

**THE MISSING NOTES:****ON POLITICS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19****Political India should put up a united front against the fast galloping virus**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the nation on March 19 on the coronavirus pandemic, rightly focused on what people should do in what is fast turning into a crisis situation. But there was very little by way of reassurance to the people about what the government was doing, or planning to do, to mitigate the developing crisis. Battling maladies of various kinds all the time, a large segment of the population has developed a detrimental fatalism, against which Mr. Modi had spoken earlier. That complacency has been evident in the social response to the creeping affliction, a nonchalance bordering on irresponsibility. Large gatherings of people at private, State and religious events have continued well after the nature of the disease became clear. The Prime Minister's call for a lockdown on March 22 could prepare the country for stiffer measures if and when the situation so demands. The Prime Minister also held a conference call with Chief Ministers on March 20. To the extent that it communicated a sense of urgency and emergency, the Prime Minister's address was timely. But beyond that it did not achieve much. The States are at the forefront of the fight against the virus, and their capacity is frustratingly uneven across the country. Marshalling all resources available, and launching a complete spectrum defence against the virus is the need of the hour. There are measures that the governments, at the Centre and the State levels, have been taking. For those who expected to hear some reassuring words from the Prime Minister on this, the address was a tad disappointing.

The most effective weapon in the fight against the coronavirus, evidence so far suggests, is social distancing. This requires people to disrupt their lives and livelihoods. The Prime Minister emphatically urged people to keep themselves at home, but did not adequately put them at ease on the looming questions of economic insecurity. There is a task force chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and an early announcement of measures that will alleviate the economic pain will go a long way in seeing the populace through these tough times. It is one thing to instill a collective purpose among the people to meet a common challenge and quite another to do what the governments are supposed to do, and communicate that. While Mr. Modi's address was very forceful on the first, instead of explaining the government's plans to deal with the crisis, he exhorted people to clap for the frontline responders against the coronavirus, who are doing a splendid job, at a particular time. In most parts of the world, this threat to humanity has prompted leaders to put political differences aside, and opposing sides have joined hands. It will be a tragedy if India cannot do the same. To this end, the Opposition should play a more constructive role, and the government must send out a message that it is taking control of the situation.

**Meanings of difficult words:**

- ❖ **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
- ❖ **put up** (phrasal verb) – give, provide, come up with; present, put forward, propose.
- ❖ **gallop** (verb) – proceed/rise at great speed.
- ❖ **address** (noun) – speak, talk, discourse.
- ❖ **coronavirus** (CoV)(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever,

cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. (Courtesy: **WHO**)

- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **focus on** (verb) – draw attention to, emphasize, highlight.
- ❖ **little by way of** (phrase) – not (very) much; less.
- ❖ **mitigate** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease, make less severe.
- ❖ **malady** (noun) – serious problem.
- ❖ **all the time** (phrase) – constantly, relentlessly, always.
- ❖ **detrimental** (adjective) – damaging, inimical, dangerous.
- ❖ **fatalism** (noun) – acceptance; belief that all events are unpredictable/unavoidable as fated.
- ❖ **complacency** (noun) – carelessness, laxity, laziness; smug; self-satisfaction, self-approval.
- ❖ **creeping** (adjective) – (of a negative manner) occurring, developing gradually.
- ❖ **affliction** (noun) – misfortune, suffering, pain, trouble.
- ❖ **nonchalance** (noun) – unconcern, lack of concern, indifference, carelessness.
- ❖ **border on** (verb) – be similar to, resemble, be comparable to.
- ❖ **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, publicly ask/necessitate, demand.
- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – confinement, restraint, encirclement.
- ❖ **if and when** (phrase) – used to say something about an future event/situation that may or may not happen.
- ❖ **timely** (adjective) – opportune, well timed, at the right time, appropriate.
- ❖ **at the forefront** (phrase) – be in a leading position in an important activity that is trying to achieve something.
- ❖ **frustratingly** (adverb) – irritatingly.
- ❖ **marshal** (verb) – arrange, organize, deploy, systematize.
- ❖ **spectrum** (noun) – wide range, gamut, ambit.
- ❖ **need of the hour** (phrase) – some need/requirement/demand at a particular point of time.
- ❖ **a tad** (adverb) – rather, quite, fairly, somewhat, a little.
- ❖ **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
- ❖ **social distancing** (noun) – a term means actively avoiding crowded public places, is a key element in decreasing the rapid spread of COVID-19. This is an effort intended to limit exposure by reducing face-to-face contact and preventing spread among people in community settings.
- ❖ **livelihood** (noun) – source of income, means of support, living, subsistence.
- ❖ **emphatically** (adverb) – distinctly, clearly, noticeably.
- ❖ **urge** (verb) – advise, recommend, suggest.
- ❖ **to put someone at ease** (phrase) – to make (someone) to feel calm & relaxed.
- ❖ **looming** (adjective) – appearing/emerging as a large/threatening one.
- ❖ **economic insecurity** (noun) – Economic insecurity can be defined as “the anxiety produced by the possible exposure to adverse economic events and by the anticipation of the difficulty to recover from them”. Examples could include a fear of unemployment, or an expectation of a worsening financial situation.
- ❖ **task force** (noun) – unit, crew, outfit, section (mainly arranged for a task).
- ❖ **chair** (verb) – preside over, lead, control/direct.
- ❖ **alleviate** (verb) – reduce, control, mitigate/moderate.
- ❖ **go a long way** (phrase) – to do a lot of work before accomplishing a goal.

- ❖ **see through** (phrasal verb) – get/have the measure of, fathom, realize, understand.
- ❖ **populace** (noun) – population, inhabitants, people/public.
- ❖ **instil** (verb) – introduce, imprint, inculcate.
- ❖ **exhort** (verb) – urge, encourage, advise, appeal to.
- ❖ **frontline responder** (noun) – a person who is among the first to arrive and provide assistance at the scene of an emergency. First/front line responders typically include paramedics, emergency medical technicians, police officers, firefighters & etc.,.
- ❖ **splendid** (adjective) – excellent, wonderful, magnificent.
- ❖ **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.
- ❖ **prompt** (verb) – give rise to, bring about, cause.
- ❖ **put aside** (phrasal verb) – disregard/forget, set aside, ignore.
- ❖ **difference** (noun) – disagreement, difference of opinion, misunderstanding, dispute.
- ❖ **join hands** (phrase) – work together.
- ❖ **to this end** (phrase) – to achieve the (previously) specified goal/aim.
- ❖ **constructive** (adjective) – positive, useful, helpful.
- ❖ **play a part/role** (phrase) – contribute to, be instrumental in, be a factor in.
- ❖ **send out** (phrasal verb) – give out, announce, deliver/release.

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## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT:**

### **ON NIRBHAYA CASE CONVICTS' HANGING**

#### **A society that prefers a male child has already condemned its women to an unequal world**

The pre-dawn hangings of four men convicted of the gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman may have brought a semblance of closure to her parents, prompting her mother, to say, “Women will now feel safe.” On December 16, 2012, the woman was brutally raped in an empty moving bus in Delhi and she died after battling for her life later that month. A little over seven years later, the first date of execution was set for January 22, and the convicts tried all legal avenues possible to escape the punishment. After the executions, on Friday, her mother said, “Families will start teaching their boys that the punishment for such a crime will be severe.” But is India any closer to guaranteeing safety for women? In 2012, the government of the day, reacting to the clamour on the streets for justice, set up the Justice J.S. Verma Committee to look into rape laws. The report, filed in a month, led to stringent changes through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, but several recommendations were simply not considered, including those relating to marital rape and police reform.

On the imposition of the death penalty, the government went against what the Verma report had suggested — that seeking such a punishment “would be a regressive step in the field of sentencing and reformation”. Now, repeat offenders in rape cases, even those that unlike the Nirbhaya case did not involve murder, can be awarded the death sentence. The Verma Committee had argued instead for rigorous imprisonment of a convict for life. It is a fact that sexual crimes against women have not come down since the Delhi case. The death penalty could actually encourage the rapist to kill the victim. Going by data in the National Crime Records Bureau report, released in January 2020, a total of 3.78 lakh cases of crimes against women were recorded across India in 2018 compared to 3.59 lakh in 2017 and 3.38 lakh in 2016. The total number of rape cases in 2018 was pegged at 33,356, of which Madhya Pradesh registered 5,450 rapes, the maximum in 2018.

The crime rate per one lakh women population was 58.8 in 2018 compared to 57.9 in 2017. At the end of 2018, 33.6% cases were pending police investigation. This raises the key question — what does India need to do to protect its girls and women? It is apparent that laws may have changed, but not mindsets. A society that endorses a preference for the male child has already condemned the girl child to an unequal world. Until Indian leaders, policy-makers and society shed the gender bias and the thinking that they need to protect women as a question of honour, there will be no stopping crimes such as rape, sexual assault and harassment.

**Meanings of difficult words:**

- ❖ **convict** (noun) - prisoner, inmate, criminal.
- ❖ **condemn** (verb) – incriminate, prove to be guilty, denounce find fault with.
- ❖ **pre-dawn** (noun) – early morning.
- ❖ **convict** (verb) - declare guilty, give a sentence.
- ❖ **semblance** (noun) - appearance, resemblance, equivalence, similarity.
- ❖ **prompt** (verb) - give rise to, bring about, cause
- ❖ **brutally** (adverb) - cruelly, savagely, ruthlessly.
- ❖ **execution** (noun) - capital punishment, the death penalty, killing (by hanging) as a punishment.
- ❖ **avenue** (noun) – line/way, path, direction (of approaching a problem).
- ❖ **clamour** (noun) – protest, complaint outcry/commotion.
- ❖ **on the streets** (phrase) – (of a crowd) to come together in the streets to display communal harmony n either celebration or opposition.
- ❖ **set up** (phrasal verb) - establish, institute, create, arrange.
- ❖ **look into** (verb) - investigate, explore, research, inquire about.
- ❖ **stringent** (adjective) strict/stern, severe, tough/rigorous.
- ❖ **marital** (adjective) married, wedded.
- ❖ **imposition** (noun) - implementation, execution, enforcement.
- ❖ **go against** (phrasal verb) - be contrary to.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) ask for, request, appeal for, apply for.
- ❖ **regressive** (adjective) – retrograde, retrogressive, unprogressive/negative.
- ❖ **sentence** (noun) - judgement, decision, verdict.
- ❖ **reformation** (noun) - rehabilitation, transformation.
- ❖ **offender** (noun) - criminal, wrongdoer/evil-doer, culprit
- ❖ **unlike** (adjective) – different from, dissimilar to not like, as opposed to.
- ❖ **imprisonment** (noun) - incarceration, custody, confinement.
- ❖ **come down** (phrasal verb) - decrease, reduce, lessen.
- ❖ **peg (at)** (verb) – fix, set, hold, limit (a price rate, or amount) at a particular level.
- ❖ **apparent** (adjective) – obvious, clear, visible.
- ❖ **endorse** (verb) - uphold, support defend, maintain.
- ❖ **shed** (verb) - discard, get rid of do away with, abandon.
- ❖ **gender bias** (noun) - a behaviour that shows favouritism toward one gender over another. A preference or prejudice toward one gender over the other.
- ❖ **honour** (noun) - uprightness/righteousness, ethics/morals, morality, principle.
- ❖ **sexual assault** (noun) – sexual misconduct, molestation, sexual interference, physical violence.
- ❖ **harassment** (noun) – persecution, persistent annoyance, coercion/intimidation.

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