

# The Hindu Editorials & Words

## 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021

### 1. Inferno

A large fire that is dangerously out of control.

"the inferno had swept through the city"

Hell (with reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*).

**Inferno:** purgatory, Hades, blazes, hellfire, netherworld, underworld, bottomless pit, fire and brimstone.

### 2. Onslaught

It is a military term that refers to an attack against an enemy. It's safe to say that no one wants to be caught on the receiving end of an **onslaught**, because there will be lots of danger, destruction and probably death.

**Similar:** assault, attack, offensive, aggression, advance, charge, onrush, rush, storming, sortie, sally, raid, descent, incursion, invasion, foray.

### 3. Strain

To make a great mental or physical effort to do something

किसी काम के लिए काफ़ी अधिक मानसिक या शारीरिक श्रम करना

I was straining to see what was happening.

She strained her ears [listened very hard] to catch what they were saying.

To injure a part of your body by using it too much

शरीर के किसी अंग में मोच आ जाना (उसका अत्यधिक उपयोग के कारण)

Don't read in the dark. You'll strain your eyes.

**Synonyms:** elbow, grease, **strain**, sweat, exertion, effort, travail.

### 4. Be stretched (to the limit)

Be stretched (to the limit) to have hardly enough money, supplies, time etc for your needs

We're stretched at the moment, otherwise we'd go.

### 5. Compliance

अनुपालन, अनुरूपता

A hard hat must be worn at all times in compliance with safety regulations.

**Compliance:** conformity, consent, assent, complaisance, concurrence, obedience, observance, submission.

### 6. No end in sight

Used to say that the point at which something will be finished is not known There is **no end in sight** to this heat wave. Prices continue to go up with **no end in sight**.

### 7. Conflagration: कॉन्फ़्लग्रेशन्

A large fire which burns a lot of buildings, land, forests, etc.

भीषण अग्निकांड (जिसमें भवनों, वनों आदि की व्यापक क्षति होती है); विध्वंसक अग्नि, भयंकर आग

**Similar:** fire, blaze, flames, inferno, firestorm, holocaust.

Take suo motu notice

In law, sua sponte (Latin: "of his, her, its or their own accord") or **suo motu** ("on its own motion") describes an act of authority **taken** without formal prompting from another party.

The term is usually applied to actions by a judge **taken** without a prior motion or request from the parties.

### 8. Diligent: डिलिजन्ट

Showing care and effort in your work or duties

परिश्रमी, सावधान और कर्मठ

a diligent student/worker

**Similar:** industrious, hard-working, assiduous, conscientious, particular, punctilious, meticulous, painstaking, rigorous, exacting, careful, thorough, sedulous, attentive, heedful, intent, earnest, studious, constant, persevering, persistent, tenacious, pertinacious, zealous, dedicated, committed.

## 9. Retrofit

1: to furnish (something, such as a computer, airplane, or building) with new or modified parts or equipment not available or considered necessary at the time of manufacture.

2: to install (new or modified parts or equipment) in something previously manufactured or constructed.

# Infernal infernos: On hospital fires amid the

**As hospital fires are on the rise alongside a pandemic, Maharashtra must act on safety**

Maharashtra has been facing the merciless onslaught of COVID-19 cases, but its public health response has also had to combat a second, connected scourge of hospital fires. In recent days, the State has been adding, on average, over 60,000 cases and losing a few hundred lives daily in the second wave of the pandemic, straining its infrastructure and institutions. It is also frequently hit by deadly fires, of the kind witnessed on Friday in the ICU of a small hospital in Mumbai's suburb of Virar, where **at least 15 patients severely ill with the coronavirus died**. With about seven lakh active cases now, many of the patients in the State require oxygen support and hospitals are stretched to the limit. Many are small institutions, while a number of facilities are simply not built for purpose, such as the hospital located in a mall in Mumbai's Bhandup area where several lives were lost in a blaze last month. Now that many COVID-19 hospital fires have been reported during the first peak of the pandemic last year and later, in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh in particular, State authorities should be able to document their learnings and put out a checklist to save patients. They should clarify whether fire safety guidelines for hospitals issued by the Centre in September last year, prioritising a strict compliance strategy, third party accreditation on safety, and adoption of a fire response plan were acted upon. This is particularly important in Maharashtra's context, given that devastating fires have been recurring, and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should lose no time in ordering a comprehensive audit.

With no end in sight to serious hospital fires, there may be a case for judicial oversight and systematic inquiries into such mishaps. COVID-19 has turned into a conflagration, and the **Supreme Court has taken suo motu cognisance** of many aspects of pandemic management, such as availability of oxygen and essential drugs, method and manner of vaccination, and declaration of lockdowns. Nearly 10 High Courts have taken up pressing matters pertaining to COVID-19. It would be logical to add fire safety to such scrutiny, to make accidents rare. Evidently, State bureaucracies can achieve a lot more on their own, if they diligently implement existing regulations. There is a professional knowledge base available with important features. It calls for ICUs to be equipped with an exhaust system to prevent smoke accumulation in a fire, ventilation cut-outs to stop a blaze from spreading, periodic maintenance of safety equipment and, very importantly, an evacuation plan for the sickest patients, who may be attached to life-saving equipment. It is undoubtedly complicated to retrofit poorly designed hospitals for high safety standards, especially when it has to be executed on the go, and every bed is precious in the pandemic. But as each successive blaze proves, business as usual may extract a heavy price. Patients should be able to go to a hospital without the fear of fires threatening their lives there.

## Too little: On the Election Commission's COVID-19 curbs

**The ECI woke up late to the ill-effects the long campaign in Bengal had on public health**

The Election Commission of India's decision to restrict campaigning for the remaining two phases of the West Bengal Assembly election is an instance of wisdom dawning late. Nevertheless, it will help limit the public health damage to what was already caused by an unreasonably extended election cycle in the State during the pandemic. After the Calcutta High Court sought an action taken report on what measures it was adopting in the context of the spreading pandemic, the Election Commission has ordered the cancellation of all rallies and roadshows. Only meetings that are attended by no more than 500 people will be allowed

now. In its order, the Election Commission noted “with anguish” that parties and candidates were not adhering to safety protocols. Daily campaign hours had already been cut and campaigning was to stop 72 hours prior to polling, instead of 48 hours, as per an earlier directive. A bit of foresight would have been more helpful. The State is recording high numbers of infection. Bengal’s health infrastructure is not robust to deal with a heavy surge. All parties organised rallies amid the pandemic. But parties other than the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been calling for clubbing the last phases together. In the face of the Election Commission’s refusal to do so, the Congress, the Trinamool Congress and the Left had discontinued big rallies.

The only party that did not have a problem with the election being spread over eight phases over five weeks has been the BJP. Allegations that this helped the BJP that was dependent on its star campaigners and workers from other States moving from one region to the next carries weight. It is ironic that the BJP that argues for clubbing together all elections across the country has been happy about such a prolonged process in Bengal. Even after it became evident that the new surge was turning out to be severe, the BJP continued with big rallies in the State. Prime Minister Narendra Modi gloated about massive turnouts at his rallies. BJP leaders declared that there was no correlation between rally turnouts and the spread of the pandemic. It is not that India sleepwalked into this disaster; it was dragged in a boisterous procession of triumphalism and hubris by the political leadership. The unusual and unreasonable schedule of the Bengal election during the pandemic was unwise and avoidable. The Election Commission’s corrective measures at the last moment can only be of limited help. The lack of foresight while drawing up the schedule and monitoring the campaign bordered on complicity in the surge of new infections.

## Monsoon musings

**IMD’s forecast suggests that this year’s monsoon may not be as munificent as last year’s**

The India Meteorological Department (IMD)’s first-stage forecast for the south-west monsoon for 2021 offers a spot of cheer amid the storm clouds gathering over the economy. It indicates that the quantum of rainfall this season is likely to be at 98 per cent of the long period average and estimates a 61 per cent probability of the country ending up with normal or excess rains. While a normal monsoon is obviously welcome as it could help agriculture GDP expand for the third consecutive year, policymakers, economy watchers and investors would do well to not get over-optimistic about the prospects for the farm economy, based on these preliminary forecasts.

IMD’s first-stage long-range forecast is generally too early to capture the evolving impact of phenomena such as the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) that have proved to be critical swing factors influencing south-west monsoon performances in the past. Reading between the lines of IMD’s release this year, it is evident that it expects the current year’s monsoon to be less munificent than last year’s, when it expected rainfall at 100 per cent of the long period average with a 70 per cent probability of normal to excess rains. While neutral conditions now prevail on both the ENSO and IOD, IMD is watchful on negative IOD conditions developing as the season progresses. Last year, it was an unfolding La Nina that led to rainfall eventually exceeding IMD’s estimates at 109 per cent of the long-term average. Two, while IMD has been improving its record at foreseeing normal and excess monsoon years, it has tended to over-estimate rainfall in drought years such as 2002, 2009, 2014 and 2015. On this score, its second-stage forecast in June factoring in evolving weather conditions, is somewhat more reliable. There is also the fact that three consecutive normal monsoon years have been quite rare for India.

Given that the monsoon is no longer adhering to its historical patterns, there has been increasing demand from farmers and policymakers for more granular forecasts on its spatial and temporal spread. On this score, it is good to see IMD introduce a new dynamical Multi-Modal Ensemble forecasting system this year which will not just provide month-wise break-ups but also focus on rainfed agricultural regions. While the IMD is clearly making efforts to improve its forecasting abilities, the Centre and State governments are yet to properly use this valuable data, to appropriately guide cropping patterns, correctly estimate the demand-supply equation for essential crops, set trade policies and achieve a better state of disaster-preparedness against floods and famines that devastate individual districts every year.