietnamese rockets and artillery shattered the self-assumed invincibility of more than 400 U.S. military aviators who became prisoners of war in the Hanoi Hilton and other infamous camps. In a matter of seconds, their missions suddenly and unexpectedly became ones of fierce defiance, patient endurance, mutual support, and unknown duration. These men did not take confinement well. They were used to streaking across open sky at Mach 1, making aircraft bend to their will, and always completing their mission. Like many of us, they believed they had control of their world. In an instant, their lives irreversibly changed, much as ours have today. Inside prison camps, they chose patriotism and pain over comfort and cooperation. They refused to acquiesce to their captors and consequently faced brutal torture, solitary confinement, and soul-crushing deprivation. One POW, future U.S. Senator Jeremiah

Denton, appeared on international television and covertly blinked out T-O-R-T-U-R-E in Morse code. No training had prepared them for the pain and intense solitude their new mission brought.

At first, most POWs believed the ordeal would last several months. When future Adm. Bob Shumaker parachuted into North Vietnam on Feb. 11, 1965, he never imagined his sentence would last until Feb. 12, 1973: eight years and one day.

In 1967, the North Vietnamese expelled Shumaker, Denton and nine other especially subversive POW leaders from the Hanoi Hilton and exiled them to a dreadful gulag these eleven POWs nicknamed Alcatraz. The "Alcatraz Gang" spent two years isolated in windowless four-by-nine-foot solitary cells. They spent 23 hours and 40 minutes per day confined inside, wearing leg irons at night. I met these notorious POWs while telling their story in my books "Defiant" and "Captured," and last month, I attended one's funeral at Arlington National Cemetery. I was standing with Adm. Shumaker when an admirer approached him and marveled, "I never could have survived an experience like that." Shumaker quietly responded, "Yes, you could have."

He meant the POWs had no choice. In many ways, neither do we. POWs had to survive day by day – sometimes minute by excruciating minute. They had to rely on their minds and their brother POWs.



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

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Why is Covid-19 death rate so low in Germany?

As Covid-19 closes in on the United States, physicians and epidemiologists and crystal ball spinners are trying to forecast just how bad things might get. Right now, cases are already in the tens of thousands and climbing every day. The enormous costs to society and to individuals seem too staggering to comprehend.

The number of deaths, however, is the most important measure to define where this pandemic settles in the grim lineup of previous catastrophic infectious diseases. Worldwide, more than 4% of patients—nearing 19,000 -- have died, with many more to come, and each death its own heartbreaking story.

As of this past weekend, nine countries had diagnosed more than 9,000 cases, and three -- South Korea, Switzerland, and Germany -- had death rates well below the others. For South Korea, this in part

is due to the cases occurring in much younger people, while the information in Switzerland is only now emerging.

But for Germany, Covid-19 is being diagnosed in the same middle-aged people as other countries. The deaths in Germany also fit the seemingly established pattern of also occurring among the very old. Yet even with similar populations of infected patients as, for example, France, Spain and the US, the German Covid-19 mortality rate is about 0.4%. What are the Germans doing right?

Recent articles have raised this issue with several theories put forth by local experts. Some feel that it is a temporary situation, since Germany, like South Korea, has been aggressively testing its population from the outset. Aggressive testing likely will identify persons otherwise too well to come to medical attention, thereby diluting the tested pool with a large set of infected but otherwise well people who are likely to remain so.

German authorities are concerned that, in the coming weeks, the wave of the very sick will appear in Germany, too, leading to a rising mortality rate. Perhaps.

Others have speculated that the first cases in Germany were older adults who had used an early spring vacation to go skiing in countries that turned out to have high rates of Covid-19. So yes, goes this thinking: the German cases are in older persons, but all were well enough to ski, that is, they were people without the various other medical conditions that increase risk of death.

There might be other explanations. With any infection, there are four basic questions to ask when looking at broad differences in death rates. These measures are used in the well regarded US News and World Report hospital ranking system and include easily gathered information such as staffing ratios, education level of practitioners and number of specialists and specialty beds, including those in an intensive

care unit.

The World Bank tracks health care information by country on three relevant structural measures (though recentness of information varies country to country), each measured per 1,000 general population: doctors, nurses and hospital beds. They and other sources also track two other relevant variables: lifespan per country and health care spending per individual. Neither of these demonstrate differences in affected Western European countries that might explain a difference in Covid-19 survival.

Furthermore, longevity, which may reflect facility with management of chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes as well as diet, is about two years higher in Italy, Spain, and France than Germany, which ranks 27th in the world. Structural measures, however, may provide insight. Higher doctor and hospital bed numbers don't vary meaningfully, but one variable stands out: Nurses per 1,000 people in the general population.

India has a short window to win the war against Covid-19

Infection rates have to be brought down in the next few weeks. For that, testing and treatment facilities are key



The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has already taken a toll on people's health care across the world. Forty years ago, the world witnessed the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic that killed 40 million people and left another 30 million HIV+. While Africa bore the maximum brunt of the pandemic then, the epicentre for Covid-19 appears to be the rich nations of western Europe and the United States (US).

Initially, India's response to Covid-19 was quick. The government identified the risk in allowing people from China to enter the country, and adopted quarantine procedures for those who were evacuated from Wuhan and other cities in China, and later from Iran and Italy. India could minimise the initial impact because of these

timely steps.

However, what followed later was a large influx of people (estimated around two to two-and-a-half million), including students, tourists, pilgrims and residents from India, who returned to the country between January and March 2020 until the borders were closed to international traffic on March 21. They returned from various international destinations and proceeded to Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and airports in northern Kerala, among other places.

The government introduced thermal screening procedures for those coming from abroad, while others who were asymptomatic or not detected by thermal scanners were allowed entry with an advisory to stay at home and observe quarantine

procedures. But many did not follow it strictly.

In the intervening period, they have travelled within the country, met people, participated in social functions and infected a large number of people. The rising infections in the last few weeks are mainly reported from among this section of the population and their contacts.

The government has done a fine job of sharing the details of incoming passengers with the state governments and district administrations. But how effectively each of them was followed up on and counselled to stay at home is not clear. Some state governments have now started monitoring these cases but that was only after they tested positive. Critical time was lost in enforcing the quarantine instructions until the "janata curfew" (people's curfew) and the subsequent lockdown in high-prevalence districts started taking effect.

The prime minister has now announced an extended lockdown for 21 days which is very timely. It will provide time and a window of opportunity for the central and state governments to mount an intensified response within a short period of identifying

people who returned from abroad and their families and testing them. This testing load is bound to be large and the present testing arrangements will be stretched to their full capacity. The testing procedures until now are built around viral load testing by taking throat swabs. The time taken for the test results is between three to five days. The tests are costly and can be carried out only in specialist institutions.

The key to scale-up testing in a large population is to introduce tests that can give results the same day to enable treatment at an early stage of infection. Such tests are based on detecting antibodies in the infected person. Antibody tests are generally more affordable both for patients and government agencies. In the case of HIV/AIDS, the entire testing programme was centred around making available rapid testing to check HIV status. In a short period of time, a large number of HIV positive persons were identified for providing anti-retroviral treatment (ART) and AIDS-related mortality was substantially reduced.

This is an opportune time for the government to look for rapid antibody testing for Covid-19 for both

symptomatic and asymptomatic travellers and their close contacts. South Korea and Singapore effectively used rapid testing to identify positive cases who were quarantined and followed up on. The United States Food and Drug Administration has recently approved a rapid test for Covid-19.

India has the technological capability to produce a high-quality rapid test quickly. In the short-term, the government can import rapid test kits and use them in the testing programmes. This will help in scaling up testing facilities in health care institutions right up to the district level and take the pressure off specialist institutions and laboratories.

The battle for control of Covid-19 can be won if the new infection rates can be brought down substantially in the next two to three weeks. And providing testing and treatment facilities to those who are at risk is the key to success. We should not make the mistakes some European countries made in not responding rapidly enough. It will prove to be unaffordable in the Indian context.

In times of a lockdown, support migrant workers

Internal migrants must be treated as well as international ones. Let them return, provide welfare, ramp up testing

It was during the Mumbai floods of July 26, 2005, that I first discovered how a city can be brought to its knees. Buses, trains, autos, taxis and all transportation that we take for granted, came to a grinding halt, as we waded through water for several kilometres to reach home. Between staying where we were and reaching home, the choice for most was easy — try and get home because you don't know how much higher the water levels will rise up to.

The official 21-day lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) in India has, and will, trigger similar reactions for many migrant city dwellers. Except that they will be walking many more kilometres, in fear of an invisible virus and visible anti-migrant hostility, and without the solidarity of people on the streets to cheer them on. As news reports filter in, many are walking home, outside the city. Orders to stay home have mixed connotations for over 100-million circular migrant workers in India because "home" is usually the

native place and getting there will be of utmost priority. With lack of clarity on income support, the figurative water levels are rising, and migrants will scramble to reach home as we did during the Mumbai floods.

As luck would have it, many millions, in northern India, would have gone home before the lockdown itself in the weeks surrounding Holi, as per the annual ritual. As authorities have clamped down on international travel, we can also rule out mass return migration from abroad. This is important since Punjab sends over 200,000 migrants to Italy, a country badly affected by Covid-19. The Indian government's stellar efforts at rescuing stranded Indian travellers abroad should also be appreciated. And yet, the routine double-standards in treating international migrants better than internal migrants, is now on full display, as millions of migrant workers are stuck, given only a few hours of notice.

What can be done for our migrant workers, especially

those with low incomes? First, state governments and district administrations need to show as much resolve as the national government in bringing back migrants should they want to do so. The Uttarakhand government appears to have taken the lead in this and other states, especially Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and West Bengal must emulate this. Civil society organisations which are tracking this issue in real-time such as the Aaajevika Bureau, with decades of experience in dealing with migrant workers in source and destination regions, should be roped in.

Second, for those who cannot go back, welfare support measures need to be put in place immediately. This will ideally require an official call on cancellation of housing rent payments for one month and access to rations for non-domiciled people.

Third, for those migrants who have already gone home, social distancing has to be strictly



enforced by district-level administrations. Since Maharashtra and Kerala have registered a number of Covid-19 cases so far, it would mean that the source-region districts of migrants to those places should be on high alert. Districts such as Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, Ganjam in Odisha, East and West Midnapore in West Bengal and a cluster of districts in the Bhojpuri-speaking belt should be prepared with more testing facilities.

A few decades ago, AIDS spread from Surat to Ganjam through migrant workers. A century ago, during the plague of 1896-98 or influenza of 1918, cities were emptied out as migrant workers fled. That perhaps contributed to a larger

spread of the epidemic, though at times, the choice was between escaping the city or facing a famine in the countryside. This time around, there is no famine but with greater information, home may also not be as welcoming as Konkan migrants from Mumbai are finding out.

Trapped migrant workers need our empathy and support. The cruel irony is that when the lockdown is over, migrant workers will be expected to return as soon as possible, where they will work and live in congested sites and pick up all sorts of infections.

That is a public health issue that demands as much of our attention as Covid-19, after this pandemic has subsided.

Implement deshbandi, with care and compassion



It is perhaps a less-known fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political career was dramatically transformed by a natural disaster. The alleged mishandling of relief operations during the 2001 Kutch earthquake by the Keshubhai Patel government in Gujarat forced the central Bharatiya Janata Party's hand. Modi was sent to Gandhinagar. The rest is history.

Covid-19 is not a natural disaster but a once-in-a-century global pandemic. Modi could bring an element of order to relief and rehabilitation

efforts in Kutch because it was a "controllable" situation. By contrast, a medical emergency such as Covid-19 is a crisis plagued with extreme uncertainty. From autocracies like China to open societies like the United States (US), almost every country is struggling to bring the virus under control. In that sense, the pandemic poses the biggest challenge to modern-day leadership, including that of Modi.

Modi's leadership style has been built around his image as a political strongman; his demagoguery and

It requires leadership with a human touch, new State-citizen engagement, and effective last-mile delivery

muscularity has a cult-like following.

His transformation from a Hindutva hero to a governance guru has revolved around a 24*7 image-making machine and is best exemplified by a highly successful one liner during the 2019 campaign: "Modi hai toh mumkin hai" (anything is possible if Modi is there). That notion of seeming political invincibility has ensured a larger-than-life image where the lines between myth and reality are blurred. A pandemic like Covid-19 has no place for myth-making to control the narrative. The viral infection cannot be countered with sharp rhetoric or glitzy events. An election can be won by a high-pitched presidential-style campaign but a disease can only be conquered by medical-scientific discovery. To that extent, the virus exposes

the limitations of the strongman cult.

Compare, for example, the 21-day national curfew announcement (deshbandi) to control Covid-19 with Modi's previous dramatic decision to demonetise high value currency in 2016 (notebandi). The latter, arguably, was a self-goal, one that was driven not as much by necessity as hubris, a conviction that massive State intervention would end the menace of black money. It was a decision based on individual judgment and not built through any form of consensus-building with the key stakeholders. By contrast, the current lockdown is adhering to an accepted global playbook that views social distancing as an imperative to limit the casualties.

While notebandi could be justifiably criticised for chaotically disrupting the

economic cycle, no one can quarrel with the intent or need for a three-week deshbadi to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. Where the problem arises is when a coercive step is taken without any matching degree of compassion towards those most affected by unbridled State power. Clamping down on the public's right to move freely is understandable. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures or, as the prime minister put it, "jaan hai to jahaan hai" (when you have life, you have the world). But to impose a clampdown without an effective social security safety net for the most vulnerable groups is a recipe for a potential disaster. India's affluent, for example, may well have recovered from the demonetisation blip in their fortunes. But those living on the margins in the informal sector have not. Likewise,

it is small and microbusinesses and daily wage labourers who stand to lose the most from an extended clampdown on economic activity. Only a massive, well-directed financial package for the poor, especially the urban poor, can at least partly soften the inevitable social and economic costs of deshbadi. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement on Thursday is a welcome first step, but much more needs to be done. The Covid-19 challenge calls for not only strong, decisive leadership but also one with a human touch, backed by intelligent policymaking. It demands a new citizen-State engagement where the mighty arms of the State — be it the police or the local bureaucracy — are trusted more than feared.

Imagining a different, better future



If sustained, behavioural changes, induced by Covid-19, can alter the way we live and work

though only a subset of workers — professionals and those not in direct service provision — can adopt a WFH policy, they tend to be affluent, with a high environmental footprint, who usually use private vehicles.

If, for example, a substantial portion (say half) of this class shifted to two days a week of WFH, it could lead to an average reduction of 20% of private vehicle commuter trips, with not inconsiderable associated air pollution reductions. For many, WFH also brings personal gains — a change in context, saved commuting time, and potential for flexibility. Once forced to experiment, corporations may become converts, not least because of space and rental cost savings. The coronavirus pandemic may have brought about in weeks a shift in professional culture that would otherwise occur glacially.

How can the Covid-19-generated understanding of the link between individual behaviour and positive social outcomes be harnessed for other purposes, such as the climate crisis? Scenarios show that changing energy demand through behavioural shifts helps limit climate change at a lower cost than traditional efforts focused on supply shifts, such as moving to renewable energy. Simple actions include changing thermostat settings, shifting to walking and public transport, and reducing meat consumption. Going further, we could limit travel by meeting more of our leisure needs locally and through creative livestreams. In The Conversation, Simone Abram writes that perhaps Covid-19 can eventually show us that happiness is not only tied to unlimited growth, consumption and travel.

Our collective attention is on addressing the immediate threat of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. This is as it should be — the pandemic is accelerating and the global death toll on March 25 was over 18,000 with more than 2,000 new deaths reported a day. India is at a critical moment, with accelerating infection rates and deaths. This week, India imposed a lockdown, banned long-distance travel, and enhanced testing. Central and state governments are developing financial packages to provide safety

nets. Whether these measures have come in time is a matter of debate. There is a serious concern that India — like Italy, the United States (US) and the United Kingdom — is closing the barn door to the sight of distant horses' hooves. We will only know the real situation in the coming days, as testing ramps up.

With anxiety all around, is there anything hopeful that we can learn from the Covid-19 response? While we have to focus now on the pandemic, the time will come when we have to turn our attention back to other,

seemingly intractable problems, such as air quality and the climate crisis, which this column focuses on. And here, we could learn some things from the response to the current pandemic.

The key insight is this. The response to problems such as the climate crisis and air pollution is incremental because personal psychology and political systems in normal times only tolerate modest change; in crises, disruptive changes become necessary. Can we learn from and build on the Covid-19-induced responses to

lock-in some disruptive changes and even manage transformational change before a crisis hits us?

To begin with, Covid-19 has shown that individuals can change behaviours at an unimagined scale and speed. For example, work from home (WFH) has become a reality for millions who are trying to maintain productivity and manage teamwork. Yet, there are also long-term gains from effective WFH. As a policy tool, it can simultaneously help to address urban congestion, air pollution and even reduce fuel imports. Even

When Covid-19 enters India's slums

India is home to one-third of the global slum population. The State needs a plan

The spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in India's slums will be even faster than in the non-slum areas we seem to be tracking so far.

Overcrowding, lack of clean water, poor sanitation, social dependency, larger number of human contacts, low disease immunity of dwellers, besides poor medical facilities make for tremendous speed and size of virus transmission in slums. The poor quality of air in urban slums are a common cause for respiratory diseases that further reduces the respiratory tract's ability to shut the coronavirus down. Our research at the Centre for Sustainability has explored the implications of the unique social infrastructure of slums in India on the

significant role it plays in the spread of Covid-19.

India is home to about one-third of the global slum population, with an average of one in six city residents living in slums where population densities vary between 277,136 persons per square kilometre (sq km) in Dharavi to 125,000 persons per sq km at the Rasolpoora slum in Hyderabad. Slums are an integral part of the city's economy as that is where a majority of workers and domestic help stay.

Various authors have estimated that reproductive ratio (R naught) for Covid-19 is somewhere between two and three, and that it would be about 20% more in the case of India's slum population. This means that the reproductive ratio of Covid-19 would range between 2.4 to 3.6 in Indian slums. R naught applies to a situation where everyone

in the population is susceptible, and no control measures are taken. It gives us the number of new cases that an existing case can generate over time, on an average. If R naught is below one, the population of infected individuals will get smaller and smaller over time. But in a fictitious population, where one infected person infects three other individuals on average — A gives it to three people (B, C, and D) and these three people give it to three more people each — R naught is equal to three.

Indeed, the spread of Covid-19 depends on the susceptible population that an infected person is going to encounter per time unit — let us say per day, times the average duration of infectiousness in days, times the average probability that transmission will take

place per unit of contact. In order to ascertain if Covid-19 is going to spread fast and wide, besides the R naught, we need to also know the serial interval of the spread. The serial interval is a measure of how fast the disease spreads from one person to the next, and this changes across localities and time.

We took a fictional case of 1,000 individuals in a Delhi slum who have never been exposed to the coronavirus. While R naught is three, we find the current serial interval in a moderately dense Delhi slum zone to be close to about 7.5 days. So, in the first 7.5 days, the infected person infects three people, and they develop the disease.

After 7.5 more days, each of these individuals infects three more people, and they, then, develop the disease. So, we now have



nine infected people, and, after 7.5 more days, each one of those nine people infects three people each. Similarly, after another phase of 7.5 days, each 27 infected individuals infect three people each, which means 81 individuals. Add the first individual with the next three, then the next nine, then the next 27, and then the final 81. And, in a month, you have 121 new cases per 1,000 people.

This simulation indicates the high speed of spread of Covid-19 in all the slums in Delhi/India. Assuming such a community transmission occurs, we are in for a disastrous situation, for which the precautionary measure of maintaining physical distance between

individuals in slums appears impossible for at least three reasons.

First, the sheer lack of living space in slums makes physical distancing of people impossible. The average slum household size in India is typically three times larger than a non-slum household, but members only have a few square metres to live within it. The average population density is about 1,000 people per square mile but in the slums, it is 10-100 times higher.

Second, the lack of adequate social security by the State or private insurance makes the fight against Covid-19 even more complex.

Global coronavirus death toll crosses 20,000, three billion under lockdown

As the number of confirmed cases worldwide soared past 450,000, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that only a concerted global effort could stop the spread of the virus.



(News Agencies) More than three billion people around the world were living under lockdown on Wednesday as governments stepped up their efforts against the coronavirus pandemic which has left more than 20,000 people dead.

As the number of confirmed cases worldwide soared past 450,000, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that

only a concerted global effort could stop the spread of the virus. In Spain, the number of fatalities surpassed those of China, where the novel coronavirus first emerged three months ago, making it the hardest-hit nation after Italy.

A total of more than 20,800 deaths have now been reported in 182 countries and territories, according to an AFP

tally. Stock markets rebounded after the US Congress moved closer to passing a \$2.2 trillion relief package to prop up a teetering US economy.

In Washington, President Donald Trump said New York, the epicenter of the US outbreak with over 30,000 cases, likely has a few "tough weeks" ahead but he would decide soon whether unaffected parts of the country can get back to work. "We want to get our country going again," Trump said. "I'm not going to do anything rash or hastily. "By Easter we'll have a recommendation and maybe before Easter," said Trump, who had been touting a strong US economy as he faces an election in November.

UN chief Guterres said the world needs to ban together to stem the pandemic. "COVID-19 is threatening the whole of

humanity — and the whole of humanity must fight back," Guterres said, launching an appeal for \$2 billion to help the world's poor.

"Global action and solidarity are crucial," he said. "Individual country responses are not going to be enough."

India's stay-at-home order for its 1.3 billion people is now the biggest, taking the total number of individuals facing restrictions on their daily lives to more than three billion. Anxious Indians raced for supplies after the world's second-biggest population was ordered not to leave their houses for three weeks. Russia, which announced the death of two patients who tested positive for coronavirus on Wednesday, is expected to follow suit. President Vladimir Putin declared next week a public holiday and

postponed a public vote on controversial constitutional reforms, urging people to follow instructions given by authorities. In Britain, heir to the throne Prince Charles became the latest high-profile figure to be infected, though he has suffered only mild symptoms. The G20 major economies will hold an emergency videoconference on Thursday to discuss a global response to the crisis, as will the 27 leaders of the European Union, the outbreak's new epicenter. China has begun to relax its own draconian restrictions on free movement in the province of Hubei — where the outbreak began in December — after the country reported no new cases. Crowds jammed trains and buses in the province as people took their first opportunity to travel.

China asks Pak to open border for transferring medical aid

(News Agencies) China has asked Pakistan to open the border between the two countries for one day on Friday so that medical supplies to fight coronavirus pandemic could be transported into the country, according to a media report. The Khunjerab Pass is usually opened on April 1 which marks the end of winter in that part, but due to the global outbreak of COVID-19, the border between Pakistan and China has been closed for an indefinite period. The Chinese embassy in a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the governor of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China would like to donate a batch of medical materials to Gilgit-Baltistan, the Dawn reported. According to the letter, the governor has donated 200,000 ordinary face masks, 2,000 N-95 face masks, five ventilators, 2,000 testing kits and 2,000 medical protective clothes mainly used by doctors and paramedics to fight with virus, which originated in China late last year.

The donation is in response to a request made by GB Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman to the governor of Xinjiang region to combat coronavirus in the province. Gilgit-Baltistan has high percentage of coronavirus cases in the country compared to its population, but the underdeveloped region has a negligible number of operational ventilators and remoteness has led to a severe shortage of medical equipment. The province has reported 84 positive cases so far while the national tally has reached to 1,102 and the death toll to eight. Earlier, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Chairman Lt Gen Mohammad Afzal had said said Pakistan had sought to purchase medical equipment, including ventilators, but these were in short supply around the world and only China had assured that it would provide such items to Pakistan.

China's Xi calls for tariff cuts at G20 virus talks

China has been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak since it emerged in the country late last year, with more than 80,000 infected and nearly 3,300 dead nationwide, according to official figures.

(News Agencies) Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday urged G20 countries to remove trade barriers in an effort to spur a global recovery after the economic shock of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Xi urged G20 members to cut tariffs, remove barriers and facilitate the unfettered flow of trade" during his

remarks at the emergency online summit, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

China has been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak since it emerged in the country late last year, with more than 80,000 infected and nearly 3,300 dead nationwide, according to official figures. The world's second-largest

economy ground to a halt in February as authorities shut factories and imposed drastic lockdowns to curb the spread of the disease.

Economic growth had already slowed as a result of the long-running trade war with the United States that saw billions of dollars in tariffs slapped on trade between the two countries.

Pope tests negative after employee gets covid-19: Report

Several Italian newspapers with reputable sources in the Vatican said the Italian clergyman who got sick had lived for years in the pope's Saint Martha's residence.

(News Agencies) Pope Francis was reported Thursday to have tested negative for the novel coronavirus after a person in his residence was said to have contacted COVID-19. Several Italian newspapers with reputable sources in the Vatican said the Italian clergyman who got sick had lived for years in the pope's Saint Martha's residence.

Il Messaggero said the person is "one of the pope's closest collaborators, an official of the Secretariate of the State, who was found to have a slight temperature after going in for a routine check". The daily La Stampa said the unnamed person has been hospitalised in Rome and that his office has been disinfected. Il Messaggero later reported that the pope himself was tested for the virus

and came out clean. The 83-year-old pontiff has remained largely secluded at his residence since coming down with a cold late last month. La Stampa said he has been "eating alone in his room for some time" and has food brought to him on a tray by secretaries.

"He spends much of his time in his apartment, and when he moves inside the residence, he keeps the necessary safe distances," La Stampa wrote. "The anti-contagion cordon has been tight around the pope for weeks." The official Vatican News site said the number of people infected in the city state has risen to four.

The ANSA news agency said the Italian clergyman in the

pope's residence was a fifth case not reported by official sources. Life in the Vatican has been shrouded in secrecy and little is known about how popes spend their days. But the Argentine-born pontiff has tried to connect more with the people and do away with some of the Vatican's more formal traditions.

He refused to move into the luxurious papal palace upon being elected to succeed pope Benedict XVI in March 2013. His Saint Martha's residence is a simple building erected next to Saint Peter's Basilica in 1996. It is also the place where cardinals stay when they gather for conclaves to elect new popes. Francis stayed there for the 2013 election and then never moved out when he was picked.

G20 Virtual Summit: Saudi king urges effective response to coronavirus crisis

Leaders of the G20 convened the Extraordinary Virtual Summit on Thursday evening even as wealthy countries including the United States unveiled huge economic stimulus packages.

(News Agencies) Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on Thursday urged G20 leaders to take "effective and coordinated" action to fight the global health crisis set off by the coronavirus pandemic. He urged leaders attending the summit to do their best to assist all developing nations.

Leaders of the G20 convened the Extraordinary Virtual Summit on Thursday evening even as wealthy countries including the United States unveiled huge economic stimulus packages.

Till date, there has been no collective action plan from the G20, and the group has been criticised for its slow response. In his opening remarks as G20 leaders began an emergency online summit in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic,

the king detailed the destruction and damage the disease had caused on the global economy, financial markets, trade as well as global supply chains.

"We must have an effective and coordinated response to this pandemic and restore confidence in the global economy," the Saudi King said.

India is expected to push for a coordinated and forward-looking approach at the extraordinary G20 virtual leaders' summit. The summit is being held against the backdrop of a divide in the G7 over US efforts to label Covid-19 as the "Wuhan virus".

Members of the G20, which includes 19 of the world's largest economies and the European Union, are engaged in hectic negotiations to finalise a joint

communiqué to be issued after the meeting. "This human crisis requires a global response. The world counts on us to come together and cooperate in order to face this challenge," the Saudi King said. As concerns mount for poorer countries without access to capital markets and adequate health facilities, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have urged G20 leaders to support its call for governments to put debt payments on hold. The members are also expected to outline their individual positions in separate statements during the video conference that has been convened by G20 president Saudi Arabia to discuss a joint response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his statement, is expected to refer

to India's role in forging a coordinated response through the video conference of leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on March 15 and how this could be replicated by other countries.

On Wednesday, other members of the G7 had spurned the US state department's push to include the phrase "Wuhan virus" in a joint statement that was to be issued after a video conference of the grouping's foreign ministers. The members issued separate statements that reflected the divisions within the G7. The US was responsible for framing the draft statement as it is the current president of the G7, which includes the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada.

Imported Covid-19 cases go up in China as overseas Chinese rush home

A total of 67 new cases were reported as of end-Wednesday, up from 47 a day earlier, all of which were from outside, China's national health commission (NHC) said on Thursday.



(News Agencies) China on Thursday reported a second consecutive day of no new domestic coronavirus cases as the country's epidemic epicentre Hubei province opened its sealed borders after weeks, allowing hundreds of people to step out of the province for the first time in several weeks.

If that was a sign of the outbreak weakening in China, imported Covid-19 cases, rose sharply on Wednesday, fuelling fears of a second infection wave returning to China riding on overseas returnees.

A total of 67 new cases were reported as of end-Wednesday, up from 47 a day earlier, all of which were from outside, China's national health commission

(NHC) said on Thursday.

It brought the total number of imported cases to 541 on the mainland.

The total number of cases now stands at 81,285 while the NHC reported a total of 3,287 deaths at the end of Wednesday, up six from the previous day.

Following the measures taken by Beijing, Shanghai government announced that starting from this (Thursday) evening, all people entering the city from abroad will be required to undergo a 14-day quarantine to prevent the spread of the infection.

Expressing the Chinese government's concern about overseas cases, the vice foreign minister, Luo Zhaohui said on

Thursday that around 90 percent of China's imported cases of Covid-19 are Chinese passport holders and 40 percent of them were students.

The Chinese foreign ministry, its embassies and hotlines have received 70000 phone calls from overseas Chinese on the pandemic, Luo said at a press conference in Beijing.

"Effectively curbing the rise of imported Covid-19 cases has become a priority of China's epidemic prevention and control," Luo said.

The minister urged Chinese overseas students not venture to places with high infection risks and avoid non-essential travel.

"We understand some overseas students are eager to come home...But under the current circumstances, by staying put, they can avoid being cross-infected in the hurried journey home or getting stuck mid-journey when the countries they transit in tighten border controls," Luo said.

Planning for a new wave of infections from overseas returnees, Beijing and local authorities in other cities have tightened screening and quarantine measures. Beijing reported six new confirmed Covid-19 cases from other countries Wednesday, bringing the total number of imported cases in Beijing to 149.

Three of the new cases are from Britain, with the others from Canada, France and Hungary. By the end of Wednesday, a total of 416 indigenously transmitted cases were reported in the city, of which 392 were discharged from hospitals after recovery.

Germany boosts coronavirus test rate to 500,000 a week

(News Agencies) Germany has boosted its coronavirus test rate to 500,000 a week, a virologist said Thursday, adding that early detection has been key in keeping the country's death rate relatively low. "The reason why Germany has so few deaths compared to the number of infected people can be explained by the fact that we carry out an extremely large number of laboratory diagnostic tests," said Christian Drosten, who heads the Institute of Virology at Berlin's Charite University Hospital. "Estimates from the last days show that we are carrying out half a million tests a week," he added.

Drosten also highlighted Germany's dense network of laboratories spread across its territory as a factor contributing to early detection. Meanwhile the research ministry said it would commit 150 million euros (\$164 million) to improve communication between hospitals and laboratories about coronavirus patients' health data, hoping the information exchange could feed into development of a vaccine. Official data compiled by the disease control agency Robert Koch Institute show that 36,508 people have been infected in Germany, including 198 who have died from the disease. At 0.54 percent, Germany's death rate is far lower than the 7.3 percent in Spain where 4,089 deaths were recorded for 56,188 confirmed cases.

France has also recorded 1,331 fatalities of 25,233 confirmed infections -- a death rate of 5.2 percent. Besides the large-scale testing, experts in Germany also said that the virus has largely affected a younger, healthier section of the population compared to elsewhere. At the same time, experts have repeatedly warned that in the country where almost a quarter of the population is over 60, the number of deaths could still skyrocket if people do not stick to measures to help halt contagion. Lockdown measures are in place across Germany, preventing people from leaving their homes except for essential trips, while most shops, restaurants and bars are closed.

Covid-19: PM Modi directs ministries to scale production of medical equipment

The railways is mulling using its vast pool of coaches to be converted to isolation wards.

(News Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modii has asked government ministries to find innovative ways of using their resources to set up manufacturing of medical equipment like ventilators and scaling up their production.

The cabinet meeting chaired by the PM on Wednesday discussed ways of using state-owned facilities and production units for boosting manufacture and supply of medical equipment and setting up quarantine facilities.

The railways is mulling using its vast pool of coaches to be converted to isolation wards. It has already begun work on using locomotive production units to manufacture ventilators and other medical equipment. "There is a plan to use vast pool of non-AC coaches for setting



up isolation wards and about 20,000 such coaches had been identified for the same. Railways has also begun production of masks, sanitisers and other supplies,” a railway ministry official said.

Indian Railways has also been tasked with using its large manufacturing and locomotive production units and workshops for manufacturing essential medical equipment such as ventilators, hospital beds, and stretchers, among others, on a war-footing.

The national carrier has issued directions to production units - the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai and Diesel Loco Works in Varanasi - among others. The Railway Board has asked production units and workshops to assess the feasibility to manufacture these items in large quantities, as may be required, at a short notice.

Ministries like defence and the heavy industries and public enterprises have also been asked to utilise their resources for ramping up production of medical gear. Defence ministry's production units like R&D

organization the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) are exploring collaborations with private companies for production of ventilators. The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) too have been tasked with production of medical supply. State owned aerospace and defence company Bharat Electronics Limited has also been engaged in manufacturing of ventilators. The ministry of heavy industries has reached out to automobile manufacturers for utilising their manufacturing facilities for production of ventilators. The ministry has written to automakers seeking their help to aid the government. "We are working on an automated version of the Bag Valve Mask ventilator (commonly known as Ambu bag). We hope to have a proto ready in three days for approval.

2 new coronavirus cases, one death in Rajasthan



(News Agencies) Two more coronavirus cases were reported from Jaipur and Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan on Thursday, taking the total number of cases in Rajasthan to 40. A 73-year-old comatose man who was suffering from multiple ailments and had also tested positive for coronavirus, died in Bhilwara on Thursday. In a statement, Rohit Kumar Singh, additional chief secretary, health department said a 45-year-old male from Jaipur and a 35-year-old male from Jhunjhunu had tested positive. He said both the persons had a travel history to the Middle East. Extensive contact tracing has been started in both the places, he said. Singh said the senior citizen who died in Bhilwara had been suffering

from chronic kidney disease and diabetes. He used to undergo haemo-dialysis.

On March 3, he had a brain stroke and slipped into coma after which his family admitted him to the Bangar hospital. He was admitted in the hospital from March 3 to 11 but seeing no improvement in his position, doctors asked his family to take him home. After some doctors from the Bangar hospital tested positive for coronavirus, the health department began intensive screening of the people and contact tracing. During the survey, since the deceased had been admitted in Bangar hospital, his sample was also taken though he was in coma.

ਪੰਜਾਬ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀਅਤ ਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾਨ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

PUNJABI DUNIYA Weekly

Since April 2005 Editor : Sharnjit Singh Thind

Vol. 14 Issue 15 Wednesday 02 Jan to 08 Jan, 2019 www.PUNJABIDUNIYA.com Published Weekly from New York

**ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ
ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ**

ਪੰਥੀਯਤ੍ਵ : ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨਿਰਧਾਰਤ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ ਸਾਧਨ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਹਰੇਕ ਸਕੂਲ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਪ੍ਰਭੂਤ ਯੁਕਤ ਨਿਯਮ ਨਾ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਤੱਕ ਚਲਿਆ। ਨਿਯਮਤ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪਾਠ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਈ ਦੇ ਅਭੀਲਾ 27,000 ਭਾਗ ਲਭੇ। ਸਕੂਲ ਸੂਚੀ ਵਿੱਚ 20 ਕੋਟੀ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਧ ਦੀ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਨੀ ਸੰਨੀ ਕੋਲੀ ਭਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨਿਯਮਤ ਨਾ ਚੁੱਕਿਆ।

ਵਿਸ਼ਾ ਸਾਧਨ 1.25 ਲੱਖ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਨਾ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਤੱਕ। ਭਾਗੀ 25 ਹਜ਼ਾਰ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਯਕੀਨੀਕਰਨ, ਡਿਜ਼ੀਟਾਈਜ਼, ਅਨਾਈਜ਼ਡ ਨਿਯਮਤ ਨਾ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਤੱਕ ਚਲਿਆ। ਨਿਯਮਤ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪਾਠ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਈ ਦੇ ਅਭੀਲਾ 27,000 ਭਾਗ ਲਭੇ। ਸਕੂਲ ਸੂਚੀ ਵਿੱਚ 20 ਕੋਟੀ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਧ ਦੀ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਨੀ ਸੰਨੀ ਕੋਲੀ ਭਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨਿਯਮਤ ਨਾ ਚੁੱਕਿਆ।

ਸਿੱਖ ਕੇ ਭਾਵ ਇਨ ਪੰਥਿਅਾਂ ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਵਿਚ
ਸਿੱਖ ਅਧੀਨੀ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਹੋ ਦੇ ਵਿਧਿਕਿਤ ਨਾਨਕ
ਸਾਧੇ ਕਾਨੀ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਭਾਰਤੀ
ਸਥਾਪਨਾ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਲੋਨ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ।

ਕੁਝ ਇਨ ਪੰਥਿਅਾਂ ਅਧਮ
ਅਧੀਨੀ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਦੇ ਵਿਧਿਕਿਤ ਕੁਲਧਾਰ ਸਿੱਖ
ਧਰਮਕਾ ਅਧੇ ਅਧੀਨੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਨਾਂ
ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੀ ਹੋਣ ਵਿਤਾਂ
ਕਿਤਾਨੀ ਹੈ। ਪੰਥਾਨੀ ਇਨ ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਭਾਰ
ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਭਾਨਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ। ਵਿਧੀ ਵਿਚ
ਨਿਧਿਅਨਾ ਹੈ, "ਭਾਨਕ ਦੇ ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ
ਵਿਧਿਕਿਤ ਅਧੇਨ ਅਨੁਧਰਮਕ ਪਾਠੀਨੀ ਨੇ
ਸੋਧੀਓਇ ਦੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਭਾਨਾ ਕਾਨਕੇਨੇਧੀ
ਸੋਧੀਓਇ। ਸਿੱਖ ਧੰਮੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿੱਖੀਓਇ
ਧਰਮਕੀ ਦੀ ਭਾਨਕ ਕਰਦੇ ਭਾਨੀਓਇ। ਲੋਨ
ਸਾਰੀ ਕੋਨੇਨਾਂ ਵਿਧਿਕਿਤ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਧੀਨਾ ਕੀਤਾ
ਸਥਾਪਨਾ ਕਰਦੇ।" ਰਾਏਪੁਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੇ
ਭਾਨਾ ਸਥਾਪਨਾ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਸਭਾਰਤ ਅਧੀਨ

[illegible]

ਨੂੰ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਮਾਰੀ 700 ਕਿਲੋਮੀਟਰ ਫਾਸਟ ਦੀ ਅਵਾਜ਼ ਨੂੰ 150 ਕਿਲੋਮੀਟਰ ਫਾਸਟ ਕਰ ਦਿਤਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਭਾਸ਼ੀ ਨੂੰ ਰਾਜਸ ਕਰਨਾ, ਲਾਜ਼ੀ ਦੀ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਕਰੀ 100ਵਾਂ ਦਾ ਪਾਸਟ ਕਰਨਾ ਚੰਦੇਰਾ। ਇਹ ਕੰਮਾਂ ਕੇਸਲਾ ਅਲਾਹ

ਸਮੇਂ ਲਾਜ਼ੀ ਦੇ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। 2019 ਲਈ ਰਾਜਸਾ ਵਿਸ਼ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਨਫਰੰਸ ਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੀ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਇਸ ਵਿਸ਼ ਵਿਚ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਕਰੀ 100ਵੇਂ ਪਾਸਟ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਮਾਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਕਰੀ 100 ਵਾਲੇ ਮਾਰੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ।

ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪੁਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ ਵਿਚ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਜੂਨੀਅਰ ਸਿਕਿਟਰੀ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਿਕਿਟਰੀ ਦੇ ਸਮਾਜਕ ਨਿਰਾਸ਼ਤਾ ਮਿੰਨਿਸਟਰ ਕਾਮਰਾ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲੀ। ਸੇਜੂ ਵਿਚਾਲੇ ਖੋਲੀ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਸਮਝੇ ਖੋਲੀਆਂ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ ਸੇਜੂ ਪ੍ਰਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਦਾ ਅਧੀਨ ਵਿਚ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ 1984 ਵਿਚ ਸੇਜੂ ਵਿਚ ਕਰਤੂਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੁੱਖ ਸੰਚਾਲਿਤ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੀ ਸੁਰੱਖਿਅਤ ਨੂੰ ਉੱਚ ਸੰਚਾਲਿਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਸਿਲਾ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸੰਸਦ ਨੂੰ ਸੇਜੂ ਵਿਚ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਸਮਝੇ ਸਾਡੀਆਂ ਸਾਡੀਆਂ 1984 ਤੋਂ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ ਦੇ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਸਿਲਾ ਕਾਮਰਾ ਨੇ ਕਿੰਨੇ ਦਰਸਾਇਆ ਹੈ ਨੂੰ ਵੱਖ ਸਮਝੇ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ ਅਰਥ ਅਤੇ ਸਮਾਜੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ 17 ਅਕਤੂਬਰ 2018 ਨੂੰ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਵੇਲਾ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਸਿਲਾ ਦੇ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਦਰਸ਼ਨਿਕਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਕਾਫ਼ੀ ਨੂੰ ਉੱਚ ਵੇਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਸਾਡੀਆਂ ਸਾਡੀਆਂ


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ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ

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मोदी का एलान-ए-जंग

बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक

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**जहाँ बाज आ रहल
पाकिस्तान, तीसरे दिन
भी की गोलीबारी, भारत
ने दिया कटारा जवाब**
जम्मू ■ हम हिंदुस्तानी

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भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा



आईएस में शामिल हुई म
अमेरिका ने एंट्री देने स

हिला को मे किया इंकार

विशाल ने बताया कि मुम्बई अमेरिका में जारी है और अब 2014 में इस्पातिका सेट में शामिल होने में पहले अंश प्राप्त किए जा सकते हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि दुनिया में अलगावकारी संस्थाओं की संख्या है और यह 18 महीने के अंदर के दो देखभाल के लिए कानून विधायी को प्रभावित करने के लिए प्रभावित करती है। मुम्बई और अलगाव के बीच अलग-अलग देशों के अलग-अलग के साथ संबंध में एक सामान्य विचार है। उन्होंने कहा कि अलगाव के अंदर है। उन्होंने कहा कि यह एक अच्छे के फैसले को समर्थन देती है। उन्होंने कहा कि यह एक अच्छे के फैसले को समर्थन देती है, और यह एक अच्छे के फैसले को समर्थन देती है।

India pulls out all stops to combat Covid-19 pandemic

India is currently under a 21-day lockdown to break the chain of transmission of coronavirus which has infected over 650 people so far in the country



(News Agencies) India is pulling out all the stops to fight the coronavirus pandemic by drafting in state-owned facilities and production units and private companies to boost manufacture and supply of medical equipment and setting up quarantine facilities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asked Central government

ministries to look for innovative ways of using their resources to set up manufacturing of medical equipment like ventilators and scaling up their production to check the spread of coronavirus that has now affected over 650 people in the country and taken more than 10 lives so far.

The country is currently under a 21-day lockdown to break the chain of transmission of coronavirus.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has also joined the fight against Covid-19.

"Some time back DRDO developed a ventilator along with Society for Biometrical Technology (SBMT), its technology has been transferred to the industry. An industry in Mysore is producing the secondary version of that ventilator now,"

DRDO chairman D R G Sateesh Reddy said according to ANI.

"DRDO scientists are working on the development of many products to tackle Covid_19. Sanitizers developed by us have been distributed to many people. In the last 15-20 days we have supplied more than 20,000 sanitizer bottles to various agencies," Reddy said. The chief of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said it is ready to act any time.

"12 battalions and 50 sub-units deployed across country on standby. 400 personnel geared with Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) are present in every battalion. We are ready to act anytime if states need," ANI quoted NDRF Director General SN Pradhan as saying.

The government has tasked the Railways with using its large manufacturing and locomotive production

units and workshops for manufacturing essential medical equipment such as ventilators, hospital beds, and stretchers, among others, on a war-footing.

Ventilators will be a key determinant in India's success to keep the mortality rate of Covid-19 patients down if community transmission sets in. India needs around 2.1 ventilators per 10,000 patients to battle the Covid-19 outbreak, according to medical experts.

The government has also tapped automobile manufacturers for utilising their manufacturing facilities for production of ventilators. The ministry has written to automakers seeking their help to aid the government.

RC Bhargava, Chairman at Maruti Suzuki India Limited, said the carmaker is looking at manufacturing ventilators following a meeting

of government representatives.

The ministry of railways is also considering using the national transporter's vast pool of coaches as isolation wards.

The textile ministry has set up an emergency control room to monitor production and supply of medical textiles including N-95 mask, body coveralls and melt-blown fabric for healthcare staff.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who chaired a high-level meeting Thursday to review overall preparedness of the defence ministry in containing the spread of coronavirus, asked the armed forces, defence public sector undertakings and other military organisations to provide all possible assistance to civilian authorities in the fight against the pandemic, PTI reported.

Clot-busting drug may work in Covid-19 emergency: Researchers

The drug is the widely used protein called tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), which is administered to people who have suffered a cardiac arrest or stroke to dissolve blood clots.



(News Agencies) A repurposed clot-busting drug may work as an emergency measure for Covid-19 patients suffering from acute respiratory distress when ventilators are not available or not all that effective, according to researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Colorado at Denver, Colorado.

The drug is the widely used protein called tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), which is administered to people who have suffered a cardiac arrest or stroke to dissolve

blood clots. Emerging data from China and Italy showed that Covid-19 patients have severe blood-clotting disorders that lead to respiratory failure and eventually death. Covid-19 patients suffer from inflammation-linked tissue damage, showed autopsy reports from China and Italy.

Past research also showed that blood clots often form in the lungs during respiratory failure, and tiny clots called microthrombi also form in the blood vessels of the lungs. These tiny clots prevent blood from reaching

the airspaces of the lungs.

"If this were to work, which I hope it will, it could potentially be scaled up quickly, because every hospital already has it in their pharmacy. We don't have to manufacture a new drug, and we don't have to do the same kind of testing that you would have to do with a new agent," said Michael Yaffe, a David H. Koch Professor of Science at MIT, who is the senior author of the study, which was published in the Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery on Thursday.

While 81% of Covid-19 positive patients have mild disease, 5% of the patients need intensive care, including a ventilator to assist them to breathe as their lungs pack up. Three hospitals in Massachusetts and Colorado in the United States of America are looking to test this therapy in critically ill Covid-19 patients.

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In Kabul gurdwara attack, India was real target; Islamic State just a front: Intel

Pakistan's intelligence had driven the terror attack at the Sikh shrine in Kabul, code-named Blackstar, and used the Haqqani network led by Taliban's deputy commander Sirajuddin Haqqani and elements of LeT.



(By Our Staff Reporter) Security at the Indian Embassy in Kabul and consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar has been put on highest alert with Indian and western intelligence confirming that Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) terrorists chose to hit Guru Har Rai Gurdwara at Shor Bazaar due to heavy troop deployment at the Indian mission.

As many as 28 Sikh worshippers have been

killed, eight are injured and another 85 were rescued during the shoot-out at the gurdwara, three kilometres away from the Indian mission.

According to information reaching Delhi from Afghan and western security agencies, the strike was ordered by Quetta Shura of Taliban at the behest of Pakistani deep state with the larger motive of driving out India from Afghanistan.

The entire operation

was code-named Blackstar by the Pakistan intelligence, which used the Haqqani network led by Taliban's deputy commander Sirajuddin Haqqani and elements of LeT. As many as 4 attackers armed with AK-47 rifles were part of the strike team of terrorists who struck at the Gurdwara. The Afghan security forces managed to kill one of the terrorists; the rest escaped.

A senior official in the Indian security establishment said there was recognition in New Delhi that the terrorists probably attacked the gurdwara because it was a soft target. There have been alerts about a terror attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul and the consulate at Jalalabad for quite some

time. It wouldn't have been an easy target since the security had been beefed up and more troop firewalls deployed. Even while the grieving Afghan Sikhs were cremating the victims on Thursday afternoon, a bomb exploded nearby creating further scare in the area. Since the US announced a deal with the Taliban on February 29, there has been a spurt in violence in Afghanistan with resurgence of the Haqqani network and relocation of terror camps of both LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammed from Pakistan. According to counter-terror analysts, the Haqqani network comprises mainly of Zardari tribe based in Nangarhar, Khost, Nuristan and Kunar provinces, which is in direct conflict with the

miniscule Sikh community over land in Jalalabad and trade in Kabul. On July 1, 2019, the Haqqani network targeted the Sikh community in Jalalabad as they came to meet President Ashraf Ghani during his visit to Nangarhar province. In both cases, the Islamic State was allowed to take credit for the attack.

However, the play is much deeper with Pakistan setting sights on forcing India out of Afghanistan post withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. With Taliban, Haqqani network, LeT and JeM all under control of the Pakistani deep state, Afghanistan again will provide strategic space to its terrorist arm for controlling Kabul and hitting at Kashmir. Already

there are inputs from western agencies about JeM and LeT moving their training camps to eastern borders of Afghanistan with Kashmir in the crosshairs. The Taliban, with their sword arm Haqqani network, will handle Afghanistan while the Islamic State and Al Qaeda would be their digital fronts in the social media space.

After the Gurudwara attack, the Indian security agencies fear that Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar will be targeted by the Haqqani network and associates in coming days. "While the world is grappling with the Covid-19 virus, the Pakistani deep state continues to push jihad against minorities in Afghanistan," said a senior official.

'First step in right direction': Rahul Gandhi on govt's Covid-19 aid package

Sitharaman announced a comprehensive Rs 1,70,000 crore economic package for the urban and rural poor to deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.



(By Our Staff Reporter) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who has been critical of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic so far, said that the financial assistance package announced by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday "is the first step in the right direction".

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

Gandhi tweeted. Sitharaman announced a comprehensive Rs 1,70,000 crore economic package for the urban and rural poor to deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The government has been working to reach out to women, migrant workers, and the disadvantaged section of the society. We have come out with a package that will address concerns of these people. We are looking at two aspects: Cash transfer and food security related measures," Sitharaman said while announcing the package.

"We don't want anyone to remain hungry, or without money. So we will be giving enough," she said.

The lockdown which will be in force till April 15 has begun to hurt low income groups the most with daily wage earners such as construction workers suddenly becoming jobless. Earlier this month, Rahul Gandhi had warned that India should be prepared not just for coronavirus but for an impending economic devastation which he compared to a tsunami. "The Indian economy is going to be devastated. You have no idea the painful thing the country has suffered and it is coming. It is like a tsunami is coming," Gandhi had said. The coronavirus pandemic continues to expand its footprints across India and now affected almost 650 people. Fourteen have died so far of the disease that it causes – Covid-19.

Sitharaman unveils Rs 1.7 lakh crore package for poor amid Covid-19 crisis

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, at a press conference in the capital, announced a series of measures for the poor to help them deal with the coronavirus crisis.

(By Our Staff Reporter) To address the immediate economic distress in the wake of the lockdown prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and ensure food and cash reaches the marginalised segments of society, the government announced a Rs 1,70,000 crore package, under a new scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), on Thursday.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, at a press conference in the capital, announced a series of measures, which focused on additional food transfers at no cost, additional cash for vulnerable segments, concessions on government schemes aimed to help households reduce their expenditure, and support those in the frontline of the battle against the pandemic. The primary beneficiaries of these measures include those below the poverty line, farmers, women, elderly citizens, the physically challenged, and workers in both the unorganised and organised sectors.

Sitharaman underlined that within 36 hours of the lockdown — Prime Minister

Narendra Modi directed a national lockdown for three weeks on Tuesday night — the government had come up with measures to immediately take care



of welfare concerns of the poor. She, however, did not address questions about the fiscal implications of the scheme, or announce measures for other economic sectors which have also got severely affected in the wake of the restrictions and the lockdown. Sitharaman announced a medical insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh per person for doctors, health care personnel and sanitation staff, acknowledging their contribution at this crisis hour. The PMGKY had two broad components — the first was centred on ensuring food availability and support, and the second was centred on income support.

While world battles coronavirus, Pakistan busy violating ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir

The Indian Army said Pakistan violated the ceasefire agreement and added that the Indian forces manning the LoC retaliated to Pakistani firing on Thursday afternoon.



at the Line of Control in north Kashmir's Uri sector on Thursday afternoon.

Locals said the firing went on for a couple of hours in the afternoon and damaged a house which was hit by a shell fired by the Pakistani side, however, no loss of life was reported.

The Indian Army blamed Pakistan for the ceasefire violation and said the Indian forces manning the LoC retaliated to Pakistani firing. The locals claimed that several mortar shells landed in the villages of Mothal, Silikote,

Halithanga and Churunda, all located on the zero line.

The latest ceasefire violation spread panic in the villages in Uri, especially those close to the LoC. Irshad Ahmad, a resident of Uri said the firing continued for two hours. "The fresh firing has spread panic in the villages, unfortunately when the world is engulfed in disease Covid -19 and fighting it out to save mankind, here Pakistani soldiers are targeting pickets," said Ahmad. Since the revocation of article 370, Pakistan has regularly violated the

ceasefire agreement with an aim to push militants into the valley, the Indian Army has said on several occasions. Indian intelligence authorities also suspect the involvement of Pakistan's intelligence services in the attack on a Gurdwara in Kabul early Wednesday morning that killed at least 28 people. The involvement of the ISI backed Haqqani network has not been ruled out despite the banned Islamic State (IS) taking the responsibility for the attack.

(By Our Staff Reporter) again on Thursday while coronavirus contagion. Pakistan violated the the rest of the world is busy Indian troops said they ceasefire agreement yet battling the deadly retaliated to Pakistani firing

Declaration of emergency sought for coordinated fight against Covid-19

The plea by an NGO seeks imposition of financial emergency under Article 360 of the Constitution to tackle the threat of coronavirus and to ensure the recovery of the Indian economy after the lockdown.

(By Our Staff Reporter) The 21-day lockdown imposed across the country has effectively led to the suspension of fundamental rights of citizens and the same can be done only through an imposition of emergency as per the Constitution and not an order under the Disaster Management Act (Act) as was done by the central government, a petition filed before the Supreme Court on Thursday argued.

The petition filed by Centre for Systemic Accountability and Change claimed that the divergence in steps taken by various state governments have led to confusion and lawlessness in the country and a unified command between central and state governments is required to deal with the situation.

"This is the biggest emergency in independent India and it must be addressed as per Constitutional provisions through unified command between Central and State Governments", the petition stated.

It, therefore, sought imposition of financial emergency under Article 360 of the Constitution, a

step, the petitioner argued was essential to tackle the threat of coronavirus and to ensure the recovery of the Indian economy after the lockdown is lifted.

As an interim measure, the petitioner prayed for directions to suspend the collection of utility bills (electricity, water, gas, telephone, internet) and EMIs liable to be paid during the lockdown

period. The petitioner also asked for directions to be issued to state police and local authorities to comply with the instructions of the union home ministry so that essential services are not disrupted.

The central government on March 24 invoked the provisions of the Disaster Management Act to impose a three-week lockdown in the country.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under the chairpersonship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi exercised its powers under Section 6(2)(i) of the Act and passed an order directing various departments and ministries of the central and state governments to take measures to prevent the spread of Covid 19.

Pursuant to such direction from the NDMA, the National Executive Committee which assists the NDMA to execute its functions, invoked its powers under Section 10(2)(I) to issue detailed guidelines to be implemented by the departments and ministries of central and state governments and union territories. The

petitioner submitted that even after the announcement of lockdown, different states and police authorities were continuing to take their own actions under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, in the guise of orders issued by the central government. This, it was claimed, amounts to a "constitutional fraud".

India extends international passenger flight ban till April 14

The DGCA had earlier suspended all international commercial passenger flight to and from India till March, 29.

(News Agencies) Aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil aviation (DGCA) on Thursday extended the ban on international commercial passenger flights to India till April 14, 2020 as part of the efforts to check the spread of coronavirus in the country.

"It has been decided that all scheduled international commercial passenger services shall remain closed till 1830 hrs GMT of April 14, 2020. However, this restriction will not apply to international all-cargo operations and flights specifically approved by DGCA," it said in a circular.

This implies that international commercial passenger flights will be able to operate from April 15, 12 am



IST.

The DGCA had earlier suspended all international commercial passenger operations till March, 29. Domestic commercial passenger operations however, continue to remain suspended till March 31 as of now.

Following the DGCA's latest circular, low cost carrier- GoAir announced suspension of both- domestic and international flights till April 14. The airline stated,

"GoAir has temporarily suspended all its flights until 14th April 2020 to-and-from Ahmedabad, Aizawl, Bagdogra, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Indore, Jaipur, Jammu, Kochi, Kolkata, Kannur, Leh, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, Patna, Port Blair, Pune, Ranchi, Srinagar and Varanasi, as well as international destinations

namely Phuket, Male, Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bangkok, Kuwait, and Dammam." The airline also announced that it will protect all the PNRs for customers who booked themselves to travel between March 26, 2020 to April 14, 2020 as part of the "Protect Your PNR" scheme, wherein customers will be able to reschedule their flights up to April 15, 2021 using the same PNR. "Customers can redeem their ticket (booked between March 1 2020 and April 15, 2020 on ANY GoAir flight on any date between April 15, 2020 and April 15, 2021 with no charges being levied (fare difference may be applicable)," the airline said.



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Coronavirus Pandemic Raises Serious Questions About China's Conduct

writes Lt Gen (retd)
Subrata Saha

The deadly novel coronavirus has affected 170 countries and territories. Nations are fighting the crisis on a war footing. Countermeasures being taken are that of a biological war. Coronavirus pandemic is, beyond reasonable doubt, an outcome of criminal negligence on the part of Chinese authorities. The war-like devastation caused by Coronavirus calls for the complicity of Chinese leadership to be dealt with like war crimes.

Going by the conventionally understood rules governing warfare i.e. the principles of 'Jus Ad Bellum'; right authority, right intention, reasonable hope, proportionality, and last resort; this may raise doubts for its justification as a 'classic case of war'. But ironically, it was Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui of China's People's Liberation Army who, two decades ago, grandly announced, "the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden."

Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, in their book titled 'Unrestricted Warfare,' published in February 1999, cited several instances of non-conventional attacks, to state that "[Warfare] has only re-invaded human society in a more complex, more extensive, more concealed, and more subtle manner." This has inspired new paradigms of conflict.

It is significant that through

the last decade, China has been focusing on biological warfare and integration of biotechnology with information technology in their military doctrine. It has been actively embedding, even sponsoring its people, in academic institutions in the West to gain access to high-end technology.

Pointing towards possible preparation for biological war, Dany Shoham, an Israeli Senior Researcher, in a recent article published by IDSA, Delhi, highlights that in July 2019, a group of Chinese virologists were forcibly sent off from the Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, for illegally shipping two exceptionally virulent viruses – Ebola and Nipah to China. According to him, the 'main culprit for the breach', was Dr Xiangguo Qiu, an outstanding Chinese scientist, who was heading a section of the Special Pathogens Programme at Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory. Dr Xiangguo Qiu had many Chinese students in her research team in Canada, from a range of Chinese scientific facilities, four of which were regarded to be part of the Chinese biological weapons programme. Interestingly, China was funding eleven programmes for research work at Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory, under the leadership of Dr Xiangguo Qiu. Indicating that the Coronavirus may have leaked from a lab, the New York

Post in an article dated February 22 points to the release of a new directive by the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology, titled: 'Instructions on strengthening biosecurity management in microbiology labs that handle advanced viruses like the novel coronavirus.'

Authorities in China most likely knew of the devastating potential of COVID-19 and attempted to conceal facts. According to reports, "the first case confirmed to be COVID-19 infection was on December 8, 2019. However, doctors in Wuhan, and throughout China, were ordered "not to disclose any information about the disease to the public." It is only after the first case of Coronavirus in Japan on January 15, 2020 raised possibility of human-to-human transmission, and videos of people dropping dead on Wuhan streets went viral, that Chinese authorities admitted to human-to-human transmission of the virus on January 23.

Highlighting the negligence, Katsuji Nakazawa, Senior Staff writer for Nikkei, Japan in his report dated March 19 states, "the Chinese government locked down Wuhan on Jan 23, halting all public transportation going in and out of the city. The following day an order was issued suspending group travel within China. But in a blunder that would have far reaching consequences, China did not issue an order suspending group travel to foreign countries until three days later." According

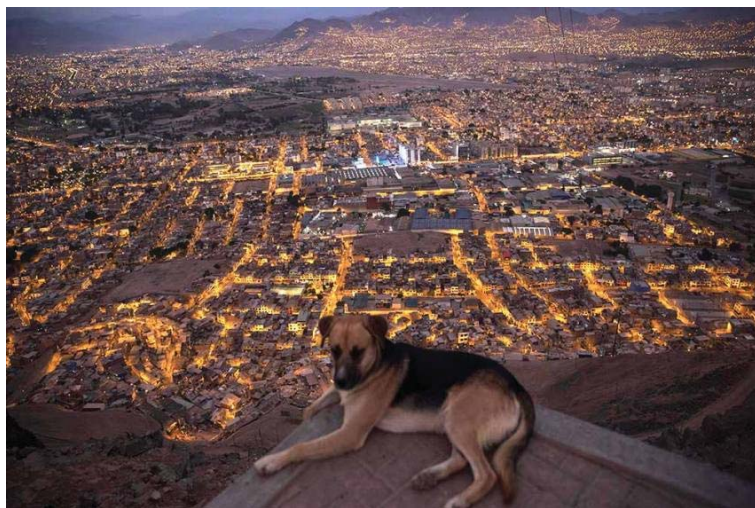
to a report published by The New York Times on 22 March, "at least 175,000 people left Wuhan on 1 January 2020. The departures from Wuhan accelerated over the next three weeks. About 7 million people left in January, before travel was restricted." The New York Times researchers believe, "about 85 percent of infected travellers went undetected. But they were still contagious. [By the time] Wuhan was placed under a lockdown and airlines started cancelling flights... outbreaks were already growing in over 30 cities across 26 countries, most carried by travellers from Wuhan." Having caused havoc across the World, China has embarked on a massive propaganda drive now, to tell its own people, and people the World over, on how effective China's countermeasures have been. It has also gained a head-start in the post-corona recovery. The Coronavirus pandemic raises serious questions about China's conduct. First, is China's active engagement in developing biological agents capable of mass destruction? Second, why was critical information concealed for so long? Third, why were millions of travellers from infected Wuhan allowed to travel across the World and other cities in China, propagating the disease? Fourth, shouldn't there be accountability by China, commensurate with devastation

caused? And fifth, ought not 'unrestricted warfare', be brought in the purview of international rules? China must acknowledge its mistakes and offer to pay compensation for those who have died and bear medical expenses of others. It is in China's interest to do so, to regain the trust of the international community.

In case China continues to obfuscate the issue and seek to profit from the catastrophe, there must, at the very least, be outright international condemnation of China for concealing information from its own people and the rest of the world. The international community must unite to ensure China doesn't take undue advantage of the weakened dispositions of other countries affected by the pandemic. In the medium to long term, supply chains involving China must be reworked. China's attempt to realign globalisation to be at the centre, with its 'One Belt One Road' initiative, must be checked. This crisis has also raised doubts on the vigilance and effectiveness of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is expected to be at the vanguard. Cautious counsel may also argue that any attempts to impose the UN sanctions will be vetoed by China. However, this crisis is an opportunity for international bodies to revive the trust in them. If the Security Council fails, the General Assembly should come together to take appropriate action.

Is Coronavirus Planet Earth's Way Of Controlling Its Own Destiny?

The Gaia Hypothesis states that planet Earth is not, as most of us presume, an inanimate interstellar body inhabited by animate life forms, but a live organism that regulates and controls its own destiny by corrective measures.



Some of my Christian and Muslim friends say that doomsday is close at hand. Some Hindu brethren say that this Kalyug (in Hindu mythology, it is the last of the four stages the world goes through), our Karmas are leading us inexorably towards universal annihilation. I don't know how right they are, but I am certainly disturbed

by the increasing incidents of natural disasters that are occurring around us. If things continue the way they are going, we are certainly heading towards a universal disaster.

We see news about floods, droughts, earthquakes, freak tornadoes and hurricanes from across the globe. There is climate

change and global warming. Snowcaps and glaciers are melting, and sea levels are rising. Europe has had an unusually hot summer. There were wildfires in Australia that laid waste thousands of hectares of land and roasted the wildlife to near extinction. A friend of mine from LA was in panic the other day and called me to say that wildfires were coming up the valley overlooking her house and might engulf it within minutes. Luckily, they stopped a hundred yards away from her place but other houses in her vicinity were gutted.

Amid these natural disasters, there is now a global pandemic – the Coronavirus – that has adversely affected the world economy and is killing thousands of people all over the world.

I have thought about this long and hard and, having done some research, have come to the conclusion that the cause of all

these disasters might be explained by the Malthusian Law of Population and the Gaia Hypothesis. I think they might also explain the rising tide of violence and needless bloodshed that we see all around us.

Recently, I was witness to some shocking riots in the national capital. Apart from the political reasons, I think much of the violence is explained by Shashi Tharoor in his book "The India Shashtra". He says: "much of terrorism and extremist violence in our country is carried out by embittered, under-educated and unemployed young men". There is overcrowding everywhere. People live cheek and jowl in Delhi and Mumbai and other big cities in our country. The cities are polluted, and the population is exploding.

The contention of Malthus (1766-1834) is that when populations grow faster than it is

in the power of the Earth to sustain them, the effects of these two unequal powers (population and food supply) are kept equal by "positive checks" through famine, disease, poverty, natural disasters and war. Lemmings, this small quadruped multiplies at a spectacular rate till its environment is unable to sustain its numbers. And then, we are told, lemmings commit suicide en masse by jumping off cliffs as nonchalantly as they would go out foraging for food. Is mankind in a suicidal mood?

The Gaia Hypothesis states that planet Earth is not, as most of us presume, an inanimate interstellar body inhabited by animate life forms, but a live organism that regulates and controls its own destiny by corrective measures. Any injustice done to Mother Earth, therefore, is punished by it as irrevocably as crime is punished in the court of law.

Goliath The Germ: Where Does India Stand In Humankind's War Against Corona

Are we really at Stage 2, where only the initial incoming cases from abroad and their contacts are infected, or have we crossed the frightening threshold to Stage 3, 'community transmission'?



Time of Corona.

It's like an unofficial, self-imposed Section 144 over most of urban India. Yes, COVID-19 is still an urban disease: from its entry through gleaming, private-run airport terminals, it will percolate out to the hinterland via the city-village interface that unfolds every day, from the NRI and the phoren-returnee to the ATM guard, the Uber driver and the domestic help who flits between condominium towers and subhuman tenements. And we have scores of detective stories unravelling (in bet-w-ween a worldwide medical thriller that could put a Robin Cook in a trauma ward). Who all did the 18-year-old boy who returned from the UK to Calcutta on March 15 meet in his first 36 hours? His IAS mother and doctor father, instead of quarantining the son, threw a welcome party for him. And next day, he was taken for an impromptu tour of Nabanna, the state-secretariat complex, by his bureaucrat mother, who, incredibly enough, later held a state-level meeting on coronavirus in those offices! A new kind of visual is being issued with urgency: patient flow charts, detailing every point in

their itineraries, every place they visited. Between now-emptied cafes and the very many boxes from a week ago lined up in those flow charts may lie the story of a would-be Malthusian epidemic. Yes, Malthusian. A world death toll of 45 million is being lobbed around as a possibility by academicians—if governments do nothing. How? That's extrapolated from an Imperial College modelling of what can happen in the US and UK. Eighty per cent of Americans get infected, and four million die, in that scare scenario—"the whole population of LA". Even if governments are reasonably proactive, the number is only halved. Health experts in India say finally 85 per cent of us will inevitably get infected. It's only a question of when, and whether by that time vaccines and treatment protocols are in place. So tracking those flow charts is of paramount importance. That's why Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens*, a 443-page 'brief history' of everything human, told CNN's Christiane Amanpour that the end result will be massive and permanent surveillance states that will use biometrics and every other

technological tool to track all of us each moment of our lives, long after Corona again becomes the name of a beer.

But that's tomorrow's nightmare. Today it's a different battle, a new frontline everyday. Scientists across the world are poring over the virus's genome sequence to find a way to tame the beast. Potential vaccine formulations—brewing in test tubes from Israel to Canada to a biotech firm in San Diego, and sundry world universities—have already sparked a debate between patenting and cheap access to the poor. In India, scientists under the aegis of ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology have received DCGI approval for a drug combination (lopinavir, ritonavir et al) as an "effective" ad-hoc measure—"we do not have time in this emergency situation," one of the authors of the protocol told *The New Indian Express*. There's another frontline: doctors, paramedics and others who are fighting the war blindfolded, and in the direct line of fire. We dedicate the following package to profiling some of these bravehearts.

Imagine the whole of humanity - indoors. Instead, butterflies fluttering across wide open roads in an Indian metropolis, blue skies over China, clear water and swarms of fish and swans back in Venice's canals! The new global mantra - stay at home - is having quite an unintended consequence. The world is seeing its arteries declogged after a long, long time, like a smoker who has just quit. But utopia will have to wait. The sense right now is of an impending apocalypse. It's sheer panic, and not love, that was making the world go round - or rather, stay still - on the Ides of March 2020. From Eiffel Tower to the Taj Mahal, from Euro2020 to the IPL, there was just one buzzphrase: 'flatten the curve'. The bio-tsunami breaking over our globalised landscape has emptied malls and pubs, hacked down the population density at bustling tech parks and divided humanity between conscientious self-quarantiners, manic hypochondriacs, and plain and simple maniacs who run away from isolation wards.

A new abbreviation, WFH, is all over. Work From Home isn't a weekly or monthly amenity anymore—it's the new normal for the foreseeable future. And people are rediscovering themselves. A big KJo family drama is unfolding in homes across Indian cities...call it Love in the

China claims it beat coronavirus but does anyone believe it? 'The truth has always been a casualty

As China and the United States race to restart their economies amid a global pandemic, foreign affairs experts say Beijing's claim of a slowdown of COVID-19 cases in Wuhan should be taken with a gigantic grain of salt.

Analysts like Gordon Chang question why the Western world would believe Beijing since the country has been accused of multiple cover-ups and spreading misinformation that may have accelerated COVID-19, which, as of Wednesday, had infected more than 428,400 people and killed 19,120 globally.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Communist Party have touted China's dip in new coronavirus cases, claiming that any pop-ups of the virus are "imported." For China, the truth has always been a casualty," Chang told Fox News.

He added that Beijing's high-stakes campaign to get its people back to work and show the world that China, under the leadership of Xi and



the ruling Communist Party, has beaten the coronavirus, is a dangerous, if not deadly, game. "It's inevitable that China will have another outbreak and it will be serious," Chang said. "Xi has been trying to get China back to work since the first week in February. He has these ambitions of China dominating the world... and he

is willing to make sure it happens at the great cost of other people's lives."

Since the coronavirus hit, China's economy has been in tatters. Its services and manufacturing sectors have taken huge hits and its consumer confidence has dipped to an all-time low. Spinning positive news

is a powerful way China can start to claw its way back from being seen as a global pariah responsible for the outbreak to an international hero ready to save the day.

However, he said forcing its citizens back to work before the virus is fully contained would be akin to playing Russian roulette. "My parents and

brother live in Beijing and they are scared," Sara Sheng, who goes to graduate school in Virginia, told Fox News. "They are being told one thing but their instincts are telling them another."

Hong Kong, once on the front lines of the war against COVID-19, thought it was in the clear last week when a relatively small number of cases were reported. The city jumped at the good news, signaling to the world that its early actions - wearing masks, social distancing and intensive hand-washing - were working. Of its 7.5 million people, Hong Kong reported only 150 cases at the beginning of March, as numbers around the world spiked. But the breakthrough for the metropolis was short-lived and the new lesson out of Hong Kong is to not celebrate beating the

coronavirus too early.

As the territory began opening its borders and allowing residents who were stranded in other parts of the world back in, its number of cases suddenly doubled. On Monday, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam said all non-residents would be barred by Wednesday.

The coronavirus whiplash felt in Hong Kong is also playing out in other parts of Asia including Singapore and Taiwan. But Chang believes Hong Kong's cautionary tale might not mean much Xi, who is hellbent on projecting his country as indestructible.

"It's either reckless disregard of people's life or he knows what's occurring and pushing forward anyway," he said, adding that Xi believes the dominance of the Communist Party is above all else.

Rural America braces for coronavirus as city-dwellers flee urban areas to counties



Rural America is bracing itself for the impact of the coronavirus pandemic as fearful city-dwellers begin to run from the spiraling crisis in the country's urban centers and head for less densely populated areas. Only three percent of the more than 63,900 cases in the United States so far have been in rural counties and deaths there have also accounted for less than three percent of national totals, a cities such as New York and Seattle dominate the headlines. Yet with fears that those

fleeing from the harder hit cities may bring with them an increased chance of infection, the aging population in rural America have growing concerns about their livelihoods, access to health care and how to stay in contact with limited internet access.

Since 2010, 126 rural hospitals across 31 states have closed and there are currently 2.7 million senior citizens in America living in a county with no hospital, some forced to drive hundred of miles for their

medical care.

And if a severe outbreak was to hit a rural hospital, half of the counties in the country have no intensive care unit beds and an even more limited supply of ventilators, placing them in competition with larger, city hospitals battling to find more.

Some 18 million people live in a county with a hospital with no ICU unit, a quarter of those aged 60 or older, according to The Daily Yonder, which specializes on life in rural America.

The pandemic's toll in big U.S. cities like New York, Seattle and San Francisco has dominated headlines, but enormous swaths of rural America from coastal Georgia to the frozen reaches of Alaska are also deeply affected by the rapid spread of the new coronavirus.

Across the nation, there are over 51,000 general intensive care beds in urban counties, compared with just 5,600 in rural counties, according to data compiled by The Associated Press.

Those beds serve a smaller population than in urban areas, but it would still take fewer people in rural areas to overwhelm a typical hospital.

In fiscal year 2018, the average rural hospital had

eight ICU beds, compared with 20 for a typical hospital in an urban area. 'This is the worst possible situation,' Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association, a non-profit that provides leadership for rural health matters told USA Today. 'Rural America is older, sicker and poorer. Now combine that with 2,000 rural hospitals where 1,300 have 25 or fewer beds, half of which have just one ventilator on site. Our system was designed for efficiency, not surge capacity.'

In Catron County, New Mexico, a county the size of Connecticut with only 3,500 residents, 41 percent of whom are over 65, doctors have been preparing to transfer

patients to hospitals that can handle COVID-19 patients. 'What we have in Catron County are two primary care outpatient clinics with no beds or ventilators,' said Don Daniel, vice president of business development at Presbyterian Medical Services. 'It wouldn't be unusual for patients to travel 125 miles roundtrip,' to go to a clinic, he added. Doctors have warned that some may need to relocate to the already struggling city hospitals as local facilities will quickly become overwhelmed. 'It's just obvious people are going to need to move,' said Dr. Peter Graham, executive medical director for Physicians Health Plan in Michigan.

Coronavirus pandemic: After PM Boris Johnson, UK health minister tests positive for Covid-19

"Following medical advice, I was advised to test for coronavirus. I've tested positive," Matt Hancock posted on Twitter.

"Thankfully my symptoms are mild and I'm working from home and self-isolating. Vital we follow the advice to protect our NHS and save lives," said the 41-year-old health minister. Similar to Boris Johnson's own video message confirming his diagnosis and stressing that he would carry on leading the government's response to the outbreak via video-conference, Matt Hancock also posted a video with an optimistic message about carrying with his job with "gusto".

"I have been able to carry on with the work, driving forward the UK response. A massive thank you to everybody in the NHS and social care," he said, describing the British public's "clapping for the carers" initiative on Thursday night as "unbelievable".

"So wonderful to see the whole country uniting in support for those

who look after us. I will continue to do everything I can to get our carers the support that they need," he said. "The truth is that all of us can learn that working from home can be really, really effective," he added. Boris Johnson, 55, is also self-isolating with his mild symptoms of a temperature and a cough at 10 Downing Street in line with the medical advice.

"I am now self-isolating, but I will continue to lead the government's response via video-conference as we fight this virus. Together we will beat this," he said on Twitter.

There will growing concerns for other members of his Cabinet as well as MPs in the UK Parliament, which broke up for Easter on Wednesday but had been following social distancing norms within the House of Commons for some time now.

There are more than 11,600 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the UK, and 578 people have died - a jump of 100 in a single day on Thursday.

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Afghanistan: dozens killed in attack on Kabul Sikh temple

Gunmen and suicide bombers have killed at least 25 worshippers, including women and children, and injured many others in an early morning attack on a Sikh Gurdwara in the heart of Kabul.

The attack lasted hours as the gunmen held hostages on Wednesday while Afghan special forces and international troops tried to end the siege in a complex that is home to many families, as well as a place of worship.

Narender Singh Khalsa, a member of parliament who represents the Sikh community, told Reuters that there were three attackers, who arrived when the buildings were full of worshippers. Islamic State, which has targeted Sikhs in Afghanistan before, said it carried out the attack.

Up to 200 people were trapped inside the temple when the

attack began at about 7am, interrupting worship that had started an hour earlier. The attackers reportedly threw grenades, and after bursting into the complex, started shooting indiscriminately. "The attackers arrived on the stairs and started killing the women. My nephew shouted and said to me 'Uncle, please go downstairs', and when I tried to go downstairs, they shot my nephew in the head," said Harander Singh, who lost several other relatives including his wife, father and daughter.

"My dearest daughter was wounded, and she was repeatedly calling me 'Dad' before she died," he told Reuters, through tears.

The attack was condemned internationally and across much of Afghan society.

"My colleague Meharwan Singh lost his uncle and 20 friends, including two children and four

women, in this appalling terrorist crime today," said Nader Nadery, a top civil servant and presidential adviser, on Twitter. "I share his pain and outrage."

Afghanistan's tiny Sikh community is one of few religious minorities in the country, protected by law but frequently targeted by extremists and subject to discrimination.

Thirty years ago it was 500,000 strong, but after decades of conflict and the rise of the Taliban – who ordered Sikhs to wear yellow armbands – many have sought asylum in India and the community is thought to have been reduced to about 300 families.

In 2018 a convoy of Sikhs and Hindus travelling to meet the president, Ashraf Ghani, was targeted by an Islamic suicide bomber. The massacre on Wednesday was the second Isis attack on a religious

minority in March; a gathering of the predominantly Shia Hazara ethnic minority was also attacked earlier this month, with more than 30 people killed.

As news of the latest attack broke, a spokesman for the Taliban, which recently signed a withdrawal deal with the US government and is moving towards intra-Afghan talks, was quick to deny any responsibility in the killings. Afghan officials and Taliban leaders met for several hours of talks on Wednesday and are expected to start a prisoner release programme next week. The prisoner releases were a precondition for starting intra-Afghan peace talks, which are meant to follow a US withdrawal deal. But they have been delayed because the results of presidential elections last

year are still contested, the two main candidates have held parallel inaugurations, and Ghani, the incumbent, said the promise of prisoner releases was made unilaterally by the US negotiators.

The US, after failing to broker a compromise between Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, threatened to cut aid to the government by \$1bn if they did not reach agreement.

Adding to the country's troubles, there are fears that a coronavirus outbreak could be gathering force, as tens of thousands of Afghans have returned from badly hit Iran this year without any quarantine or testing. There are fears it could overwhelm the country's health system, and the UN has called for a ceasefire to help prepare for the looming crisis.

Cost of household staples milk, eggs and bread skyrocket by up to 30%

State-wide shutdowns ordering people to stay home, businesses and schools shut, and restaurants shuttered meaning more people cooking at home have all fuelled the panic, leaving shoppers packing their karts full of goods to keep them in supply for as long as possible.

Several major grocers have been placing limits on the number of certain products shoppers can buy over fears that there won't be enough to go around. But shoppers are landing themselves with further money worries in the process – as stockpiling is leading to supply shortages and a surge in prices.

Household staples, such as eggs, bread, milk and toilet roll, are all becoming more expensive in stores amid the crisis.

Sales of eggs surged by 44 percent in the second week of March compared to the same time last year, according to data from Nielsen.

When demand outpaces supply, costs increase along the supply chain. This places a downward pressure on the retailers who can't get the supply of eggs they need quick enough to keep their shelves stocked and so are forced to pay higher

prices. Market research firm Urner Barry is reporting that retail orders for eggs have risen six-fold compared to normal this time of year, with wholesale egg prices up 180 percent since the beginning of March.

The answer for retailers is then to either pass the cost onto customers or for stores – many of whom are already buckling under the pandemic – to absorb the price increase themselves.

'Due to a limited supply and higher than usual demand, our suppliers have increased their prices on eggs,' a sign posted at Stop & Shop in Boston said, according to CNN. 'As a result, you may see higher prices starting Saturday, March 21, as well as potential interruptions in supply.' At Morton Williams stores in New York, egg prices have risen by 14 percent as the retailer has been left paying double for eggs from its suppliers.

'It is unconscionable that the egg industry has doubled prices because of increased demand. It is hitting low-income New Yorkers the hardest, as so many have lost their jobs working in restaurants and hotels,'

Avi Kaner, a spokesperson for Morton Williams told CNN. Eggs aren't the only food where prices have surged, with prices of milk, ground beef and ice cream also higher. The price of milk is up by about 30 percent compared to this time last year, reaching an average of \$3.72 a gallon, according to a US Department of Agriculture report Friday. The cost of ice cream also climbed 5.5 percent to \$3.08 a gallon and beef chuck was up by 10.4 percent to \$3.51 a pound. Iowa grocery chain Fareway has

reported facing limited

supplies of - and higher

prices from suppliers of

- eggs, milk, bread and

ground beef.

Wholesale prices of beef

chuck rocketed 11

percent for the week

ending Friday compared

to the same time last

year and beef cuts were

up 18 percent, according

to Lee Schulz, an Iowa

State University

livestock economist.

Major grocers may be

able to shoulder the

burden of higher prices

from suppliers.

Walmart has

been thriving thanks to

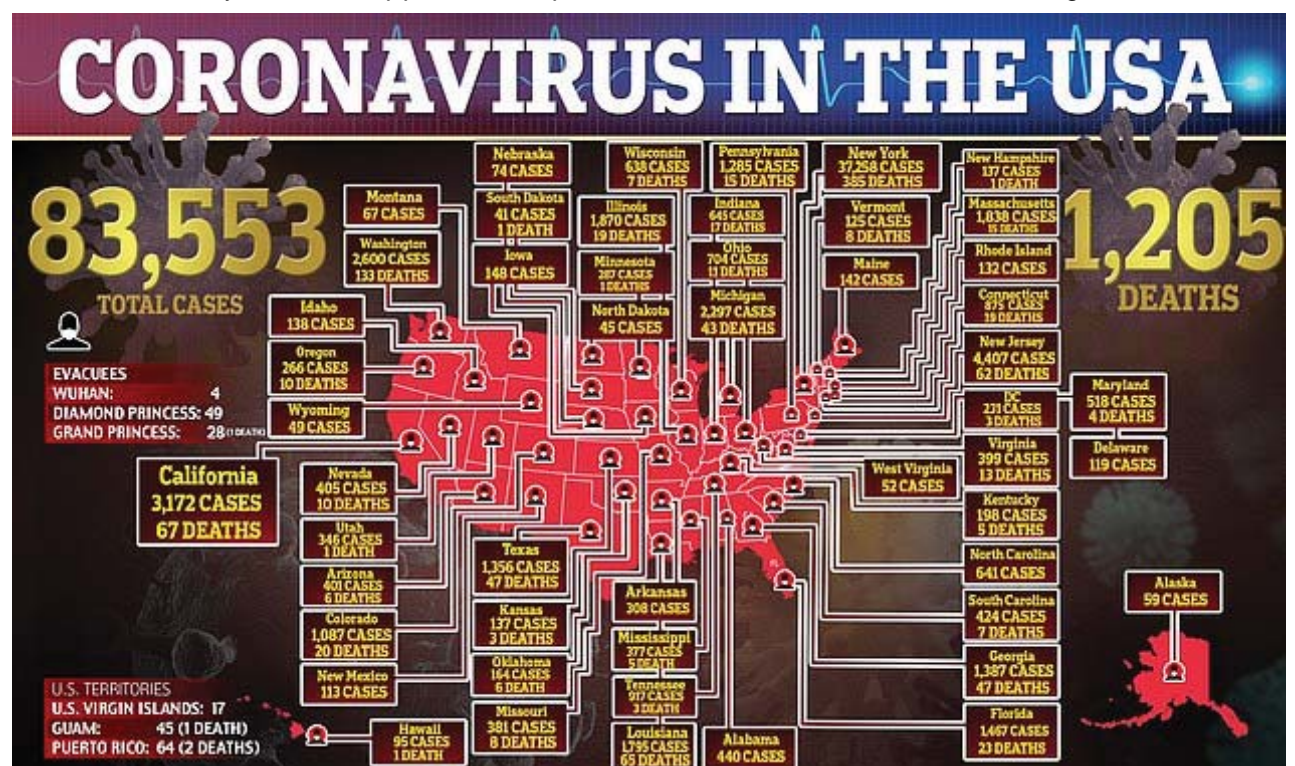
the pandemic, as

shoppers stockpile in

store and online. It is one of a select group of firms bucking the trend for mass closures, falling sales and mass layoffs across the US. The retail giant announced last week plans to hire 150,000 new temporary workers to work across its empire of stores, clubs, distribution centers and fulfilment centers to help meet its spike in demand. But for small local businesses, which will take a hit if workers are struck down by the virus, it may not be so simple. One store owner told CBS Local they had no choice but to raise the cost of toilet

roll to \$1.99 a roll: 'How am I gonna make a profit? How am I gonna pay my workers?' However, customers have expressed outrage at such cases of price gouging in some retailers. In Chicago, the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection received 190 complaints about price gouging so far in March, compared to only two for all of last year, CBS Local reported. Most complaints have been in relation to household items like hand sanitizer, toilet paper, tissues, food and beverages.

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New York City region is the new 'epicenter' with more than 5% of worldwide cases

Adding to the urgency of the crisis facing many American businesses large and small and individuals and families, US Senate failed to agree on a massive \$1.8 trillion federal relief and stimulus package Sunday.

(News Agencies) The New York City region has emerged as the new "epicenter" of the outbreak accounting for nearly 5% of cases worldwide and the toll of US fatalities crossed 400 as President Donald Trump has sought to ramp up assistance to the three states hit the hardest, New York, California and Washington with medical supplies such as masks and respirators and mobile hospitals.

Adding to the urgency of the crisis facing many American businesses large and small and individuals and families, US Senate failed to agree on a massive \$1.8 trillion federal relief and stimulus package Sunday. Negotiations continue however as both sides are keen to find common ground.

At least 414 people have died

of the coronavirus so far and more than 34,000 people have tested positive including Rand Paul, a Republican senator and a close ally of President Trump, who is now the third American lawmaker infected. Four of his colleagues self-quarantined shortly after.

Calling Paul a "great friend", President Trump said at the daily White House briefing the virus is "getting quite close to home, and it's a terrible thing that's going on". The New York City region, which had been the president's home for many decades until recently and continues to host the headquarters of his business operations, now accounts for roughly 5% of the cases around 340,000 cases worldwide, with more than half the 20,000 cases reported in New York state. The

increase in numbers is reflection

of the increase in the number of tests being conducted, state officials have said and not necessarily of the spread of the virus.

"I need every New Yorker to understand how serious the situation is right now," Mayor Bill de Blasio said Sunday evening, "We have to change the way we live if we're going to bend the curve of this epidemic. Do your part: stay home. That is the single most important thing someone can do right now." He said there have been 9,654 positive cases of COVID-19 and 63 fatalities so far (99, according to some reports Monday morning) in New York City. The mayor has been calling his city the "epicenter" of the global outbreak, in effort to highlight the gravity of the situation. It is "now clearly the epicenter of this



American crisis – literally, one-third of all the cases in this nation right here in my city, sad to say, and two-thirds of the cases in New York State, and climbing," he said on CNN Sunday. New York has turned into a virtual ghost town compared to the bustling city most residents and visitors have known it for long. All non-essential workers are staying home on orders of the local authorities, shutting down nearly every part

and aspect of the city, stores, restaurants bars. Ravi Batra, a leading Indian American lawyer, is among the city's growing number of people to have tested positive, along with two members of his family. Since Friday, he has been on anti-malarial drug treatment, which is scheduled to be rolled out on an expanded trial basis in New York Tuesday, in a move strongly backed by the president.

US deaths top 1,000 as \$2.2 trillion in coronavirus aid approved

US deaths from the coronavirus pandemic have topped 1,000, in another grim milestone for a global outbreak that is taking lives and wreaking havoc on economies and established routines of ordinary life.

In a recognition of the scale of the threat, the U.S. Senate late Wednesday passed an unparalleled \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package steering aid to businesses, workers and health care systems.

The unanimous vote came despite misgivings on both sides about whether it goes too far or not far enough and capped days of difficult negotiations as Washington confronted a national challenge unlike it has ever faced. The 880-page measure is the largest economic relief bill in U.S. history.

Worldwide, the death toll climbed past 21,000, according to a running count kept by Johns Hopkins University. The number of dead in the U.S. rose to 1,041 as of late Wednesday, with nearly 70,000 infections.

Spain's death toll has risen past 3,400, eclipsing that of China where the virus was first detected in December, after a one-day spike of 700 fatalities. Spain's count is now second only to that of Italy, with over 7,500 deaths. Lidia Perera, a nurse at Madrid's 1,000-bed Hospital de la Paz, said more workers were desperately needed. "We are collapsing," Perera said.

The Spanish parliament voted to allow the government extend strict stay-at-home rules and business closings until April 11.

US set to go for \$2 trillion stimulus to boost economy

The legislation was still being drafted and there were few details on all the provisions agreed to, especially related to the specific terms of the bailout and loan terms for companies.



(News Agencies) The Trump administration struck a deal with Senate Democrats and Republicans on an historic rescue package with more than \$2 trillion in spending and tax breaks to bolster the hobbled U.S. economy and fund a nationwide effort to stem the coronavirus. "At last we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said early Wednesday on the chamber's floor. "I'm thrilled that we're finally going to deliver to the country." Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, who engaged in marathon negotiations with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, called it an "outstanding agreement." The legislation was still being drafted and there were few details on all the provisions agreed to, especially related to the specific terms of the bailout and loan terms for companies.

Lawmakers are awaiting a final text of the bill ahead of a vote that McConnell promised would be held later Wednesday. It would still have to pass in the House before it gets to President Donald Trump's desk. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who had consulted with Schumer throughout the negotiations, has previously indicated she would act to move the bill quickly.

"This bipartisan legislation takes us a long way down the road in meeting the needs of the American people," Pelosi said in a statement Wednesday. "House Democrats will now review the final provisions and legislative text of the agreement to determine a course of action."

The outline of the plan includes about \$500 billion that can be used to back loans and assistance to companies, including \$50 billion for loans to U.S.

airlines, as well as state and local governments. It also has more than \$350 billion to aid small businesses. Then there is \$150 billion for hospitals and other health-care providers for equipment and supplies.

For individuals the package provides direct payments to lower- and middle-income Americans of \$1,200 for each adult, as well as \$500 for each child. Unemployment insurance would be extended to four months, the benefits would be bolstered by \$600 weekly and eligibility would be expanded to cover more workers. The bill provides a tax credit for companies who retain employees even if they've been mandated to close or seen a significant drop-off in business. Student loan borrowers who get assistance from their employers on paying those back don't have to pay income tax on the aid.

Coronavirus update: India bans exports of Trump-backed virus drug as global demand surges

US? President Donald Trump has vowed to make the medication widely available to fight the pandemic, calling the drug a “game changer” in the treatment of the coronavirus.



treatment. Exports will be limited to fulfilling existing contracts, while certain shipments on humanitarian grounds may also be allowed on a case-by-case basis, according to a statement issued Wednesday by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade. Trump has vowed to make the medication widely available to fight the pandemic, calling the drug a “game changer” in the treatment of the coronavirus. Though there is no conclusive scientific evidence that hydroxychloroquine can treat the infection from the novel pathogen, U.S. hospitals and

consumers have begun stockpiling the drug after reports of its efficacy in some small clinical studies -- but not in others -- began circulating online and in the media. In India, the government is recommending health-care workers take the drug regularly as a preventive measure to avoid contracting the infection while treating Covid-19 patients. Cadila Healthcare Ltd., the world's largest maker of an anti-malarial drug, has said it plans to boost capacity more than ten-fold to meet the surging global demand. Sharvil

Patel, the Ahmedabad-based company's managing director, said the company will increase production of hydroxychloroquine sulphate to as much as 35 tons, or about 200 million individual doses per month, from about 3 tons per month currently. The rush to make this cheap and decades-old medicine easily accessible led the U.S. Food & Drug Administration to lift import restrictions on three plants of another Indian pharmaceutical company, Ipca Laboratories Ltd., on March 20.

(News Agencies) India's demand surges for the malaria drug government banned exports of touted by U.S. President Donald hydroxychloroquine, as global Trump as a potential coronavirus

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The Spanish parliament voted to allow the government extend strict stay-at-



home rules and business closings until April 11. Such measures are becoming increasingly common in the U.S., where

New York is the current epicenter of the domestic outbreak, accounting for more than 30,000 cases and close to 300 deaths, most of them in New York City.

Public health officials in the city hunted down beds and medical equipment and put out a call for more doctors and nurses for fear the number of sick will explode in a matter of weeks, overwhelming hospitals as has happened in Italy and Spain.

US tells citizens in India to abide by lockdown while it plans evacuation

(News Agencies) The United States government has asked its citizens in India to follow the curbs imposed during the 21-day nationwide lockdown announced Tuesday by prime minister Narendra Modi. Washington also indicated on Wednesday that it is in talks with New Delhi to fly back its citizens. “On March 24, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide curfew till April 15, 2020, in order to prevent the spread of #COVID19. US citizens are required to comply with Indian law & obey directions from law enforcement officers,” said a release from the US Embassy in India.

The 21-day lockdown announced yesterday bars movement of all residents including foreigners unless they are associated with essential services and also orders shutting down of private businesses including hotels etc. However, exemptions have been made

and authorities are intervening to address genuine concerns.

The US embassy release asks its citizens to comply while adding that the “exact parameters of the curfew are still unclear”. The embassy also said it had requested Indian authorities to allow US residents to stay in their hotels despite the lockdown provisions.

The embassy statement says it is working to arrange for flights from India to the US and once that is done it will request the government for a “safe passage” for US citizens to the airport. “The U.S. Mission to India continues to work with the U.S. Department of State and airline companies to arrange flights from India to the United States for U.S. citizens. Once these flights are arranged, we will work with the Indian government to arrange to the greatest extent possible safe passage to airports for U.S. citizens,” says the release.

New York state, California bear the brunt

(News Agencies) India-born celebrity chef Floyd Cordoz died of complications from Covid-19 in New York City, the epicentre of the pandemic in the US, as authorities ramped up medical supplies in the city and asked those who left it recently to self-quarantine for 14 days. Cordoz, the culinary director of Mumbai's Bombay Canteen and New York's Tabla, died in a hospital where he had been under treatment since March 18. He had returned to the city from Mumbai earlier this month.

More than 800 people have died from Covid-19 in the US so far and some 60,000 people have tested positive. The surge in cases has prompted the WHO to warn that the US could potentially be the next epicentre of the outbreak.

New York City has been hit the hardest with more than 15,000 confirmed cases and nearly 200 deaths. America's most populous city accounts for 56% of all US cases, 60% of all new cases and 31% of mortality.

As a consequence, the state of New York is the worst affected among the 50 states, with 30,811 confirmed cases and 285 deaths, followed by California. It is feared that, with 2,643 cases and 55 deaths, the West Coast state could be the next hot spot. Washington, another state on the West Coast, reported 2,469 cases and 123 deaths. “We're still on the way up the mountain,” New York governor Andrew Cuomo said at his daily briefing on Wednesday. Both the NY state and New York City are facing an acute shortage of medical supplies including hospital beds and ventilators. Cuomo has said the state needs upwards of 140,000 beds and currently has around 50,000 and is way short of ventilators. The government has sent four mobile hospitals with thousands of beds and is moving a US navy hospital ship also; likewise for ventilators, 4,000 on the way from the national stockpile.

Answering 6 key questions about Congress' coronavirus response package

Congress is gearing up to vote on its largest emergency aid package in US history in order to respond to the coronavirus outbreak and its economic fallout. But the legislation has raised plenty of questions as lawmakers race to nail down specific language. Here are at least a few answers based on CNN's reporting:

How and when do I get my check?

President Donald Trump and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin have targeted April 6. Tax experts (and lawmakers working on this) are very skeptical of that date. There's no question they want -- and need to turn this around -- ASAP. There are also different ways it could be done -- through direct deposit (which would be the quickest delivery mechanism), through mailing a paper check or even, according to some people involved in the discussions, through mailing pre-loaded debit cards. But the reality is there isn't a firm answer yet. In other words, Treasury has a lot of work ahead of it.

Is there help for small businesses in the Senate stimulus package?

There's a lot of focus on the individual checks, but I'm firmly of the mind the small business loan piece of this is far and away the most important given what's happening right now.

The bill directs \$350 billion for loans to small businesses and nonprofits with under 500 employees. The loans would be guaranteed by the Small Business Administration but the actual lender would be approved banks and financial institutions, which should get the money out the door faster. Businesses could receive up to \$10 million in loans to float employee salaries, payroll expenses, mortgage and

other debt payments. If used for those purposes, the loans would be forgiven in the future. It's a huge deal if it works properly.

There are several other small business related provisions in here that may be useful and/or valuable to those who are eligible. Be sure to check them out to see if you may qualify -- a key component of this package is expanding eligibility for government programs (see: the unemployment insurance expansion/enhancement).

Is the check based on my 2018 or 2019 tax return?

Under the plan, individuals who earn \$75,000 in adjusted gross income or less would get direct payments of \$1,200 each. But which tax return is that based on?

If you've filed for 2019, that's what it would be based off of. If you haven't, it would be based off of 2018.

Does the bill include anything about student loans?

Federal student loan borrowers would get a reprieve from payments until October and any interest that would have accrued during that period would be waived.

The agreement also allows students to keep any unspent money from Pell Grants or student loans and prevents students who have to leave school due to the pandemic from losing eligibility for future Pell Grants.

I should also note the bill explicitly allows colleges and universities

to pay students for work-study programs even if they are unable to work.

Will full-time college students qualify for stimulus checks?

Depends -- and I'm not trying to dodge here, but everyone's circumstances are different, so I don't want to generalize. Say an individual is claimed as dependent by their parents, then that's an automatic no. Say you live on your own, are not claimed as a dependent and had a summer job, then yes.

Will retired seniors also get stimulus checks?

So long as they are not listed as a dependent for someone else (and, as retirees, fall within the income thresholds), yes, they should receive a check.

Misplaced Priorities Or Simply Towing The Line? Why Top Supreme Court Judges Have Been Caught Napping

When it comes to upholding civil liberties and constitutionally guaranteed rights, a conducive environment—or the lack of it—must not be grounds for courts to determine if a case pertaining to these bedrocks of democracy can be heard or deferred. Yet, in recent times, several legal luminaries have red-flagged how curtailment of civil liberties by the executive is being increasingly normalised by the judiciary—particularly the top court.

Over the past few years alone, irrespective of who sat on the high throne of the Chief Justice, the lamentation that judiciary was acting as an extension of the executive has been far too frequent. Petitions seeking urgent hearing of mob lynching cases or challenging the lockdown across Jammu and Kashmir were deemed not urgent enough by former CJI Ranjan Gogoi, whose recent nomination to the Rajya Sabha by President Kovind under the 'distinguished citizens' quota has triggered a deafening opprobrium. Gogoi's successor, S.A. Bobde, some say, has continued the trend with cases challenging the controversial CAA, atrocities on students in Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University or alleged executive inaction during the communal riots in Delhi.

The very meaning of a habeas corpus writ—produce the body—seemed to have also undergone a metamorphosis in cases of Kashmiri leaders like Farooq and Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti or M.Y. Tarigami. Despite pleas before the apex court for the release of the



Abdullahs or Mufti from their seven-month house arrest, the apex court, first under Gogoi and now with Bobde as CJI, remained unmoved. Farooq walked out recently, not because the SC ordered so but because the government finally allowed him. His son, Omar, continues to be in detention, as is Mufti.

In Tarigami's case, the apex court had told CPM veteran Sitaram Yechury, on the latter's habeas corpus plea, to "visit Tarigami and inform the court about him". Lawyer and legal commentator Gautam Bhatia terms this a "bizarre perversion of the right to habeas corpus" and says "while the court refused to pronounce on the validity of the detentions themselves, it sought to fashion ad hoc compromises in individual cases without discharging its constitutional obligation". In stark contrast are prompt actions

taken by the SC in cases where the government or its sympathisers sought refuge and remedy. A remarkable case in point has been the attempt to book civil rights activist Harsh Mander for hate speech—pursued in the SC by the second seniormost law officer of the country, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, on the basis of an allegedly "edited" video clip submitted by Delhi Police. The oral plea against Mander in the SC coincided with petitions by 10 civil society members, including Mander, who sought registration of FIRs against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur and Kapil Mishra for alleged hate speeches in the run-up to the riots in northeast Delhi. While the court refrained from passing any directives against Thakur and Mishra, it issued a notice to Mander. The Delhi violence, which left over 50

people dead, or the sustained nationwide anti-CAA protests brought out vastly contrasting sides of the judiciary. As the riots raged, Delhi High Court justices, S. Muralidhar and A.J. Bhambhani, directed police to evacuate victims and take the injured to hospital. Later, a bench headed by justice Muralidhar slammed police for inefficiency. Hours later came orders of his "immediate" transfer to the Punjab and Haryana High Court—under consideration of the Centre for over a fortnight then. A day later, when a Delhi HC bench headed by chief justice D.N. Patel heard the riot-related cases, the urgency evaporated and the court adjourned the hearing till April 13. An SC bench headed by CJI Bobde later frowned upon the Delhi HC's decision and directed for an early instruction.

Dushyant Dave, senior advocate and president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, described the Delhi HC's decision as an "abdication of constitutional duty" and said the court, "as guardian of the Constitution, was bound to have acted with alacrity... enforcement of law does not wait for conducive timing". The rationale of the court to not order immediate registration of FIRs was also not lost on former Supreme Court judge Madan B. Lokur. "FIR is the first information report; the very nomenclature has a sense of urgency. What purpose will it serve to register an FIR four weeks after an alleged criminal act has been committed" he wonders.



Kabul Gurdwara Attack

A Pakistani Attempt To Rupture Strong Indo-Afghan Ties

With the United States getting into exit-mode to leave the country and paving the way for an eventual Taliban-take over, India seems to be the last viable backer for the Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani.

The March 25 attack at the Kabul Gurdwara is suspected to be an attempt at rupturing the strong Indo-Afghan ties by Pakistan-aided terrorists.

With the United States getting into exit-mode to leave the country and paving the way for an eventual Taliban-take over, India seems to be the last viable backer for the Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani. A breach in Indo-Afghan relations smoothens the process for a Taliban-controlled regime in Kabul.

The attackers justified their action as a response to atrocities against Muslims in Kashmir, hoping the development could generate a strong public opinion in India and force it to re-think its involvement in Afghanistan.

But India's statement indicated that such a possibility might not happen in a hurry. While condemning the attack it also assured the Afghan government of Delhi's support in its effort to bring peace and security to the country.

Importantly, it also made it clear that it saw the Sikh community in Afghanistan as Afghan citizens and was confident of their welfare and security being looked after by the Ashraf Ghani government.

"Such cowardly attacks, on the places of religious worship of

the minority community, especially at this time of COVID-19 pandemic, is reflective of the diabolical mindset of the perpetrators and their backers," India said in a statement.

It made it clear that India stood in "solidarity with the Afghan government in its effort to bring peace and security to the country.

The Islamic State- Khorasan claimed responsibility for the early morning attack that killed 25 pilgrims and injured several others in the holy Sikh shrine. It also linked the attack to developments in Kashmir.

But the Taliban distanced itself claiming that attacking places of worship of religious minorities was not part of its policy.

Many see this as a ploy by Taliban's Pakistani backers. At a time when the Taliban is involved in negotiations with the US to bring peace in Afghanistan, it might be of interest to all concerned parties in keeping a safe distance between the student-militia group and terrorist activities in the country.

Afghan-watchers in India believe this trend to get stronger in the coming days as more than the Taliban, the IS-K will become the preferred tool for Pakistan to carry out its attacks against India

in Afghanistan.

Experts point out that despite ideological differences between the two terrorist outfits and frequent incidents of turf-war, there are several members in both organisations who maintain links with each other. This is perhaps on the encouragement of their common backer—the Inter-State-Services of Pakistan.

According to renowned Afghan-watcher Antonio Giustozzi, the possibility of a deal with the US has created resentment among the Taliban hardliners and their jihadist associates for the past months. Many of them believe the Taliban might play an active role in driving

them out of the country, instead of allowing them accommodation within it.

This has led jihadists "of all stripes" to keep a distance from the Taliban as they no longer trust it with ensuring their safety in the country.

"Inevitably this trend is favouring the IS-K, which also appears to have recovered from a serious funding crisis from last year," says Giustozzi as he points to "substantial defections" to IS-K from the ranks of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other groups in recent months. There are also reports of "internal turmoil" in the Taliban.

Irrespective of whether such

developments are due to contradictions within or outside the Taliban, Indian observers believe Pakistan's ISI was encouraging them to deal with an evolving situation.

As the Taliban gets more involved in negotiation on Afghanistan's future with the Americans, Pakistan's agenda of destroying Indian assets and marginalising its influence in the country could be carried out by IS-K fighters.

Though a big question still remains on how it manages to reconcile the differences that is bound to surface within the Taliban and the Islamic State in the coming days.



Dating in the time of coronavirus Chat online, meet much later

With governments clamping down on social interactions to contain the coronavirus spread, dating sites are discouraging dates and asking users to get to know each other virtually instead.

With governments clamping down on social interactions to contain the coronavirus spread, dating sites are discouraging dates and asking users to get to know each other virtually instead. "We don't know who needs to hear this, but now is NOT the time to go out with your date to a bar," leading match-maker OkCupid tweeted on Monday. "FaceTime, Skype, call, text, call, message on our app.... all very romantic right now," it added. Dating sites contacted by AFP refused to divulge their traffic since Covid-19 starting shutting down US cities this week but it

appears their usage is far from slowing.

Even if some academics would like them to suspend their activities entirely. "It's time to shut down Tinder and all online dating services," tweeted US writer Matt Stoller. "No more internet-enabled interactions among random people until the #coronavirus crisis has passed," he added. Joking about the coronavirus has become popular on dating sites, although not necessarily effective at endearing matches to each other. "If someone seems like they're not taking the crisis seriously or

they're making fun of it for me personally that's a turnoff," said comedian and author Lane Moore. She helped created the show "Tinder Live," in which she interacts with matches in real time, and thinks coronavirus could be an "opportunity" for people to bond. "I'm talking to a guy right now who I met on Tinder Live and we're both talking about how this coronavirus COVID-19 stuff is impacting our lives so that can be a good way to know somebody," she said. Moore, from New York, says many of the men she meets on Tinder want to cut the

conversation short and jump straight to meeting in the flesh. She thinks it's a good thing that now men are being forced to chat more first. "That's something that women have always wanted because it's an opportunity to meet someone you like the first time but also try to make sure that they're safe," Moore explained. The dating site Coffee Meets Bagel (CMB) is proposing several different ideas for remote interactions, including an online video game date. "This is going to be important for us to think

outside the box in crazy times like this," said CEO Dawoon Kang. CMB is also organising an online group discussion, which it has never done before. Yale University student Ileana Valdez and five friends spent just a few hours setting up a dating site for students whose classes have been canceled and campuses are deserted. The site, OKZoomer, a nod to the popular expression "Ok boomer" which millennials use to refer to older people, picked up 6,500 users in less than a week, according to Valdez.

Coronavirus outbreak: Condom sales in India go through the roof Dutch sex workers risk trafficking and abuse as coronavirus bites

Stockpiling of groceries and essentials aside, in the wake of Covid-19, pharmacists say that people are now buying condoms and other contraceptives in excess



The coronavirus outbreak has triggered fear among people leading to a consumer behaviour shift. Buyers are stockpiling essentials as the infectious virus continues to spread around the world. With recreational places such as gyms, park and theatres under a lockdown until the end of this month, and with

many corporates allowing working from home, people have started to stock up on food and hygiene products. However, a different kind of trend has been noticed with condom sales going through the roof. Many retailers have seen sales surge nearly 25% to 50% in the last one week. "People now have a lot of time, and they are bored at

home," informs Harshal Shah, a medical shop owner in South Mumbai, adding that generally, people prefer smaller packs but the demand for bigger packs has seen a huge boost. He says, "People usually prefer buying a pack of three, but in the last week most of them have purchased packs of 10 and 20." Echoing a similar thought, Ajay Sabrawal, a shop owner from the same area, says, "It's funny because generally we see a surge in sale during the festive period, especially during New Year. People are stocking up medicines and are also buying condoms. I have increased my stock by 25%."

Dutch sex workers risk being trafficked and mistreated by dangerous clients as the shutdown of Amsterdam's sex clubs, to prevent the spread of coronavirus, is likely to drive the trade underground, according to sex industry campaigners.



Dutch sex workers risk being trafficked and mistreated by dangerous clients as the shutdown of Amsterdam's sex clubs, to prevent the spread of coronavirus, is likely to drive the trade underground, according to sex industry campaigners. Lyle Muns, a sex worker in Amsterdam, told the Thomson Reuters

Foundation that he had stopped seeing clients but was able to survive, for now, on his savings and a loan. Others were less secure, said Muns, who is also a board member at My Red Light, a brothel in Amsterdam run by sex workers who hire out windows where they pose to attract clients. It shut on

Sunday in line with government orders. "Vulnerable sex workers will only become more vulnerable to human trafficking because of the coronavirus situation once their economic situation gets more desperate," said Muns. Prostitutes around the world are likely to be hit by similar moves as the coronavirus epidemic brings tight restrictions on movement and economic hardship. The Dutch government on Tuesday announced measures to support self-employed workers whose income has been impacted by coronavirus.

Asia markets surge as US agrees blockbuster stimulus package



Asian equities soared again Wednesday after US lawmakers finally agreed a mammoth stimulus package to support the world's top economy against the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. While the deadly disease continues to spread, traders have a rare semblance of optimism after weeks of carnage across global markets, with eyes fixed on Washington where lawmakers in the early hours thrashed out an emergency bill worth as much as \$2 trillion -- around 10 percent of US gross domestic product. "At last, we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, citing the massive "wartime level of investment into our nation". The prospect of a massive spending splurge, combined with the Federal Reserve's pledge to essentially print as much cash is needed, sent Wall Street into overdrive Tuesday, with the Dow seeing its biggest rise since 1933, while the S&P 500 enjoyed its best day in more than a decade. And the gains spread into Asia, which rallied for a second straight day, with extra impetus later in the day coming from the news out of Washington. Tokyo ended eight percent higher, with investors there also relieved that the 2020 Olympics had been postponed rather than cancelled. Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore climbed more than two percent, Sydney and Manila rallied more than five percent and Seoul piled on more than four percent. Taipei added almost four percent, while Bangkok and Wellington were also well up. Adding to the more upbeat mood was the G7's promise to do "whatever is necessary". The unprecedented moves are part of a worldwide response to the rapid financial shock caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, which has locked down countries including the US and brought the global economy to a juddering halt.

Donald Trump, Congress agree on \$2 trillion bill to rescue coronavirus-hit US economy

The urgently needed pandemic response measure is the largest economic rescue measure in history and is intended as a weeks- or months-long patch for an economy spiraling into recession and a nation facing a potentially ghastly toll.



The White House and Senate leaders of both parties announced agreement early Wednesday on unprecedented emergency legislation to rush sweeping aid to businesses, workers and a health care system slammed by the coronavirus pandemic. The urgently needed pandemic response measure is the largest economic rescue measure in history and is intended as a weeks- or months-long patch

for an economy spiraling into recession and a nation facing a potentially ghastly toll.

Top White House aide Eric Ueland announced the agreement in a Capitol hallway shortly after midnight, capping days of often intense haggling and mounting pressure. It still needs to be finalized in detailed legislative language.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are done. We have a deal," Ueland said. The unprecedented

economic rescue package would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and provide a \$367 billion program for small businesses to keep making payroll while workers are forced to stay home. One of the last issues to close concerned \$500 billion for guaranteed, subsidized loans to larger industries, including a fight over how generous to be with the airlines. Hospitals would get significant help as well. "After days of intense discussions, the Senate has reached a bipartisan agreement on a historic relief package for this pandemic," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., a key negotiator. "It will rush new resources onto the front lines of our nation's health care fight. And it will inject trillions of dollars of cash into the economy as fast as

possible to help Americans workers, families, small businesses and industries make it through this disruption and emerge on the other side ready to soar." At the White House on Tuesday, even as the public-health crisis deepened, President Donald Trump expressed eagerness to nudge many people back to work in coming weeks and held out a prospect, based more on hope than science, that the country could be returning to normal in less than a month. "We have to go back to work, much sooner than people thought," Trump told a Fox News town hall. He said he'd like to have the country "opened up and just raring to go" by Easter, April 12. But in a White House briefing later, Trump said that "our decision will be based on hard facts and data."

Coronavirus can drag Pakistan's shaky auto industry into depths of despair

Some of the world's largest automotive markets have taken a massive beating since the coronavirus pandemic reared its ugly head around the world. Sales in China fell to record lows in February and March has seen production facilities in many countries in Europe and India being temporarily suspended. In the US, manufacturers like Ford and GM have turned to the prospect of making masks and ventilators. While the forecast for 2020 remains extremely gloomy for the automotive market at

large, Pakistan's auto sector could be at the receiving end of an even more painful blow.

There have been over 1,000 positive cases of coronavirus in Pakistan, according to the country's media outlets. Several provinces have ordered lockdowns but the country's Prime Minister Imran Khan has so far steered clear of such a measure on a national scale. With an already shambolic economic condition, there is a suspicion that Imran is trying to avoid a further

deterioration at the cost of human health and safety.

Even if there has been no national lockdown imposed thus far, the effects of the dreaded coronavirus is already being witnessed - especially in the country's nascent automobile sector. Reports suggest new launches have already been pushed back - Yaris from Toyota being the biggest of these. Local component manufacturers have started feeling the pinch which may have already also had rippling effects on production lines.

Demand for newer vehicles is also dwindling. Sales had been falling since 2019 itself and production was temporarily halted by some companies back then. A forced suspension of operations due to a possible national lockdown, if it does take place, could well critically worsen the situation. According to Pakistan's The News, 240,335 units of cars and Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) had been sold in the last fiscal year, down 7% from the fiscal year before that.

India likely to unveil \$20 billion-plus stimulus package to tackle Covid-19 downturn: Report

The package, which could be announced by the end of the week, will be used to put money directly into the accounts of more than 100 million poor and to support businesses hit the hardest by the lockdown.



India is likely to agree an economic stimulus package of more than 1.5 trillion rupees (\$19.6 billion) to fight a downturn in the country that is currently locked down to stem the spread of coronavirus, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters. The Indian government has not yet finalised the package and discussions are ongoing between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, the finance ministry, and Reserve Bank of India (RBI), said both the sources, who asked not to be named as the matter

was still under discussion. One of the sources, a senior government official, said the stimulus plan could be as large as 2.3 trillion rupees, but final numbers were still in discussion.

The package, which could be announced by the end of the week, will be used to put money directly into the accounts of more than 100 million poor and to support businesses hit the hardest by the lockdown, the sources said. India woke up on Wednesday to a sweeping lockdown of its 1.3 billion

people, one of the world's most ambitious efforts to fight the coronavirus. India has identified 562 confirmed cases of the disease, which has so far killed nine people in the South Asian nation. Modi announced the three-week shutdown in a late evening speech on Tuesday. The government will also increase its borrowing plan for the fiscal year 2020/21, which starts from April 1, from the current planned gross borrowing of 7.8 trillion rupees, both sources said.

Thappad movie review

Taapsee Pannu film is a scorching indictment of everything that's wrong with us

Taapsee Pannu and Anubhav Sinha's film will stay with you and make you question the status quo. One of the most powerful films to come out this year.

Thappad

Cast: Taapsee Pannu, Pavail Gulati, Kumud Mishra, Ratna Pathak Shah, Tanvi Azmi

Director: Anubhav Sinha

There is a fine line between making a film on a real story and making one that tells a real story. Taapsee Pannu starrer Thappad firmly falls in the latter category. A powerful and impactful film, Thappad makes you angry and uncomfortable, and, at the same time, it makes you question the everyday misogyny that you willingly 'adjust to' in real life. Director Anubhav Sinha refuses to normalise issues that are taken for granted in a regular setup, instead he asserts and reasserts that even if it is 'just one slap', why and how can a man get away with it so easily?

And he doesn't do so with just Taapsee's story, but shows multiple women across strata facing similar struggles in different forms. However, the multiple stories don't take away from the continuity of Thappad and Amrita's story but amplify it. I loved how Sinha captures the nuances of his story and his characters. You don't feel

that you are watching a film in theatre; instead you relate to Taapsee's Amrita – a strong-headed girl who despite being a trained classical dancer chooses to be a full-time homemaker. From kitchen to the bedroom, she's a doting wife whose life revolves around her career-oriented and highly ambitious husband, Vikram (Pavail Gulati) and taking care of her ailing grandmother (Tanvi Azmi). Amrita's universe turns upside down when Vikram slaps her at a party to celebrate his promotion. When he realizes that his dreams maybe nipped in the bud due to office politics, he vents out on his wife in public. In that moment, Amrita realizes it wasn't 'just one slap' but there are so many more other unfair silent slaps that she had been ignoring for so long. Will she be able to put her self-esteem over love? Will she forgive Vikram and move on like women are expected to? Will she give her marriage another chance? Thappad delves on all this and more in quite an engaging manner.

At 2 hours 21 minutes, the

film may seem a bit long, but the story moves at a decent pace and keeps you engaged. Through his protagonist's journey, Sinha shakes your dormant conscience and forces you to have a dialogue with yourself. The patriarchal norms that we have conditioned to submit to and everyday misogyny that we accept without question are shown for what they are. Whether it's telling women, 'Shaadi mein yeh sab chalta hai' or 'Thoda bardasht karna seekhna chahiye autaron ko', the dialogues just re-emphasise what we have heard time and again. Don't forget a dialogue where one of Vikram's colleagues justifies his action saying, 'When you're truly in love, thodi bahut maar peet toh is expression of love only na'. Yes, that did make me cringe and took me back to the debate Shahid Kapoor-starrer Kabir Singh that started last year.

Taapsee Pannu delivers a spectacular performance as a submissive and vulnerable wife whose life could have been poles apart if she chosen a different path.

Despite playing this restrained character, you see her fiery and feisty side onscreen at many places. Her silences are more powerful than her actual dialogues in the film and that's a great thing for an actor to pull off. You connect with her pain, anger and helplessness when she's trying to break free from the mould that the society has forced her into.

Debutant Pavail Gulati seamlessly steps into Vikram's skin and he's a character you hate throughout for his insensitivity. He's unapologetic about his action and he'd immediately say sorry to his boss but can't do or even feel the same to his wife. He has given a confident performance and despite Taapsee stealing the show, it's pleasant to see how Gulati holds his ground.

Thappad's strength also lies in its strong supporting cast. Ratna Pathak Shah and Kumud Mishra as Taapsee's onscreen parents make you feel like your own. Both deliver fine performances; while Shah expects his daughter to



understand the unbreakable bond a marriage is supposed to be, Mishra always has Amrita's back. Then there're Dia Mirza and Ram Kapoor whose parts, I feel, are quite half-baked and rushed, put in there just to join the dots. The most underwhelming performance surprisingly comes from one of the strongest characters shown in the film -- Nethra (Maya Sarao) as Amrita's high profile lawyer. While she's all prim and proper to look her part, there's something that just feels very superficial about her character. One thing that was unsettling for me after watching Thappad was the number of 'buts and if' I was left with after the film got over. What if Vikram had apologised to Amrita for that slap on the same night? What if he slapped her inside the privacy of their

home and not in front of spectators at a party? What if Amrita's parents didn't offer her support? What if she wasn't self-sufficient to think of separation over a slap? These are some questions that haunted me for long. But I guess, Sinha has weaved his screenplay in a manner that it's a victory for him if the audiences ask such questions to themselves after Thappad.

The film takes on deep-rooted patriarchy and unfair marital norms that our society doesn't wish to raise a voice against. Sinha's Thappad is the much needed slap everyone needed to break the silence and call out the wrong. Even if it doesn't lead to things changing overnight, it certainly has started a debate, a dialogue that can make way for some change sooner or later.

Mafia movie review

Karthick Naren's film is a smart, ultra-stylized gangster drama

Mafia may come across as slightly over stylised for a story set in Chennai and involving officers of the Narcotics Control Bureau, but once you get used to the world, you're in for a surprise.

Mafia

Director: Karthick Naren

Cast: Arun Vijay, Prasanna, Priya Bhavani Shankar

Karthick Naren is one of the most exciting filmmakers in Tamil cinema today. After making a smashing debut with Dhruvangal 16 a few years ago, Karthick returns with a bang with his sophomore film Mafia – a smart, slow-burning, ultra-stylized gangster drama which has the perfect marriage of style and substance. Mafia, even though belongs to a different genre and world, could very well work as a companion piece to Karthick's debut film – in terms of writing, style and

presentation. Mafia may come across as slightly over stylised for a story set in Chennai and involving officers of the Narcotics Control Bureau, but once you get used to the world, you're in for a surprise.

The film opens in a restaurant of a plush hotel and we hear Louis Armstrong's What a Wonderful World play in the background. The camera pans across happy faces in the restaurant, and as the song reaches the line What a Wonderful World, we hear a shoot-out and everybody starts running helter-skelter. Karthick wastes no time in establishing the fact that it's not a wonderful world

after all. It very much applies to Mafia, which follows the life of Aryan (Arun Vijay) – an officer of the Narcotics Control Bureau and his team as they hunt for DK (Prasanna), the kingpin behind the drug cartel in Tamil Nadu. When Aryan and DK cross paths, we aren't sucked into a world of bloodshed; instead, we get a slow but riveting cat-and-mouse thriller.

It takes about 20 odd minutes to get used to the world of Mafia. Initially, everything feels out of place. Be it the characters, the way they speak, their fashion sense and the frequent but at times tiring slow-motion shots, but

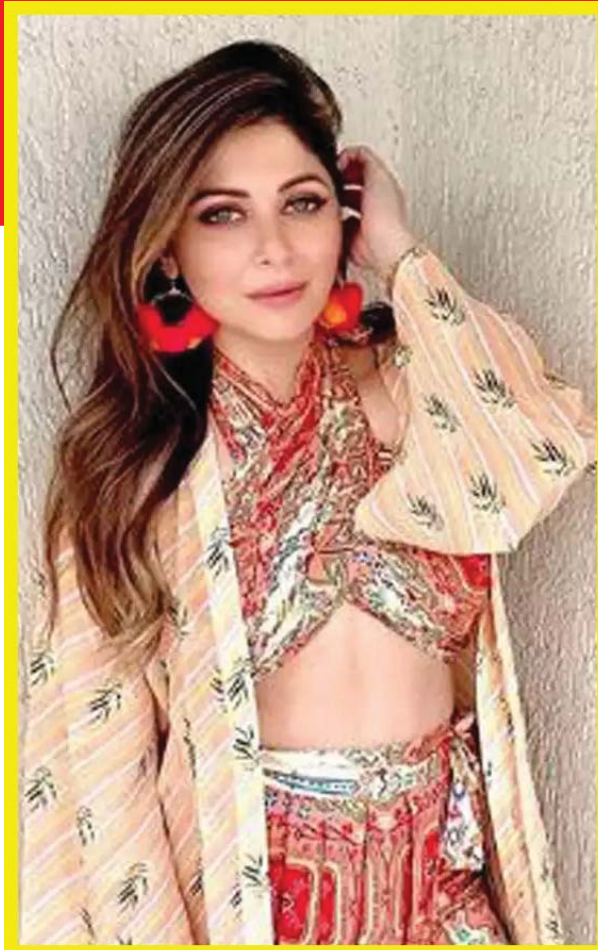
once you've made peace with the proceedings, you dig the experience. Karthick Naren builds Mafia on some great visuals which he uses to his strength to elevate the overall viewing experience. The visuals are effectively complemented by Jakes Bejoy's terrific background score and Sync Cinema's sound design. But the film is much more than just gloss and Karthick backs it with some smart writing, especially when he pulls the rug from under with a delicious, gallery-pleasing climatic twist which serves as a rewarding pay-off.

Arun Vijay as narcotics officer Aryan displays range and delivers a fiery



performance. His character is interestingly written, and rarely do we see a hero in Tamil cinema sans heroism. Aryan is an exception, but he gets plenty of moments to shine and hog the limelight. Karthick doesn't needlessly make Aryan heroic, and his is a character that isn't ashamed to ask for help from his team. Prasanna is

a very interesting choice for DK, and he isn't your quintessential mainstream antagonist. We see him as someone with class and he nails his character with grace. If not for anything else, Mafia makes for an exciting watch as it pits two genuinely good looking men (Arun Vijay and Prasanna), oozing with charisma and good fashion sense.



Kanika Kapoor deletes coronavirus post from Instagram, as trolling intensifies

Singer Kanika Kapoor has deleted the Instagram post announcing her coronavirus diagnosis, after facing severe online backlash in the wake of the announcement.

Singer Kanika Kapoor, who has been tested positive for the coronavirus, has deleted the Instagram post in which she made the announcement. Ever since her diagnosis, the singer has been on the receiving end of severe online backlash, mostly because of the perceived lack of caution she took after returning from the UK. In her original post, Kanika had written, "My family and I are in complete quarantine now and following medical advice on how to move forward. Contact mapping of people I have been in touch with is underway as

well." After it was revealed that the singer attended several functions post her return from the UK, she was targeted for not quarantining herself. VIPs who were present in her company immediately put themselves in isolation and were tested for the virus. Her building in Lucknow was put in quarantine, while the authorities scrambled to track down anyone who may have come into contact with her. She was accused of ducking the mandatory temperature check at the airport, and failing to inform those in her proximity of her travel history. The singer, in her defence, said that no

regulations had been put in place when she arrived from the UK. On March 9, Kanika told Times of India in an interview, "There are these silly rumours that I hid in the washroom to skip screening. Tell me, how is it possible for a person to skip screening at immigration while coming on an international flight? I was properly screened at the Mumbai airport and I stayed in the city for a day. But since everything was closed and no work was happening (because of the industry lockdown due to the coronavirus spread), my parents suggested I come home."

Genda Phool: Jacqueline Fernandez to feature in new music video with Badshah

Jacqueline Fernandez will be seen alongside Badshah in the new song Genda Phool.

We have seen Jacqueline Fernandez act as well as dance like a dream and now, we will once again watch her in a music video. She is all set to team up with rapper Badshah for a new track titled Genda Phool, which will have her grooving to Bengali lyrics. Jacqueline dons a traditional 'laal paar saree (white saree with red border)' in the video of Genda Phool. The song will be released on Wednesday (March 26). Talking about Genda Phool, Badshah said in a statement, "I feel blessed that I have received so much love and support throughout my journey from the audiences. I have always wanted to

make content that is relatable across the globe and here I am with a very special song - Genda Phool. I hope the audience continues to support me in my new journey and likes this new song." Recently, Jacqueline was seen in another music video-- Mere Angne Mein--alongside Bigg Boss 13 runner-up Asim Riaz. She was seen as a princess in the video of the song that was sung by Neha Kakkar and Raja Hasan. Jacqueline's last release was Tarun Mansukhani's much-delayed action thriller Drive, which skipped a theatrical release and directly came out on Netflix. Despite being unani-

mously panned by critics, it was one of the most-watched films on the streaming platform. Jacqueline will be seen in yet another Netflix film, Mrs Serial Killer, this year. Directed by Shirish Kunder, the film will have her playing a doting wife who turns killer to free her husband who has been framed and imprisoned for serial murders. On the big screen, Jacqueline will be seen next in Lakshya Raj Anand's Attack, alongside her Dishoom co-star John Abraham. The action thriller revolves around a rescue operation by an elite commando team and is reportedly inspired by real events.



Coronavirus relief: Kapil Sharma donates Rs 50 lakh, Pawan Kalyan Rs 2 crore, Kylie Jenner USD 1 million

The stars are digging deep into their pockets for the relief measures towards those affected by the coronavirus pandemic. On Thursday, actor and comedian Kapil Sharma tweeted that he is contributing Rs 50 lakh towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's relief fund.

"It's time to stand together with the ones who need us. Contributing Rs.50 lakhs to the PM relief fund towards the #fightagainstcorona. Request everyone to #stayhome #staysafe #jaihind #PMrelieffund @narendramodi," he wrote in his tweet. Telugu superstar Pawan Kalyan has announced that he will donate a sum of Rs 2 crores to the government's relief fund as the nation battles the Covid-19 pandemic. The ac-

tor took to Twitter to announce that he will be donating Rs 50 lakh each to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chief Minister's relief funds and Rs 1 crore to the Prime Minister's relief fund.

In two separate tweets, the actor shared: "I will be donating Rs.50 Lakhs each to both AP and Telangana CM relief funds to fight against Corona pandemic." He wrote in another tweet, "I will be donating Rs.1 crore to PM relief fund to support our Hon. PM Sri @narendramodi ji, in turbulent times like this. His exemplary and inspiring leadership would truly bring our country from this Corona pandemic."

Inspired by him, actor Ram Charan also contributed Rs 70 lakh. "Hope this tweet finds you in good health. At this hour of

crisis, inspired by @PawanKalyan garu, I want to do my bit by contributing to aid the laudable efforts of our governments..." Internationally, makeup mogul and billionaire Kylie Jenner has donated \$1 million to Los Angeles medical officials to bear the cost of essential Covid-19 protective gear for emergency staff. Gynaecologist Dr Thais Aliabadi, who delivered Kylie's two-year-old daughter Stormi, shared the news in an Instagram post, as she thanked the reality star and cosmetics entrepreneur for providing the financial resources needed to outfit medics with personal protective equipment as they continue to treat patients struggling with the highly-contagious COVID-19 virus.



Afghanistan: dozens killed in attack on Kabul Sikh temple

Isis gunmen held hostages for hours while Afghan special forces tried to end siege



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Coronavirus pandemic: After PM Boris Johnson, UK health minister tests positive for Covid-19



(News Agencies) British Health Secretary Matt Hancock became the second high-ranking UK government member to confirm his Covid-19 diagnosis on Friday, soon after Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was self-isolating after testing positive for coronavirus. Matt Hancock, like Boris Johnson, said he has mild symptoms of the disease and has been working from home for the past few days in line with the UK government lockdown advice for people to stay at home as part of efforts to try and control the spread of the pandemic. As the health minister, he has been at the side of the UK prime minister at the forefront of the Cabinet efforts to fight against the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the UK and has also led a series of Downing Street briefings over the issue.

(Contd on page 21)

Rural America braces for coronavirus as city-dwellers flee urban areas to counties



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Cost of household staples milk, eggs and bread skyrocket by up to 30%

Prices of eggs, beef, milk and other household staples are skyrocketing as panic-buying has left retailers grappling with supply shortages

(News Agencies) Prices of eggs, beef, milk and other household staples are skyrocketing as panic-buying has left retailers grappling with supply shortages. Anxious shoppers have been emptying shelves in grocery stores across the US as they stockpile essential goods over coronavirus fears.

(Contd on page 21)

