

LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS: ON ECONOMY AFTER LOCKDOWN

Centre Must Spend More, Forego Tax Revenues To Protect Livelihoods During Lockdown

The government is in the process of applying its mind on whether it should extend or lift in phases the 21-day lockdown that ends next week. The choice for Prime Minister Narendra Modi now, as when he decided to impose the lockdown on March 24, is the same — between saving lives and ensuring livelihoods. He rightly privileged the former over the latter then. But as India nears the end of the lockdown period, the serious damage to the economy and livelihoods is beginning to make itself apparent. There is tremendous pressure from industry bodies to opt for a nuanced policy that will help economic activity to restart as they fear a collapse if activity is stopped for another fortnight. Lives could be lost to hunger and livelihoods sacrificed in the lockdown. One way to sidestep this existential dilemma is by bringing on a second round of an economic relief package that goes well beyond the first both in terms of the financial commitment and the spread. Out-of-the-box ideas for delivering support and also for raising the required funds might be required. For starters, it is clear that the government should consign fiscal conservatism to the cupboard for now and go all out to spend and support the economy. Economists are unanimous that there is little option now but to print money and spend. That is exactly what the developed countries are doing.

The ₹1.7-lakh crore package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 was a good start but barely accounted for 1% of GDP. India should spend at least 5% of GDP for now — about ₹10-lakh crore. The cash transfers to the poor should be hiked to at least ₹3,000 a month for the next three months. This should be in addition to free rations and cooking gas, as was announced earlier. In the harvest season, farmers need logistical support for moving their produce to markets. Lenders, including NBFCs, should be granted freedom to reschedule their loan accounts so that borrowers are not under pressure to repay for fear of turning delinquent. A credit guarantee fund that will support non-delinquent borrowers for the next six months will be a good option. Such a fund can be financed through a domestic bond offering. The bankruptcy code should be suspended for the next six months, at least for MSMEs. And why not a GST holiday for the next three months? The loss of revenue will be ₹3-lakh crore at worst, but in reality will be much lower than that because economic activity is at a standstill now. Such a move will ease cash flows for business and also obviate the need for statutory compliances at a time when the focus will have to be on getting businesses back on track. The crisis now is without precedent and the solutions cannot be conservative. Generous support from the government, and quickly delivered, is the need of the hour.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **livelihood** (noun) – means of making a living with the basic necessities (food, water, shelter and clothing); means of support, subsistence, source of income.
2. **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
3. **forego** (verb) – do without, abandon, relinquish, sacrifice, refrain from.
4. **apply one's mind** (phrase) – to give full attention to; to think hard about something.
5. **privilege** (verb) – to give something/someone an advantage; to give preference to.
6. **apparent** (adjective) – evident/clear, visible, noticeable, recognizable.
7. **tremendous** (adjective) – massive, huge, immense.
8. **nuanced** (adjective) – delicate, subtle, accurate.
9. **fortnight** (noun) – a period of two weeks/fourteen days continuously.
10. **hunger** (verb) – a severe lack of food.
11. **sidestep** (verb) – avoid, evade, dodge, escape.
12. **existential** (adjective) – empirical, pragmatic, factual, experiential, objective.
13. **dilemma** (noun) – quandary, predicament, difficulty.
14. **Comprehensive Economic Relief Package** (noun) – a comprehensive package should have simultaneous reliefs across different realms (area of activity), for instance, tax compliance, relief

for poor, RBI monetary policy interventions, and relief for middle class in terms of EMI, internet rate subvention and most importantly an increase in investment in health infrastructure.

15. **go beyond** (phrasal verb) – to do more than required/expected.
16. **out-of-the-box** (adjective) – creative, innovative, unconventional, out of the ordinary, unusual.
17. **for starters** (phrase) – first of all, to start with.
18. **consign** (something to) (verb) – to put/send something somewhere (here it is cupboard), especially in order to get rid of it; send, transfer, put away.
19. **fiscal conservatism** (noun) – a political position (primarily in the United States) that calls for lower levels of public spending, lower taxes and lower government debt.
20. **allout** (adverb) – with vigour, with great effort, intensely, vigorously.
21. **unanimous** (adjective) – in complete agreement/accord, with one voice, concordant/united.
22. **account for** (phrasal verb) – represent, constitute, make up, comprise, form.
23. **Gross domestic product (GDP)** (noun) – a measure of economic activity in a country. It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and service.
24. **in addition** (phrase) – as well as, additionally, moreover.
25. **ration** (noun) – the practice of having a fixed allowance of food, esp a statutory one for civilians (particularly in time of scarcity or soldiers in time of war); allowance, allocation, allotment.
26. **harvest** (noun) – the process of gathering a ripe crop from the fields.
27. **logistical** (adjective) – relating to logistics (handling the commercial activity of transporting goods to customers).
28. **non-banking financial company (NBFC)** (noun) – a company incorporated under the Companies Act 2013 or 1956 which is engaged in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of stocks, equities, debt etc issued by the government or any local authority. The main objective of this type of a company is to accept deposits under any scheme or manner.
29. **delinquent** (adjective) – unsettled, outstanding, overdue, in arrears.
30. **credit guarantee fund** (noun) – a type of fund (by the government) which backs up the loan taken by the beneficiaries as a form of collateral (pledged as security/guarantee).
31. **non-delinquent** (adjective) – not being overdue/outstanding in payment.
32. **domestic bond** (noun) – bonds (debt obligations) issued and traded within the internal market of a country and denominated in the currency of that country.
33. **bankruptcy** (noun) – legal state of insolvency. An individual or organisation is declared bankrupt if a court judges that the party involved can no longer meet debt payments to creditors. it is defined as the outcome of a legal procedure.
34. **insolvency** (noun) – a condition in which the financial difficulties of an individual or organisation are such it is unable to pay its debts.
35. **at worst** (phrase) – considering someone/something under the most unfortunate or negative way possible.
36. **standstill** (noun) – deadlock, impasse, stalemate/stand-off.
37. **ease** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease.
38. **obviate** (verb) – avoid, prevent, eliminate.
39. **statutory** (adjective) – legitimate, acceptable, permissible/admissible.
40. **compliance** (noun) – conformity, observation, adherence.
41. **(get back) on track** (phrase) – (get back) to normal; in the right direction; on course, on target, on schedule.
42. **precedent** (noun) – model, exemplar, example, pattern; previous example/instance, prior instance.
43. **conservative** (adjective) – moderate, low, understated.
44. **need of the hour** (phrase) – some need (or requirement or demand) at a particular point of time.

STAGE FRIGHT: ON DENYING COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

Limiting Transmission In Hotspots Depends On A Wider Tracing And Testing Strategy

Even after the Health Ministry on March 28 acknowledged on its website that there was “limited community transmission”, India’s national taskforce for COVID-19 continues to deny it. Now, a paper in the Indian Journal of Medical Research, by ICMR and Health Ministry researchers, provides evidence of community transmission in 36 districts in 15 States. The study is based on sentinel surveillance undertaken by the task force among severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) patients who have been hospitalised in public sector institutions to identify the spread and the extent of transmission of COVID-19 disease in the community. If there were 1.9% (two of 106) SARI cases positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by the end of March third week, the number increased to 104 by April 2. Of the 102 coronavirus positive SARI cases tested between March 22 and April 2, 40 (39%) had no travel history or contact with a positive case; data on exposure were not available for 59 (58%) cases. If more than 1% of SARI patients tested positive for the virus in 15 States, at 21 (3.8%), Maharashtra had the most number of coronavirus positive SARI cases in eight districts followed by Delhi (14 cases; 5.1%), Gujarat (13 cases; 1.6%), and West Bengal (9 cases; 3.5%). Kerala had just one SARI patient testing positive. The authors point out that antibody-based testing carried out in those testing negative for molecular test could have helped identify more positive cases.

With community transmission, or the third stage, now being confirmed in 36 districts, an expansion and change in testing strategy has become imperative in the high focus areas for the lockdown to be more meaningful. Though the taskforce has not openly declared community transmission, it is reassuring to note that the ICMR has already initiated changes in the testing strategy in response to the change in the pattern of community spread. On April 9, the ICMR revised the testing strategy for hotspots/clusters and large migration gatherings/evacuees centres. While the criteria for testing across India remain the same, the testing norms for the high focus areas will now include people with influenza-like illness (ILI) with certain symptoms. Antibody testing should be carried out whenever molecular tests on these patients turn out negative. It is important to include antibody testing along with molecular testing when necessary in the high focus areas. Together with containment measures, this approach will help in snapping the transmission chain. Syndromic surveillance of all SARI and ILI patients along with quick and effective tracing, quarantining and testing of their contacts should be the way forward now. How well India responds now will determine whether the spread is contained quickly or leads to more cases and deaths.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **stage fright** (noun) – fear or nervousness or uneasiness (to perform/do/say something in front of an audience).
2. **community transmission** (noun) – community spread/transmission means spread of an illness/disease for which the source of infection is unknown. An infected person has no travel history to an affected area and no known contact with a person previously diagnosed with a particular disease. It is possible the patient is exposed to a returning traveler who is infected.
3. **local transmission (cluster)** (noun) – local spread/transmission means spread of an illness/disease for which the source of infection is known. An infected person has travel history to an affected area. We could able to identify and trace individual cases, and ring-fence a cluster (of them) to prevent the spread of infection.
4. **hotspot** (noun) – a place of significant activity.
5. **contact tracing** (noun) – it is defined as the identification and follow-up of persons who may have come into contact with a person infected with the virus.
6. **acknowledge** (verb) – admit, accept, realize, recognize.
7. **taskforce** (noun) – unit, crew, outfit, section (mainly arranged for a task).

8. **sentinel surveillance** (noun) – a sentinel surveillance system is used when high-quality data are needed about a particular disease. A sentinel system deliberately involves only a limited network of carefully selected reporting sites with good laboratory facilities and experienced well-qualified staff, to identify and notify on certain diseases. Because sentinel surveillance is expensive and time-taking, conducted only in selected locations, however, it may not be as effective for detecting rare diseases or diseases that occur outside the catchment areas of the sentinel sites. (Courtesy: WHO)
9. **severe acute respiratory infection (SARI)** (noun) – SARI cases are identified with the most common symptoms fever, cough, and breathing difficulty. For SARI patients, clinical outcomes are associated with disease severity, including hospitalization in an ICU and artificial ventilation.
10. **severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)** (noun) – SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV) is thought to be an animal virus from an as-yet-uncertain animal reservoir, perhaps bats, that spread to other animals (civet cats). It is a viral (human-to-human transmission) that can cause severe respiratory illness or death.
11. **exposure** (noun) – the condition of being subject to some effect (contact).
12. **point out** (phrasal verb) – identify, recognize, draw attention to, mention.
13. **antibody-based testing** (noun) – a testing method developed with rapid and easy-to-use devices to facilitate testing outside of laboratory settings. These simple test kits are based either on detection of proteins from the COVID-19 virus in respiratory samples (e.g. sputum, throat swab) or detection, in blood or serum, of human antibodies generated in response to infection.
14. **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
15. **(laboratory-based) molecular test** (noun) – In medicine, a laboratory test that checks for certain molecules in a sample of tissue, blood, or other body fluid.
16. **imperative** (adjective) – vitally important, crucial/critical, essential.
17. **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
18. **cluster** (noun) – a group (of people considered as a unit).
19. **evacuee** (noun) – a person evacuated from a place of danger.
20. **criterion** (noun) – basis, standard, norm. (criteria is the plural form of criterion).
21. **influenza** (noun) – it is commonly known as “the flu”, is an infectious disease caused by an influenza virus.
22. **turn out** (phrasal verb) – transpire, emerge; happen/occur.
23. **containment** (noun) – an act of keeping something (harmful) under control (it means quickly identifying cases of coronavirus through testing, placing infected individuals in isolation, tracking who infected persons might have been in contact with and potentially quarantining those who came into contact with infection so that the disease doesn’t continue to spread).
24. **snap** (verb) – break.
25. **transmission chain** (noun) – the act or process by which something is spread or passed from one person or thing to another.
26. **syndromic surveillance** (noun) – syndromic surveillance is inexpensive and is faster than systems (sentinel) that require laboratory confirmation. It is an active or passive system that are based entirely on clinical features without any laboratory diagnosis (for example, collecting the number of cases of Influenza (flu) with common symptoms like fever, cold, cough rather than cases of confirmed COVID-19).
27. **quarantine** (noun) – separate, set apart, segregate, detach (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).