

# The Indian EXPRESS

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THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020, MUMBAI, LATE CITY, 14 PAGES

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## FOUR DAYS TO END OF LOCKDOWN

# Considerable relaxations May 4 onward, says Centre, clears return home of stranded migrants

Curbs to be eased in many districts; no movement from containment zones, hotspots

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

IN AN indication of its plans after May 3 when the current phase of the lockdown ends, the Centre on Wednesday said there will be "considerable relaxations" in many districts.

The Union Home Ministry also issued guidelines for movement of stranded migrant labourers, students, and tourists who want to return home. Sources, however, said this will not apply to those in hotspots or containment zones.

In a statement, the Ministry said, "New guidelines to fight COVID-19 will come into effect from 4th May, which shall give considerable relaxations to many districts. Details regarding this shall be communicated in coming days."

Curbs are expected to be eased in districts where cases are tapering. The Health Ministry has identified 129 of the country's 736 districts as hotspots. On April 15, at the end of the first lockdown, 177 districts had been notified as hotspots.

The order allowing interstate movement of those stranded comes almost a week after states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh began transporting their migrant labour and students stuck in other states. Wednesday's order said, "Due to lockdown, migrant workers, pilgrims, tourists, students and other persons are stranded at different places. They would be allowed to move."

Incidentally, at a video-conference meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



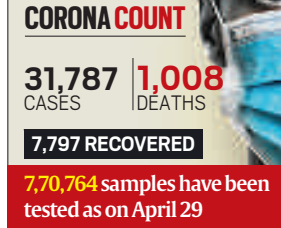
At a cremation ground in Lucknow on Wednesday, ashes await immersion in holy rivers. Vishal Srivastava

## Punjab extends curfew by 2 wks, joins Bengal in lifting some curbs

KANCHAN VASDEV & ATRIMITRA  
CHANDIGARH, KOLKATA, APR 29

SETTING A possible post-May 3 template, Punjab on Wednesday became the first state to announce a two-week extension of lockdown (until May 17), but said restrictions will be eased for four hours daily, from 7 am to 11 am, in non-containment zones with effect from Thursday. It also decided to allow opening of shops and industries in these areas.

Similarly, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said experts and doctors are of the opinion that the restrictions should continue till May-end, but announced some relaxations



in non-containment zones from May 4 — including movement of private taxis and buses in green zones, within a district, with a limited number of passengers.

Both state governments underlined that the local administration would take the final call on easing curbs.

Announcing his government's decision in a televised ad-

dress, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said: "The decision on further course of action will be taken after two weeks, depending on the situation. The only solution is social distancing. If it is under control after two weeks, we will take a call."

Singh asked people to maintain discipline and underlined that if they step out, they must wear masks, ensure social distancing and return to their homes by 11 am. "If we have given relaxation, that does not mean you can call your friends home. Social distancing has to be ensured," he said.

Punjab has reported 377 COVID-19 cases and 19 deaths so far. While four districts — Patiala, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Warning signs emerge in Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar

AMITABH SINHA & KAUNAIN SHERIFF M  
PUNE, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

WHILE MAHARASHTRA and Gujarat have been attracting attention for the rapid rise in cases of novel coronavirus infection, states in the east have, for the first time now, started to show signs that they could emerge as potential danger zones as well.

The latest analysis of computer modelling results by scientists of the Chennai-based Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc) show that though West Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand still had a combined case load of less than 1,200 on April 29, these three states had the highest rate **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

### EXPLAINED



REVISITING CURVE TO READ LOCKDOWN  
PAGE 9

# Running out of time to enter House, Uddhav dials PM for help

VISHWAS WAGHMODE & LIZ MATHEW  
MUMBAI, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29



Must become member of legislature by May 27

WITH THE Maharashtra Governor sitting on the state Cabinet's recommendation that Uddhav Thackeray be nominated to the Legislative Council, the Chief Minister dialled Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday evening.

Thackeray sought the Prime Minister's cooperation in resolving the crisis, sources in New Delhi said. In Mumbai, sources in the Maharashtra government said the Chief Minister had expressed unhappiness over the "politics being played" over his nomination to the Upper House of the state legislature.

Thackeray, who took oath on November 28 last year, has, under Article 164(4) of the Constitution, six months to become a member of the state legislature. However, with the pandemic raging, a by-election cannot be held, and the only way to fulfill the requirement is for him to be nominated to the Upper House by the Governor.

"He (Thackeray) called the Prime Minister to talk about his

nomination. He asked for help saying if it does not happen he would have to resign," a source in Delhi said. According to this source, the PM told Thackeray that he would look into the matter and get more details.

In Mumbai, a senior Shiv Sena leader told *The Indian Express*: "Uddhavji discussed the current political uncertainty in the state with the PM. He expressed unhappiness over the politics being played over his nomination as MLC at a time when the state is fighting the coronavirus outbreak, and is standing with the Centre in the crisis."

Asked how the PM had responded, the Sena leader said: **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

BJP NOT INTERESTED IN MAKING BACKDOOR ENTRY: FADNOVIS  
PAGE 4



Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital has been sealed. Express

## CMC-NEET SC: Minority institution rights not above law or absolute

ANANTHAKRISHNAN  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

STATING THAT rights of religious or linguistic minorities to administer an institution under Article 30 of the Constitution "are not above the law and other Constitutional provisions", the Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to graduate and post-graduate medical and dental courses is "regulatory" in nature and in "national interest" to improve the quality of medical education which, it said, has become a "saleable commodity".

Disposing a bunch of petitions by the Christian Medical College, Vellore, and others, the bench of Justices Arun Mishra, Vineet Saran and M R Shah ordered that NEET will be the only exam for admission to the courses and institutions cannot be allowed to conduct their own separate exams over and above NEET.

"We are of the opinion that rights under Articles 19(1)(g) and 30 read with Articles 25, 26 and 29(1) of the Constitution of **CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## Labour shortage is making Punjab and Haryana farmers switch from paddy

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA & HARISH DAMODARAN  
JALANDHAR, NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

COVID-19 has opened a window of opportunity to wean away farmers in Punjab and Haryana from growing rice to less water-guzzling crops such as cotton and maize.

The driver: Uncertainty over the availability of an estimated million labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who undertake the bulk of the paddy transplanting that begins from mid-June. That, plus the lack of mechanical transplanting options, in contrast to the ubiquitous combines used for both paddy and wheat harvesting, means fewer farmers are likely to take up rice cultivation in the coming kharif season.

Manjit Singh Sidhu has, for



Sowing cotton in a field in Sirsa, Haryana. Express

over a decade, been farming paddy on his 13 acres at Uddat Bhagat Ram village in Punjab's Mansa district. But this time he has decided to sow cotton on 11 acres, limit paddy to 2 acres, that too, subject to getting enough local labour. "I finished harvesting wheat on April 20, and I am waiting for water from the Kotla Branch of the Sirhind Canal (on the Sutlej River). They **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Railways readies movement plan, some states push for special trains

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR, ABHISHEK ANGAD & DEEP MUKHERJEE  
NEW DELHI, RANCHI, JAIPUR, APRIL 29

WHILE THE Centre has allowed movement of migrant workers in buses, several states have demanded special trains, underlining the sheer numbers of those stranded. According to sources, the Ministry of Railways has also drafted a plan to operate 400 special trains per day, which can

be scaled up to 1,000, with a detailed protocol.

While there has been no indication that passenger train services will resume before May 3, the Railways carried out an internal exercise and communicated the plan to top levels in the government.

According to the plan, each non-AC train will carry 1,000 people per trip — about half the usual number — to ensure adequate social distancing. "Each bus typically carries 25 people after following social dis-

tancing. The Railways' detailed protocol also had a paragraph stating that states falling in the routes should allow the movement, screening, controlled embarking etc.," a senior government official said.

According to sources, by deciding on buses instead of trains, the government has strategically restricted the number of people who can be transported.

"It is just to allow an option of relief for the stranded wanting to travel to their home states, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Russia under lockdown, India's manned space mission trainees confined indoors

SUSHANT SINGH  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

WHILE THE four Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter pilots selected to be trained as astronauts for the country's first manned space flight may have been motivated by the adventure of space travel, they would not have anticipated the

series of events triggered by the spread of the novel coronavirus.

A couple of months after their training began at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center (GCTC) in Star City near Moscow, it has been put on hold — and the pilots remain confined to their rooms while Russia grapples with the pandemic. Russia had reported nearly 1 lakh posi-

tive cases, with 972 deaths until Wednesday evening.

"The four astronauts-elect are in good health. The highly professional medical experts of GCTC are constantly observing them," Director General of Glavkosmos JSC Dmitry Loskutov told *The Indian Express*. Glavkosmos is the **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

# Covid fight: Govt system in front, private hospitals do the distancing

PRABHA RAGHAVAN, TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA & ABANTIKA GHOSH  
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, APRIL 29

OF THE thousands of COVID-19 patients admitted in hospitals around the country, just around 800 are critical, requiring either oxygen support, ventilators or

treatment in ICUs (Intensive Care Units). Private hospitals, which account for two-thirds of hospital beds in India, and almost 80 per cent of available ventilators, are handling less than 10 per cent of this critical load.

This is just one symptom of a larger trend over the last three months: the Rs 2.4-lakh-crore private health care sector has largely been relegated to the sidelines, watching the public health care system — govern-

ment hospitals, doctors, nurses and paramedics — battle the Covid pandemic.

Behind this are a set of circumstances that range from the nature of government policy on managing the pandemic to decisions taken by the hospitals themselves.

From being sealed in the early stages after their staff tested positive, like Wockhardt

in Mumbai or the private hospital in Bhillwara, to refusing to admit patients, from suspending services to playing safe, private hospitals aren't pulling their substantive weight.

That's not all. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

NEXT: WHAT'S HOLDING BACK PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN THE WAR AGAINST COVID?

### PAGE 1 ANCHOR

SHUBHRA GUPTA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

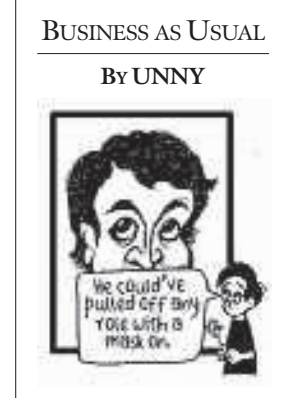
THERE ARE some obituaries you never, ever want to write. This is one of them. We knew that Irrfan Khan, one of the best actors the world has been privileged to watch, was struggling with a debilitating disease. We knew he was gravely ill. But we also believed that he would rise and shine again, because, how could he not? How could he leave us, this enormously talented human, who with his fine

body of work so enriched our inner lives?

Irrfan, who passed away on Wednesday morning at the age of 53, was not just a brilliant actor who dissolved into his part, leaving no residue behind. He also managed to walk off the screen, and come home with us. He made space for himself in our hearts, nestled in unexpected corners, and popped up once in a while, for a chat. Which he would begin, with that characteristic hooded-eyed smile: *chaliye baat karte hain*. From the very first glimpse



IRRFAN KHAN  
1967-2020



WAGHMODE & MATHEW  
NEEC and VEACOBH recommended today's Eggs and Broiler Chicken rates  
Ex Farm Broiler Chicken Rate ₹ 93 per kilo  
Retail Sale Rate Live ₹ 121 per kilo  
Dressed (with skin) ₹ 149 per kilo  
Retail Rate Per Dozen of Eggs ₹ 50 per Dozen









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CLASSIFIED CENTRES IN MUMBAI List of classified centres in Mumbai including names, addresses, and contact numbers.



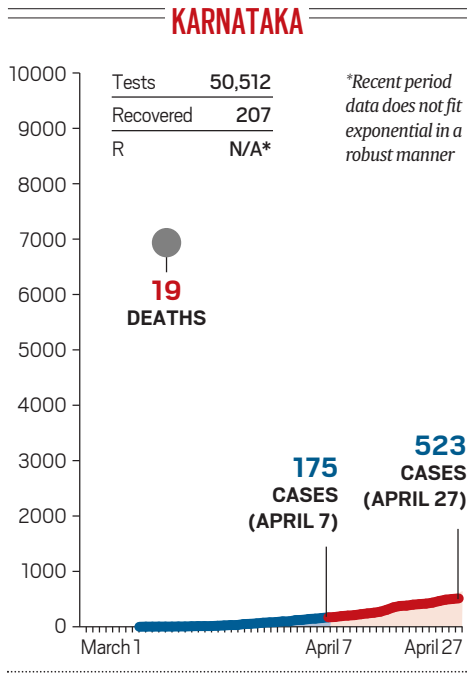
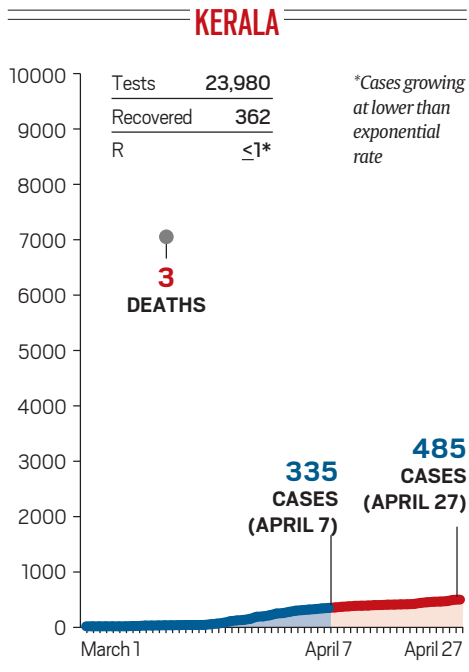
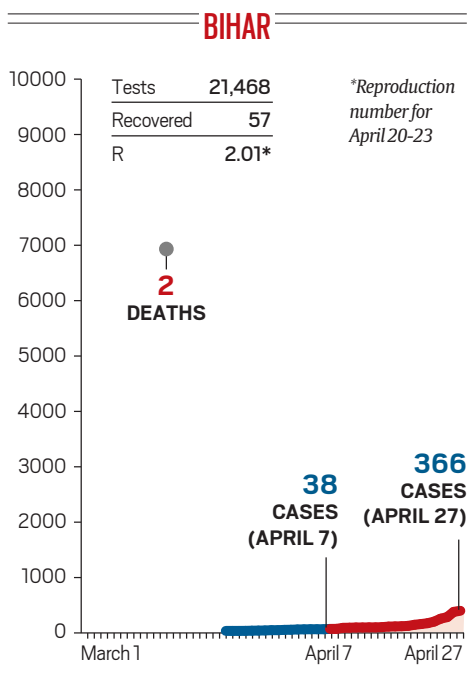
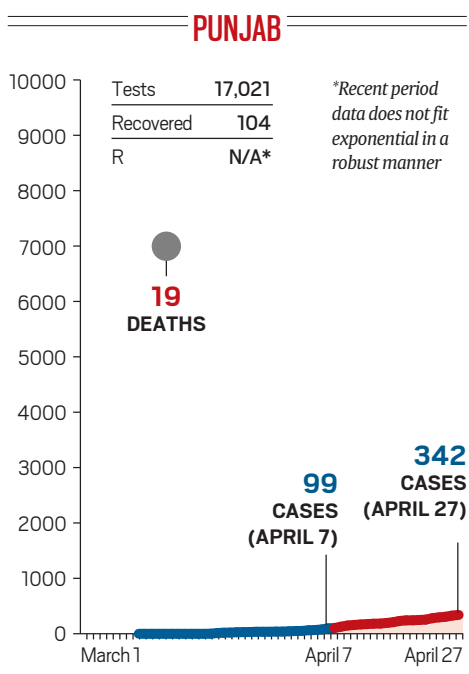
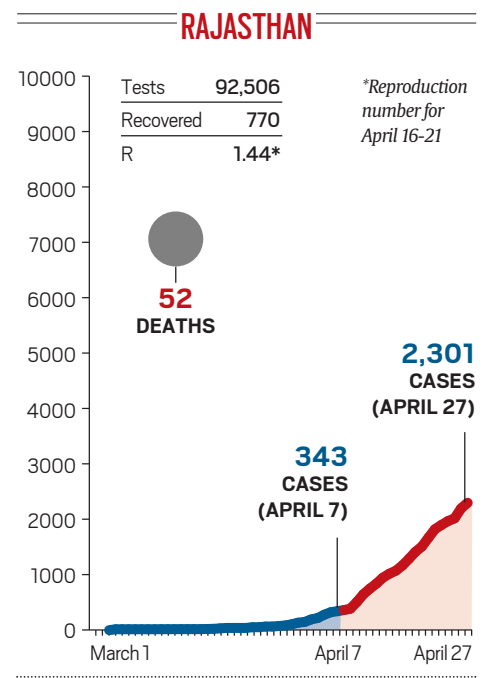
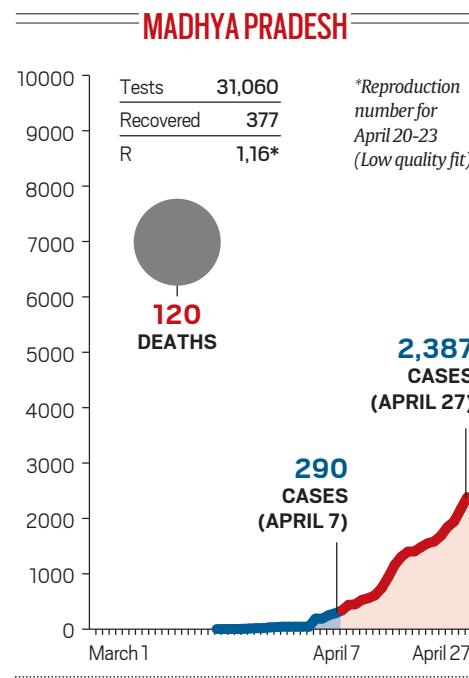
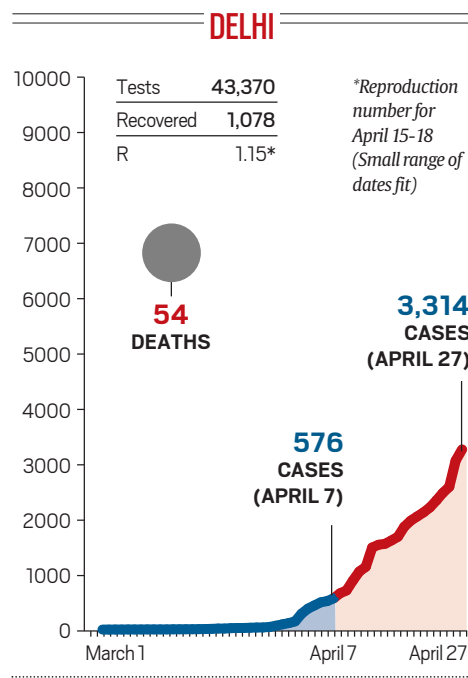
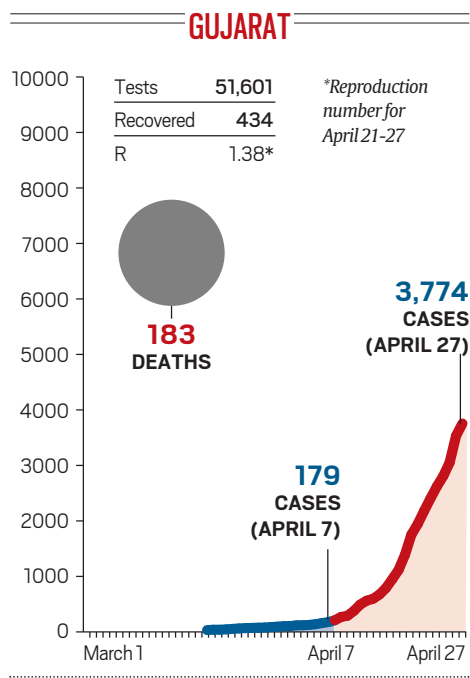
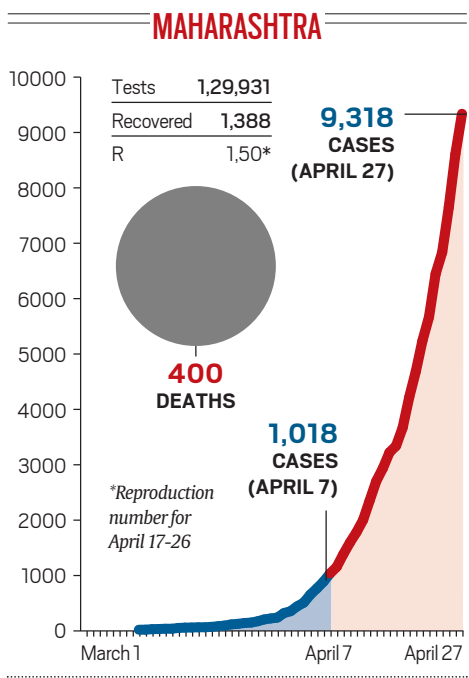






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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com



## Revisiting virus curve, to read lockdown effect

On April 9, *The Indian Express* analysed the national and state-wise COVID-19 growth curves. How have these shaped since? In updated curves, trends during last 3 weeks of lockdown

**AMITABH SINHA**  
PUNE, APRIL 28

ON APRIL 9, we had published the growth curves of the novel coronavirus epidemic in various states. Covering data until April 7, we had showed how, just over a month after the outbreak began in the first week of March, the trajectory at the national level and in many states had begun to resemble what is so typical of the spread of an infectious disease — an exponential curve.

With less than a week to go before India steps out of a national lockdown, and into the next phase of the containment strategy, we revisit those growth curves here, in an attempt to illustrate the impact of the lockdown, or at least look at what happened during this period. The national lockdown imposed at midnight of March 24 — often described as the biggest human quarantine ever — was aimed at slowing down the rate of growth of the epidemic, so that the number of patients needing urgent medical attention could remain at manageable levels while government and local authorities would ramp up health infrastructure and prepare themselves to deal with larger number of people at a later stage. As we move towards the end of that period, the lockdown does seem to have resulted in a significant slowdown of the epidemic.

"I don't think there is any doubt that the lockdown did manage to achieve a considerable slowdown in the growth of the disease," said Sitabha Sinha, a scientist at the Chennai-based Institute of Mathematical Sciences, who has been studying the spread of the epidemic in India through computer modelling.

Sinha had told *The Indian Express* on April 12 that, according to a study he had been carrying out with his colleague Soumya Easwaran, the number of confirmed infected cases was likely to remain below 20,000 by April 20. This, he had said, was a direct impact of the lockdown, in the absence of which, computer models showed, the number would have reached 35,000. The number on April 20 was 18,465, well within the prediction.

The reproduction number (R) we mention here — a reference to the average number of persons infected by an already infected person — are those calculated by Sinha's team.

There has been a significant change in the growth curves of the states from the last time. Some states, such as Kerala, have done well to contain the epidemic, winning global acclaim for their efforts, while others, like Maharashtra and Delhi, have seen a steady rise in numbers.

Some other states, like Gujarat, which had a modest case load at that time, have emerged as fast-growing hotspots. And states such as West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand have just begun to show signs that they could potentially turn into trouble zones over the next few days, although their current case load is not very high.

### FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

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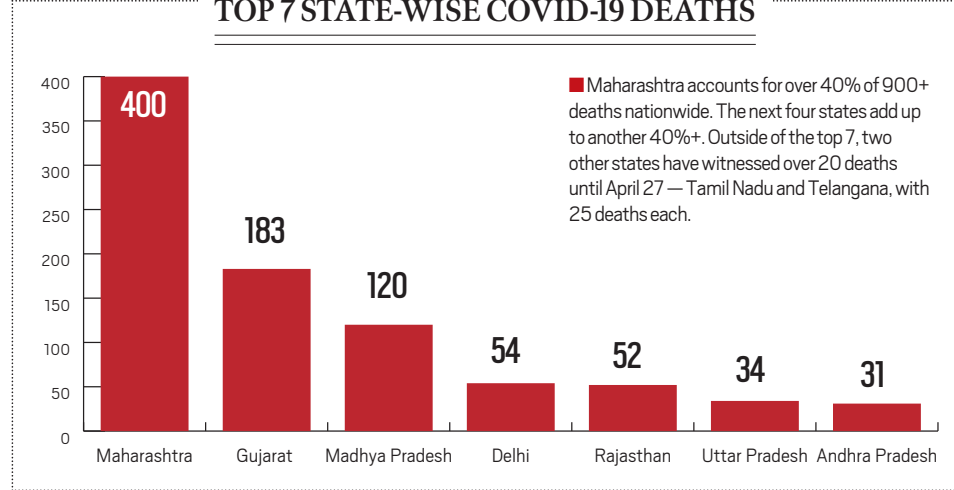
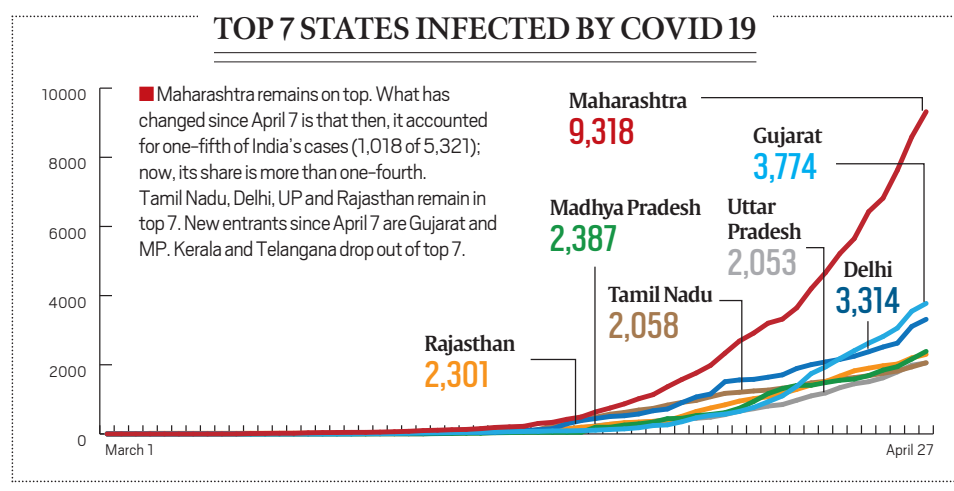
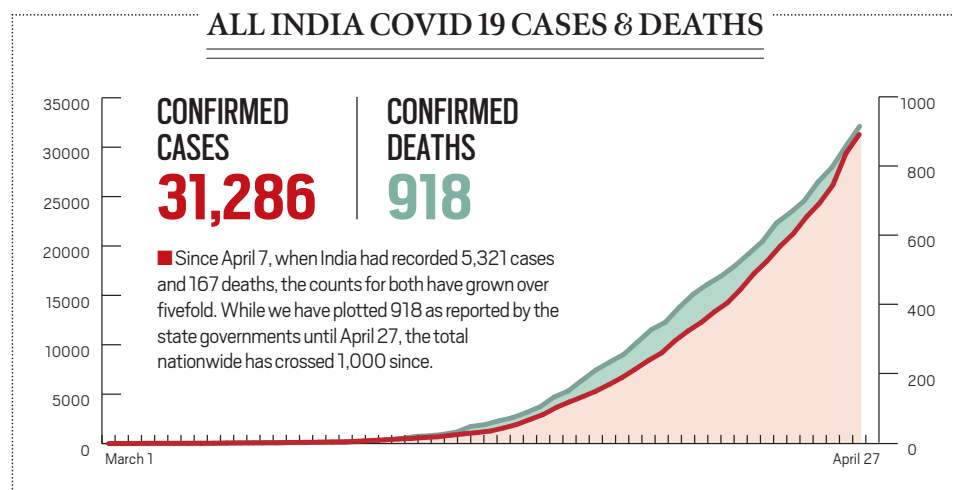
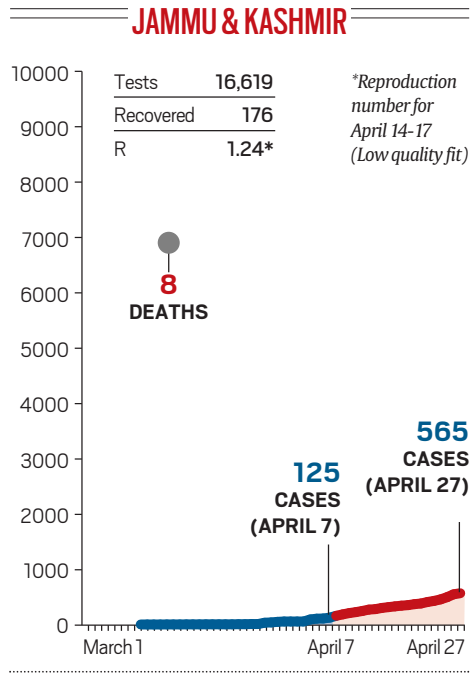
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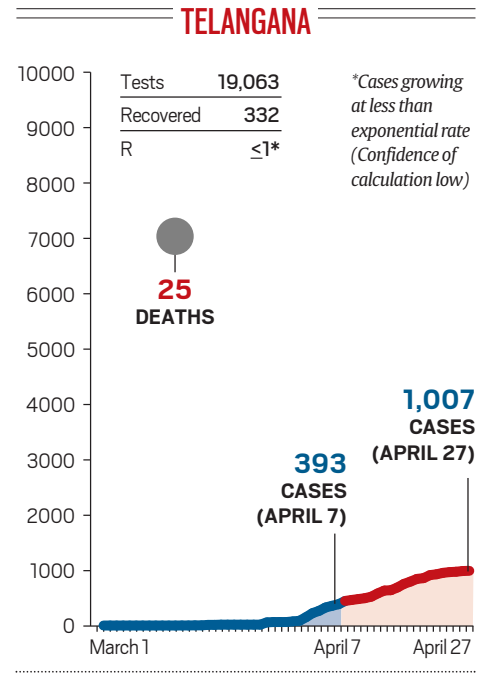
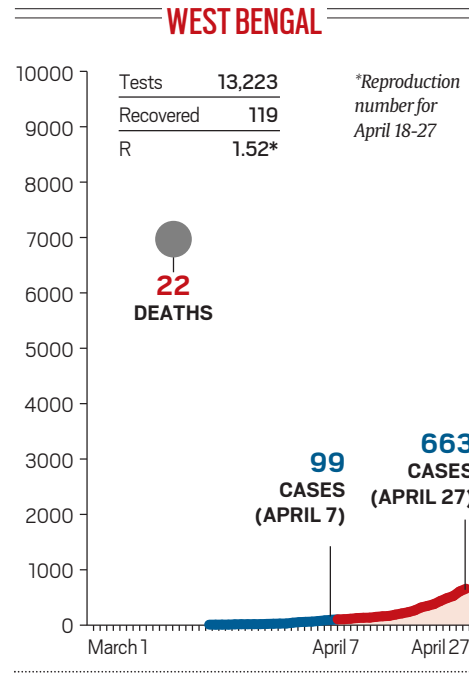
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### OTHER STATES

State	Cases	Deaths	Recoveries
Andaman	10	0	10
Arunachal	1	0	1
Assam	37	1	27
Chandigarh	56	0	17
Chhattisgarh	37	0	32
Daman	1	0	0
Goa	7	0	7
Haryana	308	4	224
Himachal	41	2	25
Jharkhand	105	2	19
Ladakh	20	0	18
Manipur	2	0	2
Meghalaya	12	1	0
Mizoram	1	0	1
Odisha	118	1	37
Tripura	2	0	2
Uttarakhand	54	0	34

Editing: Kabir Firaque  
Graphics: Mithun Chakraborty & Ritesh Kumar



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

I WANT TO ENTERTAIN PEOPLE, BUT  
WITH SOME SUBSTANCE.

— IRRFAN KHAN

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## The exit dilemma

Decision-making under high uncertainty requires  
conviction. It is now essential to begin end of lockdown

DEEPAK NAYYAR

## AFTER THE DELUGE

It is time to design clear rules for departure from  
accepted norms of fiscal prudence

ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN HAS likened the current economic situation to a "pralay (deluge)", in which the government should spend more than even what it ought to in a rainy day. India, the former chief economic adviser said at an e-Adda event hosted by this newspaper, must plan for a "substantially negative" growth this year that might require an additional fiscal expenditure of Rs 10 lakh crore. He has a point. Corporate indebtedness was already high before the lockdown. Not only will insolvency cases mount further, but even companies facing no significant cash flow issues wouldn't invest in an uncertain public health as well as demand-constrained environment. Banks, too, aren't going to lend, no matter how much liquidity the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may infuse. The burden of non-performing assets, which is set to get heavier in the coming months, makes it impossible for them to finance an economic recovery. Last, but not the least, are households. Faced with layoffs and pay cuts, they would rather save and will be afraid to spend.

Under the circumstances, the onus for ensuring that the wheels of the economy start moving — there's no guarantee of it happening even with all lockdown restrictions being lifted — lies on the government. Without somebody to spend, the economy is in real danger of contraction, which will, in turn, worsen the problem of businesses going bust, joblessness and loan defaults that can spread to the entire financial services industry. The one consolation today is that India is not saddled with its traditional "3F" constraints — food, fuel and foreign exchange — which were triggers for inflation and balance of payments crises. On the contrary, public foodgrain stocks are at an all-time-high, global oil prices have crashed and there is no run on the rupee, unlike during the "taper tantrum" period of May-August 2013. The risks, if at all, are tilted more towards demand-side "deflationary shocks", as Subramanian puts it, than supply-side inflation concerns.

There is a legitimate question, though: If the government has to take up the slack, where will the money for it come from? The finances of both the Centre and states are in a mess, with receipts from tax and non-tax sources hardly covering even existing expenditures. But governments enjoy sovereign borrowing powers that allow fund-raising at rates below that of triple A-rated instruments issued by private corporates, more so in the present risk-averse scenario. Also, there is the option of deficit financing ("printing money") through the RBI subscribing to primary auctions of government securities. There are, of course, costs in such powers being exercised. Past precedents — whether the issuance of ad hoc Treasury Bills to the RBI prior to April 1997 or the stimulus package post the 2008 global financial crisis — do not inspire confidence. This is the time to design clear rules for departure from accepted norms of fiscal prudence. Any stimulus has to be transparent and time-bound.

## THE PRICKLY STATE

At a time of crisis, government should welcome, not punish,  
ideas, criticism. These provide ammunition for the battle ahead

IN FACING THE coronavirus challenge, information and ideas are the only ammunition currently available, and should be welcomed and evaluated irrespective of their provenance, whether they originate from within the government or from the public. But a government which has, in better times, sought suggestions directly from the public over the web and through the Prime Minister's app, has become unduly sensitive at a time of grave crisis. When 50 young officers of the Indian Revenue Service forwarded, through their association, policy suggestions, in a report titled FORCE (Fiscal Options and Response to COVID-19 Epidemic) to the Central Board of Direct Taxes and shared them on social media, the Centre termed it as a position "contrary to current policies of government", read it as a breach of service rules and instituted an inquiry against three senior Income Tax officers. Some of the suggestions may be controversial, for instance, a hike in income tax rate to 40 per cent for those earning over Rs 1 crore a year for a limited period of time, but the response is repressive and excessively out of proportion. The officers never claimed that their document was official. Publicly dismissing the controversial suggestions would have sufficed if the government wanted to distance itself from the report.

Meanwhile, public questioning of the government's handling of the pandemic in Manipur has landed several citizens in trouble with the law — police have invoked sections of the Disaster Management Act and the Indian Penal Code, including sedition. In one case, it had merely been suggested that a proposed quarantine centre in Imphal should be moved from agricultural land to a disused airstrip. The deputy chief minister was stripped of all his portfolios, amid a controversy over rice allocation under the National Food Security Act during the coronavirus lockdown, apparently for being critical of the chief minister's assurances of adequate food supply. And in Port Blair, a journalist was booked for asking why the phone contacts of COVID-19 patients were being home quarantined. Instead of arresting him, the authorities could have simply explained that tracing call records is one way of discovering a patient's close contacts.

It is generally agreed that long after lockdowns are lifted, nations will have to remain in close cooperation, so that ideas that work in one place can be borrowed and deployed elsewhere. The principle applies domestically, too. Over-sensitive and prickly responses betray insecurity, precisely when governments must project confidence.

## HIS OWN PATH

Irrfan pushed back against Bollywood mainstream, made his  
audience see and believe. His best was yet to be

WITH IRRFAN KHAN'S passing, we mourn the loss of a great actor. He was one of those performers who dig deep into themselves to discover the truth, even when he played the flakiest of characters. He had that very unique, most paradoxical quality, something that all great actors possess: To make his audiences accept the falsity of film as an ineluctable truth, to make them believe.

He began, in 1988, in Shyam Benegal's tele-serial *Discovery of India*. His latest film, *Angrezi Medium* released in mid-March, but couldn't reach the theatres because of the lockdown. He was a cinephile's delight. Critics loved him. But the constraints of finding good work in a film industry which coasted on formula-heavy flicks, and star-driven vehicles were also his constant companion. He began work with directors who broke into Hindi cinema, laterally, just like he had. The mid-'90s Bollywood was on the verge of a massive churn: The mainstream, under the steam of the three young Khans, Aamir-Salman-Shah Rukh, was creating demand and supply for family-friendly, mono-cultural, mono-theistic romances and sanitised social dramas. Pushback was arriving, in the shape of filmmakers who came from the Hindi-speaking heartlands of the North, from Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Tigamshu Dhulia, who wanted to tell their stories, and needed actors who could do the job.

This Khan, who was happy to junk his surname, was finally right where he needed to be. He was capable of being as raw and visceral as the stories he was offered. And soon, he was outstanding. Big Bollywood took notice, and made a grab for him. Big Hollywood wasn't far behind, and cast him in a few mega-budget entertainers. By then, Bollywood had turned new-agey enough for Irrfan to be able to make some of his most exciting work. But his best, combining maturity and "thehraav (gravitas)", was yet to be. Farewell, Irrfan. You made us see.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi held his fourth round of consultations with state governments on April 27 to review the COVID-19 situation. The draconian lockdown, which completes 40 days on May 3, was discussed. As in the earlier meetings, several chief ministers urged that the lockdown be extended. While no decision was announced, the lockdown might well continue.

For governments everywhere, more so after the experience of Italy, Britain and the United States, where governments did too little too late, imposing and continuing lockdowns is a risk-averse strategy. If the spread can be curbed, it would bring political kudos. If it is not, the microbe is to blame. It is the equivalent of a one-way option in financial markets, where you cannot lose. This is even more attractive now as it conforms to herd-behaviour by governments worldwide. Of course, exit from a lockdown poses a real dilemma for governments. It is about decision-making under high uncertainty, which requires conviction and confidence.

This dilemma will always be larger than life when there is a single objective of saving lives in a pandemic. But it must also be recognised that the health of people and the health of an economy are interdependent, where both shape the wellbeing of people. Thus, saving livelihoods is an equally important objective. Obviously, getting sick and going hungry cannot be an either-or choice. Everyone would prefer to stay healthy and be well fed. It is the role of governments to strike a balance and reconcile these two objectives, rather than juxtapose them as conflicting, requiring a choice to be made.

Lockdowns, combined with mass-testing, contact-tracing, containment-zones, mandatory-quarantines, can only slow down the speed at which the infection spreads. This might help in countries where public health facilities are robust, yet not adequate for large numbers. But our public health system is poor and could never suffice for our large population if the pandemic spreads. There is no vaccine yet. From development through trials to production will be at least one year, and far longer before it becomes available in sufficient quantities for our massive population.

It is now absolutely essential to begin the process of exit from the lockdown. For one, it would enable the government to find some

A calibrated, planned and phased exit could also help manage the spread of the virus. So far, morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 in India has been much lower than elsewhere in the world. This is possibly attributable to our immune systems, which have antibodies that could be effective in resisting the virus. After all, millions of migrants stranded in megacities or relief camps in cramped spaces have not caught the virus through contagion in large numbers. It suggests that there are already some elements of herd-immunity in India that would grow stronger as the lockdown is lifted slowly.

balance between the twin objectives of saving lives and saving livelihoods. For another, it would help restart the economy, which has been almost completely shut down, and the collateral damage is bound to be far greater if the lockdown is extended.

A calibrated, planned and phased exit could also help manage the spread of the virus. So far, morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 in India has been much lower than elsewhere in the world. This is possibly attributable to our immune systems, which have antibodies that could be effective in resisting the virus. After all, millions of migrants stranded in megacities or relief camps in cramped spaces have not caught the virus through contagion in large numbers. It suggests that there are already some elements of herd-immunity in India that would grow stronger as the lockdown is lifted slowly.

The economic and social consequences of the lockdown have been severe. A large proportion of the self-employed, casual workers on daily wages, and informal workers, who constitute 90 per cent of the total workforce, have lost their livelihoods. Demand has dropped sharply as employment has contracted. Supply has been strangled by the massive reduction in output. Government revenues, for both Centre and states, have collapsed. And, even if the lockdown is lifted now, economic growth during 2020-21 would be zero or negative.

For the poor — 75 per cent of rural households and 50 per cent of urban households — food security is at risk. It is a matter of survival. Similarly, for micro-small-medium enterprises, their survival is at stake. Large firms, except those with deep pockets, will also struggle. Whatever the government might stipulate, most firms will find it difficult to pay the wages of their employees, for these will only add to their cash losses during the lockdown. Healthcare for patients, except those with COVID-19, has diminished in terms of both access and quality. In education, learning outcomes, already poor, will get worse as schools and colleges remain closed. In every sphere, the short-term effects of the lockdown will have long-term consequences — hysteresis — as future outcomes will be shaped by this past.

For the economy, the sooner the lockdown is lifted the better. But the process of

exit from the lockdown will have to be in calibrated steps based on a planned transition path in terms of sequence and speed. In this phasing, the geographical size and diversity of India provide degrees of freedom that are missing in most countries.

On April 27, of the total 736 districts in India, 283 districts had not reported any COVID-19 cases so far, while another 18 districts had no new case in the last 28 days (green zones). Thus, economic activity can resume without restrictions in 41 per cent of our districts. In addition, 48 districts had no new case in the last 14 days while 33 districts had no new case in the last 21 days. Thus, in 11 per cent of our districts that are orange zones, economic activity can be resumed in a phased manner.

Similarly, on April 27, there were nine states, in descending order of numbers, that had more than 1,000 infections: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, MP, Tamil Nadu, UP, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Taken together, they accounted for 80 per cent of the infections and 57 per cent of the population in India. There were 13 states, in descending order, that had less than 1,000 infections: West Bengal, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Assam (in the last five, the number of infections was in double-digits). Taken together, they accounted for 12 per cent of the infections and 42 per cent of the population. The distribution of green, orange and red zone districts among states is uneven. The distribution of economic activity across states is also unequal. Even so, there are possibilities.

Economic activity can be resumed in districts without infections and in green zones. The orange zone districts can be brought in as they turn green. The lockdown should continue in states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi (with limited relaxations where possible) and in red zone districts, containment-zones or hot spots within cities, as long as necessary.

In this decision to begin exit from the lockdown, PM Modi will need to act with the same confidence as he did when imposing the lockdown.

The writer is an economist and former Vice Chancellor, University of Delhi

## COMPASSION, ABOVE ALL

Nation's fight against coronavirus cannot ignore the chronically sick and vulnerable



SHAH ALAM KHAN

I LIVE IN a suburban, gated (let's call it corona-secure) colony in Noida at the edge of Delhi. I don't have to worry about my livelihood, clean water, food, or money to buy hand sanitiser. For work, I take the expressway to Delhi. A few days after the lockdown was declared, I witnessed a stream of migrant workers and their families on the expressway — men carrying children, women, children carrying younger children and the elderly. Poor people, deprived of their livelihoods, were supposedly walking to their villages, some as far as 200 to 400 km.

Sitaram (name changed) sits in front of my corona-secure colony. He sells balloons and had once told me that he earns about Rs 200 a day. Sitaram lives in a shanty across the road and has three mouths to feed. After the lockdown, his only source of income has dried up. But Sitaram is still lucky — he and his family members are apparently healthy. The lockdown could mean death for a large number of the chronically-ill or those under treatment or awaiting hospitalisation.

I have written in this newspaper about cancer patients who come to metropolitan cities for treatment. Once their funds evaporate, they live on the streets near the hospitals where they are undergoing treatment ('The cancer refugees', IE, July 23, 2018). Hundreds of such cancer refugees live on the street out-

side the AIIMS, in Delhi. Within 24 hours of the announcement of the lockdown, the streets and footpaths near the hospital were empty. I'm not sure where this cohort melted away. What is more worrying is that they might discontinue their treatment. It's unfair to compare tragedies, but I feel that the chronically sick are the worst affected in situations such as the current lockdown.

According to a WHO report (2015), nearly 5.8 million people in India die every year of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Constant evaluation and surveillance hold the key to treating such diseases — this anyway is a difficult proposition in a country like India. After the lockdown, a large number of these patients could have been severely affected.

In 2018, 2.15 million new tuberculosis (TB) cases were diagnosed in India. Imagine the plight of these patients, a large number of whom would be on treatment at DOTS (directly observed treatment short-course) centres and/or at hospital OPDs, which are now either shut down or inaccessible due to the stringent curfew. The resurgence of TB — multiple drug-resistant TB — as a result of not following treatment protocols is well known. It is important that we track the health of TB patients during the lockdown period.

The devotion of my colleagues, students, nurses, ancillary staff, and other members of

the hospital where I work is worth mentioning. It was encouraging that the prime minister asked citizens to clap and clang *thalis* (utensils) as a mark of appreciation for healthcare workers. People responded to the PM's call with gusto. Unfortunately, such appreciation was short-lived — junior doctors of the hospital where I work were asked by their landlords to vacate their premises. There were also reports of a female doctor in Telangana being assaulted by the police who had stopped her for violating the curfew — she was reportedly on her way to work. I wish there was less noise and more assurances about providing equipment to medical professionals.

Physical distancing is imperative to check the spread of the virus. But the lockdown could have been implemented with more compassion. People's health is the responsibility of the state. But at no stage should it resort to methods that hurt the marginalised. The healthcare system of a nation should not be judged by its response to an epidemic but by its commitment to its people's health in the long term. A well-oiled healthcare delivery system would have been useful in times like these. But it's never too late to learn from bad experiences.

The writer is professor of orthopaedics, AIIMS, New Delhi. Views are personal

## APRIL 30, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO



ASSAM CLIMBDOWN THE ASSAMESE HAVE modified their original stand on the foreigners issue, saying that they do not want their repatriation "but only their detention". This climbdown to an olive branch now offered to the Centre to "diffuse tensions in Assam", student leaders and Gana Sangram Parishad sources said. Denouncing the "occupation army-like behaviour" of the military and police forces in the strongest possible terms, they seriously regretted that while they had revised their stand, the Centre was "not showing any willingness to budge from their position". The Assamese leaders said that they had changed their position on the repatriation of

Bangladeshi migrants because it would be "inhuman" to do so.

GOLD BONDS GOVERNMENT MINTS ARE working overtime to refine 13,993 kgs of gold and make bars for refund to the gold bond holders after October this year. The gold had been given by the citizens under the National Defence Gold Bond Scheme in 1965 in wake of the war with Pakistan. About 1.4 lakh bond holders will get back their gold holdings. They were not only getting regular interest on their possession, but the value of gold has skyrocketed during the last 15 years. Prices have gone up from Rs 130 to Rs 1,400 per ten grams.

The finance ministry will refund the precious metal through 1,000 centres.

KOIRALA INTERVIEW "OUR RELATIONS WITH China will be 'very friendly' and our relations with India will be the friendliest," said B P Koirala, Nepal's only democratically elected former prime minister. The man can do it again, become PM, if the Nepalese people vote for multi-party parliamentary democracy in the referendum on May 2. In an exclusive interview to *The Indian Express* on the eve of the elections, Koirala said that "Nepal belongs to the Asian comity of nations. We will have to keep the Americans and Russians at a distance".



PANDEMIC WATCH



In Bangkok. AP

THAILAND Bangkok to ease some restrictions

Bangkok: Officials in Bangkok say they are preparing to ease restrictions that were imposed to fight the spread of COVID-19...

1 mn US cases, toll surpasses Vietnam War

AGENCIES NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

IT HAS been 100 days since a 35-year-old man presented to an urgent care clinic in Snohomish County, Washington...

Since then, more than one million people had tested positive in the United States.

In that time, residents in most states in the country — along with more than half of all humanity — have been ordered to shelter in their homes...

The death toll climbed above 58,000 on Tuesday, surpassing the loss of American life from the Vietnam War...

Epidemiologists have estimated that the true number of infections may be about 10 times the known number...



Vice President Mike Pence during a visit to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. AP

eral thousand, according to analysis of mortality data by The New York Times.

While the timeline for the spread of the virus has shifted as public health authorities find evidence that the pathogen was spreading in communities earlier than believed...

Masks are becoming an accepted part of public life, which is why there was such a backlash on Tuesday after Vice President Mike Pence flouted the Mayo Clinic's protocols on wearing a protective face covering on a visit there.

In the last 100 days, the global economy has suffered such a swift and sudden decline that economists have had to reach back to the Great Depression for analogies.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, among the latest to lock down his state against the pandemic, has been weighing whether to join other states in a relaxation of workplace restrictions...

US CONSIDERING SCANNING FOR INTL AIR TRAVELLERS

The US is considering scanning of air travellers from countries hit hard by the coronavirus to stop its spread in the country...

Trump said this could be done in coordination with either the airlines or government. 'We're working with the airlines. Maybe it's a combination of both,' he said.

EXPLAINED Misinformation emerges as challenge

As the US looks at long-term plans and economic recovery initiatives, misinformation about vaccines is shaping to be a major concern before one is even ready.

The claims range from concerns that vaccine trials will be rushed, to conspiracy theories that Bill Gates wants to use the vaccine to inject microchips in people...

NEPAL 3 returnees of Tablighi meet test positive

Kathmandu: Nepal on Wednesday said that three persons, who returned from India after attending a Tablighi Jamaat gathering...

SINGAPORE Govt warns of fake news

Singapore: Singapore on Wednesday warned against spreading fake news and videos about migrants workers, saying this could disturb law and order in dormitories...

UK now has 2nd-highest COVID-19 death toll across Europe

ANDY BRUCE LONDON, APRIL 29

THE UNITED Kingdom now has Europe's second-highest official death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic...

Some 26,097 people died across the United Kingdom after testing positive for COVID-19 as of April 28 at 1600 GMT...

These more complete data will give us a fuller and more up to date picture of deaths in England and will inform the government's approach...

Such a high UK death toll increases the pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government which is facing criticism from opposition parties...

In mid-March, the government's chief scientific adviser said keeping the UK death toll below 20,000 would be a 'good outcome'.

Although international comparisons are difficult, the new figures confirm Britain's place among the European countries worst hit hardest by the pandemic.



STADIUM TESTING

Johannesburg residents gather in a stadium to be tested for the virus on Wednesday. South Africa will begin a phased easing of its strict lockdown measures...

'Life has to go on': How Sweden faced virus

THOMAS ERDBRINK & CHRISTINA ANDERSON STOCKHOLM, APRIL 29

SHE STOOD leaning on her cane, briefly resting among dozens of bubbly young Swedes out enjoying one of the first sunny spring days of the year.

'I'm trying not to get too close to people,' said Birgit Lilja, 82, explaining that she had left her house to pick up a new identity card in person.

Trust is high in Sweden — in government, institutions and fellow Swedes. When the government defied conventional wisdom and refused to order a



Picnickers in Stockholm last week. NYT

wholesale lockdown to 'flatten the curve' of the epidemic, public health officials pointed to trust as a central justification.

Swedes, they said, could be trusted to stay home, follow social distancing protocols and wash

their hands to slow the spread of the virus — without any mandatory orders.

Sweden's death rate of 22 per 100,000 people is the same as that of Ireland, which has earned accolades for its handling of the pandemic...

While other countries were slamming on the brakes, Sweden kept its borders open, allowed restaurants and bars to keep serving, left preschools and grade schools in session...

port or outings in local parks. Gatherings of more than 50 people are banned. Museums have closed and sporting events have been cancelled...

That's roughly it. There are almost no fines, and police officers can only ask people to oblige. Pedestrians wearing masks are generally stared at as if they have just landed from Mars.

Throughout the crisis Sweden has had enough intensive care units to deal with Covid-19 patients, the minister of health and social affairs, Lena Hallengren, said in an interview.

Final journeys are getting lonelier, last goodbyes shorter

SRIRAM VEERA MUMBAI, APRIL 29

BET A graveyard in central Indore, a funeral home in the midwestern US state of Wisconsin or a cemetery in Italy's northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia...



Bodies being buried in New York's Hart Island. Reuters/FILE

Indore's Hafiz Javed, a cemetery caretaker, says the most disconcerting moment for him these days is to watch the coffin pushed, rather than lowered, into the grave.

With few relatives attending burials, the last rites finish quickly. 'We instruct family members to pile mud over the body, and once that is done, we rush to finish the job.

In the Malwa mill region's crematorium, too, the pandemic's shadow looms large. Cloth pouches and steel boxes with ashes hang from hooks or sit on the floor.

Family members of the deceased aren't turning up to collect the mortal remains. 'Some are waiting for things to open so they can travel for ashes immersion; others are paranoid about infection,' says Gauri Kailashpati...

In the US, meanwhile, funerals follow a strict protocol. Wisconsin funeral director John Wenig shares how his son was left speechless by a lady who had lost her husband after 60 years of marriage to COVID-19.

FULL STORY ON www.indianexpress.com

Failure to stop virus at source led to 184 countries going through hell: Trump

LALIT K JHA WASHINGTON, APRIL 29

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump doubled down on China for failing to tame the coronavirus at its very origin, saying it has led to 184 countries 'going through hell'...

Trump has been publicly blaming China for the global spread of the 'invisible enemy' and launched an investigation against it.

Germany believe that the deaths and the destruction of the global economy could have been avoided, had China shared the information about the virus in its early phases.

Leaders of the US, the UK and Germany believe that the deaths and the destruction of the global economy could have been avoided...

'It's in 184 countries, as you hear me say often. It's hard to believe. It's inconceivable,' Trump told reporters at White House Tuesday.

However, Presiding Judge Jawadur Hassan expressed displeasure over the bureau for not presenting the suspect and also refused to entertain the medical certificate of a private hospital.

OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

Clinton endorses Biden: 'Wish he were president right now'

LISA LERER, MAGGIE ASTOR & SYDNEY EMBER NEW YORK, APRIL 29



PRIMARIES: THE DEMOCRATS

HILLARY CLINTON, the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee and a political veteran who knows firsthand what it is like to compete against President Trump...

port the kind of person that we want back in the White House,' Clinton said on Tuesday afternoon during a virtual town hall-style event with Biden...

Accepting her support, Biden said: 'I really appreciate your friendship. What a, just a wonderful personal endorsement.'

Boris, fiancée announce birth of boy, two days after he returned to work

ASSOCIATED PRESS LONDON, APRIL 29



Boris Johnson

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds announced the birth of a son on Wednesday, just two days after Johnson returned to work following hospitalisation for the coronavirus.

John's office said Symonds gave birth to a 'healthy baby boy at a London hospital' on Wednesday, and both mother and infant were doing well.

Johnson, 55, and Symonds, 32, announced in February that they were engaged and expecting a child together. At the time

they said the baby was due in early summer. No wedding date has been announced.

Symonds, an environmental campaigner and former Conservative Party staffer, also said she was sick for a week with COVID-19 symptoms, though she wasn't tested for the virus.

The baby is the third born to a sitting British prime minister this century. It wasn't immediately clear whether Johnson planned to take paternity leave.

Pak media mogul remanded in judicial custody in 34-yr-old case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LAHORE, APRIL 29

PAKISTANI MEDIA mogul Mir Shakilur Rehman, arrested on charges of illegally obtaining government land here over three decades ago when Nawaz Sharif was the chief minister of Punjab province...

On April 27, the anti-graft body had issued an arrest warrant against the embattled former prime minister Sharif in the land corruption case.

An accountability court on Tuesday sent Rehman to jail on judicial remand till May 12 after the prosecutor said the NAB did not need him anymore for investigation, the Dawn News reported.

The charges against Rehman relating to the purchase of several plots of land in Lahore go back to 1986 when Sharif was the chief minister of Punjab province.

However, Presiding Judge Jawadur Hassan expressed displeasure over the bureau for not presenting the suspect and also refused to entertain the medical certificate of a private hospital.

The 70-year-old supreme of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, is currently in London for medical treatment.

NAB officials said Sharif illegally leased the land to Rehman. At the outset of Rehman's remand hearing on Tuesday, NAB Special Prosecutor Asim Mumtaz told the court that he could not be brought for the hearing as he was admitted to a private hospital owing to bad health.

Later, the NAB brought Rehman to the court in an ambulance from the hospital.



