

## **STANDING WITH THE NEEDY: ON CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN PACKAGE**

### **The relief package is a good start, but more might need to be done sooner than later**

The ₹1,70,000-crore relief package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 — Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) — is a good first step towards alleviating the distress caused to vulnerable sections of the population by the 21-day lockdown imposed to combat the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). What is noteworthy about the package is not the amount but the innovative ways in which the government is seeking to offer relief. It covers various sections of the vulnerable, ranging from farmers and women Jan Dhan account holders, to organised sector workers, to the most important of all — healthcare workers, who will now get a sizeable insurance cover of ₹50 lakh. The doubling of foodgrain allocation offered free is a good idea that privileges the hungry poor over rodents and pests devouring the stocks in Food Corporation of India godowns. So is the move to provide free cooking gas refills to the underprivileged who are part of the PM Ujjwala scheme. The offer to pay both employer and employee contributions to the Provident Fund for very small business enterprises is welcome and will offer relief to those businesses that have been forced to shut down operations, and also to employees earning small salaries for whom the PF deduction may hurt at this point in time. The salary limit could have been set higher at ₹25,000 per month — there's no cash outgo for the government anyway because this is just a book entry transaction.

The effort appears to be to keep the funding within the budget as much as possible and retain control over the deficit. For instance, the PM Kisan transfer has been already budgeted for and the increase in MGNREGA wages can also be accommodated within the budget. Ditto with the Jan Dhan account transfer of ₹500 per month for the next three months which will cost the government ₹30,450 crore. It is possible to argue here that the transfer could have been a little more generous — at least ₹1,000 a month. The government may have wanted to stay within the budget for now. It could also be to preserve firepower, as there is no saying how long this uncertainty will last. But, at some point soon, the government will have to break the fiscal deficit shackles. Also, it needs the financial bandwidth to support businesses in trouble. In fact, ideally the government ought to have announced a relief package for the corporate sector and the middle class along with the PMGKY. It should now turn its focus towards businesses that are running out of cash and may soon default on even salaries and statutory commitments if relief is not given. There are enough ideas to borrow from others such as the U.S. which is in the process of finalising a \$2 trillion package. Part II of the economic relief package should not be delayed beyond the next couple of days.

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

- ❖ **stand with** (phrase) – to be in support of.
- ❖ **needy** (adjective) – poor/poverty-stricken, underprivileged, impoverished.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – a state of isolation; confinement, restraint, encirclement.
- ❖ **sooner (rather) than later** (phrase) – soon, immediately, without delay.
- ❖ **alleviate** (verb) – reduce, control, mitigate/moderate.

- ❖ **distress** (noun) – difficulty, trouble, suffering.
- ❖ **vulnerable** (adjective) – relating to a weak/neglected person who is in need of special care/support.
- ❖ **combat** (verb) – fight, tackle, confront/resist.
- ❖ **novel coronavirus** (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2) (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- ❖ **noteworthy** (adjective) – significant, notable, important.
- ❖ **organised sector** (noun) - formal sector, formal economy; it is the part of an economy that is taxed, or monitored by any form of government.
- ❖ **sizeable** (adjective) – substantial, considerable, significant.
- ❖ **privilege** (verb) – give a special advantage.
- ❖ **rodent** (noun) – small gnawing mammals (such as a mouse, rat & etc).
- ❖ **pest** (noun) - insect.
- ❖ **devour** (verb) – consume, engulf, wipe out/destroy.
- ❖ **underprivileged** (adjective) – the disadvantaged, impoverished, poverty-stricken (people).
- ❖ **shut down** (phrasal verb) – discontinue, cease activity, close.
- ❖ **point in time** (phrase) – a particular moment.
- ❖ **outgo** (noun) – outlay, spending (of money).
- ❖ **book entry** (noun) - a record of an amount spent or received in a company's accounts.
- ❖ **deficit** (noun) – shortfall, deficiency, shortage.
- ❖ **accommodate** (verb) – adjust, integrate, fit in with.
- ❖ **ditto** (noun) - used to mention that something already said (again for a second time).
- ❖ **generous** (adjective) – liberal, large, ample/abundant.
- ❖ **preserve** (adjective) - conserve, protect, maintain/keep.
- ❖ **firepower** (noun) – capacity/ability, strength, posture.
- ❖ **there is no saying** (phrase) – it is not possible to know.
- ❖ **uncertainty** (noun) – unpredictability, unreliability, riskiness/precariousness.
- ❖ **last** (verb) - continue, remain, persist, go on.
- ❖ **at some point soon** (phrase) - later, someday, sooner or later, in the long run.
- ❖ **break the shackles** (phrase) - try to fail to observe (an agreement, promise, law, etc.).
- ❖ **fiscal deficit** (noun) – the difference between total expenditure and total income of the government.
- ❖ **bandwidth** (noun) - capacity, energy (needed to deal with a situation).
- ❖ **ideally** (adverb) - preferably, if possible.
- ❖ **ought to** (modal verb) – must, should.
- ❖ **run out** (phrasal verb) – use up, be exhausted, be finished.
- ❖ **default on** (verb) – fail to pay, not pay.
- ❖ **statutory** (adjective) – legitimate, acceptable, permissible/admissible.

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### **TERROR UNLIMITED: ON KABUL GURDWARA ATTACK**

#### **The is attack is another reminder that there is no end to the afghan violence in sight**

The attack on a gurdwara in Kabul on March 25 that killed at least 25 people, mostly members of Afghanistan's persecuted Sikh minority, is a barefaced attempt by the Islamic State (IS) to revive its fortunes in the country at a time when it is politically divided and the peace process is hamstrung by the Taliban's continuing violence. The IS, which is concentrated in the eastern parts of Afghanistan, carried out several attacks in the past targeting the country's minorities. But, in recent months, the jihadist group suffered setbacks in the wake of sustained military operations by both Afghan and U.S. troops. In some parts, the Taliban had also attacked the IS, as the insurgents, who are tribal Islamist nationalists, see the latter as a threat. But the war-torn country's security situation is as fluid as ever. It now has two governments, one led by Ashraf Ghani, who was declared winner of the September presidential election, and the other by Abdullah Abdullah, who has disputed the results and formed a rival administration. The peace agreement reached between the Taliban and the U.S. failed to bring any halt to violence, with the insurgents and the government not being able to reach an understanding even on a prisoner swap. Besides, the country has also seen a jump in the number of SARS-CoV-2 infections, with the Herat Province, which shares a border with Iran, emerging as the epicentre. The attack couldn't have come at a worse time.

Afghanistan is notorious for violence against its minority communities. The Hazara Shias were brutalised during the Taliban regime in 1996-2001. Most Hindus and Sikhs, once spread across the country in hundreds of thousands, have fled the country. With the resurgence of the Taliban and the fear of the insurgents taking over Kabul and undermining the Constitution, which at least in theory guarantees rights to all communities, the remaining minority groups are already in an abandoned state. By attacking the gurdwara and an adjacent housing complex, the IS has not just terrified the country's minorities further, but sent a message to the Afghan authorities that it remains a potent security threat. Afghanistan has too many problems, ranging from terrorism to the breakdown of the administration, which demands absolute resolve from the government. But, unfortunately, the country's political leadership appears to be concerned less about resolving any of them than about keeping power. The leadership should realise the magnitude of this crisis, and take a united approach to tackle it. It should kick-start the peace process with the Taliban, fight the IS cells more aggressively and work towards at least ensuring the minimum rights of its citizens guaranteed by the Constitution.

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

- ❖ **unlimited** (adjective) - unrestricted, unconstrained, uncontrolled.
- ❖ **in sight** (phrase) – noticeable, visible, perceivable; near at hand.
- ❖ **persecuted** (adjective) – oppressed, victimized; troubled/suffering.
- ❖ **barefaced** (adjective) - shameless, unembarrassed, brazen; flagrant, blatant, glaring, unconcealed.
- ❖ **revive** (verb) – revitalize, regenerate, re-institute, bring back.
- ❖ **fortunes** (noun) – circumstances (the success or failure of someone), state of affairs, conditions.
- ❖ **hamstring** (verb) – cripple, restrict, handicap, impede/obstruct.
- ❖ **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.

- ❖ **jihadist** (noun) – an Islamic militant. (in Islam) a person who is with radical views & supports jihad (jihad literally means “effort” "struggle" in Arab); Muslims use "Jihad" to describe holy war (the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary).
- ❖ **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue.
- ❖ **in the wake of** (phrase) - as a result of, in the aftermath of, as a consequence of.
- ❖ **sustained** (adjective) – continuous, constant, steady.
- ❖ **insurgent** (noun) – mutineer, dissenter/agitator, subversive.
- ❖ **tribal** (adjective) – inherited, ethnological, racial; relating to tribalism (with strong group loyalty).
- ❖ **war-torn** (adjective) – (of a place) devastated, ruined, wrecked (by war).
- ❖ **fluid** (adjective) – unsteady, unstable, fluctuating.
- ❖ **understanding** (noun) - agreement, deal, settlement.
- ❖ **prisoner swap** (noun) - prisoner exchange; a deal between opposing sides in a conflict to release prisoners.
- ❖ **novel coronavirus** (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2) (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- ❖ **epicentre** (noun) – the main point of unpleasant or problematic situation.
- ❖ **notorious** (adjective) – infamous, ill-famed, with a bad reputation.
- ❖ **brutalise** (verb) – attack, assault, beat, thrash.
- ❖ **flee** (verb) - run away, run off, take flight, escape.
- ❖ **resurgence** (noun) – revival, reawakening, resurrection.
- ❖ **take over** (phrasal verb) – gain control of, take charge of, seize, acquire/appropriate.
- ❖ **undermine** (verb) – reduce, diminish, impede, hinder.
- ❖ **abandoned** (adjective) - rejected, neglected, deserted/cast aside.
- ❖ **adjacent** (adjective) - neighbouring, bordering/abutting, adjoining.
- ❖ **terrify** (verb) - horrify, frighten, panic, appal.
- ❖ **potent** (adjective) – strong, powerful, influential.
- ❖ **breakdown** (noun) – failure, collapse, foundering.
- ❖ **resolve** (noun) – determination, resolution, decision, firmness of purpose.
- ❖ **magnitude** (noun) – importance/significance, distinction, intensity/power.
- ❖ **kick-start** (verb) – revive, renew, rekindle/regenerate, put new life into.

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