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## CHRONIC CRISIS: INDIAN MIGRANTS' EXODUS AMID COVID 19 GREATEST SINCE THE PARTITION

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**Abstract:** India's lockdown amid coronavirus has forced the migrant laborers to face the worst of their times, with a mass displacement of the population the country has ever witnessed after partition. As the pandemic exacerbates the "chronic crisis", India struggles to contain virus in hotspots and prevent it from spreading to the sensitive rural areas. An influx of migrant workers from different states to their villages has posed a new challenge for the state governments and the Centre to restrict the further spread of the virus in rural areas. While the laborers have been crippled financially with livelihoods of the millions of migrants ruined, the challenge to sustain with virus and overcome through it seems a difficult task for them and the states.

The government of India has announced two economic aid packages to support the migrants and the MSMEs ever since the lockdown began. The first one announced (Rs 1.7 lakh crore) on March 26 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was inclined towards providing direct support to the poor to see them through the shutdown period, the second mega 20 lakhs crore package instilled a new wave of positivity and vouched for providing a support to MSMEs by making them self-reliant. So, what does this economic aid means for the migrants who are at the brink of facing an uncertain future and will the displacement be ever compensated with government's economic aid which is too little and too late?

**Keywords:** Covid-19, pandemic, migrants, coronavirus, health.

### I INTRODUCTION

In late March, the outbreak of coronavirus transitioned the world's second largest population: India into a new zone of uncertainty and despair. At present, India is under lockdown 4.0 and the Health Ministry and Finance Ministry have announced a slew of measures to not only contain the cases of the virus but also provide a boost to India's economy. But the one who have been at the receiving end of the virus and its burgeoning impact have been the poor and the migrants.

As of May 29, there are 89987 cases in India 71105 have been cured/discharged so far. India has reported 4706 deaths amid the pandemic. Lately, the country witnessed an exodus of migrants to their home villages that have triggered a new wave of infections in the places that have been relatively untouched by the coronavirus till now.



The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been continuously issuing an advisory to the state governments and Union Territories to restrict the growing number of cases and prevent the virus from reaching to the villages.

In a report to the Union health ministry, the government’s Rapid Response Team (RRT) on covid suggested local health authorities focus on rural areas. It was submitted to the health ministry just as an estimated 20-25 million migrants began making their way to villages in trains, buses and on foot. The now-two-month lockdown has not only ruined the livelihood of the millions of migrants but has imposed a worry on the state governments to contain the cases and prevent them from further increase.

According to the national census, migrant workers comprised 48% of residents in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru in 2011. Most of them came from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. According to health ministry, these states have witnessed a spike in the cases after an inter-state level bans was lifted.

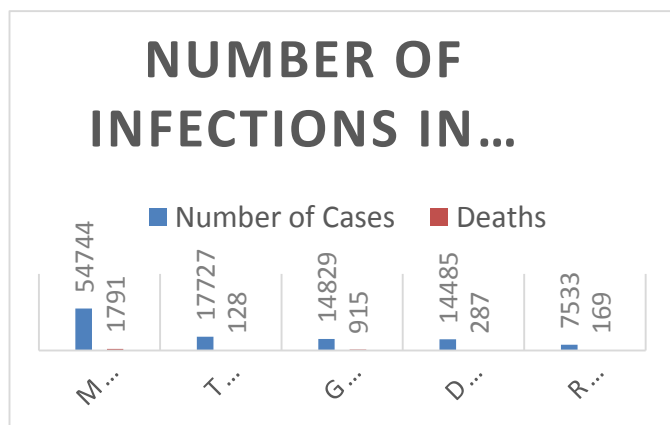
In Rajasthan, 2,045 migrants have tested positive since 1 May and 60% of new cases are migrants, according to the state’s additional chief secretary (medical and health) Rohit Kumar Singh.

As of May 28, Bihar is also recording a surge—the number of cases has increased to 2,870, many from rural areas. The new cases have come from Bhojpur (47), Purnia (45), Madhepura (43), Saran (43), West Champaran (42), Sitamarhi (39), Muzaffarpur (38), Arwal (34), Lakhisarai (32), Kishanganj (31) and Jamui (29). In Kerala, almost 85% out of the 445 active covid-19 patients are those that returned from other states.

According to IPE Global, a healthcare development consulting firm, estimates show 20-25 million migrants are moving from urban to rural areas. India has 120 confirmed cases per million of its population. If it was to be applied to the same ratio, only 3,000 of migrants should be infected.

However, with most of the cases still unreported and a fear of spike in cases growing, it is uncertain to say how badly migrants are being affected.

Source: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>



As of May 28, 2020

**1.1 Objective:**

The objective of the research is to analyze the mass exodus of migrant workers in India and what future holds for them as they compose a large part of India’s population. Will the government’s steps towards providing an impetus to MSMEs under “Vocal for Local” initiative, create employment and provide a relief to migrant laborers? The research further takes a stock of situation in the top 5 states impacted by corona and the deaths witnessed so far.

**II. LOCKDOWN 2.0 Vs 4.0: FROM A VIRTUAL HALT TO A SLEW OF RELAXATIONS**

**Lockdown 2.0:**

The government announced a nationwide lockdown with effect from March 25 to April 14 which was extended till May 3. In his address on April 14, PM Modi had said the lockdown will be partially relaxed in some districts from April 20. Conditional relaxations in certain selected sectors outside coronavirus hotspot areas came into effect from 20th April and the government attempts to kick start a battered economy. While some states have given a nod to easing of lockdown measures from April 20 onwards, many states have decided not to lift curbs amid a surge in coronavirus cases in the country

1. Telangana said no to relaxations and instead extended its lockdown till May 7. "The state cabinet, after assessing the pros and cons, decided that we are extending the lockdown till May 7. It is already there till May 3. Four days are added to it," Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao told reporters. The state cabinet will now meet on May 5 to take further decisions after reassessing the situation. The Telangana CM also appealed to air passengers not to come to Telangana till May 7 as taxi, hotel and other services will not be available.
2. In Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said the government will not relax the lockdown for at least a week. On 19th April, the total number of coronavirus cases crossed the 2,000-mark in Delhi.
3. Captain Amarinder Singh-led Punjab government has ruled out any relaxation in the curfew in the state till May 3. Taking to Twitter on 19th April, as the chief minister ruled out any relaxation, except wheat procurement, he said the situation will be again reviewed after May 3. And with the Punjab government’s decision, all exemptions to be given from April 20 to industries in rural areas, booksellers, dhabas, shopkeepers dealing in air-conditioners and those involved in sand and gravel mining and stone crushing stand withdrawn in the state.

4. The Karnataka government announced that the strict lockdown will continue till the midnight of April 21. A source, however, as quoted by news agency PTI said that the Karnataka government was considering relaxation lockdown after April 21.
5. Kerala from 20th April allowed the opening of restaurants, bus travel for shorter distances in cities and opening of MSME industries in municipal areas. The state government in Kerala announced the relaxation of restrictions in two zones -- allowing private vehicles movement in an odd-even basis and dine-in services at hotels from 20th April. The Centre, however, took strong objection to the Kerala government's decision, saying it amounts to dilution of its lockdown guidelines.
6. The Madhya Pradesh government on 19th April said it will provide some relaxations in certain districts of the state from April 20. CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan said districts like Indore, Bhopal, Ujjain and others which are affected by the coronavirus spread will be exempted from easing norms.
7. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said some industrial activity in the green and orange Covid-19 zones in Maharashtra will resume but in a restricted manner. The Maharashtra CM said of all districts will remain sealed and only essential services movement will be allowed. Maharashtra continues to be the worst-hit state in terms of confirmed number of novel coronavirus cases. On 20th April, the state tally crossed 4,000-mark.
8. Haryana also decided to give conditional relaxations in selected sectors from April 20. The state government said these relaxations will be given outside the coronavirus containment zones to kick start the economic activities amid lockdown.
9. Bihar announced that all government departments in the state will be open from April 20. All government officers of Group A and B will be present in the office on all working days while 33 per cent of Group C employees and those on the contract will be present in the office of their total strength, an order read. Bihar deputy CM also announced that work on about 40,000 projects will start in more than 8000 panchayats of the state from 20th April.
10. The West Bengal government decided to give some relief to the IT sector and the jute industry in the state. In order, the state has allowed the use of 25% and 15% workforce, respectively in the two sectors. The Mamata Banerjee-led government ordered rotational duties of the

Group C support staff and below in all state government offices. The state government ordered all government offices with officials of or above the rank of deputy secretary or equivalent to start functioning from April 20. In the order, however, the West Bengal government said the strength of each office should not exceed 25% of employees.

Agriculture, construction, Information Technology (IT), industrial units in the SEZs and rural areas and e-commerce operations were among the select sectors where the coronavirus-induced lockdown restrictions were to be lifted from April 20. E-commerce companies were, however, later prohibited from selling non-essential items during the lockdown, as conditional relaxations in select sectors outside the coronavirus hotspot areas.

#### **Lockdown 4.0:**

The Centre on May 17, declared the fourth phase of the lockdown with an additional economic aid package of 20 Lakhs crores to provide a boost to the MSMEs. Lockdown 4 came up with the relaxations that completely opened up the economy with the operation of all markets, offices, industries and business along with plying of buses in all zones, barring containment.

While the exodus of the migrant workers further intensified from the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Karnataka, the government's bid to provide an impetus to the economy by going "Vocal for Local" sent a fresh wave of positivity for the small scale industries.

#### **PM Narendra Modi's bid to make India self-reliant:**

With an aim to overcome the challenges that the corona virus and its impact have posed to India's economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a clarion call to the nation to support local brands. In an address to the nation on May 12, PM Modi outlined his vision for India in a post-coronavirus world order: Going "**Vocal about Local**".

The new outline focuses on fulfilling India's dream to lead the 21st Century by ensuring that the country becomes self-reliant. The self-reliant India seeks to stand on five pillars viz. **Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography, and Demand.**

PM pitched for the use of products manufactured in India, saying this pandemic has shown the country the importance of adopting local manufacturing, local market and local supply chain practices. He termed this self-reliance as "**Atma Nirbhar Bharat**".

**Environment Scan: Government’s Initiatives amid pandemic**

**Vocal about Local: Overview**

- **Outline for India being self-reliant in post COVID era based on 5 pillars:**
- **Economy:** Which brings in quantum jump and not incremental change;
- **Infrastructure:** Which should become the identity of India;
- **System:** Based on 21st century technology driven arrangements;
- **Vibrant Demography:** Which is India’s source of energy for a self-reliant India and
- **Demand:** Whereby the strength of demand and supply chain should be utilized to full capacity
- **Motive:** To strengthen all stakeholders in the supply chain to increase, as well as fulfill, the rising demand
- **Boost liquidity in MSMEs, help them take benefit of the government schemes, enable them to compete with foreign companies, and strengthen their network**

**What is new for MSMEs?**

- Will be defined under a common metric that will be a **mix of investment in plants and machinery or equipment and turnover**
- MSMEs to enjoy same benefits, **Micro Units investment less than Rs 1 crore and turnover under Rs 5 crore**
- Small businesses will be categorized based on **investment less than Rs 10 crore and turnover under Rs 50 crore**
- Medium enterprises will be defined on the basis of **investment under Rs 20 crore and turnover less than Rs 100 crore**

**Change in FDI Policy**

- A **transfer of ownership in an FDI** deal that benefits any country that shares a border with India will now need government approval
- Earlier FDI policy **was limited to allowing only Bangladesh and Pakistan** via the government route in all sectors
- The revised rule has now brought companies from **China under the government route filter**
- Only applicable in **large shareholdings of 10 Per cent and above**

**III. CONCLUSIONS**

- The intensifying pressures of migrants’ exodus has on the states is expected to further increase in the coming months.
- The economic aid package and gov’t’s push for MSMEs is directly inclined towards supporting the poor and the migrant laborers. However, it needs to roll out much detailed and stringent framework to directly benefit the migrants.
- The government’s Rs 20 lakh crore, economic package focuses largely on supply-side reforms and relief. It can now do more to increase liquidity in the hands of the middle class and taxpayers to drive consumption.
- As India comes close to the end of Lockdown 4.0, on May 31<sup>st</sup> there is an expectation for an another round lockdown with much relaxed measures
- The lockdown 5.0 if comes in place, not be entirely different from the fourth phase but might be implemented in cities with higher density or coronavirus cases.
- According to media reports, lockdown 5.0 might be implemented in 11 cities that account for 70 per cent of the total corona cases in the country. Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, Thane, Indore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Surat and Kolkata are some of the cities that might have to implement Lockdown 5.0 restrictions from June 1. Out of more than 1.50 lakh total cases in the country,

Ahmedabad, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune account for 60 per cent of the cases

#### IV SUGGESTIONS

- With number of the cases increasing, there is a uncertainty on when the pandemic with end and economy will be back on the tracks, therefore, the government should be ready to preserve its resources and reframe policies to directly benefit the poor and the migrant laborers.
- India's economic growth is dependent upon internal consumption and imports most of its parts, other products from foreign countries. The government should put a framework to increase liquidity and boost the supply chain.
- Although, there is a relief on the tax but it is still too little for the poor and the middle-class to keep their lives going smoothly. The government should work towards further relaxation in taxes and reduce interest rate to increase borrowing and providing direct income growth.
- Public Transportation such as buses and trains has not performed up to the expectations in ensuring safe journey of the migrant workers. The government should start more buses and trains from different parts of the country where the migrant workers are still stranded.
- Most states have not treated their migrant populations well, with many washing their hands off and blaming the Centre, resulting in an eye-opening crisis in the country. The States and the Centre should come together in fighting against the crisis that is expected to further escalate in the coming months.

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