SHORT END OF THE STICK:

On Assistance To Migrant Workers

Migrant Workers, Who Simply Cannot Fend For Themselves, Need Urgent State Assistance

It has been nearly a week since the Centre's lockdown measures to slow down the spread of SARS-CoV-2 came into force. But what was done as a means to address a public health challenge has now transformed itself into a humanitarian crisis for many among the poorer segments of India's urban population. The most affected section has been the inter-State migrant worker community, thousands of whom have been leaving cities such as Delhi, even on foot, for their towns in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere. Their plight was not unexpected. With a lockdown, migrant workers dependent upon casual and daily wage labour, unorganised retail and other such jobs, were severely affected and sought the comfort of the social net in their towns over the uncertainty of employment, and therefore of money and resources to fend for themselves over the 21 days. Physical distancing in a country where most people are involved in unorganised labour, and who are dependent upon fragile livelihoods defined in daily and even hourly wage earnings, was always going to be problematic. That the Central government announced the lockdown on March 24, with just a four-hour notice, made it even harder for these people to figure out ways to weather the challenge. Their exodus, by foot along highways finally compelled some authorities to start bus services, but these were abruptly halted. The Home Ministry issued notices to States to open highway relief camps while observing physical distancing norms. Later on Sunday, the Ministry directed State and Union Territory governments to enforce the lockdown strictly and prevent migrants from leaving cities; instead, there are to be temporary shelters with essentials for the stranded poor.

These belated steps can only work if implemented in a humane manner. Herding the families of the migrant workers into ill-equipped quarantine camps will only incentivise others to leave for their native States. Governments must use schools and college hostels for the migrants to stay and also utilise the Public Distribution System to provide food. All said, the suffering of the migrant worker is an indictment of the unpreparedness of governments to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. The first infected Indian in the country was detected in late January. The severity of the disease as it spread outside China and affected countries such as Italy was evident a little later, but there was enough time for the government to be prepared for the impending spread in India. Better coordination with the States and a more transparent approach would have helped people prepare for the lockdown. As infections have slowly begun to rise, there is little time to be lost in addressing both the public health problem and the lockdown's economic impact. Much could have been done better, but the focus now must be on what can be done.

Meanings of Difficult Words

❖ **short end of the stick** (phrase) - unfair treatment; treated unfavourably in a situation.
❖ **fend for oneself** (verb) - look after oneself, take care of oneself, manage by oneself.
❖ **lockdown** (noun) – a state of isolation; confinement, restraint, encirclement.
❖ **slow down** (phrasal verb) – reduce, decrease, lessen.
❖ **novel coronavirus (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2)** (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
❖ **come into force** (phrase) – come to effect (a new law, rule, change etc.).
❖ **means** (noun) – method, way, mode.

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- ❖ **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
- ❖ **humanitarian crisis** (noun) – it is also called as humanitarian disaster; a situation with high levels of human suffering in which basic human welfare is in danger on a large scale.
- ❖ **on foot** (phrase) - by walking (instead of travelling by a bus/train or using other transport).
- ❖ **plight** (noun) – difficult situation, trouble/difficulty, quandary.
- ❖ **dependent on** (adjective) - reliant on, relying on, counting on, leaning on; supported by.
- ❖ **sought past and past participle of seek** (verb) – try to obtain, try to find, look about for.
- ❖ **social net** (noun) - social interactions and personal relationships in a (close) society.
- ❖ **uncertainty** (noun) – unpredictability, unreliability, riskiness/precariousness.
- ❖ **social/physical 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.
- ❖ **unorganised labour/workforce** (noun) – workers, labour force in an unorganized sector (an (unregistered) economic activity that is neither taxed nor monitored by a government. As per the International Labor Organization, over 80 per cent of the Indian economy is in the unorganized/ informal sector).
- ❖ **fragile** (adjective) – weak, shaky/risky, unreliable, feeble/unsound.
- ❖ **livelihood** (noun) – source of income, means of support, living, subsistence.
- ❖ **figure out** (phrasal verb) - find an answer to, make out, fathom/decipher, make sense of.
- ❖ **weather** (verb) – survive/overcome, come/live through, outlast/outlive.
- ❖ **exodus** (noun) – mass departure, evacuation, leaving/exit.
- ❖ **abruptly** (adverb) **-** suddenly, unexpectedly.
- ❖ **stranded** (adjective) - stuck (in difficulties), helpless, abandoned, deserted.
- ❖ **belated** (adjective) – late, behind time, not on time/delayed.
- ❖ **humane** (adjective) – compassionate, considerate, sympathetic, kindhearted.
- ❖ **herd** (verb) – huddle, group, gather, cluster.
- ❖ **ill-equipped** (adjective) – not ready, unready, off guard.
- ❖ **quarantine** (noun) - a process of separating out people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease; setting apart, keeping apart, sorting out.
- ❖ **incentivise** (verb) – encourage, motivate, galvanize.
- ❖ **indictment** (noun) – a formal charge, accusation, allegation (of a serious misconduct/ wrongdoing).
- ❖ **unpreparedness** (noun) - disregard, neglect, laxity, inattention, heedlessness/carelessness.
- ❖ **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
- ❖ **severity** (noun) – seriousness, intensity, extremity.
- ❖ **impending** (adjective) – imminent, about to happen; approaching, forthcoming.
- ❖ **transparent** (adjective) – straightforward, clear, apparent/distinct, recognizable.
- ❖ **little time to be lost** (phrase) - if you have little time to be lost, you must hurry/rush as fast as possible to do something.

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UNUSUALLY INEPT:

On Us Surpassing China In Coronavirus Cases
The U.S. Can Still Pull Itself Out Of The Virus Crisis, But Not Without Tougher Steps

The U.S. has surpassed mainland China as the country with the most number of novel coronavirus cases. On March 27, it recorded 85,486 infections; On March 30, it had nearly 75% (1,43,527) more cases than China (82,198). Even as Italy and Spain have reported large numbers, the daily increase in new cases has slowed down in Europe even while accelerating in America, thus shifting the pandemic epicentre to the U.S. However, unlike in China and a few other countries, America is yet to institute large-scale mitigation measures such as shutting down the three major hotspots —New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. On Saturday, U.S. President Trump backtracked on the possibility of imposing travel quarantine in these hotspots after a pushback from the New York Governor. New York has the most number of cases in the country — over 53,000, as on March 29. According to the CDC, residents in these hotspots are now "urged" to refrain from non-essential travel for the next 14 days. It is true that Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea managed to contain the spread without having to undertake stringent measures such as those seen in China, Italy, and even India. That is because these countries acted early, enforcing strong containment measures together with large-scale testing; this is not the case with America.

Though South Korea and the U.S. reported their first case on January 20, it was only by end-February that the U.S. had a reliable test kit, unlike South Korea, which had the tests by February first week. While South Korea was testing thousands each day after the wave of cases came up in a hospital and among members of a religious sect, the U.S. began large-scale testing only in early March. America thus remained largely oblivious to the looming threat. There were just about 100 tests done each day till end-February. If the tests developed by the CDC were faulty, the testing criteria remained narrow and there was little surveillance for community spread. The FDA's public health emergency, on January 31, did not make things easy for labs wanting to develop tests. Independent labs and hospitals could start testing using tests developed by private players only by February 27. As on March 28, hardly 1,22,000 tests had been done in the U.S. Instead of decisive actions, Mr. Trump made the situation worse with his dismissive attitude, this despite knowing that the virus was crippling China's health-care system and had killed a few thousands. If agencies such as CDC, which are known to act swiftly especially in the face of a pandemic, were found wanting this time, the government's priorities too were misplaced. The deadly combination is now playing out. But knowing how the U.S. can act, there is still hope of virus control. Tough steps need to be in place soon.

Meanings of Difficult Words
❖ **unusually** (adverb) - exceptionally, uncommonly, surprisingly, strangely.
❖ **inept** (adjective) – unsuccessful, ineffectual, incompetent, clumsy.
❖ **surpass** (verb) – be greater than, exceed, outdo/eclipse.
❖ **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.
❖ **pull out** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, get out, leave.

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- ❖ **novel coronavirus (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2)** (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- ❖ slow down (phrasal verb) – reduce, decrease, lessen.
- ❖ **accelerate** (verb) – increase, rise/surge, speed up.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **epicentre** (noun) – the main point of unpleasant or problematic situation.
- ❖ **institute** (verb) – set/put in, establish, begin/start.
- ❖ **mitigation** (noun) – alleviation, reduction; lessening.
- ❖ **shut down** (phrasal verb) – close, discontinue, cease operation, stop.
- ❖ **hotspot** (noun) – a place of significant activity.
- ❖ **backtrack** (verb) – retract, take back, go back on, disclaim/disavow.
- ❖ **quarantine** (noun) - a process of separating out people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease; setting apart, keeping apart, sorting out.
- ❖ **pushback** (noun) – a negative reaction/response.
- ❖ **refrain** from (verb) – stop oneself, abstain, desist from, hold back.
- ❖ **undertake** (verb) – begin, start, embark on, launch into.
- ❖ **stringent** (adjective) – strict/stern, severe, tough/rigorous.
- ❖ **containment** (noun) – an act of keeping something (harmful) under control.
- ❖ **the wave of** (noun) – a sudden increase in a certain phenomenon/happening.
- ❖ **come up** (phrasal verb) – arise, present itself, transpire/emerge, happen/occur.
- ❖ **sect** (noun) – (religious) group, community, faction.
- ❖ **oblivious** (adjective) – unaware, heedless, unconcerned.
- ❖ **looming** (adjective) – appearing/emerging as a large/threatening one.
- ❖ **criterion** (noun) – basis, standard, norm. (criteria is the plural form of criterion).
- ❖ **narrow** (adjective) – limited, restricted; marginal.
- ❖ **surveillance** (noun) – observation, scrutiny, inspection/examination.
- ❖ **hardly** (adjective) – barely, only just, almost not.
- ❖ **decisive** (adjective) – resolute, firm, strong-minded, determined.
- ❖ **dismissive** (adjective) – negative, egotistic, self-satisfied, domineering/high-handed.
- ❖ **attitude** (noun) – standpoint, approach, point of view, way of thinking.
- ❖ **cripple** (verb) – ruin, destroy, damage; paralyse.
- ❖ **swiftly** (adverb) – quickly, rapidly, fast.
- ❖ **in the face of** (phrase) – when confronted with.
- ❖ **wanting** (adjective) – deficient, lacking, insufficient.
- ❖ **misplace** (verb) – put in the wrong place, mislay, forget; position incorrectly.
- ❖ **deadly** (adverb) - lethal, fatal.
- ❖ **play out** (phrasal verb) – happen, occur, take place.
- ❖ **in place** (phrase) – established, arranged, set up.

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