

**LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND: ON INDIA'S RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS****Governments must aid people during this difficult phase and prepare for wider testing**

India has responded to the spectre of large-scale transmission of the novel coronavirus and the unprecedented public health catastrophe it may bring by ordering a full national lockdown. The goal is to flatten the transmission curve and help a frayed health system cope with a large number of cases. Physical distancing of people, ensured through a suspension of rail and inter-State bus services, closure of public places, cessation of all non-essential activity and street-level monitoring, is the first order priority during a pandemic and the lockdown can ensure that. The options being used by States to enforce this are Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and the Indian Penal Code. What must follow is the galvanising of governmental machinery to address essential requirements. This was certainly not in evidence on Sunday during the janata curfew, which saw near-total compliance, but culminated in noisy public celebrations. It was also marked by a last-minute scramble among migrant labour stuffing themselves into trains to return home ahead of the shutdown. Many hundreds more remained stranded in several cities, crowding termini, as train services were withdrawn. These hapless people, who must largely fend for themselves, have been potentially exposed to the pathogen; some may have unwittingly infected others. The week-long lockdown ahead cannot become a similar exercise in chaos, confusion and misery. As a war-like moment in the country's history, it calls for massive preparation with all hands on deck to mitigate the impact on people, and to formulate a public health response for the period beyond the shutdown.

Governments have a duty to ensure that the most vulnerable classes, economically and socially, including the elderly, have access to essential articles including medicines, close to where they live. It should not be difficult to provide to them a package of staples to last a week using civil supplies departments, civic workers, and non-governmental organisations. Considering that about 37% of households depend on casual labour as their major source of income for rural and urban India, and nearly 55% have tenuous regular employment, as per Periodic Labour Force Survey data for 2017-18, it is essential for governments to ensure that they get subsistence wages for as long as restrictions last. Some States have already moved in that direction. Funds transfers during the containment phase of the pandemic, followed by a stimulus to sustain employment are necessary. But a bigger challenge stares India in the face: can it get a universally accessible testing system in place to prevent transmission when the lockdown is lifted? China, South Korea and Singapore, as WHO points out, adopted a strict shutdown, but used the breather to get a grip on infections by testing at the population level. This is the hard work that lies ahead, and it will test the mettle of India's national and State governments.

**Meanings of Difficult Words:**

- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – a state of isolation; confinement, restraint, encirclement.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.

- ❖ **spectre** (noun) – threat, menace, danger/peril.
- ❖ **novel coronavirus** (nCoV) (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- ❖ **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- ❖ **catastrophe** (noun) – destruction, damage, disaster.
- ❖ **flatten** (verb) – make flat, make even, make smooth.
- ❖ **frayed** (adjective) – strained, stressed, fraught, overtaxed.
- ❖ **cope with** (verb) - deal with, grapple with, handle/manage.
- ❖ **inter-** (prefix) – between.
- ❖ **cessation** (noun) - suspension, stopping, halting/ceasing.
- ❖ **first-order** (adjective) - primary, immediate, urgent.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **epidemic** (noun) – widespread disease/illness; outbreak, plague, scourge.
- ❖ **galvanise** (verb) – inspire, spur, encourage.
- ❖ **machinery** (noun) - organization, system, structure.
- ❖ **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
- ❖ **curfew** (noun) – a rule which is instructing people to stay at home, typically at night.
- ❖ **near-total** (adjective) - close by.
- ❖ **compliance** (noun) – conformity, observation, adherence.
- ❖ **culminate** (verb) – come to a climax; come to an end with, terminate with.
- ❖ **noisy** (adjective) – vociferous, clamorous, tumultuous, talkative.
- ❖ **scramble** (verb) – struggle, hurry/hasten, rush (to do something to achieve a goal/result).
- ❖ **stuff** (verb) - fill, pack, force/push, ram.
- ❖ **strand** (verb) – get stuck, be in a place (unable to move).
- ❖ **termini plural form of terminus** (noun) - the end of a transport route (railway or others).
- ❖ **hapless** (adjective) – unfortunate, unlucky, ill-fated, cursed.
- ❖ **fend for oneself** (verb) - take care of oneself, look after oneself, manage by oneself.
- ❖ **pathogen** (noun) – bacteria/virus that causes disease.
- ❖ **unwittingly** (adverb) – inadvertently, unknowingly, unintentionally.
- ❖ **chaos** (noun) – disorder, turmoil, mayhem/disruption.
- ❖ **misery** (noun) – pain, distress, suffering.
- ❖ **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, publicly ask/necessitate, demand.
- ❖ **all hands on deck** (phrase) – figuratively means that all the members are involved in a situation.
- ❖ **mitigate** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease, make less severe.
- ❖ **vulnerable** (adjective) – weak, feeble; unsafe, unprotected/unguarded.
- ❖ **staple** (adjective) – main or important thing, major/primary element.
- ❖ **household** (noun) – family, house.
- ❖ **casual labourer** (noun) - a person who is employed on a temporary, rather than a permanent or regular basis.
- ❖ **tenuous** (adjective) - weak, fragile, shaky; insubstantial, unspecific, indefinite.
- ❖ **periodic** (adjective) - regular, periodical, recurrent, recurring.
- ❖ **subsistence** (modifier) – relating to sufficient only for one's own use; relating to one's maintenance, living, livelihood.
- ❖ **stimulus** (noun) - impetus, boost, incentive, fillip.
- ❖ **sustain** (verb) – preserve, conserve, bolster up.
- ❖ **stare someone in the eye** (verb) – look fixedly, gaze, watch closely (at someone).

- ❖ **universally** (adverb) - by everyone; in every case, invariably; widely, commonly.
- ❖ **point out** (phrasal verb) – identify, recognize, draw attention to, mention.
- ❖ **breather** (noun) – break, rest/pause, interval after a period of activity.
- ❖ **get a grip** (phrase) - make an effort to control oneself; regain one's composure.
- ❖ **lie ahead** (phrasal verb) – be going to happen; to be in the future.
- ❖ **mettle** (noun) – spirit, strength of character, nerve/determination.

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## **THE MAOIST TRAP: ON KILLING OF SECURITY PERSONNEL IN SUKMA**

### **In difficult terrain, security personnel end up second best despite the training**

The attack by Maoist extremists in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Saturday, that killed 17 security personnel and injured 15, including two critically, presents a grim picture on how poorly India continues to fare on this front. There was intelligence that Maoists were going to assemble at Elmagunda village, which is dominated by the Peoples' Liberation Guerrilla Army Battalion 1. Accordingly, security forces, comprising District Reserve Guards, Special Task Force, numbering 500, were dispatched into the forests to deal with the emergent situation. In retrospect, despite the intelligence, they did not encounter even one Maoist and began their journey back, in two groups, to their camps at Chintagufa and Burkapal, not more than six kilometres apart as the crow flies. The smaller contingent, numbering 100, headed to Burkapal, encountered fire six kilometres from the base camp and they duly returned it. The Maoists retreated and fired again and the security forces fired and followed till they had been lured into an open area in hilly terrain where the Maoists, some 350 of them, had the advantage of numbers, line of fire as well as height, a classic ambush. The Maoists then picked off their targets. The other much larger group, not more than three kilometres away, also came under diversionary fire that kept them pinned down.

The real story is still to emerge, but it is odd that in the battle that began about noon and lasted five-and-a-half daylight hours, reinforcements could not be sent to hapless personnel. It can be surmised that at the very least those who got ambushed did not know the terrain or the tactics enough, although that should not be the case considering the composition of the DRG. It is yet to be convincingly explained how as many as 400 personnel so near did not rush to aid their uniformed brethren. Was it a leadership or assessment issue? Was there a communication breakdown? Was the initial intelligence properly vetted or was it a bait? Was this entire operation properly supervised? It is remarkable, too, that helicopters were able to evacuate the wounded afterwards. So complete was the rout that even though the security forces said they took down some Maoists, there is not much physical evidence to support this claim. It is also significant that as many as 13 of the dead security forces were locals from Sukma district, many of them surrendered Maoists. And unfortunate that many of them bled to death waiting for assistance. There is a lot to answer for but it seems that despite dedicated training the security forces get for just these eventualities, the Maoists are able to improvise and come out on top, smarter, nimbler, and many steps ahead.

#### **Meanings of Difficult Words:**

- ❖ **trap** (noun) - ambush, bait, tricky attack, trick/ploy, deceptive plan.
- ❖ **personnel** (noun) – employees, staff, workforce.

- ❖ **terrain** (noun) – land, area, territory, domain, countryside.
- ❖ **end up** (verb) - come/appear, find oneself (to a particular course of action in the end).
- ❖ **(come off) second best** (phrase) - be defeated.
- ❖ **extremist** (noun) – militant, radical, fanatic, hardliner.
- ❖ **grim** (adjective) – severe, serious, distressing, upsetting, worrying.
- ❖ **fare** (verb) – manage, cope, get on, proceed, get along.
- ❖ **front** (noun) - a particular situation.
- ❖ **intelligence** (noun) – (military & political) information.
- ❖ **dispatch** (verb) – send, send off (to a place).
- ❖ **in retrospect** (phrase) – looking back, on reflection, in/with hindsight.
- ❖ **encounter** (verb) - face, come across, confront, come up against.
- ❖ **as the crow flies** (phrase) - in a straight line.
- ❖ **contingent** (noun) – unit, squad, troop.
- ❖ **retreat** (verb) – withdraw, pull back, draw back.
- ❖ **lure** (verb) – tempt, persuade, attract, coax, win over.
- ❖ **hilly** (adjective) - high, steep, precipitous.
- ❖ **line of fire** (phrase) - in a position where someone is aiming their gun at you.
- ❖ **pick off** (phrasal verb) - shoot a target (person) in a group of people by aiming carefully from a distance.
- ❖ **come under** (phrasal verb) – be subjected to.
- ❖ **diversionary** (adjective) – aimed to distract attention from something more important.
- ❖ **pin down** (phrasal verb) - confine, trap, hem in; force, compel, pressurize (to deal with something).
- ❖ **odd** (adjective) - unusual, strange, uncommon.
- ❖ **reinforcement** (noun) - additional troops, extra personnel, reserves.
- ❖ **hapless** (adjective) – unfortunate, unlucky, ill-fated.
- ❖ **surmise** (verb) – assume, conjecture, suppose.
- ❖ **at the very least** (phrase) – to put it mildly, take the most pessimistic view.
- ❖ **ambush** (verb) - attack by surprise, trap, confront/encounter someone (attacker) suddenly.
- ❖ **composition** (noun) - formation, structure, organization, arrangement.
- ❖ **convincingly** (adverb) – strongly, conclusively, forcefully.
- ❖ **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.
- ❖ **brethren** (plural noun) – community, group.
- ❖ **breakdown** (noun) – failure, collapse, foundering.
- ❖ **vet** (verb) - evaluate, review, inspect.
- ❖ **rout** (noun) – overwhelming/overwhelming defeat; downfall, collapse, fiasco.
- ❖ **take down** (phrasal verb) – shoot someone to fall down (& die).
- ❖ **bled past participle of bleed** (verb) - lose blood, haemorrhage (due to injury).
- ❖ **eventuality** (noun) – event, incident, occurrence/outcome.
- ❖ **nimbler comparative adjective of nimble** (adjective) – quick, active/fast, quick-thinking/skilful.