



## Three Indians in Abu Dhabi win big in lottery pocketing Rs 41.50 crore

**Jijesh Korth, a native of Kannur in north Kerala, was working as a driver and later graduated as a mechanic and now owns a small garage, had taken a ticket two months back online sharing the cost with his two friends.**



(News Agencies) The lady and later graduated as a luck smiled on them when three youngsters a mechanic and now owns hailing from Kerala were a small garage, had about to pull down months back online shutters of their ailing sharing the cost with his automobile garage which two friends, Shanoj and they started a few Shahjehan. Reeling months back. They won under crisis one of after the first prize of the Abu another, he forgot about Dhabi duty-free big ticket the big ticket till he got pocketing Rs 41.50 crore a call from duty-free (Dirham 20 million). authorities. "I took the Jijesh Korth, a native of lottery carrying the no Kannur in north Kerala, 041779. Somebody was working as a driver called me the other day

asking me about the same number. Initially I thought somebody is playing pranks with me. But it wasn't," he said. His wife Sujisha and his seven-year-old daughter were with him when the call came. He said he will share prize money equally with his friends and revive the business. "I have been living in Ras Al Kaimah for 15 years. Last few months were really tough due to oil meltdown and pandemic. I was even planning to send the family back home unable to foot rent and other expenditures. This win is nothing but miracle that changed my life," he said adding two of his friends were also in deep red.

## Covid-19: Air India repatriation flights to carry passengers to London, Singapore and US

(News Agencies) National carrier Air India on Wednesday opened bookings for Indians stranded abroad to return home. It has also invited passengers to apply for passage from India, if they qualify under the Centre's directions.

The repatriation flights will carry a limited number of passengers, who meet a certain eligibility criteria, to destinations such as Singapore, London and cities in the United States. The airline will also bring back Indians stranded abroad. Almost two lakh Indians who are abroad are likely to return in these airlift operations – one of the largest evacuation efforts in the world. he flights will ply between May 8 and May 14. In these seven days, Air India will bring back a total of 14,800 Indians from 12 countries on 64 flights, according to the plan released by the

Ministry of Civil Aviation. Thursday's flights include ones from Kochi to Abu Dhabi, Delhi to Singapore, and Calicut to Dubai.

"We would like to inform all those who wish to travel from India to London, Singapore and select destinations in the USA on Air India flights operating between May 8 and May 14 to click on <http://www.airindia.in/r1landingpage.htm> for booking," the airline said in a statement. "Passengers are requested to read the eligibility criteria carefully as available on the link and proceed further for booking only if they meet the same." However, not all stranded Indians will be brought back home. Students, pregnant women, elderly and those whose visas will expire soon will be given priority, reported ANI. People facing medical emergencies or deaths in the family will also be considered for travel. All

passengers will be chosen through an electronic random selection method. The passenger will bear the cost of travel so the government has fixed the prices. Flights from London to Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and Delhi will cost Rs 50,000. For Chicago-Delhi-Hyderabad, the cost will be about Rs 1 lakh. Dhaka to Delhi flights will cost Rs 12,000.

The government has prepared a standard operating protocol for the passengers, involving screening for Covid-19 before taking the flight and after reaching the destination. After reaching the location, the passengers will have to register on the Aarogya Setu app. They will be quarantined for 14 days, either in a hospital or in an institutional quarantine on a payment-basis by the concerned state government. They will be tested for Covid-19 after 14 days.

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# More Cases in Delhi, Mumbai Because People Did Not Follow Lockdown Properly, Says Health Minister

**Dr Harshvardhan said rural India has responded better to the crisis and insisted that India is not in stage-3 of transmission of the coronavirus.**

(News Agencies) New Delhi: Blaming people in metros like Delhi and Mumbai for not following the lockdown guidelines properly, union health minister Dr Harshvardhan said that's one of the main reasons these cities are not performing well in controlling the spread of coronavirus as compared to other cities in the country.

"I have a feeling that people in these cities have not followed lockdown principles quite adequately," he told News18 in an interview after being asked about why major urban centres account for a lion's share of India's cases. "Rural (India) has behaved much more responsibly than urban India," he added. Mumbai, alone has reported more than 20 per

cent of India's overall cases. The overall case count in the financial capital stands at 8,613, while the death toll is 343. Delhi has so far reported 4,549 confirmed cases, after a record single-day hike of 427 cases on Sunday.

The minister, however, admitted that some of these big cities had also borne the maximum brunt of international travellers and that could have contributed to more cases there.

"They also have huge slums where it's not practically possible to implement the guidelines of social distancing and lockdown principles in a perfect manner," he said. He praised the response to the crisis in rural areas, and said he has a "feeling that these

migrant labourers are not so much a cause of concern for Covid-19 because they probably never got in contact with those who got the disease from foreign lands because of the socio-economic status."

The explanation for less cases in villages or migrant workers not being carriers of the virus does not take into account the variance in testing rates in urban centres and rural areas. India's overall testing rate, at around 694 per million, too, is one of the lowest in the world and the testing figures vary by state.

Dr Harshvardhan pointed out that India has tested over a million people now and the number of positive cases is far lower than other coronavirus-hit countries at the same

stage.

The government had said on Sunday that India reported roughly 40,000 confirmed cases after a million tests, as compared to 73,000 in Germany, 1.6 lakh in USA and 2 lakh in Spain.

"We have plans to test 1 lakh people per day. Anybody with symptoms must be tested. We are testing in a judicious manner and the results speak for themselves. This is a well-crafted strategy," he said.

The minister further said that government data shows that over 11,000 patients have recovered, and "a majority are recovering well". He told News18 that less than 1 per cent of the patients are on ventilator, 2 per cent need oxygen supply and 2-



3 per cent are in ICUs.

The main goal of his ministry, he said, is to control unwanted mortalities. "Covid-19 is infectious and spreads fast. My concern is to catch everyone with infection early and make sure they are tested. If positive, they should be shifted to a hospital," he said.

He also insisted that India is not in stage-3 of transmission of the virus, or no community transmission has taken place so far. Going by the

definition of the World Health Organisation, he said the government has saved the country from going into community transmission. "In India we have checked at number of places at number of occasions, random samplings have also been done and we couldn't find significant number of people who got the disease whose contact tracing we couldn't do successfully. Again reiterating, we have saved country from going into stage 3 of transmission.

## Maharashtra Government Moves Supreme Court Alleging Browbeating by Television Anchor

**Arnab Goswami had moved the apex court seeking quashing of the Complaints and FIRs filed against him by Congress leaders in different states across India.**

(News Agencies) Maharashtra government has moved the Supreme Court alleging that Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami, facing probe in criminal cases for his alleged comments in news shows on the Palghar lynching, has been "browbeating" the police which needs to be insulated from his "pressure" and "threat".

The top court had on April 24 granted protection against any coercive steps for three weeks to Goswami in connection with some FIRs lodged against him in various states for alleged defamatory statement on the Palghar mob-lynching of three persons including two saints in Maharashtra.

The bench had transferred a case lodged against Goswami from Nagpur to Mumbai and stayed the investigation in other similar criminal cases. It had asked the Mumbai police to probe the FIR of Goswami against some youth Congress workers together.

The fresh plea filed by a Deputy Commissioner of Mumbai police has

sought a direction to Goswami "to insulate the investigating agency from any pressure, threat and coercion"



and to enable the investigating agency to carry out its lawful obligations in a "fair and transparent manner".

The plea, filed through Maharashtra's lawyer Sachin Patil, has also sought a direction to restrain him from "abusing the interim protection".

The police has narrated the sequence of FIRs and investigation carried out so far and referred to a news show on the Hindi channel of the media house and said, "The

statement on his debate on his Republic Bharat channel are aimed browbeating, terrorizing and intimidating the investigating officer".

The plea referred to certain tweets and the contents of the news show and said, "The petitioner had gone on air narrating his story and also carried his entourage of reporters, cameraman etc inside police station where he virtually commanded the police to do certain things and act in a

certain way". Earlier, the senior journalist had moved the apex court seeking quashing of the Complaints/FIRs filed against him by Congress leaders in different states across the country. In his plea, Goswami had also sought direction that no cognizance of any complaint would be taken by any court nor any fresh FIR registered by the police. He also sought security for family members and colleagues of his channels.

## 3 CRPF Personnel, 1 Civilian Killed in Militant Attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara District



(News Agencies) Srinagar: Three CRPF personnel were killed and two others injured when militants opened fire at them at a checkpoint in Kupwara, officials said here on Monday, a day after five security personnel lost their lives during an encounter in the district. A teenaged civilian, reportedly of unsound mental condition, was also killed in the exchange of fire between the security forces and the ultras on Monday, they added. The militants opened fire on a 'naka' party of the Central Reserve Police Force at Wangam-Qaziabad in Kralgund area of the district, the officials said, adding three CRPF jawans were killed on the spot. A brief shootout

ensued as the CRPF personnel opened retaliatory firing, the officials said. A 15-year-old civilian boy, identified as Mohammad Hazim Bhat, was also found dead at the scene of the incident, they said, adding he was reportedly mentally challenged. The area has been cordoned off and additional forces rushed there to track down the assailants, the officials said. This was the second major damage inflicted by militants on security forces in Kupwara district within 48 hours. Five army personnel, including two officers and a Jammu and Kashmir policeman, were killed during an encounter with militants on Saturday in Handwara area.

# Bengal Govt Cracks Down on Nearly 300 Ration Dealers for Corruption, Retrieves Stolen Food Items

On April 16, CM Mamata Banerjee had announced the removal of the secretary of the Bengal food and supplies department amid allegations of ration malpractices.

(News Agencies) Kolkata: The West Bengal government has cracked down upon close to 300 ration dealers for their involvement in corrupt practices while distribution amid COVID-19 lockdown across the state.

The action was taken amid allegations that there are some ration dealers who are not following the set guidelines of the state government, while streamlining the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Bengal. Meanwhile, opposition leaders have alleged that a section of ration dealers backed by TMC leaders are involved in hoarding and black-marketing of food-grains meant for PDS.

Speaking to the News18, West Bengal Food and Supplies Minister, Jyoti Priya Mallick, said, "There was

never an issue while distributing rations to the people. During this time, some of the dealers were involved in malpractices. The matter came to our notice and we have taken stern action against them."

Mallick said that these dealers were distributing 50-100 grams less food grains to the beneficiaries. "We prepared a list of those dealers and total 272 were suspended, while some were show-caused, penalised and arrested," he said, adding that there is no problem in PDS anywhere in Bengal.

"On Sunday, we have distributed ration to 14, 00, 1489 people. Every day we are increasing the reach," he said.

Earlier, on April 16, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has announced the removal of the secretary of the Bengal food and

supplies department amid allegations that there are ration card-holders who had not received the full month's allotment at one go to help them to survive amid lockdown crisis.

Manoj Agarwal, a 1990-batch IAS officer, was replaced with P.A. Siddiqui, who had been serving as the finance department secretary.

Agarwal has been sent to compulsory waiting, but sources in the state secretariat claimed that it was a routine transfer.

However, his removal came at a time when opposition leaders slammed the government over the ration malpractices in the PDS allotment.

When contacted Biswambhar Basu, General Secretary, of All India Fair Price Shop Dealers' Federation (AIFPSDF), said, "Initially,



there was some problem in the PDS allotment. Actions were taken against those who were involved in corruption. Not only were they penalised, but also forced to return the food grains, which they have kept unlawfully."

"There are 20, 271 ration dealers across the state and I am presently monitoring the distribution by personally inspecting all the areas. Presently, there is no problem in the distribution of ration in Bengal," he added.

On March 29,

Biswambhar Basu of AIFPSDF had written a letter to West Bengal Food and Supplies Minister, Jyoti Priya Mallick mentioning that Councillors, Panchayat members and their supporters are creating mental pressure on the Fair Price Shops (FPS) dealers for subscribing rice and wheat from their shops on the pretext of relief.

Meanwhile, Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar alleged that food supplies are not reaching the needy people as the PDS has been hijacked by

the ruling party and the distribution of ration is being handled by the TMC leaders.

BJP National Secretary Rahul Sinha said, "Already people are worried over their livelihood due to COVID-19 crisis and TMC leaders are taking control over the ration allotment system. We strongly condemned this and demand strong action against those who are involved in the corruption. I have alerted the Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar about the malpractices of PDS in Bengal."

## J&K Govt Declares Entire Kashmir Valley, 3 Districts of Jammu as Coronavirus Red Zones

All passenger movement by trains, except for security purposes or for purposes permitted by the MHA will remain prohibited, the order said.



(News Agencies) Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir administration has declared the entire Kashmir valley and three district of Jammu region as "red zone" based on overall assessment of the coronavirus situation and expected movement of stranded persons to the union territory.

The classification of

districts was given in an order issued by Chief Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam on Sunday night. The Union Health Ministry had classified four districts of Jammu and Kashmir - Srinagar, Bandipora, Anantnag and Shopian -- in red zone.

The Centre has allowed the administration of States and Union Territories (UTs) to classify additional districts as

red or orange zones. However, States and UTs are not allowed to lower the zone classification of a district.

As per the order issued by the Jammu and Kashmir administration, entire Kashmir valley, which comprises ten districts has been declared as red zone.

In Jammu region, three districts of Jammu, Samba and Kathua are in red zone, it said. While four districts of Jammu region - Udhampur, Reasi, Ramban and Rajouri - are in orange zone, Doda, Kishtwar and Poonch are in green zone.

The other guidelines issued by the chief secretary were more or less based on the MHA order issued on May 1 for the third phase of lockdown from May 4 to May 17. As per the guidelines, the

government has allowed movement of individuals in vehicles only for permitted activities, with a maximum of two passengers, besides the driver in four-wheelers, and with no pillion rider in case of two-wheelers. Intra-district movement of individuals is also allowed in orange zone in individual vehicles with similar restriction of passengers in four and two-wheelers, on the basis of passes issued by the district authority. Taxi and cab aggregators are permitted to ply with one driver and two passengers only while e-commerce activities (home delivery etc) are permitted for essential services and goods," the order said, "Private offices can operate with up to 33 percent strength as per requirement

with remaining persons working from home."

In green zone districts, all activities which are permitted in orange zone, will be allowed, it said. Other activities permitted in green zones included opening of all shops except those prohibited across the Union Territory. The activities which will remain prohibited in the entire UT include all domestic and international air travel of passengers, except for medical services, air ambulance, security purposes or for purposes permitted by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

All schools, colleges, universities, educational and training coaching institutions etc. will also remain closed across the UT till March 17 but online and distance

learning will be permitted.

All passenger movement by trains, except for security purposes or for purposes permitted by the MHA will remain prohibited, the order said.

As per the government order, all cinema halls, shopping malls, gymnasiums, sports complexes, swimming pools, entertainment parks, theatres, bars, liquor shops, restaurants, auditoriums, assembly halls and similar places will remain shut.

The movement of individuals for all non-essential activities has been prohibited between 7 pm and 7 am.

# Riyaz Naikoo setback upsets Syed Salahuddin, says the spark will spread in region

**Syed Salahuddin, who also heads the alliance of pro-Pakistan terrorist groups, called the United Jihad council, warned India that the Kashmir issue is a spark that could set off a fire that envelopes the entire region.**

(News Agencies) A day after security forces eliminated terror group Hizbul Mujahideen's Kashmir chief Riyaz Naikoo in a joint operation, the terror group's Pakistan-based boss Syed Salahuddin said the sacrifice would help them achieve the mission that they had set out to achieve.

Salahuddin, who also heads the alliance of pro-Pakistan terrorist groups, called the United Jihad council, warned India that the Kashmir issue is a spark that could set off a fire that envelopes the entire region. The message, according to a statement issued by the terror group said, was delivered at a meeting to condole the death of 32-year-old Riyaz Naikoo and his associate Adil Ahmed who were killed in Wednesday's operation carried out by Jammu and Kashmir police and troopers from the 21 Rashtriya Rifles.

Salahuddin was

designated as a global terrorist by the United States in 2017. According to the US, Salahuddin had committed or poses a "significant risk of committing acts of terrorism". But that classification hasn't made

a difference to the Hizbul Mujahideen boss who has the support of Pakistan's deep state and has been participating in public events for years. The Pakistan government had then declared that it will not act against Salahuddin

since the United Nations Security Council hadn't classified him as a terrorist. Islamabad hasn't acted against those designated by the UNSC either. There are about 130 individuals who have been sanctioned by the UNSC. On

them, Pakistan says it can't find most of the individuals sanctioned by the UNSC due to inadequate or inaccurate information about them in UNSC dossiers. Syed Salahuddin's statement described Riyaz Naikoo's status in the Hizbul

Mujahideen hierarchy as its chief commander. His elimination is a huge setback to the terror group and will lead to its weakening in south Kashmir, where the Hizbul has traditionally been active, a senior police officer said.

## India conveys concerns about terror sanctuaries in Pakistan to US special envoy Khalilzad

**The concerns were conveyed to the US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation during his meetings with external affairs minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, the people cited above said on condition of anonymity.**

(News Agencies) India on Thursday conveyed its strong concerns about a spike in terrorist violence in Afghanistan to US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, and called for rooting out terror sanctuaries in Pakistan to ensure peace in the war-torn country, people familiar with developments said.

The concerns were conveyed to the US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation during his meetings with external affairs minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, the

people cited above said on condition of anonymity.

"The existence of terror sanctuaries in Pakistan and their role in terrorist violence in Afghanistan figured in the meetings," said one of the people cited above, without giving details.

The development came against the backdrop of worries in New Delhi that India's viewpoint on the Afghan peace process is being given the short shrift by the US, which is apparently focused solely on implementing its deal with the

Taliban to facilitate the withdrawal of American forces.

India has also been concerned about the increased activities of Pakistan-based terror groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed in Afghanistan and the targeting of minorities, including the March 25 attack on a Sikh place of worship in Kabul that killed nearly 30 people, including an Indian citizen. Indian intelligence agencies believe the Islamic State, which claimed the attack, targeted the Sikhs after being unable to go ahead with plans

to strike the Indian embassy.

"India is deeply concerned at the upsurge in violence and supports call for immediate ceasefire and [the] need to assist the people of Afghanistan in dealing with [the] coronavirus pandemic," the external affairs ministry said in a statement on Khalilzad's meetings. The Indian side "emphasised that putting an end to terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries is necessary for enduring and sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan", the statement added, without naming Pakistan.



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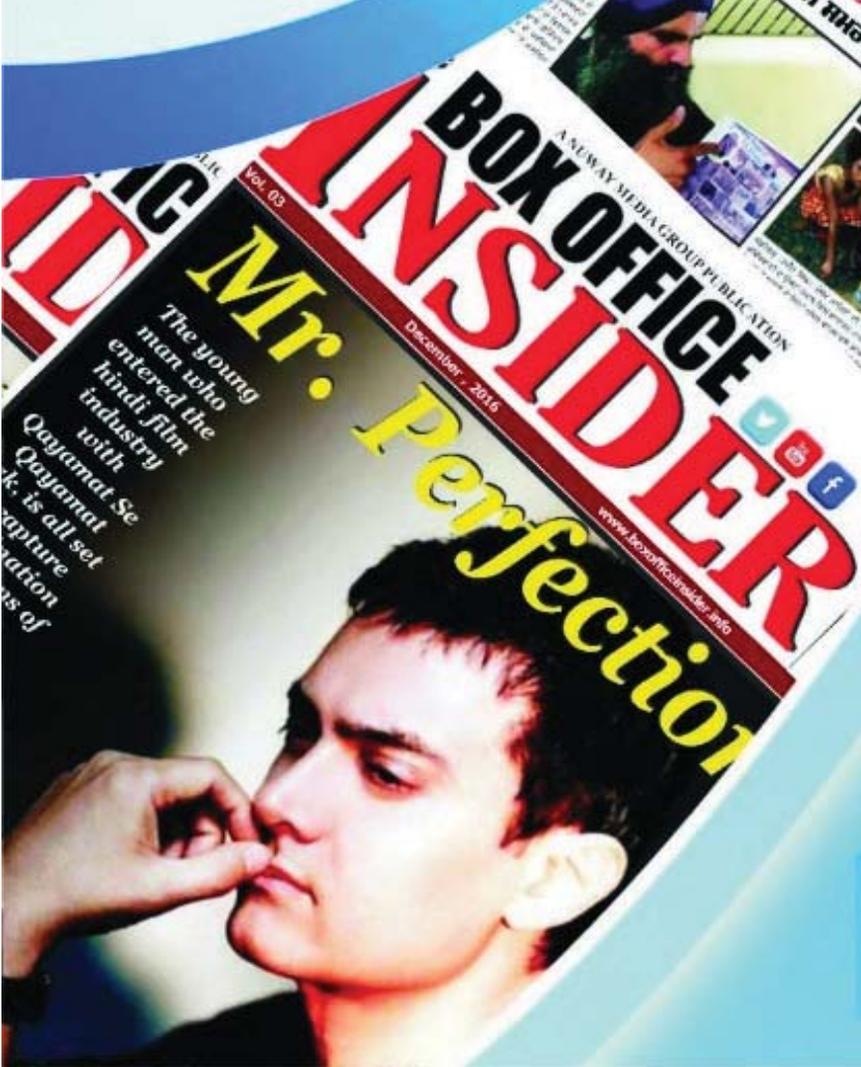
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# Handwara: India must act strongly

Even the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) fails before Pakistan's obsession with inflicting terror against India. The Handwara encounter, in which five Indian soldiers and a policeman were killed fighting a militant cell, is a reminder that through the pandemic, it has been business-as-usual along the Line of Control and in Kashmir. The past few months have seen a steady exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani forces along the border, a parallel infiltration of militants, and

## Defeat Pakistan's designs to inflict terror

concomitant terrorist activity in Kashmir. Rawalpindi's recent rebranding of the existing militant groups in Kashmir as "The Resistance Front" does nothing to disguise the fact what is happening continues to be State-sponsored terrorism with Rawalpindi's favourite Lashkar-e-Taiba at the forefront of the violence. Pakistan has been ratcheting up violence in and along Kashmir since the abrogation of Article

370. This is despite failing to persuade the international community to force India to reverse its decision, and the sanctions threat of the United Nations Financial Action Task Force. It is evident to everyone that India is not going to change what was passed in Parliament without opposition, and is now engraved in the Constitution. Pakistan knows this too, but what it is seeking to do is make India pay a price for

effectively cutting Islamabad out of the future of the Valley. Pakistan should know that incidents like Handwara, however tragic, will do nothing to bend India's will. Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi laid out a new path for Indo-Pakistani relations, one that focused on trade and investment, tackling common development challenges and building personal bridges. It required, however, Pakistan to accept that the use of

coercion to force territorial changes is no longer viable. The Covid-19 pandemic provided a perfect opportunity for Islamabad to at least explore this new path, using the excuse of a common viral enemy to put aside a legacy of animosity. Instead, PM Imran Khan chose to treat the pandemic as a non-event and the military, which still determines Kashmir policy, rejected the opportunity through violence on the ground. Pakistan must accept the new reality. But

a nation born in bloodshed and sustained by violence will not surrender its delusions easily and peacefully. Which is why India should take into account these designs, anticipate challenges, and respond accordingly. Security forces will have to be at the forefront of this battle. The prize at the end will make it all worthwhile: The conclusion of the Kashmir conflict, a more united India and forcing Pakistan to, hopefully, give up terror as an instrument of State policy.

## Across the world, dictatorial regimes use Covid-19 to quash press freedom



Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by attacks on press freedoms and journalists around the world amid the Covid-19 pandemic. We've seen this pattern before: A crisis engulfs a nation, and its government moves to curtail, manipulate or shut down news coverage. But just because we've seen this pattern before doesn't mean that we should pay less attention to it now. In fact, now is a time to be especially vigilant. In Iran, the government has imposed sweeping restrictions on coverage of the pandemic, including a ban on printing newspapers. Journalists have been arrested for their reporting, including one who criticized the government's failure to prepare for the pandemic and another who alleged that a local official had tested positive for Covid-19, as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has noted. In

Hungary, a new law giving the prime minister wide-ranging emergency powers includes a provision prohibiting publication of "false information" about the pandemic, with violators facing up to five years in prison. Journalists there told the German public news outlet Deutsche Welle that the law has generated uncertainty over whether they could be prosecuted for reporting true information, could harm independent news outlets' revenue streams, and makes the already difficult job of obtaining information even more so. In China, the government maintains that controlling information is necessary to combat the disease. Chen Qiushi, a citizen journalist who traveled in January to Wuhan, where the virus was discovered, and who posted videos on YouTube reporting that hospitals were overwhelmed, has not been

heard from since Feb. 6. This "Covid-19 crackdown" — as Joel Simon, the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, has called it — is unfolding as we prepare to mark World Press Freedom Day on May 3. This annual event serves as a reminder to respect the press, defend journalists and news organizations from attacks on their independence, and remember journalists who have lost their lives while doing the heroic work of keeping the public informed under difficult circumstances. This year, that reminder is particularly resonant. The enormous challenges and high stakes of this pandemic have created an urgent need for independent, timely and credible information. Moreover, the daily onslaught of misinformation has made this literally a matter of life and death. Yet many repressive regimes and autocratic leaders

are seeking to restrict the press — even as journalists are working to hold governments accountable for their response to this pandemic and to report on the growing public health crisis and the concomitant financial toll. Particularly in China, we've seen how self-defeating press restrictions can be in combating the spread of Covid-19. On March 24, Reporters Without Borders (also known as Reporters sans frontières, or RSF), a Paris-based nongovernmental organization that advocates for freedom of information, wrote that "without the control and censorship imposed by the authorities, the Chinese media would have informed the public much earlier of the severity of the coronavirus epidemic, sparing thousands of lives and perhaps avoiding the current pandemic." RSF has created Tracker 19, a tool designed to evaluate Covid-19's impact on journalism (the name refers both to the disease and to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). A map on the Tracker 19 website shows documented instances across five continents of state censorship, deliberate disinformation and other efforts that obstruct the public's right to information. RSF has compiled a list of concerning developments in more than 40 countries. The abuse of press freedom is hardly limited to authoritarian nations. A new law in South Africa — which has guaranteed press freedom since its 1996 constitution and which enjoys a tradition of independent journalism — has made it a crime to publish "disinformation" about the pandemic. Developments in India, the world's largest democracy, are even more

troubling. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government asked the country's Supreme Court to require news outlets to obtain state permission before publishing any coronavirus-related content — essentially empowering the government to censor coverage. While the court denied the request, it ordered news organizations to "publish the official version" of coronavirus developments, CPJ noted. Journalists who have continued independent reporting on the pandemic have faced intense harassment, as RSF has detailed. Responsible reporting from journalists who are free to call out mismanagement of the pandemic and deception by government officials has never been more vital. In February, the World Health Organization termed the swell of rapidly evolving information about the Covid-19 outbreak — including a flood of misinformation — an "infodemic." On April 14, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres referred to this "dangerous epidemic of misinformation" as "a poison that is putting even more lives at risk." Against this backdrop of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, World Press Freedom Day takes on a deeper meaning. The growing limits on press freedoms not only make it more difficult for journalists to help keep the public informed, but also undercut the ability of journalists to help keep the public safe. At a time when their work is most needed, journalists worldwide are risking not only their freedom but their lives on the front lines to cover this devastating pandemic. They deserve our appreciation — and need our support — more than ever.

# Evaluating India's Covid-19 battle *The sharp dip in US-China ties*

Over 50,000 people in India have now tested positive for the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). There are two ways to look at this number. At one level, it is alarming — for it shows that the disease has truly made its way in, and there is, undeniably, a level of community transmission where those infected are not necessarily people who have either travelled abroad or been in contact with those who have. It also shows that the lockdown may have been able to slow, but has not been able to stop, the spread of the disease. But at another level, the figure needs to be seen in a wider perspective. Given India's size and population, the fact that there have been over three million cases globally, and the rate of fatalities is low (around 2,000 people have died), the situation could have been a lot worse.

But is it getting worse? Despite the stringent lockdown, the past week has brought disturbing news. There has been a surge in cases — to be sure, this can also be attributed to higher levels of testing, which is needed to trace the infected. From a doubling rate of 11.5 days on May 3, it has shortened to 10.3 days — which means that cases are doubling in quicker time. Each set of 10,000 cases are now increasing at a more rapid pace than the

preceding set. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu are particularly affected, and are contributing a substantial share of the cases. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar remain particularly vulnerable because of both the density of population and the fact that migrant workers are now in the process of returning home. Two other states — West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh — need to be carefully watched too, given reports of undercounting and administrative weaknesses. The good news is that India now has a clear health protocol to deal with the disease even if there is no cure — ensure social distancing, test, isolate, treat. The bad news is that India has probably not peaked yet. And with relaxations in the lockdown, and possibly greater opening after May 17, there will be more mobility and human interactions. This, in turn, will increase the number of cases. It is not clear if India has the adequate health infrastructure to deal with this possible surge, despite the time given to gear up by the lockdown. The government must not succumb to the temptation of underplaying the challenge — sometimes visible in the regular Press briefings. The situation will get worse before it gets better.

**Hindustan Times Editorial**

## Respect the human rights of migrant workers

The coronavirus disease (Covid-19)-sparked migrant worker crisis took a new turn when the Karnataka government cancelled special trains to



take the workers to their home states on Tuesday. The decision came after chief minister BS Yediyurappa met construction industry representatives, who expressed concern that work will grind to a halt if workers left. The CM defended the decision, saying the state is providing facilities to the workers, including Rs 5,000 to all registered workers. He has also announced a Rs 1,610 crore stimulus package. But facing criticism, the government backtracked and decided to resume train services on Friday.

The controversy brings to light the crucial role played by migrant workers in sustaining India's economic

engine. But this cannot come at the cost of curtailing the individual liberty of workers, and their ability to exercise free choice. Karnataka's initial decision showed that political regimes are indifferent to the needs of migrant workers — who are often caught in exploitative work arrangements. These workers have been stuck for close to 50 days, with a severe shortage of money and food. They are desperate to return home, to their families and communities, in search of a degree of psychological reassurance.

The decision to step back in the face of rising hostility from workers, and criticism from across the spectrum, is positive. For, at the core, this is not about economics but fundamental human rights. Migrants must be allowed to choose whether they want to stay or leave. Forcing them to do stay reflected a tendency of treating workers as bonded labourers. By listening to feedback and changing course, Karnataka did the right thing.



In the wake of pandemic, the rift between the United States (US) and China has deepened. Washington has said it will scrap the phase one trade deal it made with Beijing in January. The Donald Trump administration is also speaking to countries such as India about the possibility of ripping out electronic and healthcare supply chains from China. As the US president blames China for Covid-19, Chinese official media mocks the bungled US response to the pandemic. The abusive language at the highest levels of government on both sides is unusual and dangerous. Governments keep ambassadors out of the nastiest frays so that they have a path towards negotiations and reconciliation. Talk of a trade war even as the world is slipping into a recession could not be more badly timed. All is fair in trade and war, but when superpowers have only battle plans as blueprints to handle bilateral relations, the resulting scenarios range from bad to worse. That all this is happening during a global health crisis makes it even more perilous. India leans towards the US but keeps an outstretched hand to China.

This allows it to maximise benefits. New Delhi has been careful not to call out Beijing regarding its handling of the outbreak. Yet, it has worked more closely with the US on almost every other element of the pandemic. Its reward: tangible assistance and public praise from both sides. The economic gains from supply chain distribution are potentially enormous but are seriously diminished if they require India to align with a single pole. The challenge for India will be to continue its present soft balancing against China without being drawn into a US containment policy, which, it is unclear Washington has either the will or the way to impose. Fortunately, India has sufficient heft that both the US or China know they must persuade rather than coerce New Delhi. Multi-alignment is the catchphrase of Indian diplomacy today, but at its core is the belief India must avoid choosing between sides until the time it is powerful enough that the choice become irrelevant. The next six months will test whether a foreign policy hedge can grow during a geopolitical storm.

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# It's time to refresh old ideas like universal job guarantee

## ***Self-targeting features of a universal job guarantee make it a long-term policy option to protect informal workers in urban India***

The lockdown due to the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is estimated to have tripled the urban unemployment rate in its first three weeks. According to the Reserve Bank of India, a full bounce-back looks unlikely in the near future, and the business sentiment has shifted from negative to one of pessimism.

The government's recently-announced economic package does little for workers in urban areas, most of whom are irregular informal workers. The majority of them – 62 to 85% – have no access to benefits such as provident funds and insurance, which make up the flagship government schemes for Covid-19 relief aimed at such workers.

Policies to protect workers are being discussed across the world. Such as the United Kingdom's payment of 80% of wages for furloughed workers and a universal basic income. Closer home, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), has urged the government to provide a fiscal stimulus of Rs 2 trillion, which could support 200 million low-income people with Rs 10,000 each. Many of the proposals being put

forward insist on targeted direct transfers, often through biometric identification-based bank accounts. The CII specifically mentions an "Aadhar based Direct Benefit Transfer".

Targeting based on incomes and encashing checks may be easy in economies with broad-based tax and payments systems. For vulnerable groups in India, correct targeting and timely payments are perennial problems. Detailed data is severely lacking. For example, just 7% of adults file taxes, and the available labour force statistics make it difficult to accurately identify unemployed individuals. There is growing evidence of exclusions and omissions, and payment failures and misdirection from the Aadhar-based system even in normal times and in areas where it has been in place for a while. Economists have long recognised the informational challenges of targeted payments. They have advocated job guarantees because they are self-targeting. A needy rural household and a rural landlord both have access to work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(MGNREGA), but the landlord is unlikely to take up digging wells for Rs 202 a day.

These reasons motivated MGNREGA to cover all rural households, and the government expects to rely on it to create rural jobs once social distancing rules are relaxed. It is time to be bolder than this. A universal job guarantee needs to be on the table for discussion to cover the many workers who are in precarious work situations across in the country.

Even in more advanced countries, national statistics have proved inadequate in recording informal workers outside the organised sector, especially the new breed of self-employed and temporary workers in cities. To understand the value of job guarantee to such workers, the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics conducted a survey of over 16,000 individuals in India in 2018. It found that, on average, an urban worker is willing to take a 15% cut in wage to get a guaranteed number of days of work in a year.

Our survey showed that migrants were much less likely

than non-migrants to be able to pay for emergency expenses. They also placed a greater value on having a job guarantee. Although a universal programme would not have overcome the immediate plight of uncovered migrants, it is certainly fair to say that the holes in coverage created by targeted payments have not been adequately weighed in policy discussions.

The self-targeting features of a universal job guarantee make it equitable and cost-effective. A 100-day job guarantee at a daily wage of Rs 200 (similar to MGNREGA) would cost Rs 20,000 per person. Let's suppose all casual workers (13% of the urban workforce of 300 million persons), irrespective of income, take up the job guarantee. To calculate how many other individuals take it up, add the 15% value that workers place on having a job guarantee, and we end up with a daily value of Rs 230. In urban India, 16% of the workforce, including those who are unemployed, earn less than Rs 230 from other works – and suppose all of them take up the job guarantee scheme. From a back of the envelope calculation, an

urban job guarantee would cost Rs 1.74 trillion, or 0.8% of India's annual GDP.

Many may consider Rs 200 obscenely low. At Rs 400 a day, the estimated cost of providing a 100-day job guarantee would be Rs 6.6 trillion. In reality, costs are likely to be much lower, because the take-up rates here include government workers and business owners, who place much lower values on job guarantee.

Importantly, these costs do not net out potential benefits from skills for young urban workers, 93% of whom have no formal vocational or on-the-job training. A job guarantee might lift some of their despondency, as documented for young UK workers during the New Deals of the late 1990s.

At a time of severe economic insecurity, a pledge, not even an actual outlay of 1 to 3% of GDP, is a minuscule sum to restore dignity to those who may have fallen through the cracks. This is not the time for "technophiles" to dogmatically cling on to the libertarian ambitions of targeted bank transfers as an end in itself. Old ideas of job guarantees have value in today's difficult economic times.

**By Swati Dhingra**

# How Uddhav Lined Up The Call To PM, Why It Paid Off



The Wednesday night call from Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai to Prime Minister Narendra Modi has got the Maharashtra Chief Minister what he's desperately in need of - an election. 24 hours after the phone call, the obdurate governor of Maharashtra, BS Koshiyari, a card-carrying member of the BJP before his appointment in Maharashtra, formally asked the Election Commission to hold elections for the nine vacancies on Maharashtra's legislative council; with the strength of his three-party alliance, Thackeray is certain to win one of them. The Election Commission today said that the election would be

held before May 27. That means Thackeray will be elected just in the nick of time to the Maharashtra legislature. If this does not transpire, he will have to resign. Thackeray who did not contest the Maharashtra assembly elections in November has to become a member of the legislature within six months - or step down. That six-month window expires on the 28th. It was all looking pretty tight till earlier this week which is why Thackeray SOS-ed Modi. As always, there's a whole lot of political capital being exchanged behind the scenes. When Thackeray phoned the PM, he complained that the lack of initiative in calling

the election was a blatant attempt to have him disqualified from his job. With the elections postponed on account of the lockdown, Thackeray's cabinet had twice recommend to the Governor that he name Thackeray to one of the two seats on the council that he gets to appoint. The Governor did not comply.

Modi's intervention will enable him to soften and further his image as an elder statesman of Indian politics who put Maharashtra's need to fight the raging pandemic above petty politics. Sources say Thackeray pinged the PM after Koshiyari bluntly told him that he would not be nominating him but reportedly hinted to Thackeray that a phone call to Modi might persuade him to petition the Election Commission to hold the election. Thackeray's key aide Milind Narvekar worked his rolodex to set up the

all-important call with Modi. The call was slotted into the PM's schedule. Modi was reassuring but noncommittal, saying that he would find out what was hitch was.

Modi now has a personal IOU from Thackeray and BJP leaders say this will go a long way to repair the ruptured relationship between the BJP and Thackeray's Shiv Sena, who ended their decades-long alliance after the last election. The break up was motivated by Thackeray feeling insulted over the BJP treating him like a second class citizen in the alliance. Sharad Pawar, arguably the craftiest politician in the country, fished in troubled waters and conjured up an unlikely government in Maharashtra with the Congress, Sena and his own Nationalist Congress Party.

Despite the multi-dimensional drama, signs of a thaw are now visible. In the last session of parliament, Pawar spent a lot of time in Modi's chambers in

the House. Modi had earlier publicly called Pawar his "political guru".

Since at the time the BJP was engaged in pulling down the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh, perhaps Pawar gave Modi and Amit Shah a tip or two on how to replace Kamal Nath's government with one led by their party.

The Congress, which is the junior-most partner in the Maharashtra government, has reason to feel anxious over the bonhomie, however superficial, of its partners with the central leadership of the BJP. From the beginning, Rahul Gandhi was against the Congress participating in a government that included the Sena because he felt it was power at the cost of their vastly disparate ideologies. Modi's intervention is also likely to make unhappy the former Chief Minister and BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis who has been

seen as high-energy in attempts to bring down Thackeray with multiple visits to the Governor. Any reset of the relationship will hurt him politically. His image also takes a hit with Modi's move being seen as a distant rebuke.

Before the way was cleared for Thackeray, the Sena was anxious. Its leader Sanjay Raut told me that "The opposition (BJP) is in frustration right now. In a situation like this, our stand is absolutely right. And supported by the Constitution."

Thackeray has never contested an election. His hard scrabble to make it to the House on his first attempt seems to have worked.

Despite being a newbie administrator, Thackeray has been widely perceived as delivering a hands on, calm and mature leadership as his state combats the maximum number of Coronavirus cases in the country. On one front at least, he can exhale.

## Corona Curve Not Flattened But Economy Is, Thanks To The Centre

Accountability of the executive to the legislature and of the government, generally to the people, is a fundamental tenet of democracy and the inalienable right of the people. Under what circumstances should such accountability cease to operate or such right be suspended and for how long? This is a question which democratic countries have answered in their own way whenever such situations have arisen. To the best of my knowledge however, this right has not been suspended anywhere, even in the most difficult times. People may have exercised self-restraint on their own but they have never been told that the right has been abrogated or suspended. The US was engaged in a critical war in Vietnam during the 1960s and early 70s. But the people of the US did not like the military involvement of their country in far-off Vietnam and the returning body bags. So, opposition to the war started to mount at the popular level and soon became a mass

movement which forced the US administration to finally disengage. Old-timers would not have forgotten the sight of huge numbers of people regularly protesting against the government. Nobody asked them not to do so since the country was at war. India, like the rest of the world, is facing an unprecedented crisis because of the Coronavirus. We have been told, specially by the Godi Media in our country that in such critical times, all of us should stand with the government, support whatever it is doing and not ask any questions, much less criticise it. Most of us have abided by this prescription so far. In any case, criticising the government and the ruling party was considered, even earlier, not only anathema but also anti-national. It is more so now. But this admonition does not apply to the BJP. They are free to criticise, even launch agitations against state governments where the party is in opposition. It freely demands resignations of

Chief Ministers and accuses their governments of even imagined acts of omission. So there is no bar to politicking in these states because parties other than the BJP rule them. But the matter does not stop there. State governors are the representatives of the government of India every state. It is a constitutional post with limited powers. But this high constitutional post has now been thoroughly politicised. Look at the way the Governor of West Bengal is behaving. He has no control over his actions and language. Every day, almost with monotonous regularity, he indulges in verbal duels with the elected Chief Minister of the state. Is the governor of Gujarat where the Covid situation has gone out of hand, behaving similarly? Certainly not, because Gujarat is ruled by the BJP. See how the Governor of Maharashtra was bent upon creating a constitutional crisis in that state by refusing to accept the recommendation of the cabinet to nominate the Chief

Minister to the legislative council. Now the Election Commission has accepted the recommendation of the state to hold elections to nine council seats on May 21. This is in complete contradiction to its stand on Rajya Sabha elections which stand postponed indefinitely. MLAs are supposed to vote in both elections. How is voting by them in the council elections of Maharashtra safe in these Covid times while voting in the Rajya Sabha elections is unsafe? The principle of federalism has been given a complete go-by. The centre is sending teams to states with power to give directions on the spot. In West Bengal, one such team went to a district which had no recorded case of Coronavirus. While criticism is not acceptable to the government of India, it does not tire of praising its actions day in and day out, as does the Godi Media. Is this one-way street acceptable?

The fact of the matter is that politics and politicking are forbidden for everyone else except the BJP and the central government. So, we must consider all bets as off now and start asking our questions. China had warned the world about a new virus on December 31/January 1. The two first cases outside China were recorded in South Korea and the US on January 20. The first case in India was recorded on January 30. There was no doubt from Day One that if the virus spread in India, it would be on account of passengers coming from abroad. Why did we not put a complete ban on such travellers in January itself? Was thermal testing enough? When the virus started spreading, why was a lockdown not enforced immediately? Why did we have to wait until March 24 to enforce the lockdown? When our own medical staff was woefully short of protective gear, why were two planeloads of them allowed to be exported to Ukraine?

Who was responsible for the purchase of faulty testing kits from China? And what action has been taken against the guilty? It was also clear as daylight from Day One that the state governments would have to bear the brunt in the fight against the virus. Yet, why was the first consultation with Chief Ministers held only on March 20? And most importantly, why was the fate of the migrant workers and students studying outside their states not taken into account when imposing the first lockdown on March 24 at four hours' notice? And why did it take the centre weeks to realize that there was a problem there? And now when factories are being allowed to open, trains are being arranged to take them home. Who will work in these factories? But surprise of surprises is that the financial burden of this has been put squarely on state governments whose finances are already in a state of collapse from before. Can anything be more insensitive?

# Covid-19: Portraying India unfairly



It would not have come as a surprise to most people when a national survey last week showed an staggering 93% of Indians expressing confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in tackling the coronavirus crisis. In fact, other surveys had shown public's confidence having steadily grown, from 77% at the beginning of the national lockdown over a month ago, to 83% earlier this month.

This was evident to anyone with an ear to the ground, such as the millions of volunteers who have been reaching out to assist those in need, or those who are in touch with many of them to coordinate aid. That confidence was also echoed by the vast majority of domestic and international public health experts monitoring India. Their sentiments were backed by solid evidence of the nation having done remarkably well in managing the pandemic.

Nevertheless, for a group of the usual suspects among international media, and some of their fellow travellers in India, all this might have been happening in a different galaxy. So deeply do they seem vested in purveying bad news about India, that they appeared oblivious to the overwhelming evidence that India was a stunningly positive outlier.

In the early stages, this school of reportage and commentary predicted catastrophe for India. They kept emphasising that since first world nations with superior healthcare systems were in big trouble, India was doomed. Some headlines include "Calmness of India's Covid response"; "A vulnerable population braces for a pandemic"; "The consequences (in India) will be especially grim"; and even "Mr Modi is in big trouble."

Next, as the days went by, they cast doubts on the relatively few infections by hyping the "low level of testing." Never mind that their cynicism—which should have been corroborated by a severe shortage of hospital beds and ventilators, and a sharp rise in respiratory-related deaths—was contradicted by reality. As testing was ramped up dramatically to the hundreds of thousands, and it became clear that far fewer Indians were turning up positive per 100 (IS THIS 1,000?) tests than in Europe and the United States (US), that bogey has mostly been quietly tucked away.

Thereafter, their acknowledgment that India was doing relatively well has been fleeting, and the tone grudging. Some sounded wistful, almost as if hoping that the good news about India were untrue, or if it were, that it would soon be overcome by negative developments. To be sure, the road ahead for India's fight against the virus will be long and arduous. But while

it is not the global media's job to exude undue optimism about India, neither should it be to downplay real achievements and ooze negativism. Finally, when the doom and gloom failed to materialise, these purveyors of a rigidly-blinkered narrative on India turned to their favourite charge: Islamophobia. They pounced on the developments surrounding the Tablighi Jamaat, and the public's disapproval of its members' behaviour, to accuse the Modi government and most Indian media of polarising the situation. Of course, the reports that made this claim invariably omitted mentioning that the government's rules—such as the closure of places of worship—were equally applicable to all religions. Or that the PM's repeated appeals to unite people, including asserting that this virus "does not see race, religion, caste...we are in this together" was exactly the opposite of their

allegation. And ironically, even those in the Indian media who went out of their way to be politically correct, more often preferring to use the euphemism "single source" rather than name the Tablighi Jamaat, were nevertheless accused just the same. Such jaundiced views about India have gradually become commonplace among far-left, modern liberals within and without the country. Another aspect that stands out among this group is an excessive empathy for China that defies reason and which has eroded their credibility. That was visible in the hotly-contested debate about the name of this virus. Although originally termed the "Wuhan virus" and later whitewashed into "SARS-CoV-2," the moment US President Donald Trump called it a "Chinese virus," all hell broke loose. Calling it that has, somewhat oddly, been termed racist by these commentators. More to the point, as the American talk

show host and classical liberal—and no fan of Trump—Bill Maher pointed out, all past epidemics have been named after the place of their origin. These include German measles, Japanese encephalitis, Spanish flu, Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and others. The reason this should be of interest in India is that none of this cohort objected a few years ago when an antibiotic-resistant bacterial strain was named the "New Delhi metallo beta-lactamase 1 (NDM-1), because it was possibly first acquired here. This sort of hypocrisy only reinforces the perception of an entrenched bias against India among these circles. As India grapples with the next phase of this pandemic, both in containing it as well as reviving the economy, it will also have to contend with more such determinedly pessimistic portrayals. It would be more appropriate for us to strive for a more balanced global narrative on India.

(By Baijayant "Jay" Panda, Hindustantimes.com)

## Criticising Govt Won't Help, Parties Must Join Hands: Pawan Khera

COVID-19 is a global crisis that has brought every single leader under the lens. Under normal circumstances, political reflexes of leaders can be spun around in a million ways, and are seen through multiple prisms of ideology and identity. Thus, whether it is the way Israel responded to the Haredim while implementing social distancing, or the way the Mayor of Brooklyn responded to the funeral of the Hasidic Rabbi and the subsequent controversy, or the way in which various stakeholders in India handled the Tablighi Jamaat issue, or the way the country of Georgia responded to the Patriarchate's insistence on celebrating Orthodox Easter, using the communion spoon—our inherent bigotry or the absence of it gets displayed in the way groups and governments respond to deviance and

defiance.

India too has witnessed an unprecedented crisis over the last couple of months. A crisis that is not just ongoing, but is also unfolding itself and throwing new challenges. Every day brings a new test for the government, the media, the Opposition, and different institutions as also the society and the multiple constructs we have either chosen or are imposed on us. As the country's leading Opposition party that has also been in government for the larger part of our journey as an independent country, I can say with some satisfaction, and lots of humility, that the Congress Party has risen to the occasion in the way a responsible political party should, irrespective of whether it is in government or out of it.

In the course of the lockdown, the

leadership of the Congress Party kept flagging its concerns either through letters written to the Prime Minister by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, or through tweets and posts by P Chidambaram, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Randeep Singh Surjewala, Manish Tewari, and others.

Whether it is the suggestion to provide liquidity to mutual funds, providing free ration to those who do not fall under the criteria of existing rules, giving immediate advance payment of wages for 21 days to registered MGNREGA, suspending the ambitious central vista beautification plan, direct cash transfer in Jan Dhan Accounts, seeking a package for the beleaguered MSME sector—the list of constructive suggestions offered by the Congress Party is long.

# India May See An Unintended Baby Boom Due To COVID-19 Lockdown. Is Govt Prepared?

**While nationwide lockdown is unavoidable and is a wise decision to contain the spread of the virus, there is a need to address the possibility of an unintended baby boom among poor and vulnerable groups.**

With most countries following nationwide lockdown or stay at home orders due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, there has been a debate on a possible unintended baby boom across the world. Although many demographers from western countries believe it is unlikely to occur due to economic, psychological, household stress and shortage of healthcare workers, a report by UNFPA projects that 47 million women in low and middle income countries are unable to use modern contraceptives, leading to seven million unintended pregnancies in the coming months. In case of India, we cannot reject outright possibility of a baby boom if the lockdown continues for more than three months. Though this may not be anticipated in urban India due to anxiety, awareness, and access to contraceptives, but there is a higher possibility of a spurt in birth of children in rural India,

particularly in populous and high fertility states. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data shows that the overall fertility rate (TFR) in India declined from 2.7 in 2005-06 to 2.2 in 2015-16. Despite such reduction, the percentage of women with unmet need (Fecund and sexually active women not using modern contraception but they don't want children, or they want to delay their birth of next child for at least two years) for modern methods is as high as 20.4 per cent (that's approximately 51 million women). In 2005-2016, the unmet need for family planning remained the same. Also, there is huge regional variation in unmet need, the higher fertility states in the north-central region contributing the biggest share (Unmet need for modern contraception is about 35 per cent in Assam and Uttar Pradesh). Such unmet need results in nearly half of total

pregnancies mistimed or unwanted. Such an unmet need for contraceptives followed by unintended pregnancy may further increase due to several reasons such as limited service by hospitals, absence of public transport, inadequate supply of contraceptives in local chemist shops. During lockdown, it is most likely that health workers are occupied with Covid19 response or preparedness. Secondly, couples might restrain their visits to health facilities looking for abortion and other family planning methods fearing infection. Finally, return migration might also have an impact, especially among the poverty-stricken couples who have fewer means of economic engagement and meaningful entertainment. While nationwide lockdown is unavoidable and is a wise decision to contain the spread of the virus, there is a need to address the possibility of an unintended baby boom among



poor and vulnerable groups. Unwanted pregnancy is a tremendous public health concern in India that leads to unsafe abortions and high maternal mortality. It puts both mother and child at risk. Children born due to unintended pregnancy may suffer from malnutrition, negligence, illness, and even death. At the societal level, it has far-reaching socio-economic implications. To avoid a baby boom or unwanted abortions, massive awareness on

family planning methods is needed during the 'Stay Home' period. The availability of family planning methods should be considered as an essential service and delivered in rural India. It is also important to train health workers to provide consultation on family planning services by alternative modes such as digital tools, home visits, mobile clinics, etc. At the same time, incentives may be provided to the health workers for continuing maternal and child health services.

Our world lies torn and shattered, and all because of an invisible virus that probably was let loose by a horseshoe bat. In our understanding of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), one critical factor stands out. The destruction of wildlife and wildlife habitats led to its creation. It could be from Wuhan's horrific wet wildlife markets or experimenting with bats in a Wuhan laboratory or destroying bat habitats that led to a crisis where millions are infected and hundreds of thousands are dead.

Intermediary species like the pangolin might have helped in mutating this virus and, over the last decade, humans have left no stone unturned to decimate pangolins and smuggle them live into wildlife markets. They could very easily have been the intermediary species. China is hugely responsible for the demand and needs to be shamed across the world. I squarely place blame on its actions. I watched closely its enormous role in the tiger crisis that enveloped India from the 1990s for two decades. I watched its increasing presence in Africa and the resultant decline in Africa's



## Covid-19 : A call to save the planet

**China's irresponsibility has led to this crisis. So has the myopia of our political, business leaders**

wildlife. At many international meetings for the last 30 years, it was warned to end its illegal wildlife trafficking and markets. It paid no heed. Many wildlife warriors fought to prevent China from this highly destructive role. But China, as a global economic power, cared little and plunged on regardless in its craze for wild animal parts and associated medicine. As far as I am

concerned, this virus is a result of this. This virus is also a result of the actions of all those political and business leaders who did not care. All those who scoffed at and mocked nature's warriors, hurled abuse on those who served both wildlife and nature. The disrespect that many who serve nature have suffered is shocking. Many of us are now angry and unforgiving.

Our warnings over the last 50 years have come true. We have tirelessly strived to prioritise the protection of our natural world. Very few who made policy or took decisions listened. Today, they should be drowning in guilt. Big business has failed nature. Few provide grants to protect it. Corporate leaders prefer to remain ignorant of the ways of nature. Now they have been hit

where it hurts most. Trillions of dollars lost, and economies at a standstill. If we wake up from this nightmare, will they learn? Will they shed their arrogance? The less said about our politicians and bureaucrats, the better. I remember how hard I tried to get Prime Minister (PM) Manmohan Singh to create a department of forests and wildlife (which did not exist in the ministry of environment and forests) so that this essential sector was governed properly. The idea was to create a separate ministry over time and allow a ministry of environment and climate change to be independent of it. He agreed with my logic, (10 years ago), and instructed that it should be done. But a bunch of secretaries vetoed him. PM Narendra Modi has not held one meeting of the National Board of Wildlife in seven years. Nobody cares. They still do not realise that the virus they deal with originates in wildlife and is unleashed because of poor governance. They do not realise that India is in dire straits, the economy a mess and life disrupted because of how we deal with the natural world and its myriad species.

# For Modi Government, Migrant Workers Are Not Citizens

India was among the first countries to rescue citizens stranded abroad when international travel was severely restricted because of the coronavirus pandemic. Special Air India planes were sent to bring Indians home. In answer to a question in the Lok Sabha on March 4, the Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said, "Air India has raised a bill of Rs 5,98,90,352 for operating two special flights to China." The state carrier spent Rs 92,566.23 on each of the 647 people to evacuate them from China. There was no charge to the passengers. Subsequently, Indians stranded in Italy, Japan and Iran were also provided the same facilities and brought home. It was a humanitarian step taken by the government of India.

Why should this approach not be extended to help the migrant workers stranded in cities far away from their homes? In the last two months, looking at the central government's policies during the lockdown, the common use of the words "migrant workers" seems to have earned them a reverse "reasonable classification" which robs them of their right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution of India. Obscene inequalities in India embedded in the framework of our social-economic system have been one of the biggest impediments for equal access to constitutional rights. But this period of the pandemic crisis and lockdown has brought this out in a much more graphic way, raising fundamental questions of whether the labouring sections of our population, who have borne a disproportionate burden of the crisis, are at all considered citizens of India by this government.

Consider this. In the first instance, the central



government gave just four hours' notice before imposing the lockdown. If their rights as citizens had been factored in, it would have been better planned and a large number of workers would have had the opportunity to go home paying their own way. This right was denied to them. Instead, this huge army of India's labour force was reduced to becoming objects of suspicion, considered as burdens, in many cases beaten into submission for trying to get home, herded into camps, treated as less than humans, leave alone as equal citizens. As on April 5, of the millions of stranded citizen workers, around 1.25 million were given shelter by state governments; more than half of these were in Kerala. What about the plight of millions of migrant workers in other states who had neither camps nor homes?

Even the World Bank in its recent report "COVID-19: Through a Migration Lens" states "lockdown, loss of employment and social distancing prompted a chaotic and painful process of mass return for internal migrants in India." This painful process also took many lives. It is legitimate to ask if notice had been given, would it have saved the life of 12-year-old Jamlo Makdam, the only child of her parents, who had joined a group of adivasi women working as chilli pickers in

Telangana and who, trekking back home after the lockdown, died of hunger and dehydration? Maybe if she had known earlier that a lockdown was to happen, she could have taken a bus home? Many died, many suffered. Whose responsibility? Who is accountable?

Now, the third lockdown has been announced. But again the central government has made a mockery of the rights of migrant workers. The first circular issued by the Home Ministry on April 29 instructed states to "mutually agree" to arrange buses for migrants to return home from May 4. The permission was only to travel by road in buses. This was not just devoid of even a minimum of common sense - after all, how many days would it take, for example, to bring workers home from Punjab to Bihar or from Kerala to Bengal - but once again reflected a deeper reality, that of the non-citizenship status of migrant workers in the eyes of the government.

After eight states protested against the April 29 circular and demanded a resumption of train services, the Home Ministry modified its April 29 circular after two days and declared that the Railways would run "Shramik Special" trains. These have already started. However, workers have to pay the full fare. Not only the regular fares, but extra charges of fifty rupees per passenger for "express charges" and food.

According to estimates projected by various state governments, at present, more than one crore migrant workers want to get home. This number could go up dramatically once the process of allowing their return home starts. After all, estimates given to parliament in a written answer from the Labour Ministry on March 24 put the



number of migrant workers across the country at 10 crores. Funds with migrant workers are totally exhausted. They have been without work for two months. Their families, dependent in large part on remittances from migrant workers to survive, have gone further into debt. Obviously, they would be in no position to send money for tickets to return home.

The Prime Minister has set up a PM Cares Fund. Hundreds of crores of rupees have been donated to this fund. We can only make guesses since the actual amount is not in the public domain. Why is this money not being used to bring the workers home? Whose care is the PM interested in if not that of India's labour force, or rather, India's life force who are the creators of wealth? Further, in the 2020-2021 budget, Rs 5,600 crore has been allocated to the Railways for the PM's dream project of a bullet train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai. This is much more than what it would cost to ensure free travel for the migrants. Would national interest not be better served to put an end to such wasteful expenditure and use that money to bring the workers home?

The Indian Railways has the capacity to bring the migrant workers home within a short time framework. On an average, the Railways have a daily traffic of 2.3 crore passengers. Even if one excludes the large section of daily commuters on short-distance trains, there is no denying that the workers can be brought home within a matter of days. What is required is the political recognition of the workers' right to go home. Certainly, during a pandemic, this has to be done with utmost care and precaution for their own safety. State governments too have had the time to plan for the

return of the migrants. It is another matter that they are having to do so without any financial help from the centre. Here, too, not a single rupee from the PM Cares Fund has been used to help the states, leave alone transferring resources it should through the Disaster Management Act and fund.

While the centre has taken recourse to the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act to issue instructions to states, it has ignored the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, which is an extremely relevant legislation in the situation today. This Act, though weak and inadequate, since it covers only that section of migrant workers who are recruited by contractors for inter-state work and not those who go on their own, nevertheless sets out certain rights for migrant workers. It guarantees registration of migrant workers, a minimum wage, and importantly and relevantly, free travel home if the employment is terminated. There is a legal case to make the central government liable to pay for their journey home apart from the wages lost.

India has been forced to acknowledge the existence of this huge force of workers. Yet, even today, in spite of all the sophisticated methods of computing, the government has no reliable assessment of their numbers. What is an urgent task emerging out of the experience of the lockdown is to ensure registration of this workforce, strengthen the law which governs their employment and above all recognize their rights as equal citizens of India. And as a first step, let the centre take the responsibility to bring workers home with dignity.

(By Brinda Karat NDTV.com)



# A tale of two epidemics- Aids and Covid-19

**There are similarities in how countries responded to Aids then and Covid-19 now. Even though their capabilities to fight such crises vary, their immediate response in the form of denials is similar**



The global upheaval created by the new strain of coronavirus (Covid-19) reminds us that communicable diseases are always a threat to public health. I look at the coronavirus pandemic with a feeling of déjà vu – with memories of the deadly spread of HIV/Aids just two decades ago fresh in my mind. It consumed more lives and left many more infected than Covid-19 is likely to before it is tamed and eliminated.

I see similarities in how countries responded to Aids then and Covid-19 now. While, in case of Aids, it was Africa and the third-world countries that were in denial and bore the brunt of the epidemic, this time around, it is the developed world that has messed up the response to the Covid-19 crisis, despite possessing the scientific and technological prowess to challenge it. During the Aids epidemic in the 1990s, African and Asian countries underestimated the spread of HIV, thanks to the lack of sophisticated epidemiological tools and responsive health systems. But there can be no excuse for the developed world's complacency and a lack of preparedness in dealing with the coronavirus crisis; they, after all, possess the world's best information technology-enabled epidemiological surveillance systems to track pandemics. One common challenge that we faced then, and face still now, is to arrive at a credible number of infections. In the case of Covid-19, most countries are tailoring their responses to symptomatic cases or those quarantined for suspected infections. Infectious diseases always have a large number of unreported cases, with people either unaware or frightened to undergo tests. But there are still no organised efforts to bring out a credible number of estimated infections in countries reporting a high number of cases.

During the HIV crisis, the process to arrive at an estimated number was developed quite early with help from the United Nations system. India reported less than one lakh HIV infections 20 years after the first case was reported in 1986. But national-level sentinel surveillance conducted in 1998 yielded an estimate of three million infections. This was further refined using new data, but the number was still as high as 2.4 million, 20 times more than the reported cases. This forced the government to recognise the severity of the epidemic and invest resources into a vastly expanded and decentralised

national Aids response in 1999. In the next 10 years, the infection level was brought down by 56%, and the mortality was reduced through an expanded treatment programme covering almost 1.2 million people.

It should be epidemiologically possible to initiate national-level sentinel surveillance for Covid-19 in India, to locate if any latent epidemics are occurring in rural and remote areas outside the hot zones identified by states. The integrated disease surveillance programme (IDSP) should be given the mandate to undertake such periodic surveillance with technical inputs from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Testing is another important component of epidemic control. In the Aids programme, rapid kits introduced in 2,000 had enabled the government to quickly expand testing facilities across the country, which allowed people to get themselves tested and, if required, enrolled in the treatment programme.

Similarly, in the case of Covid-19, India could easily overcome its initial reluctance to test large

numbers. States could gradually expand testing facilities; the numbers, in case they are higher, can be partially explained by scaling up testing. The availability of rapid test kits for quick diagnosis could have enormously helped the programme, but substandard kits from China slowed down the effort. We need to quickly ramp up the indigenous production of rapid kits of standard quality to test the asymptomatic cases. Making kits available for voluntary testing at a very low price will help people access health care services during the early stages of infection. In the 90s, stigma and discrimination associated with HIV positives greatly hindered the response. Health care providers were reluctant to treat them due to the fear of infection, and a lack of universal precautions for infection control in government hospitals which bore the brunt of the epidemic. The big difference this time around is that health care providers at the forefront of the response are being hailed as heroes. But stigma is emerging from society due to an

inadequate understanding of the dynamics of the Covid-19 epidemic. Disturbing instances of locals resisting last rites of people dying of Covid-19-related infections point towards the need to normalise the disease. Massive awareness campaigns in the late 90s, with community participation, contributed to a rise in awareness levels about HIV and Aids in the population. Similar efforts are needed now, with strong involvement of communities and persons cured of Covid-19. Unlike HIV, which still infects about 1.5 million persons every year, the immediate threat of Covid-19 may not last more than a year or two. But its impact on the health systems and economies will be more profound than HIV, which was more of a silent tsunami causing unnoticed destruction to vulnerable communities. But even if Covid-19 is controlled, it may not necessarily vanish. Until the mass immunisation of populations becomes possible with a preventive vaccine, we must be prepared for its periodical onslaughts, even if in a less virulent form.

## Covid-19 is an opportunity for India to rediscover itself

**Rural India is rich in culture and tradition. To help revive the economy, make villages part of the growth story**

It would have been overly optimistic for anyone to expect that the government would do away with all restrictions lock, stock and barrel on May 3. Given the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and its destructive course, this would not have been possible. The main takeaway from these fraught times is that this virus is now an inextricable part of our lives for some time to come and we need to work around this. As the third lockdown begins, the government has tried to ease things for people in several ways. Many restrictions have been lifted in the orange and green zones. Local administrations have been given the responsibility of deciding to what extent restrictions can be relaxed, depending on conditions in different areas. But, many would argue that this is not nearly enough.

The decision to extend the lockdown was taken on May 1, Labour Day. This is a day to honour the contributions of the labour force but this time around, we could do little to ease their suffering and deprivation from job losses and their inability, in many cases, to get back to their distant homes. While we are proud of India's achievements as an emerging economy, the grim reality is that a huge percentage of its workforce lives under the pressure of economic uncertainties. They live in harsh conditions

in slums around industrial townships and megacities. Now, the government has allowed them to go back home. Some of the shramik special trains have even reached their destinations. This brings hope for them during this difficult time. Hopefully, more measures, to ensure the safety and well-being of these workers, will follow.

But what happens once these desperate people reach their villages? What are their avenues of income generation? There are only a few opportunities for them in villages, which prompted them to move out of the village in the first place, often leaving behind their families, to brave the harsh conditions of cities. They do this to make a life for themselves and support their families. Cities cannot do without them, and yet, their plight remains understated. Will there be opportunities for them?

However, with every crisis, there is hope for a solution. The Covid-19 crisis seems to be an appropriate, even opportune, moment to revive India's artisan traditions, handicrafts and also rural agro-industries. This is the time for a renewed focus on the Make in India initiative. This may not generate jobs for everyone, but it will bring hope and long-term gain in rural India.

Can villages be a big part of the new growth story? Despite the naysayers, a

village-focused approach will bring about a turnaround. They often have interesting cultures and traditions that do not find a place in cities. There are many success stories about initiatives taken in our villages and mofussil towns. Let me relate one of these.

A few years ago, in a village in Nainital, I was on my way to a market with a friend. When we reached the part of the road where the ascent began, my friend, who was older than me, ran out of breath. Both of us had to stop for a while. Within two minutes, a car that passed us, stopped at some distance. A charming young man, who turned out to be an acquaintance of my friend, approached us. He asked us where we were going. Luckily for us, our destination was the same as his. We got into his car and accompanied him to the market. En route, my friend introduced us. The young man had earlier worked in a multinational company, but left his lucrative job to return to his village and start a horticulture business, selling cut flowers. He ran a medical store there with his wife. He told me that while he was earlier an employee, he was now an owner. Now, many local men and women worked for him. I asked him how he accomplished this.



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# Why I can live without eating meat in the pandemic



I love eating meat. A meal doesn't feel like a meal without meat, even if it's just a slice of bologna sandwiched between wheat bread, like I had this morning. I like my steak well done, my chicken fried or baked or battered, my sausage spicy and my hamburger well seasoned with just the right mix of ketchup and mustard. I might forget to eat my vegetables, but I never forget to add the meat. But I'm willing to give it up if it means people like my brother — who worked at a small poultry processing plant in South Carolina — don't have to risk their lives doing their jobs during this pandemic. President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday aimed at keeping these meat processing facilities open, even

though more than 4,900 workers have tested positive for Covid-19, and at least 20 have died, according to a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study.

After serving a decadeslong prison sentence, the only steady work Moochie could initially get was at the poultry processing plant, where he had to deal with a unique mixture of blood and other fluids for several hours a day. That's nothing new to us, though. Where we grew up, it was nothing to watch a man knock out a pig with an ax before removing its head and hanging it up on a long rusty nail on the side of the barn to let the blood drain and ... you get the picture.

We aren't squeamish. We aren't vegetarians. Heck, when two of

my nieces brought vegan burgers to a cookout and asked that we guard them so no one else would eat them before they could to get the grill, we giggled. Their vegan burgers were safe around us. That's why I will admit that a part of me silently approved of President Trump's decision to use the Defense Production Act to keep meat and poultry processing plants open. That part of me — the meat eater in me — doesn't know that there can be life without meat, or at least not a fulfilling life. To me, food is meat and meat is food. But then I thought about Moochie, and it seemed wrong to expect people to risk their lives so I can keep eating chicken nuggets.

I know it won't be easy to give up meat. Breaking a decadeslong pattern of behavior is no small task. Honestly, it still feels like an impossible transition even as I'm typing these words.

Every now and again, forces beyond our control reshape the world in ways we can't anticipate. That's what this coronavirus is doing, whether we like it or not. When something major happens, the sudden change can be frightening. In

that state, our focus is mostly on what we are likely to lose, and the things we don't want to let go of because they've long brought us comfort. We want to go to the movies and sit down in restaurants and yell expletives at football players in packed stadiums and hug friends and decide to not wash our hands after using public restrooms because that's what we've long done. And because we're Americans, damn it, and Americans get to do what we want to do!

In that state of mind, we leave little room for new possibilities. We don't consider whether our habits are really necessary — or whether they might feel vital or sacrosanct only because we've long done them. Maybe there is a better way to enjoy each other's company than meeting up for lunch at the local grill. Maybe there's a better way to eat than making meat the centerpiece of just about every meal, particularly given that we think this coronavirus jumped from animals to humans.

Our bodies can survive without eating pork or beef or chicken or any other meat. And there's reason to believe the average American might be more

susceptible to the ravages of Covid-19 because of our relatively poor state of health, which has been caused in part by fetishizing meat. We know it's a fetish because even though the President of the United States and corporate executives have been trying to force already-vulnerable workers to potentially expose themselves to Covid-19 just so we can keep eating meat, there was not a big outcry. Few of us protested or got the absurdity, the immorality, of telling fellow human beings to risk sacrificing themselves so the rest of us can keep eating burgers.

This coronavirus isn't the first virus to change the course of world history and it won't be the last. It has disrupted our lives in awful ways, and it may have pushed the country into another economic recession. It's a reminder that we aren't in control of everything. But there are some things we can do, and how we respond to this pandemic is one. As part of that response, we should reconsider our relationship with meat, and question our long-standing behaviors that have brought us comfort while putting the most vulnerable among us at greater risk.

(By Issac Bailey, CNN.com)

## It is time to rethink the way humans treat animals

**It is time to rethink how chickens are bred, treated and eaten, too. There is a whole new generation of people who care about where their food comes from, and how it is grown**

On May 4 each year, since 2005, a non-profit in the United States (US) called United Poultry Concerns celebrates International Respect for Chickens Day. It spreads the message that we need to rethink how we treat all food animals, especially chickens, since poultry is the most consumed meat in the world. The rest of the world needs to join them in celebrating May 4 as International Chicken Day.

Astonishingly, 60 billion chickens are reared for meat globally each year. India produces about three billion, in an industry valued at close to \$20 billion. The broiler and layer industry that perfected itself in the US has spread globally, and so have all its practices, both good and bad. In India, it has created economies of scale, given livelihoods to thousands of farmers, and become an important source of protein. But animal rights activists have long tried to

sensitise people that chickens are arguably the most abused animals on the planet. Broilers and layers undergo a lot of suffering so that humans can get low-cost protein. They also save other forms of wildlife from being trapped and slaughtered for food.

From the moment they are born, these birds spend all their lives in total confinement. Broiler chickens are born in large incubators with hundreds of others; crammed into small, often filthy spaces. They are fed and drugged to become very large very quickly. They can become crippled under their own weight; they can get heart attacks and have organ failure. Many die because their baby-sized hearts cannot keep up with their adult-sized bodies. Sometimes, they, especially the layer hens, can't even move; sometimes, their bodies grow outside and

around their tightly packed wire cages.

Broiler babies are slaughtered at around 42 days, though their natural lifespan can be 10-15 years. When they are ready to be killed, there is more agony waiting for them. They are roughly handled in small crates on the way to the slaughterhouse. Sometimes, they are immersed alive in hot water to remove their feathers. Sometimes, when there is no market for them, as during this pandemic, they are just buried alive in mass trenches.

Yet, there is enough evidence to show that chickens are inquisitive, intelligent and highly social animals. Mother hens spend a lot of time teaching young ones and vocalising to them. Some studies have shown they could feel empathy and also jealousy. In experiments, they have shown they can count, and can even recognise human faces.



Certainly, they feel fear and pain. Maybe it is time to rethink how chickens are bred, treated and eaten, too. There is a whole new generation of people who care about where their food comes from, and how it is grown. More people are turning vegetarian. There is also an increasing demand world over, and now in India, for humane meat, for free-range chickens and organic eggs.

The recent pandemic has reminded us once again, this time with deadly urgency, about the threat of zoonotic disease that spread from the animal world to the

human. People deserve to know more about the connection between the industrial processes at poultry farms and the spread of diseases. We now know exactly how much our well-being is intertwined with that of animals and birds. Maybe it is time to honour the sacrifice that they, and chickens especially, make for us all, including vegetarians. Let's mark May 4 on our calendars, not just for the partial end of the lockdown, but for the end of misery for the animals we depend on for food.

(By Rohini Nilekani)

# Rohingya refugees sent to remote Bangladeshi island after weeks at sea

## Hundreds more refugees still stranded on boats after being turned away by Malaysia

(News Agencies) Rohingya refugees believed to have spent weeks stranded on cramped boats at sea have been sent to a remote, uninhabited island by Bangladesh, while hundreds more remain adrift.

Dozens of Rohingya landed on the coast of southern Bangladesh on Saturday, an official said, with some sent to Bhasan Char, a silt island in the estuary of Bangladesh's Meghna River.

Hundreds more refugees remain stranded on at least two trawlers between Bangladesh and Malaysia, according to rights groups, who say south-east Asian governments are using the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to turn away refugees. "A small boat carrying 43 people

came to shore today," the Bangladesh government official said. It is not clear how many have been sent to Bhasan Char, Bangladesh, which hosts about 1 million Rohingya who have fled persecution in Myanmar, previously said it would house refugees on the island, which is accessible only by a three-hour boat ride. The plan has been widely opposed by Rohingya refugees, and condemned by NGOs, who warn Bhasan Char is vulnerable to rising sea levels and storm surges. Human rights groups say that relocating refugees would leave them isolated, with limited access to education and health services. Yanghee Lee, who recently stepped down as the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar,

previously said it was unclear whether the island was "truly habitable".

Chris Lewa, the director of the Arakan Project monitoring group, said the refugees who landed on Saturday had probably come on a small boat from one of the larger vessels still at sea, believed to be carrying hundreds of people. On Saturday, Rohingya refugees whose relatives, including children, have been missing for weeks on the boats, pleaded with international governments to act before they perish. The refugees onboard, who were fleeing desperate conditions in camps in Bangladesh, had attempted to reach Malaysia but were turned away. Two boats carrying approximately 500 people were



last spotted off Bangladesh about a week ago. The country's foreign minister said Bangladesh was already overburdened and would not allow the boats to dock.

Among those fearing for their loved ones is Razaul, who has lived in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh since 2017, when he fled a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar. He said on Friday he believed his brother, his sister-in-law and their two children, aged six and eight, were at sea. He went to visit them in March and was told by neighbours they had left to go to Malaysia. They have been

missing for 53 days. "I have only one message. My question to the UN and to the government of Bangladesh and others is to allow the boats to come in," he said. "They can save their lives." Last month, the Bangladesh authorities rescued a ship, allowing about 400 emaciated people, mostly teenagers, to come ashore after spending two harrowing months at sea. Passengers were starved and beaten by traffickers, according to Médecins Sans Frontières, which treated survivors. More than 70 people may have died on the boat, it has been reported, though no official death toll has been announced.

# Pakistan: Imran Khan's government is 'muffling critical voices'

In an interview with DW, Harris Khalique, secretary-general of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said that PM Imran Khan's government is undermining the supremacy of parliament and democratic norms.



(News Agencies) DW: Local and international media organizations are critical of Prime Minister Imran Khan's government's handling of the media and the freedom of the press situation in Pakistan. What is the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's take on it? Harris Khalique: Pakistan witnessed censorship and curbing of the freedom of expression during military dictatorships. However, such restrictions have never been experienced under a political government that claims to be democratically elected. Even if there are questions around the manipulation of the 2018 general elections, the current government can still be seen as

a product of a continuous electoral process that was restored in 2008. We believe that the muffling of critical voices and systematic suppression of political dissent under the incumbent government is incomparable with any elected government in the past. How is the incumbent government muzzling the freedom of the press in Pakistan, and how is it different from the tactics used by previous administrations? The current dispensation is not only constraining independent journalists, columnists and writers, it has also put a financial squeeze on media houses by various means. That has resulted in a number of publications going

out of print and a large number of media professionals losing their jobs. Interviews of opposition leaders are taken off air in the middle of the broadcasts, anchors on news channels are asked to comply with the official narrative, and op-ed writers are regularly censored. There have been multiple attempts to regulate social media with a view to eliminate any difference of

opinion. There are two types of media owners in Pakistan. Those who fall in the first category are traditional media houses run by journalist-cum-owners. They have tried to put up with the pressure as much as they could. The other category is large businesses that entered into media and journalism considering it a lucrative industry, which brings influence and

political clout. Those belonging to the second category have been more ruthless when dealing with journalists. However, even those falling into the first category have placed their material interests before ethical journalism. Therefore, professional journalists and those who work in their supporting professions are the worst hit in this situation.

# Pentagon warns Taliban of 'responses' if violence continues

(News Agencies) The U.S. military in Afghanistan warned the Taliban against continuing violence and to "return to the political path," saying further attacks would lead to "responses." "If the violence cannot be reduced then yes, there will be responses," US Forces-Afghanistan spokesperson Colonel Sonny Leggett wrote in a letter to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah

Mujahid that he posted a copy of to Twitter. "All sides must also return to the political path. Afghans should sit down now and begin talking about the future of Afghanistan together," Leggett added. While violence is down, Leggett said, "we spoke of ALL sides reducing violence by as much as 80% to pave the way for peace talks."

Mujahid, in a response on Twitter, accused the U.S. of "provocative statements," adding "we are committed to our end, honour your own obligations," according to Reuters. The Taliban have accused the U.S. of failing to hold up its end of the agreement with an agreed-upon prisoner exchange involving 5,000 Taliban and 1,000 members of the Afghan forces. The Taliban launched a series of

attacks over the last week, the first of the holy Islamic month of Ramadan, killing 17 civilians and injuring another 49. Javid Faisal, a spokesman for the Afghan National Security Council, said on Twitter that the majority of the casualties were the result of direct fire or roadside bombs.



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# Pakistan's Alliance With China Comes At A High Cost



(News Agencies) Here's What You Need To Remember: In a future of multilateral alliances and blocs, Pakistan would be well advised to choose its allies carefully. In the event of becoming a vassal state of China, it will primarily have itself to blame. Pakistan has made several major grand strategic mistakes since its creation in 1947, including the

attack on India in 1971, which led to Pakistan's dismemberment. However, Pakistan is in the midst of making another grave mistake, and it is one seldom discussed. This is the high cost of its alliance with China. Due to the poverty in its long-term, strategic planning, Islamabad's conception that the Sino-Pakistani alliance is key to Pakistani

security introduces dependence on Beijing and creates the avenue for Beijing's exploitation and manipulation of it—with the result that Pakistan finds itself less secure and alone in the world. We argue that Pakistan should reverse course. The alliance with China ultimately serves China's ambitions above Pakistan's. Islamabad should extricate itself from its alliance with China, and improve its position by aligning with other, democratic states. The rise of China has had profound impact on Pakistan's strategic calculations. A more powerful and outwardly amicable China causes a natural reaction in Pakistan to align itself more closely with China in

order to balance against India, its long-term adversary. Pakistan's leadership believe that an alliance with China will somehow replace the long-term Pakistani dependence on the United States in mediating its relations with India. They also think that this relationship will help improve Pakistan's poor economic situation. To the contrary, Pakistan's strategic choice to ally with China is a profound mistake. Before it gets drawn even closer to China, Pakistan should rethink its strategic choices. The alliance with China is a strategic blunder because China is a poor alliance partner. Islamabad should note that China has tended to treat its allies as

subordinates instead of partners in shaping its geostrategic ambitions. Indeed, Beijing has not been subservient to any state since the Sino-Soviet split by the late 1950s. China's steadfast allies are Cambodia, Iran, Myanmar, and North Korea—hardly an august group. Beijing's relationship with Moscow underscores the authoritarian character of its alliance relationships. China's behavior as an alliance partner is often boorish, exploitative, and Machiavellian. China's economic assistance to Pakistan has come with very high costs. It has vowed to invest up to \$60 billion in Pakistan as part of the CPEC but most of this investment will be extended in the form of

loans—with a high interest rate of up to 7 percent. Sooner rather than later, Pakistan will find itself unable to service these very costly debts held by China. As it is rapidly moving all its eggs into the Chinese basket, it will quite likely have to enter a "debt-for-equity swap" with China—something that Sri Lanka recently had to do when it was unable to service its Chinese debts. The Sri Lankan deal handed China control of the strategically important port of Hambantota (and fifteen thousand acres of surrounding land) for ninety-nine years. The current Sri Lankan government is trying to extricate itself from such arrangements put in place by the country's previous administration.

## Pakistan's Coronavirus Cases Cross 20,000 With 476 Deaths: Health Ministry



(News Agencies) Pakistan on Monday reported 694 new cases of coronavirus, taking the total confirmed infections to 20,884 with 476 deaths in the country, the health ministry said. The Ministry of National Health Services said that out of the total patients, Punjab reported 7,646 cases, Sindh 7,882, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 3,288, Balochistan 1,218, Islamabad 415, Gilgit-Baltistan 364 and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir reported 71 cases. "Pakistan's coronavirus cases reached 20,884 after 694 new patients were diagnosed by Monday evening," said the statement issued by the

health ministry. The new cases came as Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday that the nationwide lockdown will be lifted gradually, asserting that Pakistan cannot afford an indefinite closure. The health ministry said that 14 more patients died on Monday, taking the total toll to 476. "Another 5,635 recovered so far. The authorities so far had conducted 212,511 tests, including 9,522 in the last 24 hours," the statement said. Separately, a district and sessions court's judge in Tank area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province was tested positive for the coronavirus, the Peshawar

High Court's Protocol Officer said in a statement. "As per reports received till date no other Judicial Officer or staff of District Judiciary Tank has been found positive for COVID-19," the statement said. The judge, the first officer of district judiciary to have contracted the virus, is in self-isolation, according to the statement. Meanwhile, the prime minister telephoned also his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau to discuss the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters of mutual interest. He thanked Canada for its support to include Pakistan in the G20's debt relief initiative.

## Husband, father, sex worker As adults, Afghanistan's 'dancing boys' lead double lives

**In conservative Afghanistan, former dancing boy Farhad leads a double life; married father-of-six by day, cross-dressing dancer and sex worker by night.**

(News Agencies) In conservative Afghanistan, former dancing boy Farhad leads a double life; married father-of-six by day, cross-dressing dancer and sex worker by night.

The practice of "bacha bazi" - translated as "boy play" - involves boys dressing up and dancing at private parties, but it was outlawed in 2017 amid concerns it fostered sexual abuse and servitude of young boys by powerful, older men. Islamic clerics led calls for the centuries-old tradition to be stopped, saying those involved should be stoned for sodomy which is forbidden under Islamic law.

"(But bacha bazi) continues to happen and is a grave human rights violation," said Abdul Rasheed, executive director of the non-profit Youth Health and Development Organization (YHDO). "Pressing charges against the perpetrators is almost impossible as many are in a position of power," he added. The YHDO has highlighted how sexual abuse and trafficking of boys was a practice that exploded during Afghanistan's civil war in the 1990s, with boys from rural areas flocking to cities to find work to support families, leaving them

vulnerable to abuse. In 2019 aid workers said they were seeing a growing number of children orphaned or forced to work on the streets. But human rights campaigners voiced concerns not only

about the abuse of young boys but the impact on those forced into this kind of exploitation in their later lives. Farhad, now 29 - who asked not to be identified by his real name - said he was raped in his early teens by several local police officers but his parents quickly moved from their home city and never wanted to talk about the attack or report it.

Shame, or threats from those responsible, prevents most victims of sexual abuse from speaking up in a country where the sexes are strictly segregated and it is common for men to dance for other men at weddings. Psychologist Lyla Schwartz, who works with child victims of rape in war-torn Afghanistan, said harsh parental attitudes meant many abuse victims carried the trauma into adulthood. "Stigma and unsupportive, denying family members make the healing process of being sexually abused even more difficult," she said.



# Afghanistan investigates reports Iran guards forced migrants into river

(News Agencies) Afghanistan is investigating reports Afghan migrants drowned after being tortured and pushed into a river by Iranian border guards. The migrants were caught trying to enter Iran illegally from the western Herat province on Friday, according to local media. The migrants were beaten and forced to jump into a river by Iranian border guards, the reports said. Some of them are said to have died. Iran has

dismissed the allegation. A foreign ministry spokesman said the incident took place on Afghan territory, not Iranian, and security guards denied any involvement. The number involved in the incident is unconfirmed but officials said dozens of migrants crossed the border, and at least seven people died with more still missing. A search party has been sent to retrieve the bodies of migrants from the

river. The Afghan Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said local officials told it "Iranian security forces arrested a number of Afghan migrants seeking work who wanted to enter Iran".

Shir Agha, a migrant who witnessed the incident, told Reuters the Iranian guards "warned us that if we do not throw ourselves into the water, we will be shot". Another Afghan migrant, Shah Wali, alleged that the Iranian

guards "beat us, then made us do hard work". "They then took us by minibus near to the river, and when we got there, they threw us into the river," he added. About three million Afghans live in Iran, including refugees and wage labourers. Hundreds of Afghans cross into Iran every day to find work. There was a mass exodus of migrants returning to Afghanistan after the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, which has recorded



almost 100,000 cases of the disease to date. Many are suspected to have brought coronavirus back across the border with them. But as Iran seeks to ease restrictions, Afghan migrants in search of work are crossing the country's border in greater numbers again. Afghan officials have expressed concern over the incident in Herat province, risking a diplomatic row at a time of already strained relations over the coronavirus pandemic. In a tweet to Iranian officials, Herat's governor Sayed Wahid Qatali wrote: "Our people are not just some names you threw into the river. One day we will settle accounts."

# From a Sri Lankan rainforest, a new species of orchid blooms



(News Agencies) the journal *Biotaxa* COLOMBO — A rare new orchid described from a tropical lowland rainforest in Sri Lanka now bears the name of two of the island's pioneering forest ecologists. A new paper published in

the journal *Biotaxa* identifies the new discovery as *Gastrodia gunatillekeorum*, a species found in just three small populations comprising fewer than 100 mature individuals. That makes it both habitat specific and

endangered. In naming the petite orchid, researchers dedicated it to two of the island's top ecologists, Nimal Gunatilleke and Savitri Gunatilleke from the University of Peradeniya. "This is our humble tribute to this unique couple for

their immense contribution in the field of ecology and for encouraging, mentoring and nurturing future ecologists of Sri Lanka," said study's lead author Champika Bandara from the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the Uva Wellassa University, Badulla.

*Gastrodia* are mycotrophic plants — those that rely on fungus for their nutrition — and as such occur in highly specific locations, given that fungi are also highly specific to the habitat where they grow, Bandara said this new species was discovered in the Sinharaja lowland rainforest, an area dominated by *Mesua* and *Shorea* trees.

The small orchid bears a close resemblance to *G. spatulata*, a flower endemic to Indonesia, because they both have white, wide-open and backward-reflexed flower

fronts. In *G. April.*

*gunatillekeorum*, however, the petals are as long as the outer part of the flower, known as the perianth, while in *G. spatulata* there are free linear petals inside the perianth tube. There are some 90 *Gastrodia* species, or potato orchids, known to science, with a range across much of the Indo-Pacific, from Africa to New Zealand, and as far north as Siberia. For all its biological richness, Sri Lanka had only one species of the plant — *G. zeylanica* — before the recent discovery. The new orchid can be easily distinguished from *G. zeylanica* by its shorter stature of the whole plant, yellow-orange color inside the perianth tube, and shorter lip. And *G. gunatillekeorum* is unique also because it has a short flowering and fruiting season each year: between February and

It was during an ecological field survey in April 2018 that lead author Champika Bandara observed a few flowering individuals of *Gastrodia* within the biodiversity-rich Sinharaja Man and Biosphere Reserve, just above the Beverly Estate tea plantation near the town of Deniyaya in the southern district of Matara.

In March 2019, Bandara spotted some more at the Center for Tropical Forest Science and Forest Global Earth Observatory located within Sinharaja, this time closer to Ratnapura district, and again the following month in the same western region of Sinharaja. Having discovered only the three distinct populations within the western and southern regions of Sinharaja rainforest, conservation efforts for the new species may have to be location specific, the researchers say.

## Bangladesh eases some restrictions, extends lockdown to May 16

(News Agencies) DHAKA (Reuters) - Bangladesh authorities said on Monday they will gradually open up more factories, as well as farms and logistics operations, as they try to diminish the economic impact of a coronavirus lockdown which they extended to May 16. Shopping



malls were given permission to reopen with shorter than usual hours. The move followed a decision last week to reopen more than 2,000 garment factories that supply global brands, after a month-long shutdown. Much of the rest of the economy

remains offline. The official tally of confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus rose by 688 to surpass 10,000, the health ministry said. Some experts are concerned that the real number of cases could be higher in a country of more than 160 million people where many have only limited access to healthcare. The death toll rose to 182 from 177. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has told government officials that schools and colleges may have to remain closed until September if the situation does not improve.

## Special Boeing aircraft with 230 passengers lands at Mattala airport

(News Agencies) A special Boeing 767-300ER aircraft carrying 230 passengers from the Netherlands landed at the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) today. The flight was bringing the crew members needed for the merchant vessels docked at the Galle Harbor in southern Sri Lanka. They have been permitted to enter the country on special humanitarian grounds. After arriving at the airport, all the

passengers were subjected to a special disinfection process under the supervision of the officers of the Chemical Nuclear, Biological and Radiological Response unit of the Sri Lanka Air Force and taken to Galle Harbor by buses. Meanwhile, 53 crew members aboard the vessel, who are scheduled to leave for The Netherlands on the return flight, are expected to arrive at the Mattala airport tonight, the MRJA officials said.

# MULTIMILLIONAIRE CELEBRITIES CALL FOR END TO CAPITALISM FROM THE COMFORT OF THEIR LUXURY MANSIONS



their movies or buying their music (God forbid), they're talking about a reduction in everyone else's living standards while they, the celebrity elite, continue to live like royalty. While they dance and their giant kitchens and virtue

signal about how "we're all in this together" during the lockdown, people in the real world are losing their businesses and jobs. They want to create a vertical economy of princes and paupers where no one outside of their bubble is allowed

to elevate themselves. Meanwhile, once the lockdown is over, they'll continue to travel the world in private jets and buy expensive beachfront property while lecturing you about the necessity of eating bugs to save the planet.

## RAND PAUL: 'REOPEN THE ECONOMY, NO MORE IMAGINARY MONEY'

(News Agencies) Multimillionaire celebrities have signed a petition calling for an end to capitalism from the comfort of their luxury mansions.

The petition, called 'Please, let's not go back to normal', says the COVID-19 pandemic is a "tragedy," but that the "ongoing ecological catastrophe is a meta-crisis."

"The pursuit of consumerism and an obsession with productivity have led us to deny the value of life itself: that of plants, that of animals, and that of a great number of human beings," states the letter.

"Pollution, climate change, and the destruction of our remaining natural zones has brought the world to a breaking point." The petition urges world leaders to not allow everyone to "go back to normal" after the coronavirus pandemic is over.

Signatories include Madonna, Robert de Niro, Cate Blanchett, Jane Fonda, Marion Cotillard and Monica Bellucci.

This is yet another example of the sheer disdain these celebrities have for ordinary, working aspirational people.

When they talk of 'ending consumerism' – they're not talking about people not watching

(News Agencies) Senator Rand Paul has called for the economy to be reopened, saying that it is the only solution for recovery. Appearing on Fox News, a bearded Paul said that Americans need to be allowed to go back to work imminently or there will "continue to be economic calamity." "To people [who] ask me I remind them that we have no money," Paul urged. "We have no rainy day account. We have no savings account. The \$3 trillion that we've already passed out is imaginary money." The Senator said, referring to the already staggering national debt. "It's being borrowed basically

from China. So, the irony is we got the virus from China, and now we are going to be more dependent by borrowing more money from China." Paul stressed.

"The only thing that recovers our economy is opening the economy," Paul asserted.

The Senator urged that Americans need to be released from "forcible home arrest" if any recovery is going to stand a chance.

"It's not a lack of money, it's a lack of commerce. If you let people have commerce, if you let them trade, if you take them out from forcible home arrest, our

economy will recover. But if you keep everybody under home arrest and say you cannot practice your business, you cannot sell your goods, there will continue to be economic calamity. ... We don't have any money." Paul proclaimed.

Paul also slammed Democratic-run states for wanting to keep the economy shut down.

"All these blue state governors who don't want to open their state, now they're clamoring for federal money to bail them out because no state revenue is coming in. We don't have any money," he urged. Rand Paul: 'Reopen The Economy, No More Imaginary Money'

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

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

#### Stay home except to get medical care

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



#### Wear a facemask if you are sick

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



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

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



#### Cover your coughs and sneezes

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



#### Clean your hands often

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



#### Call ahead before visiting your doctor

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



#### Avoid sharing personal household items

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



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

### STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

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

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



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



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



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



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



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

# Women face increased risk of sex attacks on France's deserted streets

For many women venturing out during France's coronavirus lockdown, the absence of crowds has made them easier targets for sexual assault and harassment, a threat that could increase as officials prepare to ease stay-at-home orders.



(News Agencies) For many women venturing out during France's coronavirus lockdown, the absence of crowds has made them easier targets for sexual assault and harassment, a threat that could increase as officials prepare to ease stay-at-home orders. Feminist advocacy groups are reporting an increase of incidents in broad daylight by aggressors who know their

victims are unlikely to be able to summon help. Fatima Benomar, a 36-year-old rights activist, said she was hounded by several youths on the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, a wide-open thoroughfare that has been emptied of cars and passers-by. "They came up because I was ignoring their catcalls, and started insulting and threatening me," Benomar told AFP. "It was incredibly

scary." "There wasn't any way to escape, all the stores were closed and there was nobody to ask for help," she said. For Laurene Martin, a 28-year-old nurse, the commute between Paris and a nearby suburb had never caused her alarm, until the lockdown was imposed on March 17. "On the second day of confinement, some guys jumped me in the Metro

and stole my phone. I screamed and they ran off, but then the only other person in the train, a man, came up right next to me and asked if I was married," she said. Other incidents since then convinced her to buy a bicycle to get to work. "It's certainly worse than before," Martin said. "There are fewer people to target, and fewer witnesses." Police, who have been urging victims or witnesses to report any cases, have not released official figures on the number of assault reports during the lockdown.

But prosecutors reported last week that two women were attacked in rare rapes in public spaces within 24 hours of each other — one in a park, the other on a street — in Seine-Saint-Denis, just north of Paris. Geraldine

Franck, a rights advocate in Paris, said she had tracked numerous accounts on social media by women harassed while trying to take advantage of their rare moments outside. "These moments have turned into an anguishing ordeal, and women quickly return home out of fear," she said. "Day is now just like night, for women there's no longer any difference." That fear, "normally felt only at night," is shared by Daniella Corallo-Martin, 26, who said men had been harassing her daily on her Metro trips since mid-March. She has adopted a series of precautions for navigating "a strange atmosphere, lots of drifters, deranged people, the ones who normally are just part of the crowd. "I keep my eyes open for anyone following me, and on the

platform I always find someone to stand next to. I never get in a train that's almost empty, and I don't listen to any music," the migrant aid worker said. Equality Minister Marlene Schiappa said Thursday that she was worried about "a real risk of increased sexual violence" from May 11, when the stay-at-home orders are set to be lifted across wide swathes of the country. She pointed to the risk of pent-up energy among aggressors along with "a sense of impunity" since streets are still expected to be thinned because people will be discouraged to ensure social distancing. Her ministry has set up a task force of experts to determine which measures will be taken to protect women once the lockdown begin to be lifted.

# Millions of Americans without traditional bank accounts

(News Agencies) While millions of US workers have already received a quick relief payment from the federal treasury through direct deposit to help them get through the coronavirus pandemic, millions of others without traditional bank accounts must wait weeks for paper checks. When the checks finally arrive, this disproportionately black and Hispanic population often has little choice but to use expensive check-cashing services to access the money. 'I live check to check, and right now I need more groceries,' Akeil Smith, 35, said as she stood inside Payomatic, a small check-cashing store in a predominantly black neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY.

In the six weeks since the deadly flu-like virus, also known as COVID-19, shut down much of the US economy, more than 30 million American workers have filed for unemployment insurance. Congress, in

response to the financial impacts of the virus passed a \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help both businesses and Americans wait out the pandemic. The government in April then began sending out \$1,200 for each individual, \$2,400 for each married couple and another \$500 for each dependent child to poor and middle-class families across the US. Wealthier families got either a reduced payout or nothing depending on their income.

As the financial relief is rolled out, there have been 1,185,982 confirmed cases in the US of the coronavirus, which has been blamed for 68,390 deaths. To help smooth the delivery of the payments, the government launched an online portal for people to provide their banking information for direct deposit. But that system offered nothing to people without savings or checking accounts. A House Ways and Means

Committee memo obtained by AP estimated about 5 million paper checks will be issued each week, meaning those most in need could wait many weeks for their payments. In Houston, Ta'Mar Bethune, a 41-year-old mother of four grown children who is raising a grandchild, is likely to wait a while. As a younger woman, she struggled for years with affording bank account fees until her account was closed. In the 1990s, she also was a victim of identity theft and never fully recovered. More than 20 years later, Bethune still cannot pass a standard background check to open a checking account because the banking system views her as too risky, she said. To get by, she transfers the money she makes as a professional hairdresser and babysitter onto a non-bank debit card. 'They charge you an arm and a leg,' she said, citing a monthly fee and a charge for every swipe or



withdrawal. 'You never get your full money. It's bad, but I have no other choice.' Bethune receives financial coaching from the Houston Area Urban League, a nonprofit organization helping low- to moderate-income families examine their behaviors around spending and saving. The organization says many families are reluctant to open bank accounts, especially if they have been burned by the system. 'Nobody wants to be exploited,' said Carmela Walker, a

financial coach for the group. Approximately 8.4 million US households were considered 'unbanked' in 2017, meaning that no one in the household had an account, according to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Another 24.2 million households were 'underbanked,' meaning they might have a bank account but members of the household also used an alternative financial service for money orders, check cashing, international remittances, payday

loans and pawn shop loans, often at high costs. Some of those services have been criticized for being predatory and marketing to black and Hispanic communities, which are disproportionately unbanked. Roughly 17 per cent of black households and 14 per cent of Hispanic households were without a bank account in 2017, compared with just 3 per cent of white households and 2.5 per cent of Asian American households, the FDIC said.

# Three Russian doctors fall from hospital windows, raising questions amid coronavirus pandemic

(News Agencies) Three frontline health care workers have mysteriously fallen out of hospital windows in Russia over the past two weeks, heightening public attention to the working conditions for doctors and medical professionals amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Two of those health care workers are dead, and one remains hospitalized.

All three incidents, which are being investigated by Russian law enforcement authorities, have prompted intense discussion in the Russian press and on social media.

Alexander Shulepov, an ambulance doctor in Voronezh, a city about 320 miles south of Moscow, is in serious condition after falling from a hospital window on Saturday. Local state television, citing regional health officials, said he fell out of second-floor window of the Novousmanskaya hospital, where he worked and was receiving treatment after testing positive for coronavirus.

Shulepov was hospitalized for coronavirus on April 22, the same day he and his colleague Alexander Kosyakin posted a video online saying that Shulepov had been forced to continue working after testing positive for coronavirus.

Kosyakin had previously criticized hospital administration for protective gear shortages on his social media and was questioned by the police for allegedly

spreading fake news.

Kosyakin confirmed these details to CNN in an interview.

"[Shulepov] is an intensive care unit, as far as I know in a serious condition, last time I spoke to him was on the 30th of April, we checked in with each other," Kosyakin told CNN. "He felt fine, he was getting ready to get discharged from the hospital ... and all of a sudden this happened, it's not clear why and what for, so many questions that I don't even have the answer to."

The regional department of Russia's health ministry told CNN in a statement that Shulepov "is a victim of an accident due to his own lack of caution" and is receiving all necessary medical care. Police have not responded to CNN's request for comment.

The Novousmanskaya hospital said in a statement that Shulepov had been taken off a shift as soon as he informed the hospital administration about his positive diagnosis and was offered hospitalization in the infectious diseases ward. Three days later, Shulepov retracted his previous statements, saying that in his video with Kosyakin

he was "overwhelmed by emotions." The second video Shulepov recorded featured Igor Potanin, the head doctor of the Novousmanskaya hospital, who said his medical staff has enough

spending a week in intensive care, the regional department of the Health Ministry said in a statement. Local TV station TVK Krasnoyarsk reported at the time that Nepomnyashchaya allegedly

fell out of a window during a meeting with regional health officials, during which they discussed turning the clinic into a coronavirus facility. Nepomnyashchaya was reported to have opposed those changes due to the lack of protective gear in the hospital. The Health Ministry's regional health department denied the allegations in a statement, adding that the hospital is in "reserve" for coronavirus patients and its staff has

been trained and equipped. The hospital did not respond to CNN's requests for comment. On April 24, Natalya Lebedeva, head of the emergency medical service at Star City, the main training base for Russia's cosmonauts, died in a hospital after a fall. The hospital within the Federal Biomedical Agency, which says it treated her for suspected coronavirus, released a statement that "a tragic accident" occurred, without elaborating. The hospital did not respond to CNN's request for comment.



protective equipment.

"I spoke about this to the department's employees: I won't let anyone go to outpatients or inpatients if we don't have enough means of protection, I told them I'd go myself there, but I will not send anyone," Potanin said.

It is rare for doctors to fall from windows in Russia, but Shulepov was the third health worker to fall out of a window in the country in the past two weeks. On May 1, Elena Nepomnyashchaya, the acting head doctor of a hospital in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, died after

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# Florida is back in business!

**Cheers go up as freshly groomed beaches reopen at 7am - and restaurants and retailers open for 25% capacity trade as the Sunshine State joins nearly half of America in relaxing lockdown**

(News Agencies) Florida has now officially reopened with most coronavirus restrictions being lifted as of today as about half of all US states partially reopen their economies after the lockdown.

As part of the reopening in Florida, which has seen 1,300 deaths and 36,000 infections among its 21.5 million residents, retailers and restaurants across much of the state can open their doors at a 25 percent capacity. While some beaches across parts of the state were allowed to reopen last month, Clearwater Beach in Tampa officially reopened to the public before sunrise on Monday morning.

Police removed 'closed' signs from barricades at 7am to the cheers of the 50 or so people waiting to step on the freshly groomed sand. Clearwater police have a large presence patrolling the beach and are urging



people to socially distance.

Cafes along the beach also reopened with eateries allowed to resume dine-in services if they have outdoor seating and can ensure appropriate social distancing. Medical practices can also resume elective surgeries and procedures as part of the state's phased reopening. Movie theaters, bars and fitness clubs will remain closed for now.

Governor Rick DeSantis has left existing restrictions in place across Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties - the three most

highly populated in the state.

DeSantis had drawn criticism for waiting until April 2 to clamp down on commerce - after most other states had already done so - in part because of Florida's high proportion of elderly residents - more than a fifth are age 65 and over - who are especially vulnerable to the virus.

But Florida, a key swing electoral swing state, appears to have avoided the worst of the health crisis seen in other states such as New York and New Jersey.

The highest daily number of infections occurred on

April 17 with just over 1,400 new cases. New daily infections have been considerably lower since then and only increased above 1,000 on April 23 and May 1. The highest daily deaths occurred on April 28 with 83 deaths and fatalities appear to be on the decline since then.

The state does not appear to have met all the White House's guidelines for reopening, which include 14 days of declining cases and contact tracers to track infections. The number of US cases has now topped 1.1 million and the death toll has increased to more than 68,500.

States, mostly in the South, the Midwest and mountain West, have moved to relax restrictions since Georgia led the way last month. Georgia took another step toward a full restart by allowing all businesses to reopen from Friday. Large crowds of people were seen in Atlanta on Sunday as shelter-in-place orders expired and businesses reopened. Health experts are now concerned that warmer weather could prove to be challenging to manage coronavirus as restaurants, hair salons and other businesses reopen across the

country. On Saturday, thousands of people gathered on the National Mall in Washington to view a US Navy flyover to honor healthcare workers and others battling the pandemic. In New York City, the warmest weather yet this spring caused picnickers and sunbathers to flock to green spaces in Manhattan, including crowded conditions at the Christopher Street Pier in Greenwich Village. Last week, California ordered beaches in Orange County to close, after crowds defied public health guidelines to throng the popular shoreline. Police in the county's Huntington Beach said people were complying on Sunday. Dr Deborah Birx, coordinator for the White House coronavirus task force, said on Fox News Sunday that massing on beaches was not safe unless people kept at least six feet apart.

# More than 770 lawsuits are filed against hospitals



(News Agencies) More than 770 lawsuits have been filed against hospitals, nursing homes, gyms, airlines and cruise lines, in a wave of litigation stemming from the coronavirus. In New York, still the global epicenter of the disease, there have been some 250 lawsuits filed, according to a database made by international law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth. One of them brought by the nurse's union against the state and two hospitals alleges that officials failed

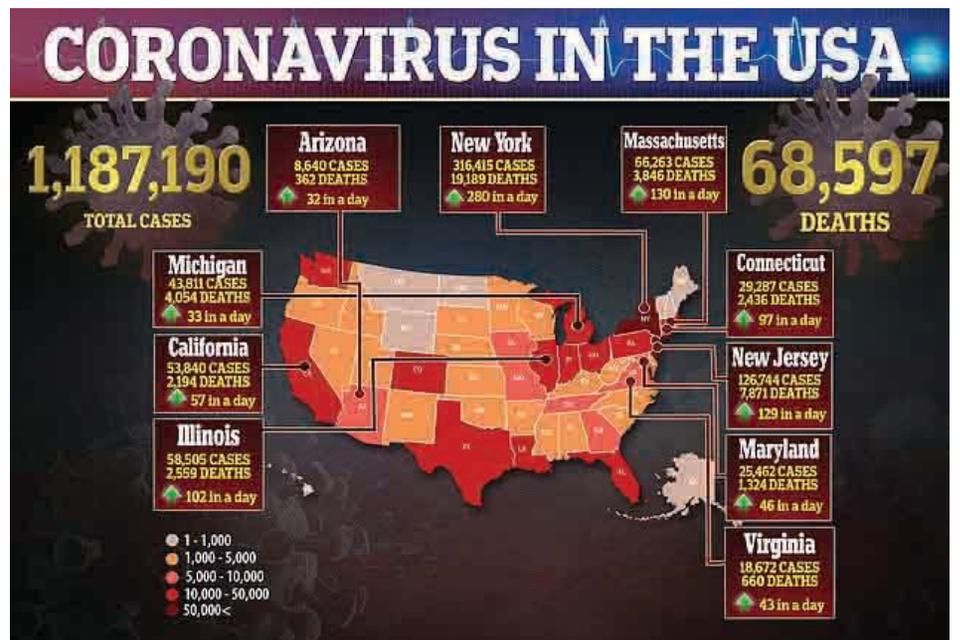
to supply enough PPE and ensure their staff would not contract the disease. Meanwhile families of deceased relatives at a care home in Atlanta have accused it of not protecting the elderly residents by continuing with events and group meals. And there have been class actions, including against Ticketmaster, over cancelled live events. One suit in Illinois claims the box office company 'sought to force their customers to bear the brunt of their own shortsightedness,' The

Washington Post reported. That breach-of-contract suit alleges that Ticketmaster withheld funds from thousands of fans. Neither Ticketmaster, nor its parent company Live Nation, has filed a response in court yet, and a spokesperson declined to comment. The country's airlines - now dependent on government billions in relief - have been swarmed by suits claiming that customers have been unable to retrieve refunds for cancelled flights. Farah and

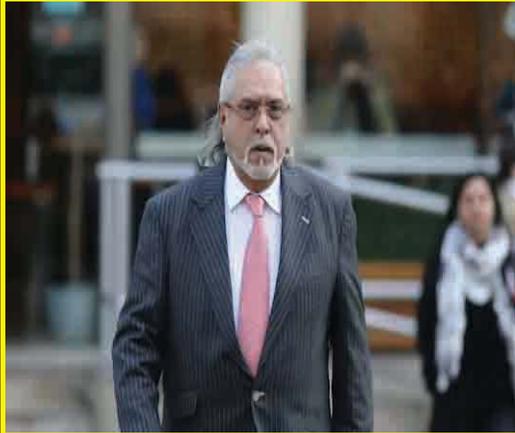
Mohammed Toutounchian, from Los Angeles, are taking action against Princess Cruises after they say they were left stranded on the Diamond Princess in Japan for two weeks early in the crisis. The couple's attorney, James Urbanic, told the Post that the quarantine was mishandled, with food brought uncovered to their

cabin as the disease spread on board. In a statement Princess Cruises said: 'Our response throughout this process has focused on the well-being of our guests and crew within the parameters dictated to us by the government agencies involved and the evolving medical understanding of this new

illness.' The legal future of cases stemming from the virus could depend on lawmakers, as well as judges. Some states have already introduced immunity measures for hospitals and nursing homes. White House officials have also ventilated the possibility of liability shields for businesses.



## Vijay Mallya Files Appeal against London High Court's Extradition Order to India



(News Agencies) London: Vijay Mallya on Monday filed an application seeking leave to appeal in the UK Supreme Court, nearly two weeks after the embattled liquor baron lost his London High Court appeal against an extradition order to India on charges of fraud and money laundering related to unrecovered loans to his now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

The 64-year-old businessman had 14 days to file this application to seek permission to move the higher court on the High Court judgment from April 20, which dismissed his appeal against a Westminster Magistrates' Court extradition order certified by the UK Home Secretary. The leave to appeal has been filed. We have until May 14 to respond," said a spokesperson for the UK Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which represents the Indian authorities in the legal process of the extradition.

The leave to appeal to the Supreme Court is on a point of law of general public importance, which according to experts is a very high threshold that is not often met.

## Silver Lake to buy stake in Jio Platforms: What you need to know about the US firm

(News Agencies) Silver Lake, American private equity firm, has said it will buy about 1.15% stake in Jio Platforms, weeks after Facebook invested \$5.7 billion in the digital arm of Mukesh Ambani-owned Reliance Industries Ltd.

Silver Lake announced on Monday it will be investing Rs 5,655.75 crore (about \$746.8 million) in Jio Platforms, giving it a valuation of \$65 billion, a 12.5% premium to the value implied by the Facebook investment.

Here are key things to know about Silver Lake:

\* Silver Lake, which has approximately \$40 billion in combined assets and committed capital, was launched in 1999 as a specialist firm focused on technology company investments.

\* The portfolio of investments of the Menlo Park-headquartered PE firm collectively generates revenues of more than \$204 billion annually.



\* For Silver Lake, this is the second investment in an Indian firm. It had invested in Bengaluru-based commodity trading and risk management software firm Eka Software in 2013.

\* It has invested in dozens of tech

firms over the years. They include video game engine maker Unity, Skype, consultancy firm Gartner, Alibaba's Ant Financial, and Chinese ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing, several of it in recent weeks.

\* Its portfolio also includes Airbnb, Motorola Solutions and City Football Group. \* Silver Lake sold Skype to Microsoft for \$8.5 billion in 2011 in one of the most successful private equity exits in history.

\* Silver Lake has invested in Expedia, Twitter (in which it invested \$1 billion), Airbnb, Waymo, the self-driving unit of Alphabet Inc, and ServiceMax this year. ServiceMax is a cloud-based provider of software used in inventory and workforce management.

## Bad bank debts could delay India's recovery from Covid-19 crisis: Report

(News Agencies) India expects bad debts at its banks could double after the coronavirus crisis brought the economy to a sudden halt, a senior government official and four top bankers told Reuters.

Indian banks are already grappling with 9.35 trillion rupees (\$123 billion) of soured loans, which was equivalent to about 9.1% of their total assets at the end of September 2019.

"There is a considered view in the government that bank non-performing assets (NPAs) could double to 18-20%

by the end of the fiscal year, as 20-25% of outstanding loans face a risk of default," the official with direct knowledge of the matter said.

A fresh surge in bad debt could hit credit growth and delay India's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

"These are unprecedented times and the way it's going we can expect banks to report double the amount of NPAs from what we've seen in earlier quarters," the finance head of a top public sector bank told Reuters.

The official and bankers declined to

be named as they were not officially authorized to discuss the matter with media. India's finance ministry declined to comment, while the RBI and Indian Banks' Association, the main industry body, did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment. The Indian economy has ground to a standstill amid a 40-day nationwide lockdown to rein in the spread of coronavirus cases. The lockdown has now been extended by a further two weeks, but the government has begun to ease some restrictions in districts that are relatively unscathed by the virus.

## Sebi investigates Franklin Templeton

The parent's inquiries revolve around the impact of the decision on their brand, while Sebi's probe seeks to understand the fund house's commitment to adequate risk management, portfolio diversification, credit research.

(News Agencies) unit had violated rules or acted in the best interest of its investors, following the collapse of six of the asset manager's debt funds, two people with direct knowledge of the developments said.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) will probe whether the asset manager had misrepresented the risk involved in investing in these funds by inaccurately classifying them as 'income' funds, committed a violation of the model code of conduct, and whether the fund's investments met fiduciary requirements. "It is to ascertain whether there was a failure of risk management," said one of the two people mentioned above. "The queries from Sebi are on the portfolio of these six schemes, rationale for choosing these papers, extent of bank borrowing, and how liquid the underlying bonds are," according to this person. Typically, in such instances, Sebi audits the investment rationale and minutes of meetings of the investment committee for the past five years, the person said. The schemes allegedly did not follow

Sebi's scheme classification mandate. Credit risk funds must invest at least 65% of their holdings in securities rated below AA+, according to Sebi norms. Other types of debt schemes, including income funds, are meant to invest in higher-rated bonds.

Franklin Templeton India's parent has also initiated an inquiry into the reasons leading to the drastic action, said the second person mentioned above. It is, however, not clear whether the inquiry has been entrusted to a third party. The parent's inquiries revolve around the impact of the decision on their brand, while Sebi's probe seeks to understand the fund house's commitment to adequate risk management, portfolio diversification, credit research and whether the funds violated Sebi's fund categorisation norms, the person said. "The Franklin inquiry involves questions to the Indian team about prudential steps taken by the asset manager while launching and running the schemes and whether the fund house had kept aside adequate surplus cash to meet redemption stress," the person said.

## Retail chain J. Crew Group file for bankruptcy protection

(News Agencies) J. Crew Group Inc. filed for bankruptcy, unable to revive flagging sales of its preppy clothing line amid the coronavirus pandemic and crushed by debt rooted in a long-ago leveraged buyout. The retail chain reached a deal with a majority of its lenders to convert \$1.65 billion of debt into equity, J. Crew said in a statement Monday. Lenders led by Anchorage Capital Group, Blackstone Group Inc.'s GSO Capital Partners and Davidson Kempner Capital Management are providing \$400 million of financing that will allow the company to maintain operations during the Chapter 11 restructuring, according to the statement.

The bankruptcy filing in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Richmond, Virginia, allows J. Crew to stay in business while cutting its borrowings. Normally that would include keeping the doors open for its J. Crew and Madewell stores, but sales at those outlets vanished when the coronavirus forced shoppers to stay home and nonessential businesses to shut. Even before the virus spread, the company was struggling because shoppers were defecting to online merchants and consumer tastes were changing. J. Crew had been trying to rebound from some fashion misses and complaints of poor-quality clothing.

# It could be war



Beijing could face a rising wave of hostility in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak that could tip relations with the United States into 'armed confrontation', an internal Chinese report has warned. The report, presented early last month by the Ministry of State Security to top Beijing leaders including President Xi Jinping, concluded that global anti-China sentiment is at its highest since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, the sources said.

As a result, Beijing faces a wave of anti-China sentiment led by the United States in the aftermath of the pandemic and needs to be prepared in a worst-case scenario for armed confrontation between the two global powers, according to people familiar with the report's content, who declined to be identified given the sensitivity of the matter. The report was drawn up by the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), a think tank affiliated with the Ministry of State Security, China's top intelligence body. Although the briefing paper remains disclosed, the content of the document was described to Reuters by people who had direct knowledge of its findings.

'I don't have relevant information,' the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson's office said in a statement responding to questions from Reuters on the report. China's Ministry of State Security

has no public contact details and could not be reached for comment. CICIR, an influential think tank that until 1980 was within the Ministry of State Security and advises the Chinese government on foreign and security policy, did not reply to a request for comment. But the presentation of the report shows how seriously Beijing takes the threat of a building backlash that could threaten what China sees as its strategic investments overseas and its view of its security standing, according to Reuters. Relations between China and the United States are widely seen to be at their worst point in decades, with deepening mistrust and friction points from US allegations of unfair trade and technology practices to disputes over Hong Kong, Taiwan and contested territories in the South China Sea.

In recent days, US President Donald Trump, facing a more difficult re-election campaign as the coronavirus has claimed tens of thousands of American lives and ravaged the U.S. economy, has been ramping up his criticism of Beijing and threatening new tariffs on China. His administration, meanwhile, is considering retaliatory measures against China over the outbreak, officials said. It is widely believed in Beijing that the United States wants to contain a rising China, which has become more assertive globally as its economy has grown. The paper

concluded that Washington views China's rise as an economic and national security threat and a challenge to Western democracies, the people said. The report also said the United States was aiming to undercut the ruling Communist Party by undermining public confidence. Chinese officials had a 'special responsibility' to inform their people and the world of the threat posed by the coronavirus 'since they were the first to learn of it,' US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in response to questions from Reuters.

Without directly addressing the assessment made in the Chinese report, Ortagus added: 'Beijing's efforts to silence scientists, journalists, and citizens and spread disinformation exacerbated the dangers of this health crisis.' A spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council declined to comment. The report also warned that anti-China sentiment sparked by the coronavirus could fuel resistance to China's Belt and Road infrastructure investment projects, and that Washington could step up financial and military support for regional allies, making the security situation in Asia more volatile. Three decades ago, in the aftermath of Tiananmen, the United States and many Western governments imposed sanctions against China including banning or restricting arms sales and technology transfers.

China is far more powerful nowadays. Xi has revamped China's military strategy to create a fighting force equipped to win modern wars. He is expanding China's air and naval reach in a challenge to more than 70 years of U.S. military dominance in Asia. In its statement, China's foreign ministry called for cooperation, saying, 'the sound and steady development of China-U.S. relations' serve the interests of both countries and the international community. It added: 'any words or actions that engage in political manipulation or stigmatisation under the pretext of the pandemic, including taking the opportunity to sow discord between countries, are not conducive to international cooperation against the pandemic.'

One of those with knowledge of the report said it was regarded by some in the Chinese intelligence community as China's version of the 'Novikov Telegram', a 1946 dispatch by the Soviet ambassador to

Washington, Nikolai Novikov, that stressed the dangers of U.S. economic and military ambition in the wake of World War Two. Novikov's missive was a response to U.S. diplomat George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' from Moscow that said the Soviet Union did not see the possibility for peaceful coexistence with the West, and that containment was the best long-term strategy. The two documents helped set the stage for the strategic thinking that defined both sides of the Cold War. China has been accused by the United States of suppressing early information on the virus, which was first detected in the central city of Wuhan, and downplaying its risks.

Beijing has repeatedly denied that it covered up the extent or severity of the virus outbreak. China has managed to contain domestic spread of the virus and has been trying to assert a leading role in

the global battle against COVID-19. That has included a propaganda push around its donations and sale of medical supplies to the United States and other countries and sharing of expertise. But China faces a growing backlash from critics who have called to hold Beijing accountable for its role in the pandemic. Trump has said he will cut off funding for the World Health Organization (WHO), which he called 'very China-centric,' something WHO officials have denied. Australia's government has called for an international investigation into the origins and spread of the virus. Last month, France summoned China's ambassador to protest a publication on the website of China's embassy that criticised Western handling of coronavirus. The virus has so far infected more than 3 million people globally and caused more than 200,000 deaths.

## Some retailers are too broke to go bankrupt

On Monday, J.Crew became the first national retailer to file for bankruptcy during the crisis. Experts say they're certain it won't be the last. But they also say many retailers are likely holding off filing until they are able to make plans for the stores they need to close during bankruptcy.

"We probably would have seen more file by now if stores were open," said Reshmi Basu, an expert in retail bankruptcies at Debtwire, which tracks the finances of troubled companies. "We're clearly seeing a lot of companies engage [bankruptcy] advisors. But it's not a great time to file. A lot of companies are on hold because you can't get the money you need coming in from liquidation sales."

Numerous national retailers are reported to be close to a bankruptcy filing. JCPenney (JCP) disclosed on April 15 that it missed a debt payment and that it was looking at strategic options during the 30-day

grace period to make that payment. According to published reports Neiman Marcus also is close to filing. Neither JCPenney nor Neiman Marcus are commenting on their plans. Filing for bankruptcy does not need to be a death sentence. Companies can use the process to close unprofitable operations, shed debt and other liabilities and emerge as more profitable companies. But those turnarounds require funding during reorganization, and normally that comes in the form of debtor-in-possession loans, or DIP loans. DIP lenders are willing to loan money to troubled companies because bankruptcy law allows them to be repaid before other lenders. And in the retail sector, that DIP lenders depend on the inventory of stores to be closed to be repaid. "Historically, the store closing sales are pretty important," said Matthew Katz, managing partners at consultant SSA & Co. "The

longer the [store closing sales] take, and more aged the merchandise gets, the less the value. That value is what the lenders are looking at." Most major companies that file for bankruptcy do so intending to stay in business. But many fail, including Toys "R" Us and Sports Authority. Once a company files for bankruptcy, the clock is ticking on its effort to win approval of the bankruptcy court to stay alive. After 180 days in bankruptcy, a company's creditors can push the court to halt the reorganization effort and start the process of liquidation. Some stores that have been closed because of stay-at-home orders and orders mandating the closure of non-essential businesses, are slowly starting to reopen this week. But for many stores and malls, it remains to be seen how many shoppers want to return, particularly to troubled department stores that sell few essential items.

# Racism in America is Alive, and Still kicking

The video is short and shocking. It's taken from the perspective of a vehicle following a young black man running at a jogger's pace. The jogger is 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery. Arbery approaches a pickup truck parked in the street. There are two white men, one outside the vehicle with a shotgun, 34-year-old Travis McMichael, and the other, his father, 64-year-old Gregory McMichael, standing aloft in the flatbed.

The McMichaels had reportedly chased Arbery, blocking his path at another location, at which point he had turned around and jogged another way to avoid them. In the video, when the men encounter each other, there's immediately an altercation. Arbery and the younger McMichael fight for control of the shotgun. Shots are fired. Arbery tries to run away, but he is clearly wounded and his knees buckle. He collapses to the ground. The video ends.

After Arbery fell, the younger McMichael rolled over the limp body "to see if the male had a weapon," according to a police report. There was blood on McMichael's hands when the police arrived. Arbery died of his wounds.

This is how the police report detailed the father's explanation for why he and his son chased Arbery:

"McMichael stated he was in his front yard and saw the suspect from the break-ins 'hauling ass' down Satilla Drive toward Burford Drive. McMichael stated he then ran inside his house and called to Travis (McMichael) and said, 'Travis, the guy is running down the street, let's go.' McMichael stated he went to

his bedroom and grabbed his .357 Magnum and Travis grabbed his shotgun because they 'didn't know if the male was armed or not.'"

Arbery was not armed, and he was not the "suspect" in any break-ins. He was a former high school football player who liked to stay active and was jogging in the small city of Brunswick, Glynn County, Ga., near his home.

Neither of the McMichaels was arrested or charged. From the time this happened in late February, they have had the luxury of sleeping in their own beds, free men, while Arbery's body is confined to a coffin, deep in a grave at New Springfield Baptist Church in Alexander, Ga.

According to The New York Times, "Gregory McMichael is a former Glynn County police officer and a former investigator with the local district attorney's office who retired last May." The local prosecutor recused herself from the case because Gregory McMichael had worked in her office. The next prosecutor, a district attorney, also recused himself because his son worked for the district attorney for whom Gregory McMichael had worked.

But, before the second prosecutor's recusal, he said in a letter obtained by The New York Times: "It appears Travis McMichael, Greg McMichael and Bryan Williams were following in 'hot pursuit,' a burglary suspect, with solid first hand probable cause, in their neighborhood, and asking/telling him to stop. It appears their intent was to stop and hold this criminal suspect until law enforcement arrived. Under Georgia law this

is perfectly legal."

The third and current prosecutor on the case said Tuesday that the case should be heard by a grand jury.

He cites the statute: "A private person may arrest an offender if the offense is committed in his presence or within his immediate knowledge."

But there is a clear problem here: Arbery had committed no offense. His only offense, the thing that drew suspicion, was that he was black and male and

running through these white men's neighborhood.

The recused prosecutor's letter states: "Given the fact Arbery initiated the fight, at the point Arbery grabbed the shotgun, under Georgia law, McMichael was allowed to use deadly force to protect himself."

The similarities here to the Trayvon Martin case are uncanny. These men stalked Arbery, projecting onto him a criminality of which he was not guilty, then used self-defense as justification to gun him

down in an altercation that they provoked. Arbery was killed eight years to the month after Martin was killed, just about three hours north. The Black Lives Matter movement that peaked a few years ago focused activism and protests largely around police killings of black people, but the moment was born of another phenomenon, one present in the Martin case and again here: anti-black vigilantism. This form of anti-blackness marks black masculinity as menacing, and state laws

protect the vigilantes' rights to involve their weapons and their power to end lives. The most infuriating part of most of the cases in which unnamed black men are killed, either by the police or vigilantes, is the lack of arrest, prosecution or conviction. It is not any suggestion that the killers were right, morally, but rather that in most cases it could be reasonably argued that the killings were legal.

(By Charles M. Blow for NY Times)

## #BoysLockerRoom. A Delhi Students' Group Chat Is Every Parent's Nightmare

(Contd on page 40)

The cyber-crime division of the police has also written to Facebook-owned Instagram for details on the group that is every parent's worst nightmare. The controversy flared on Sunday after several social media users posted screenshots on Instagram and Twitter of an online group called "Bois Locker Room". They show members of the group - said to be Class 11 and 12 students from some of Delhi's top schools - posting photos of teenage girls without their consent along with comments too crude to be reproduced. A number of conversations purportedly showed members talking about sexual assault often against their own classmates, raising questions about normalising of rape, misogyny and

objectification in schools. The allegations triggered outrage on social media with the top trending hashtag #BoysLockerRoom amassing thousands of posts on Twitter and other platforms. The Delhi Commission for Women Chairperson Swati Maliwal called for the arrest of those associated with the group. "The DCW has sent notices to Instagram and Delhi Police. We want these boys to be arrested immediately and the strongest action to be taken against them," she told NDTV. A social media user, one of the first to highlight the group, wrote on Twitter, "I have never in my life been so furious. These shameless f\*\*\*\*\* are not even slightly guilty about what they've done. They're going around and hacking our

accounts now. NOTHING CAN OR WILL STOP US." The Mumbai Police, known for its social media savvy, also joined the conversation. According to social media accounts that posted the screenshots, members of "Bois Locker Room" even threatened to leak nude photographs of the women who reported them and launched a second group. Sexist attitudes, rape jokes and so called "locker room banter" are considered by experts the foundations that escalate from normalisation of rape culture to outright sexual assault. A widely-publicised international poll in 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, ranked India as the most dangerous country for women due to the high risk of sexual violence.

## India's chemical plant disaster: another case of history repeating itself

(Contd on page 40) But there are also startling parallels. The leak in Visakhapatnam, an industrial port city in Andhra Pradesh state on India's east coast, was from two 5,000-tonne tanks of liquid chemicals. According to a local police officer, it occurred as the plant was being restarted as coronavirus restrictions imposed in late March were eased. In Bhopal, a much bigger leak occurred, also from a tank full of chemical liquid - extremely hazardous methyl isocyanate - as parts of the complex were reactivated after a shutdown. In both cases, the leak occurred at night, releasing gas into the crowded homes of workers and their families living around the factories. And both plants had overseas owners: South Korea's biggest petrochemical maker, LG Chem, in the case of Visakhapatnam, and US-based Union Carbide the majority owner in the case of Bhopal. Both incidents are only the most high-profile of thousands, big and small, that happen every year in India. Quite how many industrial accidents occur in India annually is unknown, as many go unreported. Government statistics - which show 54,000 killed or injured in factory accidents between

2014 and 2016 - are thought to only represent a fraction of all casualties. Campaigners claim the true figure is up to 15 times greater. One problem is that few workers or their relatives are aware of their rights or have the resources to seek legal redress. Many are migrant workers from distant rural communities, a higher proportion are women, a significant number come from the most disadvantaged communities, and so are vulnerable to physical or other threats. Employers often pay compensation privately to ensure a bereaved family's silence.

Though a profusion of laws exist to protect workers in India, few are enforced. Inspections are rare, and some officials are easily compromised. Last year a fire caused by a short circuit killed 43 people and injured 60 in a workshop in Delhi. The building had been repeatedly inspected by local officials but no alarms were raised despite its evidently poor condition. Police said they would investigate alleged corruption. Similarly, owners often escape sanction. The criminal justice system in India is slow, and scarce police resources are unlikely to be focused on the investigation of

industrial accidents. Local political rivalries, or tensions between state-level and national-level governments can also complicate the search for justice. Pursuing multinationals or foreign owners is expensive, complicated, time-consuming and fraught with uncertainty. In the case of Bhopal, the then chairman of the company, a US citizen, refused to return to India to face charges, and Union Carbide paid only \$470m (£282m) in 1989 to the Indian government in an out-of-court settlement. In 2010 a court sentenced eight Indians to two years in jail. Finally, there is the profound problem of political will. Campaigners point to the example of traffic accidents. There are between 150,000 and 300,000 road deaths a year in India. Most of the casualties are poor people, with pedestrians and cyclists prominent among victims. Political decision-makers are significantly more likely to be among those being driven in large, safe cars on the chaotic roads than among those suffering most from the potholes, poor discipline and driving skills, or badly maintained vehicles.

## The challenge of lockdown 3.0

(Contd on page 40) and this was always going to be difficult because of the inability of local police officials or district authorities to distinguish between what was permitted and prohibited, and who to allow and who to stop. But the second, more important prerequisite was citizens exercising a high degree of responsibility. On day 1, this was missing. The most egregious reflection of this was in liquor shops. People lined up in hundreds, often without masks, jostling with each other, to buy cases of alcohol. The police authorities had to, in some cases, resort to lathi-charge or close shops. Liquor is an important source of revenue for state governments. Given the dire straits of public finances, as well as popular demand, opening stores made sense. But if citizens behave with such irresponsibility, then don't rule out a revision of rules in the future. In times of the pandemic, it is not just about drinking responsibly - but also purchasing it responsibly. It is about maintaining social distancing and knowing that the right to step out comes with responsibilities.

# Georgia shooting of Ahmaud Arbery spurs outcry



The case of a black man in Georgia who was fatally shot in February after being pursued by two armed white men is gaining widespread attention among lawmakers, particularly after a graphic video of the incident was released this week.

"Ahmaud Arbery was murdered for being Black," Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said in a Thursday morning tweet. "His White assailants were allowed to roam free \*for months\* after lynching him. They faced no charges, no arrests. Police had video of Ahmaud's murder the day it happened. His family deserves justice. Our country deserves answers."

Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was killed on Feb. 23 when 64-year-old Gregory McMichael spotted Arbery jogging and called 911 to report a "black man running down the street" and said he suspected the man was involved in recent burglaries. McMichael called his son, Travis. The pair armed themselves, and then tracked Arbery down on the road.

The police report says Gregory McMichael told officers he and his son first tried to stop Arbery by shouting, "Stop, stop, we want to talk to you!" The father claimed that Arbery attacked his son and they got into a struggle for a shotgun. Police said the son fired two shots.

Arbery's family maintains he was simply out for a jog at the time. Justice must be blind. Bring #Ahmaud Arbery's killers to justice," Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., tweeted.

The video shows a black man running at a slow pace toward a white truck that is stopped in the middle of a country road. Two men are seen outside the vehicle, including one standing on the truck's bed. The black man seems to attempt to run around

the truck, and the moment he clears the vehicle, a shot rings out. A brief struggle ensues in what looks like an effort to control a shotgun, and another two shots are heard, according to the video. The runner staggers away and collapses. The man in the truck's bed is seen holding a handgun after he climbs out to approach the others.

The public developments in the case prompted Georgia's Republican Gov. Brian Kemp to speak out, noting that the Georgia Bureau of Investigation was assisting the prosecutor who

has been placed on the case "to ensure a thorough, independent investigation into the death of #AhmaudArbery." Georgians deserve answers," Kemp said. "State law enforcement stands ready to ensure justice is served." Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr said "I am deeply concerned with the events surrounding the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery," in a brief statement that was also shared by Kemp. A grand jury will be reviewing the case.

Others who have chimed include Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., who said the fact neither of the men who were involved in the shooting had been arrested is, "An all-too familiar story," Atlanta Mayor and potential Joe Biden VP candidate Keisha Lance Bottoms, who reflected on how sad Arbery's loss is and said "May justice be served;" and former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, also a potential Biden running mate. "I believe that there should be [an] immediate investigation of charges," Abrams said on MSNBC Wednesday. "It looks like murder. It looks like vigilante behavior that should be

charged and criminalized. And it looks like the Arbery family has been dealt a very sore hand of injustice."

Former Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., who is a former prosecutor, said he was surprised it took the video being released to get prosecutors to ask for a grand jury review.

"I guess my first question would be, why did it take the video [becoming public]?" Gowdy asked Fox News' Dana Perino on "The Daily Briefing." "If you have someone who is jogging, who is unarmed, who is shot and killed by officers who aren't officers — they aren't even law enforcement officers — why did they take video?"

The video even prompted Biden himself to weigh in earlier in the week.

"The video is clear: Ahmaud Arbery was killed in cold blood," he tweeted. "My heart goes out to his family, who deserve justice and deserve it now. It is time for a swift, full, and transparent investigation into his murder." Tom Durden, the prosecutor who was put on the Arbery case after the

previous two resigned due to previous professional ties with the older McMichael, called for the case to be reviewed by a grand jury, though he did not make clear what charges the grand jury should consider.

But due to Georgia's orders to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a grand jury would not be able to convene until at least June 13, according to Fox 5 Atlanta, meaning there is a chance the McMichaels will remain free until at least then. Some have called for the police to detain the McMichaels, who have not been charged, in the meantime.

"That is disturbing and that needs to be resolved in detention until trial," lawyer John Phillips told News4Jax of Jacksonville, Fla. "That's what it smells like is up to me is that there is just an intent not to prosecute these guys and they need to be prosecuted whether that's by a grand jury indictment or filing charges right now under Georgia law and get in the indictment later for the higher charges they have those options available to them."

(By Tyler Olson Fox News)

## Ahmaud Arbery: Anger mounts over killing of black jogger caught on video

On a sun-speckled, tree-lined street on a sunny Sunday afternoon, Ahmaud Arbery ran through his neighborhood in the coastal town of Brunswick, Georgia. Neighbors had seen him run by their homes every day for years.

One of them was Lauren Bennett, 26, who says running was what Arbery was known for around their Fancy Bluff neighborhood in Brunswick. Her security camera would ping into her phone as he raced by each day. "Yup, there goes Ahmaud," she told the Guardian, recalling his bouts of exercise. She'd heard he used to wave to another neighbor on his daily runs.

It should just have been another ordinary run for the 25-year-old Arbery back in February. But a series of events unfolded that ended in his brutal killing at the hands of two white men, which has caused anger across America and especially among black Americans and campaigners for social justice. Now, as Bennett watches the video of how his last run through her neighborhood ended in his death, she cries.

That sorrow — and rage — has

spread through Georgia and the rest of the US, and has reignited a long-running debate over the killings of young black men by white people. It was sparked by a 36-second video released online months after that late February run — a video that shed new light on how Arbery was killed. In the film, an unidentified person in a car films Arbery jogging towards a white truck parked on the road, where two men stand: one in the bed of the truck and another just to its side.

One shot rings out as Arbery disappears off camera, swerving around the truck. Another shot rings out as Arbery struggles back into frame as yet another shot is heard. Finally, he falls to the ground.

Before police made it to Arbery, he was already dead.

According to a police report, the two men, Gregory McMichael, 64, and his son, Travis McMichael, 34, had grabbed their weapons, a .357 Magnum revolver and a shotgun, jumped into a truck and began following Arbery after seeing him run by. In the video, it appears Arbery is running in the moments leading up to his death.

Two men involved in the incident have not been charged or arrested over Arbery's death, but the case will now go to a grand jury following the release of the video and the condemnation that it produced, according to a statement from the district attorney in charge, Tom Durden.

This month, the state chapter of the NAACP visited Arbery's family, calling for an end to race-based discrimination in Brunswick, a majority African American city. Tuesday evening, its local chapter called for swift action, urging arrests to be made in the case and the immediate dismissal of the Glynn county police chief.

"This is murder," wrote Lee Merritt, a civil rights attorney who is representing Arbery's mother, in a statement posted to Facebook.

Arbery's mother has been unable to watch the video that now has over 4 million views and has drawn condemnation from prominent figures across the country, including the former vice-president and 2020 Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

The McMichaels, according to

numerous reports, argue they were abiding by Georgia's stand-your-ground statute, a similar defense to that used by security guard George Zimmerman in the killing of black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida.

Arbery's death is one of dozens of killings of black boys and men across America, who have been shot in their communities often while engaging in everyday activities. Tamir Rice was killed at a playground in Ohio; Terence Crutcher slain while being pulled over by police; and Walter Scott shot dead in South Carolina after a traffic stop.

LChris Stewart, an Atlanta-based civil rights attorney who has represented a number of families like Arbery's, has a close relationship with the lawyer representing Arbery's mother. The two have spoken about what happened to Arbery. When Stewart first heard what happened, he thought to himself, "I jog and I live in a predominantly white neighborhood now. And, you know, if someone suspects you're a criminal because you're black, then this is going to turn into the Wild Wild West."

(By Khushbu Shah The Guardian)

# Ahmaud Arbery's parents call for arrests after 'modern lynching in the middle of the day'

Video surfaced online this week of a black man killed by two white men in Georgia, causing public outcry

The parents of a black man killed by two white men in Georgia have called for immediate arrests after video footage of the incident surfaced online this week.

Public outcry over the shooting on 23 February of Ahmaud Arbery has intensified following the video's release. A large crowd of demonstrators marched in the neighborhood where Arbery was killed, and the state opened its own investigation, which the governor and attorney general pledged to support. Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper Jones, told reporters on Wednesday her 25-year-old son "was just out for his daily jog" when he was shot dead in a neighborhood outside the port city of Brunswick. She hasn't watched the video.

"I saw my son come into the world," Jones said. "And seeing him leave the world, it's not something that I'll want to see ever."

Neighbours told the Guardian they often saw Arbery out for his daily jog, and he would wave at some as he passed. No arrests have been made or charges filed in coastal Glynn county, more than two



months after the killing. An outside prosecutor in charge of the case said he wants a grand jury to decide whether criminal charges are warranted. That won't happen until at least mid-June, since Georgia courts remain largely closed because of the coronavirus.

Attorneys for Arbery's family said the father and son, who have acknowledged in a police report grabbing guns and pursuing Arbery in a truck after seeing him running in their neighborhood, should be arrested now before a grand jury decides whether to indict them – as often happens in criminal cases. "These men were vigilantes, they were a posse, and they performed a modern lynching in the middle of the day," said Lee Merritt, an attorney for Arbery's mother.

Politicians, athletes and

celebrities joined the public outcry over the killing.

Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, said Arbery was "killed in cold blood" and called for a "swift, full, and transparent investigation into his murder".

NBA star LeBron James tweeted: "We're literally hunted EVERYDAY/EVERYTIME we step foot outside the comfort of our homes! Can't even go for a damn jog man! Like WTF man are you kidding me The California senator and former Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris said on Twitter the video "sickens me to my core".

"Exercising while black shouldn't be a death sentence," she said.

In the 36-second video released online on Tuesday, an unidentified person in a car films Arbery

jogging towards a white truck parked on the road, where two men stand. One shot rings out as Arbery disappears off camera, swerving around the truck. Another shot is heard as Arbery struggles back into frame, then comes another shot. Finally, he falls to the ground. Before police made it to Arbery, he was already dead.

According to a police report, the two men, Gregory McMichael, 64, and his son, Travis McMichael, 34, had grabbed their weapons, a .357 Magnum revolver and a shotgun, jumped into a truck and began following Arbery after seeing him run by. In the video, it appears Arbery is running in the moments leading up to his death. Gregory McMichael told police that he and his adult son thought Arbery matched the description of someone caught on a security camera committing a recent break-in in the neighborhood. They armed themselves with guns before getting in a truck to pursue him.

Arbery was not armed and was not considered a suspect in any burglaries. A phone number listed for Gregory McMichael has

been disconnected. The Associated Press could not immediately find a phone listing for Travis McMichael. Georgia law says a person can kill in self-defense "only if he or she reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily injury ... or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony". The law also says a person who provokes an attack or acts as "the aggressor" can't claim self-defense. According to the police report, the father said his son, Travis McMichael, got out of the truck holding a shotgun, and claimed that Arbery "began to violently attack". He claimed Arbery was shot as the two men fought over the shotgun. Merritt, the attorney for Arbery's mother, said the justice department should also investigate the death as

a hate crime. "The FBI has said it's assisting," said a DoJ spokesman, Matt Lloyd, "and as is standard protocol we look forward to working with them should information come to light of a potential federal violation." The Republican governor, Brian Kemp, threw his support behind that inquiry late on Tuesday. He tweeted: "Georgians deserve answers. State law enforcement stands ready to ensure justice is served." Georgia's attorney general, Chris Carr, also a Republican, spoke out as well. "Based on the video footage and news reports that I have seen, I am deeply concerned with the events surrounding the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery," Carr said in a statement. "I expect justice to be carried out as swiftly as possible."

(Guardian Staff and Agencies)

## Latest development in Ahmaud Arbery case

At the time of South Asian Insider going to press, both Travis McMichael, 34, and his father, Gregory, 64, father and son have been arrested. Both father and son were arrested and charged with murdering Ahmaud Arbery, a man whose shooting death in February has sparked protests, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) announced Thursday night.

## Why is Georgia only now seeking justice for Ahmaud Arbery?



WHAT IF Ahmaud Arbery had been white? What if the two men who confronted Mr. Arbery before one of them shot and killed him had been black? What if the graphic video showing a young man needlessly gunned down while on a

Sunday afternoon jog had not been anonymously posted to the Internet but, instead, had been kept hidden?

We all know the terrible answers. Had Mr. Arbery not been black, it would not have taken law

enforcement authorities in Georgia more than two months to be shamed into seeking some semblance of justice in his killing. The announcement by a Georgia prosecutor that the case would be presented to a grand jury for

consideration of criminal charges against the two men involved in the shooting came Tuesday, the same day that a video of the Feb. 23 shooting surfaced, sparking outrage and reigniting America's debate about whether black lives matter. The arrest of the two men came two days later.

The 36-second video is difficult to watch. Taken from inside a vehicle, it shows the unarmed, 25-year-old Mr. Arbery jogging on a residential road when he comes upon a white truck stopped in the street. One white man is standing in the bed of the pickup and another beside its open driver's-side door. Both are armed, one with a shotgun. Mr. Arbery runs around the truck and disappears from view before

he reemerges. There is muffled shouting and three shots sound as Mr. Arbery tussles with the man with the shotgun before he stumbles and falls on the road. There is blood on his shirt. The two men are father and son. The father, Gregory McMichael, is a former police officer and retired investigator in the local district attorney's office who told police he and his son chased Mr. Arbery because he resembled a suspect in a rash of recent break-ins. The video appears to contradict portions of that account, and the handling of the case doesn't inspire confidence. Police apparently limited their investigation to interviewing Mr. McMichael, while a prosecutor concluded that the men had acted legally

under Georgia's citizen arrest and self-defense statutes. Authorities obtained a video of the incident but refused to share it with Mr. Arbery's family. They seemed more upset that the video that appeared on the Internet had been posted than with its gut-wrenching contents.

The arrest of the father and son came after the outcry caused by the release of the video and the intervention of state officials. "All I want to do is get justice for my son," said Marcus Arbery, the slain man's father. "This is terrible. It could happen to anybody's kid." We would add: especially, and tragically, if they are black. (The Washington Post)

# No Social Distancing, More Domestic Abuse

## Alcohol Shops May Save Economy but Put Many at Risk

As alcohol shops across the country opened their shutters and saw the light of day for the first time in 41 days since the government imposed a national lockdown, guzzlers across cities broke all social distancing norms and thronged to shops in hordes.

The government's decision to open alcohol shops across red, orange and green zones was met with an overflow of enthusiasm as Indians braved the hot sun and threat of coronavirus to stand in long queues outside shops. Within just a few hours of shops opening, scenes of mass hysteria outside liquor shops flooded social media and news outlets.

The rush for alcohol was such in Delhi that four districts in the national capital had to be shut down within hours of opening to contain the chaos and panic created by crowds baying for booze.

While the Ministry of Home Affairs released a detailed list of rules alcohol shops needed to follow in order to function amid Phase three of the lockdown, it was perhaps naive of the government to assume billions of Indians would follow the advisory.

In all the photos and videos of the mad rush, however, women remained missing from the picture. Hardly a surprise. But let's get to that later.

### Home delivering liquor

With respect to the ongoing pandemic, one begs to ask the question - why were liquor shops opened in the first place? If the tanking economy is your answer then consider this - why not home deliver alcohol like other essential items? If governments allow home delivery of liquor instead of opening shops, those queuing up on streets could make the same purchase from inside their homes rather than risking themselves and others with COVID-19.

The idea is not novel. States like West Bengal and Chhattisgarh are already implementing a home delivery system for delivering alcohol to people's doorsteps. Bengal's



Excise department on Monday issued an order in which it said the state would encourage home delivery of alcohol in every way possible to facilitate social distancing while allowing the sale of liquor.

Earlier in April, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) had also written to several ministers including state heads and health as well as commerce minister to allow the online sale of liquor.

As videos of customers thronging shops across India went viral, many on social media also asked the same question. Why not make alcohol available through home delivery?

Governments can set a limit to weekly or monthly consumption and maintain a tab for each ordering customer to ensure they don't exceed the permitted limit. E-commerce sites, third party delivery

services, and state-regulated apps could be used to order alcohol online, even helplines can be set up for the quick and easy delivery of alcohol.

Since the government thinks the best way to revive the economy amid the coronavirus lockdown is to reopen alcohol shops, online delivery of stipulated quantities of alcohol could help avert a potential health crisis.

### Alcohol and women

While the end of India's own version of "Prohibition" saw many, many men rejoicing on streets after buying alcohol, or simply standing in long queues to wait their turn, women remained missing from the queues. With a growing number of domestic violence cases amid lockdown, the opening of liquor stores could lead to further aggression and violence against women at home.

Several studies have linked

substance abuse to an increase in intensity and/or frequency of violence. Data from the 2004 Global Burden of Disease project showed that over 248,000 deaths annually were attributable to alcohol in some way or other.

India is not new to the women's agitation against the problem of alcoholism in their husbands. The anti-arrak movement in Andhra Pradesh led by rural women led to several regulations and temporary prohibition of alcohol as well.

But one need not go as far back to trace the link between alcohol consumption and domestic violence amid lockdown. The State Commission for Women in Punjab has already raised the issue where the state government has allowed the sale of liquor. The Police helpline in Punjab registered over 700 complaints of domestic violence.

As per the latest figures, cases of domestic violence between February and April 20 increased from 3,287 to 3,993 and daily calls received on the police helpline registered an increase of 34 percent. Gender expert Dr Ritu Lethal from Punjabi University told The Telegraph that at a time when people are "jobless and frustrated, alcohol consumption will only worsen things". She wondered why the government would not delay the opening of liquor stores until the end of the lockdown.

The answer might lie in the Rs 2.48 trillion that state governments together earn every year from excise duty revenues across states. As sales resumed, most state governments have announced tall hikes in excise duties to cope with economic losses caused by the lockdown. In a country that repeatedly puts women in its lowest list of priorities, hoping that state governments would forego revenues to enhance women's safety at home is a far cry.

While home delivery of alcohol and state-controlled limitation on sale could serve as short term measures to curb overcrowding in shops and violence caused due to overconsumption, the government needs to find more permanent solutions that not only ensure social distancing but also take into account the human cost that women must pay to help the economy get back on track.



# Thailand's king living in luxury quarantine while his country suffers

Life in Thailand has been brought to a standstill by the coronavirus pandemic. The normally bustling streets of Bangkok are deserted. Suvarnabhumi Airport, normally a hub of international tourism, is seeing a fraction of its usual traffic. Thailand's critical tourism industry, which made up 20% of the country's GDP in 2018, has ground to a halt.

During a crisis, people expect leaders to demonstrate solidarity and encouragement. But Thailand's king, Maha Vajiralongkorn, has largely been absent from his kingdom since the coronavirus pandemic began. He has been riding out the coronavirus at a luxury hotel in the Bavarian Alps.

Vajiralongkorn enjoys special permission to reside at Hotel Sonnenbichl in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. According to local authorities, the hotel is not open for normal accommodation. The king and his entourage have special permission because they are a "single, homogeneous group of people with no fluctuation."

## The king's hotel

The king is not living alone in isolation; his entourage of 100 includes a harem of at least 20 women. At the end of March, German media reported the king was jet-setting around Germany in a private Boeing 737, visiting Hanover, Leipzig and Dresden. Vajiralongkorn reportedly didn't even disembark and took off again directly after landing.

The king is known for his eccentric behavior. He officially succeeded his father to the throne in October 2016 and was coronated during a magnificent ceremony in May 2019. Rather than following in the footsteps of his father, who was revered by many Thais, Vajiralongkorn is often embroiled in scandal. "The king's behavior during the coronavirus crisis has been a disaster for the reputation of the Thai monarchy," said journalist and activist Andrew MacGregor Marshall, adding that the king is a "troubled, sadistic and authoritarian



monarch who should have no place in the 21st century."

## Dangerous criticism

Marshall, the author of the critical book "A Kingdom in Crisis," is allowed to say what he wants about King Vajiralongkorn. In Thailand, this kind of criticism would be severely punished under a draconian lese-majeste law, outlawing any disparaging statements or opinions about the king and the royal family. Anyone violating the law faces up to 15 years in prison. There have been multiple cases in the past of Thais being thrown in jail for several years over posts on Facebook. Nevertheless, social media remains one of the only sources to understand how Thais, and especially the younger generation, feel about the monarchy. Despite the risks, a tweet from exiled historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul circulated in Thai social media at the end of March, showing the

king's flight path to Germany and asking in Thai: "What do we need a king for?" It was quickly shared thousands of times and was a trending topic for weeks.

And for a long time, several popular memes have circulated. A particularly biting example uses HBO's Game of Thrones: "We don't go serving some shit king who's only king because his father was."

Some users turned their criticism, which was mainly aimed at the current king, toward the institution of monarchy as a whole. A user on Facebook, for instance, wrote: "Seeing people questioning why we need a king on Twitter makes me happy but I want it to go beyond just insulting him on Twitter. I want people to read or listen to lectures about this topic and crystallize systematically why it had to exist, why it was regarded as very important and why, at the moment, it doesn't seem

necessary."

Some users even went so far as to implicitly demand the abolition of the monarchy: "Honestly, I already want to have a president."

However, criticism of the king and the royal family mainly comes from the younger generation, said a Thai expert, who wishes to remain anonymous for security reasons. Thais aged over 30 still stick strongly to the monarchy even if they secretly disapprove of the present king, the expert told DW.

## Military and monarchy

The Thai royal family has remained silent about controversy. But on March 22, Puttipong Punnakanta, minister for digital and social affairs, warned in a tweet that it's dangerous to post content online that endangers national security. The accompanying picture was unambiguous:

The military-backed

government that took power in the aftermath of the 2014 coup protects the king, and the military and the monarchy are interdependent.

The unloved king needs the military and its government to secure his power. The military relies on the king, because it is easier to come to terms with a monarch ruling for life than with a constantly changing set of politicians and parties in a democratic system.

## The unbroken power of the king

Thai expert Marshall does not believe that the growing displeasure with the king will lead to concrete steps against the monarchy because of the military's support for the king.

Vajiralongkorn has successfully pushed the kingdom towards absolute monarchy since taking office, although officially the country is still a constitutional monarchy, Marshall said.

For this purpose, the king has brought an elite unit of soldiers and policemen under his direct control. He took direct control of the assets of the royal family, formerly managed by the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). According to estimates, this amounted to \$30 to \$60 billion (¥27.6 to ¥55.2 billion).

"It's clear that the king does not have the support of most Thais, but it will be very difficult to challenge his power because of his control over the military. An uprising against the monarchy would lead to mass bloodshed on the streets of Bangkok," Marshall said.



# As society opens, Saudi women surge into job market

Like thousands of Saudi women, Rouaa al-Mousa entered the workforce as reforms sweep the ultra-conservative kingdom and is certain that neither grumbling male bosses nor the coronavirus will change that.

Armed with a college degree but bound by conservative Saudi attitudes to women working, the 25-year-old was expecting to wait years before finding a suitable job.

But Mousa graduated in the midst of changes in the kingdom that have seen women flood the labour market.

She got a job working the evening shift as a receptionist at a government institution in Riyadh -- part of a mixed team of 10 women and six men.

And although the coronavirus has threatened a global recession and put Mousa in lockdown for now, she is confident the long-term trend of getting women into the workforce is here to stay.

"I wanted to do my best during my studies so that I could get a job in academia afterwards, because that was the best option available for us. But big changes happened during the past four years," she told AFP.

"Almost all of my friends are now working, and when one of them doesn't get a job, it seems strange."

For decades, straitlaced Saudi society offered limited opportunities for women seeking a paid job and the few who did find work were mostly restricted to the health and education sectors.

An oppressive "guardianship" system also gave male relatives the right to object to the women's professional aspirations.

But change came in mid-2016 when Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveiled his "Vision 2030" plan aimed at diversifying the kingdom's economy and ending its addiction to oil.

The national blueprint promotes the tourism and entertainment sectors, while opening wide the doors of the labour market to millions of women by paring back the restrictions that had constrained them.

## 'The crisis will pass'

Fatima al-Dakhil got her big break as a sales manager at a French company in the Saudi city of Khobar after months of job hunting, but just weeks later Saudi Arabia took strict measures to combat coronavirus.

The kingdom has so far recorded the highest number of cases in the Gulf with more than 17,000 infections and 139 deaths.

Despite being frustrated by the lockdown, which has forced her and hundreds of thousands of others to abandon their offices and work from home, Dakhil is confident that women across the country will continue to pursue careers.

"All my girlfriends have joined the labour market," the 25-year-old told AFP, solemnly expressing hope the virus "crisis will pass".

Saudi women have now penetrated professional spheres at all levels -- they are bankers, business owners, heads of financial institutions, border crossing officers, civil defence members, food cart vendors and shoe sellers.

Male employees report that their workplaces have changed dramatically -- among the many small revolutions are women's toilets which have been introduced for the first time in some places.

Saudi saleswoman Sarah Al-Dosari, 23, works at a clothing store run by



three women at the Panorama Mall in the centre of Riyadh.

"People's perspective towards working women was bad," said Al-Dosari.

But this attitude has been consigned to history, she said. "Now customers say they are proud of us."

The number of working women in Saudi Arabia reached 1.03 million in the third quarter of 2019, 35 percent of the total workforce, compared to 816,000 in 2015, according to official figures.

Rodina Maamoun has been tasked by the owner of five stores selling women's accessories with introducing women onto a formerly all-male staff.

"Customers, especially

women, feel more comfortable with female assistants -- sales and profits have risen," said the Saudi who employed 19 young women, almost entirely replacing the men.

A woman's world?

Since the rise of Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia has witnessed major social and economic changes.

Women are now allowed to drive cars, cinemas have reopened and genders are permitted to mix at events, including concerts, and in public places.

The reforms have also been accompanied by a crackdown on dissent that has drawn widespread criticism. Some of those detained and allegedly

tortured in custody are women's rights activists who were prominent in the campaign to end the driving ban. Although the changes have been uneven, they have emboldened Saudi women to address decades of discrimination and marginalisation, including graduates who are returning from Europe and the United States to seek jobs at home. "Empowering Saudi women means empowering the Saudi family," said Rania Nashar, CEO of Samba Financial Group, the first Saudi woman to hold such a senior position. Saudi women "are ambitious and passionate about playing a role in shaping the future of their country", she said

## NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

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



### PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



### STAY HOME IF SICK

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



### PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



### REDUCE OVERCROWDING

- Consider telecommuting.
- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
- Walk or bike to work, if possible.
- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

Text COVID to 692-692 for real-time updates or visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus).

Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.

\*Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.

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Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
Owens Reborek, MD  
Commissioner

# What Is Reliance Jio Going To Do With All That Money It's Raising?

If there's one thing Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani is good at, it's being a sharp businessman. At a time when the world is reeling under the COVID-19 pandemic with markets and economies all heading south or navigating turbulent waters, Reliance is one of the few companies grabbing headlines for the investments it has been bringing in. Timing. It's perfect. On 22 April, Facebook bought a 9.99 percent stake in Reliance Jio Platforms for a whopping \$5.7 billion (Rs 43,574 crore). On 4 May, US private equity fund Silver Lake Partners bought a 1.15 percent stake in Reliance Jio Platforms for \$750 million (Rs 5,655 crore). Silver Lake Partners is one of the world's largest technology investors. It has invested in top tech companies such as AirBnB, Alibaba, Twitter and ANT Financial (earlier known as Alipay) among others. Betting Big on 5G

Just what is Reliance Jio going to do with all the money it is raising? Why are companies like Facebook and

For 4G, Reliance was dependent on Samsung equipment. It was also conducting 5G trials with Samsung.

the world that will not have any Chinese components in it while setting up 5G. Rivals Airtel and Vodafone Idea have tied up with Huawei and ZTE among others for 5G equipment. Reliance Jio instead acquired a US-based firm Radisys in 2018 for \$67 million and has merged its subsidiary Rancore Technologies with itself to help in developing telecom equipment. This equipment will be either designed in India and built abroad or designed and built in India, as per its indications to TRAI. Making its own equipment is just one part. It also needs deep pockets for 5G spectrum. The 5G spectrum band is between 3,300 MHz and 3,600 MHz. That's a minimum of Rs 49,200 crore an operator needs right there. Coincidentally, guess who has just raised Rs 49,229 crore in the past couple of weeks? We'll get through this! Meanwhile, here's all you need to know about the Coronavirus outbreak to keep yourself safe, informed, and updated.



Silver Lake rushing to invest in Jio? Jio must be doing something right. Jio's statement says its investors are impressed with the company's grasp on broadband connectivity, smart devices, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, IoT, cloud computing, AR, mixed reality and blockchain.

However, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has been pushing for local manufacture of telecom equipment in a 2018 notification. Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani at a meeting with US President Donald Trump recently said that Jio was the only network in

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## मोदी का एलान-ए-जंग

### बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक

नई दिल्ली: मोदी सरकार ने पाकिस्तान के अर्थ और विकास को नुकसान पहुंचाने का एलान किया है। मोदी सरकार ने पाकिस्तान के अर्थ और विकास को नुकसान पहुंचाने का एलान किया है। मोदी सरकार ने पाकिस्तान के अर्थ और विकास को नुकसान पहुंचाने का एलान किया है।

## भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंद

आइएस ने शामिल हुई महिला को अमेरिका ने एट्री देने से किया इंकार

नई दिल्ली: भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंद। आइएस ने शामिल हुई महिला को अमेरिका ने एट्री देने से किया इंकार।

ਪੰਜਾਬ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀਅਤ ਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾਨ  
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## ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

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## ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

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ਬੁਰਖਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਵਿਚਾਰਨ ਵੇਲੇ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨੀ ਲਾਈ।

## ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੱਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ

ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੱਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ।

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# 'Murder hornets' land in the US for the first time



state. Washington State University (WSU) are unsure how or when the hornet first arrived in North America, but beekeepers in the region have reported gruesome hive deaths in recent months. Scientists are bracing for further emergence of the species, which begins its life cycle in spring. The hornets are "shockingly large", said Todd Murray, a WSU scientist and invasive species specialist. "It's a health hazard, and more importantly, a significant predator of honeybees."

The insects, roughly the size of a matchbox, have large yellow-orange heads, prominent black eyes, and a black and yellow striped abdomen. "They're like something out of a monster cartoon with this huge yellow-orange face," said Susan Cobey, a bee breeder with WSU entomology department in a press release.

The Asian giant hornet's life cycle begins in April, when queens come out of hibernation, and begin to feed and seek out subterranean dens to build their nests. Once their habitats are built in the summer and autumn months, worker hornets are sent to find food.

With their sharp, spiked mandibles, the hornets decapitate honeybees, using the bodies to feed their young. The hornets can destroy a honeybee hive in a matter of hours. Though beehives are their primary target, when threatened the hornets can attack people. Multiple stings can kill humans, even those who are not allergic. In Japan, where they are most common, murder hornets kill roughly 30 to 40 people each year. "It was like having red-hot thumbtacks being driven into my flesh," Vancouver Island beekeeper Conrad Bérubé told the New York Times. He was

stung through a bee suit and sweatpants underneath. The WSU scientists will begin trapping queen murder hornets this spring, aiming to detect and eradicate the species.

Populations of honeybees and other pollinators in the US were already under pressure. Between 1947 and 2017, number of honeybee colonies in the US plummeted from 6 million to 2.5 million. And last year, researchers from the University of Maryland reported that 40% of the country's honeybee colonies died in a single winter, between October 2018 and April 2019 - the largest loss of its kind. Pollinators, most often honeybees, are responsible for one of every three bites of food taken in the US, and increase the country's nation crop values every year by more than \$15bn (£12bn), according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Even as the US remains under attack from the coronavirus outbreak, a new terror has arrived: "murder hornets". The 2-inch (5cm) long Asian giant hornets, *Vespa mandarinia*, have been found in Washington state. Multiple stings are deadly to humans and in their "slaughter phase" the hornets destroy honeybees, whose bodies they feed to their young. Scientists are now on a hunt for the hornets, hoping to

eradicate the species before they wipe out US bees. Although they typically avoid people, in Asia, "murder hornet" stings are thought to cause as many as 50 human fatalities a year, according to the New York Times. The hornets made their first North American appearance in August 2019, in British Columbia, Canada. Months later, in December 2019, the flying insects were reported south of the border in Washington

## Why So Sneaky Xiaomi: Preloaded Apps, Ads, Browser Breaches and More

Xiaomi is in the line of fire. A recent report pointed out a major security flaw where the company's phones send a large amount of user data to remote servers outsourced by certain Chinese partners. The report said that data collected through preinstalled apps on Xiaomi's MIUI interface include browsing history, accessed services, app usage behaviour as well as music listening preferences.

Xiaomi India did respond to the allegations in an official statement, saying that the claims are "incorrect and not true." While the long statement might be enough to reassure consumers' faith in the brand, the information given out by independent cybersecurity researcher Gabi Cirig cannot be ignored. Considering I have reviewed a few Xiaomi smartphones in the past, there are certain things that do give the undeniable feeling that the company's MIUI interface is flawed. And it is a consistent experience which makes me say that. I am absolutely not alleging that Xiaomi is saving user data to some remote servers, but there are certain things that make it pretty evident that some data is being collected. Even if it isn't, doesn't help with the privacy sentiment which consumers are now becoming more aware of. Also, there is a lot of clutter and preloaded stuff on the custom Android ROM that is a bit of a nuisance.

I did a quick experiment by resetting a Redmi Note 9 Pro and going through the setup procedure in detail. Things look pretty much in order, the phone asks me to sign into my Google account and the regular set of permissions. Things start to get interesting once I get a prompt to log into my Xiaomi account. There is an Additional Settings page asking you to enable certain services. These include Location as well as prompts for User Experience Programme, sending diagnostic data automatically, personalized ads and Glance for Mi.

## Coronavirus: A hunt for the 'missing link' host species

It was a matter of "when not if" an animal passed the coronavirus from wild bats to humans, scientists say.

But it remains unclear whether that animal was sold in the now infamous Wuhan wildlife market in China.

The World Health Organization says that all evidence points to the virus's natural origin, but some scientists now say it might never be known how the first person was infected.

Trade in wild animals is under scrutiny as source of this "spillover".

But when wildlife is bought and sold in almost every country in the world, controlling it - let alone banning it - is far from straightforward. Tackling it on a global scale could be the route to stopping a future pandemic before it starts.

Global health researchers have, for many years, understood how the trade in wild animals provides a source of species-to-species disease transmission. As life-changing as this particular outbreak has been for so much of the global population, it is actually one of many that the trade has been linked to.

As the WHO's technical lead on Covid-19, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, told the BBC: "We were preparing for something like this as it's not a matter of if, it is a matter of when."

### How it began

Infectious disease experts agree that, like most emerging human disease, this virus initially jumped

undetected across the species barrier. Prof Andrew Cunningham, from the Zoological Society of London,

the ability to infect a humans; the key that unlocks some of our cells, where they can replicate.



explained: "We've actually been expecting something like this to happen for a while.

"These diseases are emerging more frequently in recent years as a result of human encroachment into wild habitat and increased contact and use of wild animals by people."

The virus that causes Covid-19 joins a murky list of household name viruses - including Ebola, rabies, Sars and Mers - that have originated in wild bat populations. Some of the now extensive body of evidence about bat viruses, and their ability to infect humans, comes from seeking the source of the 2003 outbreak of Sars, a very closely related coronavirus. It was only in 2017 though that scientists pinned down the "rich gene pool of bat Sars-related coronaviruses" in a single cave in China. - the possible source of the pandemic. These viruses have resided in the bodies of bats for millennia, but are pre-programmed with

"In the case of Sars-CoV-2 the key is a virus protein called Spike and the main lock to enter a cell is a receptor called ACE2," explained Prof David Robertson, a virologist from the University of Glasgow. "The coronavirus is not only able to fit that ACE2 lock, "it's actually doing this many times better than Sars-1 [the virus

that caused the 2003 outbreak] does", he said. That perfect fit could explain why the coronavirus is so easily transmitted from person to person; its contagiousness has outpaced our efforts to contain it. But bringing the bat virus to the door of a human cell is where the trade in wildlife plays an important role.

### A risky trade

Most of us have heard that this virus "started" in a wildlife market in Wuhan. But the source of the virus - an animal with this pathogen in its body - was not found in the market.

"The initial cluster of infections was associated with the market - that is circumstantial evidence," explained Prof James Wood from the University of Cambridge. "The infection could have come from somewhere else and just, by chance, clustered around people there. But given that it is an animal virus, the market association is highly suggestive."

## Is obesity the second biggest COVID-19 risk factor?

Obesity may be one of the biggest risk factors for developing severe COVID-19, according to scientists.

Elderly people, regardless of their weight, have been found to be the most vulnerable to severe illness or death if they catch the coronavirus.

But scientific evidence, mostly from the US, is beginning to show that someone who is obese may be at more risk of severe complications than people with high blood pressure, lung disease or asthma.

The UK government classes anyone 'aged 70 or older regardless of medical condition', as clinically vulnerable, as well as anyone who is younger than 70 with a 'underlying health condition'.

Experts say expanding the list of at-risk people to include those who are obese would be problematic to enforce.

Therefore, individuals carrying extra weight may need to make their own decisions on whether to be 'cautious' based on early research.

According to data from hospitals, almost 75 per cent of COVID-19 patients in intensive care are overweight, compared with 65 per cent in the general population.

And NHS data last week revealed obesity raises the risk of dying from coronavirus in hospital by nearly 40 per cent.

SAGE, the scientific group advising the Government, is now

investigating the relationship between obesity and the coronavirus to consider how to advise the public. Researchers at New York University recently highlighted obesity as a main driver of patients under the age of 60 needing hospital care. They looked at the records of 3,615 patients who tested positive between March 4 and April 4. The team found those with a BMI between 30 and 34 were almost twice as likely to be admitted to acute or critical (ICU) care than those with a BMI under 30. This likelihood increased to 3.6 times in those patients with a BMI of 35 or greater, according to the findings published in Clinical Infectious Diseases.



## I have loathed them for years. Now I discover video games boost the brain!

Like many, I've long believed that our relentless use of social media is, for want of a better term, rotting our brains. Over-reliance on screens is compromising our physical health, so it can't be good for our brains, either.

I have a particular loathing for video games – a pursuit three of my children have dedicated hours to over the years. I've always seen these games as a complete waste of time. But is it true?

Recently, I was invited to take part in one of the largest intelligence tests ever undertaken in the UK. The study, which we coined 'The

Great British Intelligence Test', involved more than 250,000 Britons. It was developed by Dr Adam Hampshire, from the Department of Brain Sciences at Imperial College, London. His team created an online test designed to score individuals on as many different factors that work together to build intelligence, as he could fit in. The tool – which you can find by Googling 'Great British Intelligence Test' – featured a series of challenges designed to test every crucial aspect – from memory to vocabulary, to emotional IQ.

The team also gathered essential information on

people's age, lifestyles, interests and where they live, to discover if any of these factors are linked to a particular type of cleverness. The findings are fascinating. I especially enjoyed the revelation that cat owners have better vocabularies than dog owners.

Young people did better than their elders on average, but there were some areas where the over-60s scored particularly well. And who would have thought that Londoners come out on top when it comes to emotional intelligence?

Do have a go at the test yourself – and watch BBC2 tomorrow night, when I'll be



revealing some of the results along with mathematician Dr Hannah Fry.

In the meantime, I'd like to share the discovery that, for me, proved the most striking: the brain-boosting power of computer games. As well as measuring the brainpower of

the nation, the Imperial College researchers had another important aim: they wanted to examine the impact of screen-based activities on our highly malleable brains.

By DR MICHAEL MOSLEY:

## Gilead CEO says remdesivir will be available to treat coronavirus patients this week

The CEO of Gilead Sciences, the company that makes the promising drug remdesivir, says it will be available to treat COVID-19 patients as early as this week after receiving approval from the FDA.

The drug showed promising results in a study of more than 1,000 people around the world and has been touted as one of the first steps in reopening the economy.

Scientists found that patients who were given it recovered 31 percent faster than those who did not and that the mortality rate among recipients was around three percent lower; it was 8 percent in the drug recipients and 11.6 percent in placebo patients.

In an interview with Face The Nation on CBS on Sunday, Gilead CEO Dan O'Day said the company had donated its entire

supply of the drug to the government to roll out to hospitals across the US and that it will also send some overseas.

'We intend to get that to patients in the early part of this next week, beginning to work with the government, which will determine which cities are most vulnerable and where the patients are that need this medicine,' O'Day said. Stocks for the company rose last week after the results of the study were announced by Dr. Tony Fauci, the White House's foremost coronavirus expert.

O'Day said that the company had now donated 1.5 million vials of it to the government.

Depending on the length of a patient's treatment, the supply should cater to between 100,000 and 200,000 people, O'Day said. 'We did that because we

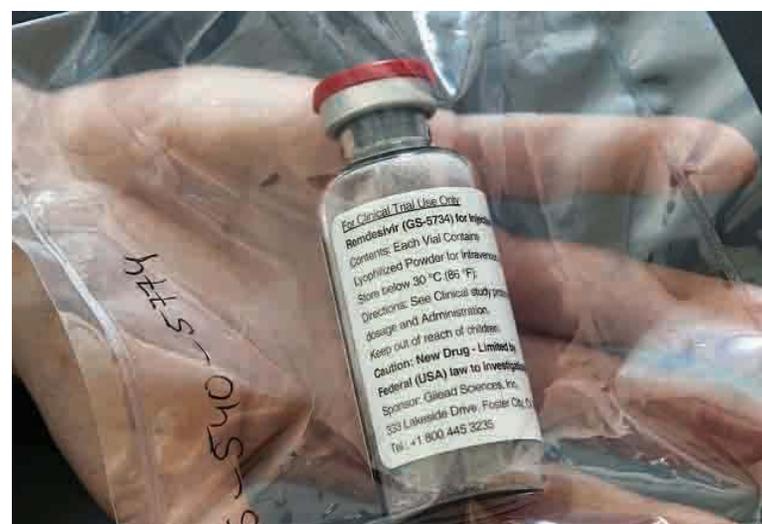
acknowledge and recognize the human suffering, the human need here and want to make sure that nothing gets in the way of this getting to patients,' he said.

It is now up to the government to determine where to send the doses and how much each area needs.

It is unclear when more will be ready. O'Day said that the company ramped up production of it in January but did not explain what prompted them to boost manufacturing. There were scarcely any known COVID-19 cases in the US in January.

President Trump claims China tried to cover up how deadly it was late last year and that it may have even been created in a lab and escaped.

When the US should have known about it much less responded to it to prepare is now



a source of political contention.

'We are now firmly focused on getting this medicine to the most urgent patients around the country here in the United States. Dr. Fauci said last week that while the drug was not full-proof nor was it a cure,

it proved for the first time that the virus could be 'stopped' with treatment. Doctors who took part in the study now want to examine how to use it with other medications to give patients 'tailored' courses of treatment.

# Anushka Sharma, Kareena Kapoor, Katrina Kaif: Throwback to the best metallic trends

**Style throwback:** Kareena Kapoor, Anushka Sharma, Sonam Kapoor, Katrina Kaif, Sara Ali Khan and Alia Bhatt among others have shown big love to the metallic trend. Their best looks.



One of the most dazzling trends of 2019, metallic tones have been on the style radar for a while now and not only for its celebrity-like glamorous appeal but also for its texture and dramatic appeal. Metallic party wear but now it is also entering the day-to-day wardrobe in terms of casual wear and day-to-night looks. Gold, silver, copper and bronze ruled the runway last year in a range of patterns, textures and design in the clothing, jewellery and accessory area. Actors like Kareena Kapoor, Anushka Sharma, Sonam Kapoor, Malaika Arora, Katrina Kaif, Ananya Panday, Sara Ali Khan, Alia Bhatt among others have shown big love to this trend as they stole the show at film screenings, events and public appearances. Metallic tones can be tricky though when it comes to styling and picking the right ensemble. As powerful and gorgeous they look, it is important to pick what works as per body type, persona and taste in fashion. Metallics were quite big in the 70s and 80s with the retro and disco

fashion ruling the style radar back in the day. from dresses to pantsuits, skirts to tops, co-ords to separates, traditional wear to casual wear, there is something for everyone if

they dare to try on the trend. One metallic add-on to the look can be transformational and it takes the style appeal to the next level.

If you are not too sure about adding a few metallic

pieces to your wardrobe, take inspiration from your favourite celebrities on how to get it right and pick your favourite one. You can start small by adding a few metallic accessories to your

wardrobe, or even beginning with footwear is a good idea. See how you feel about it and experiment with certain tones as picking the right colour is your primary here.

wardrobe, or even beginning with footwear is a good idea. See how you feel about it and experiment with certain tones as picking the right colour is your primary here.

## Bachelorette vet Ali Fedotowsky displays her tummy after two pregnancies: 'Felt strong in this moment... every body is beautiful'



Former Bachelorette Ali Fedotowsky made a brave move on social media this weekend.

The 35-year-old blonde beauty showed off her tummy after welcoming two children into the world. The reality TV vet was in a

bikini by her swimming pool with toys in the background as she went makeup-free.

'Felt strong and beautiful in this moment and wanted to document it,' said the former Facebook employee, who tested

negative for COVID-19 in March after a long illness. 'No other caption needed.'

#everybodyisbeautiful.'The star has two children with her 36-year-old husband Kevin Manno: Molly, aged three, and Riley, aged one.

## Fashionistas Take #MetGalaChallenge at Home as Real Event Pushed to October

The fashion world looks forward to the first Monday in May as one of the most exhilarating days of the year. It's the fashion equivalent of the Oscars and Grammys all rolled into one, with a mix of costume party thrown in for good measure. Celebrities and fashionistas count down to this day on which the Met Gala is held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art every year. Influential designers and models pair up with actors, musicians, authors, and artists, turning the Metropolitan Museum of Art's staircase into a ramp showing off fashion and creativity. But this year, the famous steps wear a grim look on the first Monday of May, as the event has been pushed to October. This



year's exhibit, 'About Time: Fashion and Duration', was set to mark 150 years in the museum's life, reports Vogue. A group of 11 young women are planning to mark the exhibition's would-be opening with a virtual gala. Called the HF Twitter Met Gala, the digital event will celebrate the exhibition on Monday, May 4. There's also the Met Gala Challenge, being held as part of the digital effort by the Met to lessen the sting of the Gala cancellation and to help preview its new exhibition. It's call to action is to glam yourself up in either your own Met Gala-esque outfits or recreate looks of the past and post it on social media, Forbes reported.



## Priyanka Chopra's bold fashion has made her a global style icon

Priyanka Chopra is an actress, producer, philanthropist, singer and former Miss World. And, as has become evident in recent seasons, she is also a style icon. Chopra's aesthetic has evolved over the past few years, transforming her from girl next door to fashion queen, both on and off the red carpet. She's done so by — in equal measure — wearing international brands and championing Indian designers and classic Indian dress. Chopra even caused a spike in online searches

for the terms "golden saree" and "red lehenga" when she wore them to her wedding to pop singer Nick Jonas in December 2018. Chopra's style is bold, polished and glamorous. Nowhere is that more evident than on the red carpet. Chopra has been earning acting accolades since making her Bollywood debut in 2003. She has since become a Hollywood regular after starring as an FBI agent in ABC's "Quantico" from 2015 to 2018. In the US, Chopra started gravitating towards more relaxed

fits and international designers, embracing retro jumpsuits and edgier leather looks. But it wasn't until 2016, that her fashion credentials crystallized.

That year saw the star wearing one flawless outfit after the other — a glam embellished white strapless gown by Lebanese designer Zuhair Murad at her maiden Oscars ceremony; a cerulean Atelier Versace stunner at the Billboard Music Awards; and a sharp white suit by ST.studio by Olcay Gulsen at the Time 100 Gala.

## Madonna Flouts Social Distancing Norms Days After Revealing She Tested Positive For Antibodies

Popular American singer Madonna was captured attending the birthday party of filmmaker and celebrity photographer Steven Klein, just days after claiming that she has tested positive of having the coronavirus antibodies. The pictures of the star hugging and mixing with those in attendance have gone viral and producing a lot of flak for the 'Express Yourself' singer. Sharing a picture with the star, Steven wrote, "Some things stay for an eternity ... and then some = masterpieces + friendships". According to Michele L Ruiz, an artist manager, Madonna gifted a 'COVID cake' to the birthday boy and the party was a virtual one. Sharing a video where Madonna can be seen standing in a room with at least 8 people, Michele wrote, Madonna was "in her own home w/her faMily and crew that she has been quarantining with. There were about 5 people that came to her



home (or Steven's?) to celebrate Steven's bday, and all of these people have been quarantined for over a month as well. Please stop the Madness - she would never put herself or her children at risk!" In the footage released online, none of the attendees can be seen wearing masks or maintaining any social distance.

Taking the risks higher, netizens have pointed out that Madonna attended a party just someday after revealing she had undergone a test for antibodies and results came back positive. On May 1, Madonna had posted the long video where she can be seen typing on a typewriter and reading from a paper.

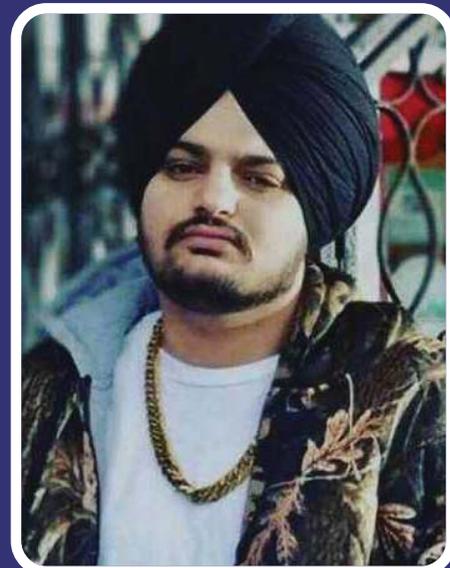
## Punjabi Singer, Cops Charged After Gun Shooting Video Amid Lockdown

**In the video, the singer is seen using an assault rifle in front of police officers who were allegedly deputized at the range by Sangrur DSP (Headquarters) Daljit Singh Virk.**

Chandigarh: A controversial Punjabi singer, Sidhu Moosewala, who is already facing charges for promoting gun culture, was charged again today after a video of him shooting at a firing range was widely shared on social media amid the nationwide lockdown. The incident took place in front of five cops, in an embarrassing situation for Punjab police. In the video, the singer is seen using an assault rifle in front of police officers who were allegedly deputized at the range by Sangrur DSP

(Headquarters) Daljit Singh Virk. The five police officers have been charged along with three others who were at the gun range in Sangrur's Badbar village. Punjab DGP Dinkar Gupta ordered for immediate suspension of the DSP for delinquency on duty. Departmental inquiry will be initiated against Mr Virk, a police spokesperson said. A criminal case under Section 188 of the IPC and Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act has been registered against the accused. Earlier this year, Sidhu

Moosewala and another singer Mankirt Aulakh were charged for allegedly promoting violence and gun culture in a song uploaded on social media. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh had expressed concern over the propagation of violence and gun culture in Punjabi songs. The chief minister had reiterated his government's commitment not to show any sort of complacency towards singers promoting violence or drugs through songs.





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## It could be war

Classified Chinese report warns Beijing it faces Tiananmen-like global backlash over coronavirus that could lead to 'armed confrontation' with the US



(Story on Page 28)

## Some retailers are too broke to go bankrupt



(News Agencies) Everything must go! Store-closing sales are crucial to the nation's retail economy: They help liquidate slow-to-sell inventory, and in many cases, they fund a company's operations through bankruptcy. Without liquidation sales, retailers would find it much tougher, if not impossible, to stay in business during a reorganization. The coronavirus pandemic is making retail bankruptcies more likely. But, ironically, it could also make bankruptcies more difficult, and lead to delayed filings. With much of the United States still limiting nonessential businesses, and with shoppers nervous about visiting open stores, closing sales are much more difficult to hold.

(Contd on page 28)

#BoysLockerRoom. A Delhi Students' Group Chat Is Every Parent's Nightmare



(News Agencies) New Delhi: An online group allegedly involving teenage boys from Delhi schools casually talking about rape, sexual objectification and slut-shaming schoolgirls has set off a storm on social media. Delhi Police has filed cases linked to the Instagram group, which has now been deactivated.

(Contd on page 28)

### India's chemical plant disaster: another case of history repeating itself



(News Agencies) The gas leak at a chemical factory in Visakhapatnam will immediately remind many in India and beyond of the 1984 Bhopal disaster, widely considered the world's worst industrial disaster. So far, the scale of the tragedies are very different. Eleven people are confirmed to have died in Visakhapatnam – but with hundreds hospitalised and thousands affected, there are fears the toll will rise. In Bhopal, 4,000 people died within days of the toxic gas leak from a pesticide plant in the central Indian city, and thousands more in the following years.

(Contd. on page 29)

### The challenge of lockdown 3.0

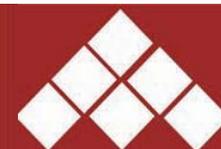


(News Agencies) The first day of lockdown 3.0 has shown the challenges involved in the graded opening up of the country. On Friday, the Union government came up with a complex order — which categorised the country into red, green and orange zones; prohibited a set of activities nationally; and allowed other activities, in varying degrees, in the different zones. This made sense. India needed a calibrated loosening up to ensure that there wasn't an immediate surge in cases. But for this approach to succeed, there were two prerequisites. The first was proper bureaucratic implementation

(Contd. on page 29)

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(See Full Page Advt. on Page 16)



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