

Indian hospitals overwhelmed amid over 100,000 COVID-19 cases daily

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India has had over 100,000 COVID-19 cases every day since April 5, endangering the lives of millions of people and pushing the country's grossly underfunded public health care system to breaking point.

The disaster is a direct result of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which has allowed industries to keep operating with unsafe conditions, placing the profits of big business over human life. Indian state governments also share responsibility for the worsening situation.

On Monday, India recorded 168,912 new COVID-19 cases, replacing Brazil as the second-most affected country in the world hit by the highly-infectious disease. According to under-counted figures provided by India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the country's overall tally is now 13.7 million cases with the death toll surpassing 171,000.

In the past seven days—from April 5 to 11—India recorded over 937,000 cases, a 70 percent jump from the previous seven days, while the death toll hit 5,057—a 70 percent rise on the previous seven days. Reuters has reported that India's death toll is on course to double in two months, according to estimates based on data from Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering.

India, the current epicentre of Asia's COVID-19 pandemic, now has more than 1.5 million active cases that are overwhelming hospitals and their intensive care units and oxygen-equipped beds.

Health experts have reported a number of new COVID-19 variants, including a new “double mutant variant” and the highly-infectious UK variant, which are undoubtedly a major factor in the rapid increase in corona cases and deaths.

The western state of Maharashtra, home to India's financial capital Mumbai, accounts for more than half

of India's new infections. On Monday, Maharashtra reported over 63,000 new coronavirus cases and 349 deaths.

The next day, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray declared a “Janata curfew” (but stopped short of calling it a lockdown) on the movement of people beginning at 8 p.m. on April 14 until May 1. The state government also imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144, which ban gatherings of more than five people for the same period.

Construction work and industrial production, however, will continue as usual, ensuring employers maintain their exploitation of workers and profits. The state government claimed there would be limited relief for those affected but small businessmen and traders are complaining that they have not received any subsidy to compensate for having to close their shops for the 15 days.

Despite the massive increase in deaths and infections, the Modi government has ruled-out a national lockdown. This was made clear in an April 8 video conference with chief ministers from various regional states.

Modi declared that COVID-19 infection figures were “very alarming in some states” and that “work on a war footing” should be resumed to prevent spread of the disease corona.” His so-called war footing, however, does not involve a national lockdown but a “corona curfew” from 9 p.m., until 5 or 6 a.m., and only in “small containment zones.”

Modi made the following outrageous and criminally irresponsible point: “Don't make the entire locality a containment zone if there are two flats in a six-storey building where positive cases have been discovered. Don't seal the nearby tower.”

This response guarantees that the disease will

continue to rapidly spread in major cities like Mumbai, Chennai and New Delhi, where millions of poor people live in jam-packed, unhygienic shanties and social distancing is practically impossible.

Once again, Modi attempted to blame the population for the rising infection rates and deaths. “The root cause of the problem is that anybody who leads a routine life and considers it to be a minor disease spreads it to the entire family,” he arrogantly declared.

This is from a prime minister who, working on behalf of a tiny super-rich elite, is employing disastrous “herd immunity” policy that allows COVID-19 to surge unchecked throughout the country. Major Indian industries, including garment factories, have never sealed their doors, except for a brief period, and with only limited restrictions, during last year’s lockdown.

The indifferent and irresponsible attitude of the Modi government and its state counterparts has created a false sense of security among broad layers of the population.

The BBC reported on April 12 that masses of Hindu devotees had bathed in the Ganges River, as part of the two-month-long Kumbh Mela religious festival. Officials told the news outlet that over 2.1 million devotees had already bathed in the river and “many more were expected to follow suit,”

The BBC report correctly warned: “Monday’s bathing day will help the infection spread faster among the devotees and that some of them could also take the virus back to their cities and villages in other parts of the country.”

Highlighting the government’s recklessness, it reported that although “the government had earlier said that only people with COVID negative reports would be allowed at the festival and that strict measures, like social distancing would be followed... a number of people, including top saints, have already tested positive.”

During his April 8 video conference, Modi also boasted that daily vaccinations had reached four million. Yet, according to a Reuters report on April 12, less than 4 percent of India’s 1.4 billion-strong population have been vaccinated. The news agency said that “experts say the situation could have a long way to go before it starts getting better.”

The Modi government has refused to make coronavirus vaccinations available for all age groups

and is currently only vaccinating those over 45 years. Meanwhile, several media outlets have reported that there are vaccine shortages in at least half a dozen of states, including Maharashtra.

On April 12, the BBC, citing local government officials, said that the state’s current stock of 1.5 million COVID-19 vaccines will last only three days. Vaccination centres in a number of districts in the state have been shut down due to lack of supplies.

During Modi’s meeting with chief ministers he falsely declared, “today, we have better resources” and therefore, “we can bring down this peak very fast and not allow it to go up.” The reality, however, is a disaster.

In Raipur, capital of the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, the Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Memorial Hospital, the city’s largest medical facility, is running out of space to store the large number of COVID-19 dead. NDTV reported on April 12 that the dead were “piled on gurneys, lying on the floor and even outside in the sun by the dumpsters.”

These “skin-crawling scenes,” it added, “highlight the huge human cost of the second wave of COVID-19 in India and shows what happens when the country’s creaky healthcare system is pushed to its brink.”



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