

## **N1. Coronavirus pandemic: India's Covid combat gets a tech tonic**

*India Today. 13 April 2020*

*The app also provides information on containment measures. ... Central government and supported by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), has been ...*

The AAP government has developed - and is utilising - a cellphone application to monitor thousands of people who have been home-quarantined. It is also working on another app to track those living in high-risk areas.

he health department and civic body officials use drones to spray disinfectants and sanitise Delhi's containment zones. Cops operate these machines to ensure the lockdown is enforced properly. The AAP government has developed - and is utilising - a cellphone application to monitor thousands of people who have been home-quarantined.

It is also working on another app to track those living in high-risk areas.

In fact, the Centre and states have launched more than a dozen apps and counting, during the past weeks in their efforts to bend the ever-rising COVID-19 curve.

Most popular among them is the Union government's Aarogya Setu that can alert users if they come in close contact with infected people and enable a risk self-assessment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested people to download the app, saying it is effective in preventing infection cases. The app also provides information on containment measures.

"Aarogya Setu is an important step in our fight against COVID-19. By leveraging technology, it provides important information. As more and more people use it, its effectiveness will increase. I urge you all to download it," PM Modi said in a tweet on Friday night. He has also urged BJP workers to popularise the app.

After it was launched on April 2, the app, owned by the Central government and supported by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), has been downloaded by over 2.1 crore citizens.

### **HOW AAROGYA SETU WORKS**

The app asks about age, profession, international travel history, contact, symptoms and existing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and lung disease.

Once the information is keyed in, the app responds with a risk assessment. When a Mail Today reporter fed answers, the response marked in green said, "Your infection risk is low."

"We recommend that you stay at home to avoid any chance of exposure to the novel Coronavirus," said a message that popped up.

Users such as Gaurav Singla, who works with a real estate firm in South Delhi, have found the app very useful. "You need to follow guidelines like social distancing and staying at home to prevent infection," he said.

But if the user is marked in yellow with a text saying 'You are at high risk', the app will recommend to him to contact a helpline number along with other guidelines. The app is available in all regional languages for both Android and iPhone users.

It uses the phone's Bluetooth and GPS data to check whether the user has interacted with someone who could have tested positive for COVID-19.

"Once the data is sent to the server at the time of registration, for "at risk" or positive cases, a 30-day log of previous contacts is downloaded to the server, and an alert is sent to each contact," an expert said.

Many experts have also pointed to a loophole in the app, as it doesn't say anything about where the user was before installing it on his phone.

Sources in the government said that a feature phone version, along with an IVRS (Interactive Voice Response System), is expected to be released soon.

### **'TECH' IT EASY**

Government officials are also using several AI-based systems for contact tracing. Besides, technological solutions like geomapping of hotspots and CCTV surveillance of containment zones have been a huge help in allowing contactless functioning in the time of lockdowns and social isolation.

"The pandemic and the crisis situation that emerged out of it have resulted in a digital jumpstart, where even fencesitters and laggards are now going digital. We had all the enabling technologies around, just that our behaviours were not ready to accept them," said, Faisal Kawoosa, Chief Analyst at Gurugram-based market research firm techARC.

"Due to this behavioural change we will see a long-term acceptability and the future of business changing in many ways. The usage of apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype Meet Now, etc., all are giving us that immersive experience and we are virtually at our workplaces," he said.

"Having apps to help track and monitor COVID-19 is to leverage advanced technologies available. I am sure we might soon be seeing a time when some apps could also get into giving us early indications of such situations," he said.

### **OTHER APPS**

Most apps launched by the governments have monitoring and tracking goals. Punjab has come up with its own app which gives real-time updates on Coronavirus cases, measures and preventions.

Then there is the Maharashtra government's Mahakavach app that has both contact tracing and quarantine tracking features. Goa and Puducherry have come up with "Test Yourself " apps that help users self-diagnose Coronavirus symptoms.

Corona Kavach, an app launched joint by the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in association with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, gives real-time locations of coronavirus infected people.

### **VIRTUAL PLATFORMS**

Teleconferencing apps like Zoom is being used by both private and public sector firms.

Data science and Chatbots are also being used to bust virus misinformation, not to mention apps dedicated to telemedicine and education. "Drones are being used for surveillance, announcement and also sanitising affected areas.

Big companies like Facebook and Google are trying to fight fake news. Facial and iris recognition solutions integrated with infra-red thermometers are increasingly being used for screening. This is for sure a big leap in the technology sector," said cyber expert Gautam Kumawat.

In response to the lockdown, education technology companies have come forward to help educators reach students in virtual ways. Proctur, an Ed tech start-up, for example, has decided to offer Free Live Classes on its platform for a month. Over 5 lakh students and 800 tutors use Proctur apps and tools.

"In the first four days after we launched a one-month free subscription, more than 160 coaching centres have enrolled and are going live with their study materials," said Nishant Agarwal, Founder and CEO at Proctur.

According to the 2019 report by Internet and Mobile Association of India in collaboration with Nielsen Holdings, the country has 451 million Internet users with 385 million of them over 12 years of age. Reports suggest that nearly 69% of Delhi's 20 million population can access the Internet.

### **SOME QUESTIONS**

Popularity of these apps, however, has raised questions about privacy. "There is no denying the fact that technology is playing an important role," said Pawan Duggal, a prominent cyber lawyer. "But, what people are not understanding is that technology can also be used in an organised manner to target people's personal data," he said.

News Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/coronavirus-pandemic-indias-covid-combat-gets-a-tech-tonic-1666296-2020-04-13>

## **N2. These Aadhaar-integrated Cameras Can Be A Game-changer In Fight Against Covid-19: Experts**

*Outlook India. 12 April 2020*

*A senior official working with the **National Informatics Centre**, which has developed Aarogya Setu mobile app to alert people from the risk of COVID-19 infection, says that people having fever can be tracked with Aadhaar data. The blend of Aadhaar and Artificial Intelligence can be a game-changer in the fight against Coronavirus. But it also raises a question: does it risk the privacy of the people?*

China has made the successful use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the fight against Coronavirus and results are obvious to the world. In India, experts say, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) can play an unprecedented role in tackling an unseen enemy like Coronavirus.

The UIDAI officials say that if a camera that can capture an individual's image along with the body temperature is placed at a public place and is integrated with the Aadhaar data, it can prove to be a game-changer.

How can it work?

Let's presume that such a camera is placed in a public place. The camera can take the picture and read the body temperature of everyone present there. A software can be programmed in the camera that will identify only those people whose body temperatures read beyond a permissible limit, let's say 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

The picture of such people will be sent to UIDAI database. The UIDAI has images and contact details of over 123 crore people of India. It will match the images received from the camera with its existing data and can send an alert to the government authorities. The authorities can do a physical check to find out the authenticity of the system and isolate such person.

Himanshu Kumar Lal, former Assistant Director-General, UIDAI agreed that Aadhaar data can be used to identify sick individuals and isolate them.

"This is the use of data and artificial intelligence for the benefit of society. It will save a lot of manpower of the government," Lal, who is at present DIG Sambalpur in Odissa said.

He said that manual thermal checking might have chances of error but the technology-driver system will be nearly fool-proof. "If human interference is minimised, controversies like Tablighi Jamat will not happen," Lal said.

Technology experts also say that any work on this line will have game-changing results.

A senior official working with the **National Informatics Centre**, which has developed Aarogya Setu mobile app to alert people from the risk of COVID-19 infection, says that people having fever can be tracked with Aadhaar data and government can intercept them from their home address or by tracking location through their mobile.

"The same can also be used with drones having such cameras at market places or other crowded places," he said on the condition of anonymity.

Companies dealing with AI say that today such cameras are available that can recognise the face and measure the temperature of people even with masks.

“In technology, the thermal cameras being originated from China may be giving readings with high error rates; that may be counter-productive for such initiative to implement technology for countering COVID-19 spread,” Bikas Jha, Country Head, RealNetworks said.

He added, “In my view, Indian companies should not shy away from taking technological help or forging collaboration with reputed US, EU, Japanese or Korean companies who have excelled in developing such solutions with the high-level of accuracy in temperature measurement and facial recognition.”

However, the question is, “Is it legitimate to use Aadhaar data for this purpose?”

The present Aadhaar Act doesn't allow the government to use the data for such purposes. “The 5 judge bench decision in the Aadhaar case looked at the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar law and considered that the failure to establish the identity of a person is a major hindrance in the successful implementation of welfare programmes. Protection of life and providing of healthcare is part of a state's duty under Article 21,” Sidharth Luthra, former additional solicitor general, said.

He added, “Hence Aadhaar usage in the battle against the Wuhan virus is legitimate though it may require the issuance of regulations under the Act.”

Senior SC lawyer, Sanjay Hegde, who backed the right to privacy in Aadhaar case in the Supreme Court, said that even at a public place there is a presumption of privacy but any breach of that could possibly be made proportionate.

“While definitely it is a breach of privacy, the question is whether you can make it proportionate,” he said.

According to Hegde, if such a system serves as a starting point for investigation for an individual to be asked to turn up for health check-up, it could possibly be justified.

“It should not result in warrantless surveillance.”

News Source: <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-fever-and-face-detection-cameras-integrated-with-aadhar-can-be-game-changer-against-covid-19-experts/350595>

### **N3. Behind Aarogya Setu app push: 'At least 50% people must download for impact'**

*Financial Express. 11 April 2020*

*The app, which is owned by the government and supported by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), was developed by a joint team of official entities ... On Tuesday evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union ministers, including Amit Shah, Ravi Shankar Prasad and Piyush Goyal, were part of a high-level group that attended a presentation by the app's developers.*

*[Aarogya Setu app can be used as e-pass to facilitate travel amid lockdown: Modi](#) - Northeast Now*

The app, which is owned by the government and supported by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), was developed by a joint team of official entities such as NITI Aayog and tech industry volunteers, who also help manage it.

WITH 2.1 crore downloads, the Aarogya Setu [mobile app](#) — to track and alert those who physically come close to COVID-19 cases — is being aggressively promoted by the government at the highest level because its effectiveness depends on at least half the population registering as users, according to its developers and experts.

On Tuesday evening, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and Union ministers, including [Amit Shah](#), Ravi Shankar Prasad and Piyush Goyal, were part of a high-level group that attended a presentation by the app's developers. Since then, the Prime Minister and Union Ministers have tweeted about the app. The HRD and Rail Ministries have sent out advisories urging students, teachers and employees, and their family members, to download it. And banks are sending alerts to account-holders.

The app, which is owned by the government and supported by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), was developed by a joint team of official entities such as NITI Aayog and tech industry volunteers, who also help manage it. The first line of code was written by March 19, and the app launched on April 2 after a security audit conducted by IIT-Madras and a tech consulting firm.

News Source: <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/technology/behind-aarogya-setu-app-push-at-least-50-people-must-download-for-impact/1925379/>

## **N4. Kerala brings out circular on state-central services exempted from COVID-19 lockdown**

*New Indian Express. 11 April 2020*

*The circular also mentions about the commercial and private establishments that can operate in addition to transport services exempted from lockdown. 5. National Informatics Centre*

The state government has brought out a circular with a compiled list of guidelines issued by the state and central governments to be followed during the lockdown. Violating the directives will be punishable under the Disaster Management Act and IPC, said the circular.

Seven central government departments/establishments and 12 state government establishments have been exempted from lockdown. In addition, officials working with 21 state departments/services including farming and drinking water supply have been exempted from lockdown.

The circular also mentions about the commercial and private establishments that can operate in addition to transport services exempted from lockdown. Other restrictions including not allowing more than 20 people for funerals and ban on public gatherings including religious, political, social, cultural and academic meetings. All individuals who reached the country after February 15 should undergo quarantine.

### **Central government offices exempted from shut down:**

1. Defence and Armed Forces
2. Pay and Accounts Office, Economic Advisors, Officers of C&AG (with minimum staff)
3. Petroleum, CNG, LPG, PNG, power generation and distribution centres, post offices.
4. Disaster management and weather forecast units
5. National Informatics Centre
6. Customs Clearance, GSTN, MICA 21 registry systems in Ports, Airports and land borders.
7. Reserve Bank, economic institutions under RBI, NPCI, CCIL, payment system operators (with minimum staff)

### **State government offices exempted from shut down:**

1. Police, Home Guard, Civil Defence, Fire and Rescue Service, Disaster Management, Prisons
2. District Administration, Treasury
3. Electricity, Drinking water, sanitation
4. Sanitation and drinking water distribution under local bodies
5. Office of the Resident Commissioner, New Delhi
6. Forest Department offices, zoo, nurseries, wildlife sanctuaries, forest fire-prevention, plantations, irrigation, patrolling etc
7. Social Justice Department, institutions for children, differently-abled, senior citizens and women, observation homes, pension office.
8. Activities relating to the procurement of Agri produce and fixing of Minimum support price
9. Procurement and distribution institutions under the Agriculture department.

Travel facilities for those working in institutions in the public and private sectors engaged in the manufacturing and distribution of items related hospitals and veterinary hospitals - dispensaries, chemists, pharmacies (including Jan Oushadhi Kendras), establishments selling medical equipment, laboratories, clinics, nursing homes, pharmaceutical research labs, ambulance, medical, hospital and health sectors are among those who are exempted.

### **Institutions excluded from lockdown:**

Ration shops, Consumerfed shops, Supplyco outlets, shops selling fruits, vegetables and other food items, milk, milk products, fish, meat, cattle feed, fertiliser, seeds and pesticides are allowed. They can be open between 7 am and 5 pm and home delivery be encouraged.

Also allowed are banks, insurance organisations, ATMs, IT establishments helping banks, banking correspondent, ATM-related agencies, print and electronic media.

Telecommunications, internet services, broadcasting, cable service, IT services are allowed. Work from home be encouraged.

Allowed establishments include petrol pumps, LPG outlets, establishments involved in power generation and distribution, SEBI-notified capital and debt market services, cold storage, warehousing services, private security services, data and call centres working for the government, farmers, agricultural labourers, shops selling farm equipment, truck repair workshops on national highways, establishments in fishing and aquaculture, two-wheeler repair workshops.

**The following industrial institutions are exempted from lockdown:**

- \* The units which manufacture essential commodities including medicines, pharmaceutical, medical equipment and its raw materials
- \* The distribution of coal, explosives and others using for mining purpose
- \* The units which produce components carrying food, medicines, pharmaceutical products
- \* The distribution and package units which produce seeds, fertilisers, pesticides
- \* Plantations including tea can function with a maximum of 50 per cent of workers
- \* Cardomom, Coffee, Cashew, Palmoil and cloves plantations can also function with limited workers
- \* The factories which produce rubber and surgical gloves, rubber plantations
- \* The workers will get one year period for procuring clay for clay making units.
- \* Beedi making units can function on Monday and Tuesday with a minimum number of workers
- \* Kerala Minerals and Metals Limited, Chavara
- \* Indian Rare Earth Limited, Chavara
- \* Travancore Titanium Products Ltd, Kochuveli
- \* Travancore Cements Ltd, Kottayam
- \* Malabar Cements Ltdm Palakkad
- \* Travancore Cochin Chemicals Limited, Kalamasserry
- \* All these units can function only after obtaining prior permission from the government

Services - Exempted



- \* Distribution of essential services
- \* Police, Fire force, ambulance
- \* Air, rail and port services to transport essential goods and the related institutions and agencies
- \* Inter-state transport of goods for export and domestic distribution
- \* Inter-state distribution of Petroleum products, LPG, Food products, medical devices.
- \* Inter-state transportation of harvest machines and others for agriculture purposes
- \* Travel arrangements of foreign nationals who stranded in the state ( On the basis of the directive of the Centre)

*News Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/apr/11/kerala-brings-out-circular-on-state-central-services-exempted-from-covid-19-lockdown-2128848.html>*

## **N5. Juggling e-files & family — how WFH, Covid-19 changed life for govt's science, tech officers**

*ThePrint . 11 April 2020*

*Using e-Office, a platform created by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), almost 70-75 per cent of the ministries files had been made digital. The Department of Science & Technology knows it holds the key to solving the Covid-19 problem. Here's how it has changed its functioning in this time of crisis.*

**New Delhi:** Juggling between constant WhatsApp notifications, video conferences, and mobilising her family members to help out with domestic chores. That's what life is like for Anita Gupta, a scientific officer at the central government's Department of Science and Technology (DST), during the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Gupta is spearheading a major initiative to encourage India's start-ups to propose rapid solutions to fight Covid-19. And with the death toll in the country climbing above 200, Gupta and other members of the government workforce are working double shifts from their homes to accelerate scientific research.

The DST, like many other arms of the government, has been accused of sitting on project proposals for many months — a charge even officials of the department admit to.

Yet, in this hour of crisis, the department is approving research proposals in a matter of days, with the hope of rapidly deploying scientific solutions to battle the disease that has no cure yet.

### **Simplifying processes without losing due diligence**

“When the secretary gave us this direction that we should have an initiative to combat Covid-19 with our start-up network, we did not have any proposal in hand. That was on the morning of 30 March. By the evening of 31 March, we mobilised everyone in our network, and within hours, proposals started coming in,” Gupta said.

“We used to take a minimum of one week in running around and getting sanctions from the finance department. This has been cut down to just a few hours,” she added.

Ashutosh Sharma, the DST Secretary, told ThePrint that it is usual for him now to be on video calls late into the night.

“Considering the urgency of situation, when it comes to projects related to coronavirus, we have gone about simplifying some of the processes — but without short-circuiting anything that is important,” Sharma said.

The financial and scientific due diligence retains the same intensity, he added.

### **Shifting work online**

Sharma said the process of shifting the ministry's work onto the digital platform had started almost four years ago. Using e-Office, a platform created by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), almost 70-75 per cent of the ministries files had been made digital.

“Starting four years ago, we made all submission and processing electronic. The scientific processing and interface with the rest of the world was already becoming electronic. It was only our internal processing that was not entirely electronic,” the secretary said.

This changed once the lockdown was announced.

In the first week of the lockdown, the DST gave VPNs for section officers, Sharma said.

“At this point, officers at all levels can handle files online,” he said.

Akhilesh Gupta, the DST’s nodal officer on Covid-19, explained that physical presence in office was required for two things — meetings and signing files. But e-files are now being handled completely digitally.

“My colleague in Ghaziabad sends the e-file to me in R.K. Puram, where I stay. I look at the e-file and if I have to write any comment/remark, I do that, and forward it to the secretary, who resides in Moti Bagh,” he explained.

“The secretary opens that e-file, vets it, signs it digitally and sends it back to me. I send it to the person concerned, who again forwards it to the finance department. This entire process does not require physical presence,” the nodal officer said.

As for meetings, the DST has convened 60 to 70 meetings in the last two weeks.

“What we have realised is that if we conduct a meeting through a webinar, we see that the attendance is almost 100 per cent,” Akhilesh Gupta said.

“Earlier, people could not attend meetings throughout the day. There were instances when people had to attend 2-3 meetings at different places in a day, and so could not make themselves available all the time.”

Anita Gupta added: “We used to spend so much time only trying to decide where our next meeting would be held. Mobilising all the national experts for the meeting, arriving at a date agreed to by all, planning with the local partner who would be conducting all the logistics... It is used to take a good month or two to plan a high-level meeting.”

Now, the same thing can be done from home in a day.

### **‘Working from home, and working for home’**

The lockdown has, however, created new hurdles, especially for women working in the government.

“We do not have the support system anymore — our house helps are no longer here, so one needs to mobilise family to help with household chores,” Anita Gupta said.

She added that some of her colleagues who have young children have had to figure out how to work, since all schools are closed and children need attention.

“We have to constantly strike a balance between working from home and working for home,” she said.

### **Will this style of work continue post-Covid-19?**

Sharma said the Covid-19 challenge has brought the best out of the employees, but in a business-as-usual scenario, “the work will expand to fill the available time”.

“If we lock people inside and tell them that some work has to be done in one week, then they have to do something extra to make that possible. So, people will be surprised about what they can achieve,” he said.

The DST secretary added that the “good practices learnt during the lockdown” will get incorporated when this crisis blows over.

However, Anita Gupta said Covid-19 will mark a paradigm shift in the department’s work culture.

“All departments of the government are stepping up to do their part, but at the end, solutions are only going to come from science and technology — be it vaccines, personal protective equipment, ventilators, sanitisers or novel therapeutics. So, we realise how important the role of innovation in science is,” she said.

She added that the DST is working at its peak productive capacity, and all those who can help are rising to the challenge and doing their bit.

“That is the positive side to this crisis,” she said.

**News Source:** <https://theprint.in/india/governance/juggling-e-files-family-how-wfh-covid-19-changed-life-for-govts-science-tech-officers/399525/>

## **N6. Virus brings 'Digital India' to govt as papers, meetings make way for e-Office, WhatsApp**

*ThePrint . 11 April 2020*

*Use of NIC platforms go up in lockdown period. While the video conferencing platform Zoom was initially used for holding regular meetings, top officials ... Central government ministries have shifted most of their daily business to online platforms in the last two weeks, even as routine work has taken a backseat.*

**New Delhi:** The Indian government machinery has for long earned the reputation of being a bureaucratic behemoth walled behind stacks and stacks of paperwork and burdened by slow-moving files.

The 21-day lockdown, precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has however forced an overnight metamorphosis — from the analog to the digital.

The buzzwords in the structures of power in the Central government these days are e-Office, video conferencing, audio bridges, emails and WhatsApp.

Central government ministries have shifted most of their daily business to these virtual platforms in the last two weeks, even as routine work has taken a backseat as a result of the lockdown guidelines.

This is for better coordination as most government buildings are functioning with just a skeletal strength of staff.

The move is in line with an [office memorandum](#) issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), which said that heads of departments should ensure that 50 per cent of Group B and C employees attend office every day, while the remaining 50 per cent staff should work from home.

### **Work in the time of a pandemic**

Senior officers in the ministries — barring those directly associated with Covid-19 work — are either working from home or attending offices on staggered timings and rotations.

And as a result of the memorandum, most junior staff such as section officers and deputy secretaries are mostly working from home. Directors and above are attending offices when required.

Most consultants attached to the Central government are working from home. Other necessary contractual staff have been issued official letters so that they are not stopped during the lockdown.

Multiple government officials across ministries told ThePrint that they are slowly adapting to the changing work conditions, though coronavirus-related work remains the priority for ministries directly working on it.

A senior civil servant in the central government told ThePrint that the limited routine work of other ministries are being held on virtual platforms.

“Meetings in the office are being called only if a matter is of utmost urgency or if there is an important meeting at the Prime Minister’s Office. Urgent files are being cleared on e-office,” the officer said.

The official, however, added that ministries such as the health ministry or home ministry and others involved directly in Covid-19 work, regularly hold meetings.

“They have to interact with the states as well as the PMO for coordinating and issuing new guidelines and rules. Work has only increased in such instances,” the official told ThePrint.

### **Use of NIC platforms go up in lockdown period**

While the video conferencing platform Zoom was initially used for holding regular meetings, top officials are increasingly shifting to the video conferencing facility hosted by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

This after CERT-In warned Zoom users of cyber risks.

Talking to ThePrint, NIC director general Neeta Verma said the video conferencing facility is hosted in secure NIC servers. “All video conferences at the top levels of the government are being hosted on our platform,” she said. “Whether it is cabinet meetings or the PM’s interaction with media heads or pharma companies, our lines are fully functional and teams are working overtime to ensure there are no glitches.”

Verma said that not only central and state government meetings but even district-level meetings are taking place on the NIC platform.

“The use of this platform has grown manifold in the last one month than what it used to be in the last few years,” she told ThePrint. “In the month of March itself, NIC facilitated over 2,300 video-conferencing sessions of over 60,000 hours across the country.”

Verma further said that NIC software e-Office is being used to transfer files and streamline workflow. “e-Office, the digital office solution from NIC has turned out to be the nerve of government functioning. Secure access to e-Office from home has helped government officers do a lot of work from home during the lockdown period,” she said.

Verma added that the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) team is facilitating smooth functioning of the financial machinery of the government.

“PFMS achieved a major milestone recording the highest number of transactions in a single day on 30 March. There were 2.19 crore transactions that day, surpassing the earlier mark of 98.19 lakh on 28 March 2018,” she said. “PFMS also facilitates transfer of funds directly to the bank accounts of beneficiaries under various government schemes.”

### **Regular govt business takes a backseat**

Senior officials from several infrastructure and social sector ministries said their routine work has taken a backseat.

“Essential files are being cleared on e-Office, requisite interactions are being held on our official emails. But the usual routine work of the ministries has been put aside for now, with the focus being only on Covid-19,” a senior officer of one of the social sector ministries told ThePrint.

In a given day, ministries in the Government of India conduct a range of business — starting from legal issues, administrative work, drafting policies, working on amending legislations, bringing new rules, initiating procurements to coordinating with states for the implementing and monitoring of central government’s schemes.

“Monitoring of Government of India schemes such as Swachh Bharat or others at the state level or initiating any amendment in them, new policy decisions or even amending existing legislations are out

of question now,” the social ministry officer said. “Only essential work such as releasing funds to states is taking place.”

Government officials said even routine administrative and legal matters are not the priority. “For example, if a scheme had to be modified, the process had to begin now,” another officer said. “From getting the expenditure finance committee to look into it to preparing the cabinet note, it takes six months. But no such work has been initiated now.”

A third senior officer from one of the infrastructure ministries said that those unable to access files digitally are banking on the scarce staff present in the offices, who would email or message relevant portions of a file to the person concerned.

“We are just ensuring basic business continuity in such times,” the official said.

### **‘A cultural shift’**

Senior government officials told ThePrint that the transition is more of a cultural shift.

“It’s true that a fully paperless office is yet to be a reality, but a lot of work is being done through e-Office,” said another senior civil servant posted in an infrastructure ministry. “But junior officials do not have the VPN required to access e-Office from home. Work can move faster once they have it.”

The official said the bigger problem is the virtual video conferences, which he says makes coordination of important work much more difficult than a regular meeting.

“Officers come better prepared when there are regular meetings in the office, because a lot of review takes place there,” the officer said. “This is lacking in virtual meetings. Moreover, there are connectivity issues at times, which adds to the problem.”

Another senior government official said that decision-making, however, is faster in the e-Office system. “Only complex files needing a lot of referencing to previous decisions need a physical examination. Otherwise, e-files had percolated substantially in the last five to seven years, except for ministers,” the official said.

### **Work deadlines extended after lockdown**

With the slowing down of work since the lockdown, ministries have extended several important deadlines.

Pre-planned events too have been cancelled or postponed. For example, the government cancelled the 13th Civil Services Day on 21 April scheduled to be held at Vigyan Bhavan. The DoPT, for instance, has extended substantially, timelines for recording Performance Appraisal Reports for 2019-20 for All India Service officials.

The ministry has also extended the fixed timelines associated with the steps involved in the processing of vigilance related matters.

“A lot of work is not getting completed on time because of the lockdown and the focus on Covid-19. Hence extension of deadlines were inevitable,” the third government official told ThePrint.

News Source: <https://theprint.in/india/governance/virus-brings-digital-india-to-govt-as-papers-meetings-make-way-for-e-office-whatsapp/399602/>

## **N7. CollabCAD: Newly Launched 3D Product Design Software System For Students**

NDTV. 13 April 2020

*AIM's collaboration with NIC's CollabCAD is a great platform for students to utilize indigenous, state-of-the-art made-in-India software for 3D modeling/ slicing to use 3D Printing, said an official statement. ... and National Informatics Centre (NIC) today jointly launched CollabCAD, ... Sharing her views, Director General NIC Dr Neeta Verma said, NIC is happy to ..*

### **New Delhi:**

To provide students experience in creating and modifying 3D designs Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog and National Informatics Centre (NIC) today jointly launched CollabCAD, a collaborative network, computer enabled software system, that would provide a total engineering solution from 2D drafting & detailing to 3D product design.

The aim of this is to provide a platform to students of Atal Tinkering Labs across country to create data across the network and concurrently access the same design data for storage and visualization. Atal Tinkering Labs or ATLS are established across India in 5,000 schools and provide tinkering spaces to children to hone their innovative ideas and creativity.

AIM's collaboration with NIC's CollabCAD is a great platform for students to utilize indigenous, state-of-the-art made-in-India software for 3D modeling/ slicing to use 3D Printing, said an official statement.

For the students a customized version of CollabCAD has been developed.

Mission Director Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog Shri R Ramanan while launching CollabCAD online via social media said that 3D printing is going to be an integral part of the new 21st century innovations and AIM, NITI Aayog is proud to enable designing through CollabCAD in 5000 Atal Tinkering Labs with over 2.5 million students having access to it.

Sharing her views, Director General NIC Dr Neeta Verma said, NIC is happy to share this make in India 3d product CollabCAD which will be used by around 5000 schools where Atal Tinkering Labs are established.

Atal Innovation Mission also launched the Game Development module in partnership with DELL Technologies and Learning Links Foundation. It is an online platform where students can start their learning journey while tinkering from home. Through the platform they can learn to create their own games and also share it with others. This platform envisages to make students transition from 'game players' to 'game makers'.

Atal Innovation Mission is the government's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

News Source: <https://www.ndtv.com/education/collabcad-newly-launched-software-system-for-3d-product-design-2211013>



## **N8. Third party apps 'prone to hacking', Centre advises ministers to use NIC interfaces for video conferencing**

*Jagran. 13 April 2020*

*Instead, ministers across a wide range of departments have been advised to use the official video conferencing (VC) services offered by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**, News18 reported citing its sources. National Informatics Centre sources.*

**New Delhi | Jagran News Desk:** The COVID-19 pandemic has replaced most of the real face-to-face interactions with virtual exchanges of vital communication between the central government and its states and Union Territories. This has invoked the government to ensure a set of cautionary advisories to be sent across the different ministries advising the ministers to not use “third party apps and services” for hosting sensitive meetings via video conferencing.

Instead, ministers across a wide range of departments have been advised to use the official video conferencing (VC) services offered by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), *News18* reported citing its sources.

The advisory informed ministers that privately-run third-party video conferencing tools are mostly developed on Java-based software, and often, the software source codes are hosted online in public domain, thereby making them vulnerable for hacking.

The National Informatics Centre, established in 1976, has been playing an important role in intra/inter-governmental connectivity during the current lockdown. The Union Cabinet for the first time had a video-conference using the NIC platform in the first week of April.

The PM’s video-conference interactions with chief ministers, SAARC counterparts, sportspersons and heads of embassies and high-commissions too have been done using state-owned NIC’s video-conference service. It has a permanent setup at the Prime Minister’s 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence and the office.

The set of government advisories come as third-party video conferencing interfaces like ‘Zoom’ have come under fire from the countries across the globe, for its loosely stitched encryption standards and privacy issues.

The encryption standards, in particular are key to such highly-sensitive interactions – and therefore, to add an indigenous layer of security, the Govt. Of India is utilizing its already existing vast communication infrastructure run and sustained by National Informatics Center.

Instead of setting up new third-party conferencing interfaces from scratch, NIC video-conferencing modules have been advised to be utilized by the ministries in New Delhi.

News Source: <https://english.jagran.com/india/third-party-apps-prone-to-hacking-centre-advises-ministers-to-use-nic-interfaces-for-video-conferencing-10010666>

## **M1. Demand for cybersecurity to rise in post Covid-19 India**

*Hindustan Times . 12 April 2020*

... cybersecurity market,” **Ajay Sawhney, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, said during a virtual conference. “We have joined hands with DSCI (the Data Security Council of India) in establishing a National Centre of Excellence to accelerate innovation and make India an attractive cybersecurity market,” **Ajay Sawhney, Secretary, MeitY**

Digitisation in India will dramatically rise in a post COVID-19 scenario which in turn will increase demand for greater cybersecurity and privacy, experts said on Saturday.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, as businesses are still coping up, cybersecurity is being seen as a core technology to keep companies secure as they go online and virtual, and as emerging deep tech such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Blockchain evolves, investment in cybersecurity will be a key differentiator for companies offering such services.

“We have joined hands with DSCI (the Data Security Council of India) in establishing a National Centre of Excellence to accelerate innovation and make India an attractive cybersecurity market,” **Ajay Sawhney, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, said during a virtual conference.

**Also read: [US, UK cyber officials say state-backed hackers taking advantage of outbreak](#)**

“Currently, all focus lies on COVID-19 management and innovation challenges are running to help us tackle the pandemic but all this will possibly transform into something larger, and we should never waste a crisis but take it as an opportunity,” he added.

The National Centre of Excellence for Cyber Security Technology Development and Product Entrepreneurship, a joint initiative of DSCI and MeitY, hosted the “Security Investors Conference” to accelerate funding and transform India into a hub for cybersecurity innovation.

The virtual conference brought together key government stakeholders as well as multinational investment firms such as Sequoia Capital, Accel Partners, IvyCap Ventures, Indian Angel Network, IDFC Parampara, India Nivesh, Helix Investments Management and around 70 cybersecurity start-ups and many large enterprises on the same platform.

“Post COVID-19, digitization of companies is going to accelerate dramatically as we are already witnessing innovative ways in which online education, telemedicine facilities are growing,” said **Rajan Anandan, MD, Sequoia Capital**.

“As the pandemic dust settles, COVID-19 will actually prove to be an accelerator for cyber security and its definition will expand. Cybersecurity now being a key priority for investors, start-ups need to focus on building scale and plan to get to \$100 million Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR) to catch the attention of venture capital funds and investment firms,” **Anandan** added.

Industry leaders also talked about cybersecurity growth amid the pandemic and funding roadmap for the industry, post the crisis.

“As India gears up to become a hub for cybersecurity, investment becomes the game changer to nurture start-ups,” **Rama Vedashree, CEO, DSCI**, said in her opening address.

“We have seen an uptick in cybersecurity patent filing and grants in India which proves the growing innovation ecosystem in our country. As Big Data, AI, Cloud and other deep tech emerges, cybersecurity serves as a foundational tech across all technologies and for that we need a spurt in innovation and investment,” she noted.

News Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/tech/demand-for-cybersecurity-to-rise-in-post-covid-19-india/story-ATSJWdulvPBVVDGHDCefGN.html>

## Other IT News

### **O1. Home Ministry suggests cyber security tips for people working from home**

*Hindu BusinessLine. 11 April 2020*

*The Ministry of Home Affairs, along with Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre have come out with some cyber security tips, as most of the people are working from home.*

### **O2. Apple, Google bring Covid-19 contact-tracing to three billion people**

*Hindu BusinessLine. 11 April 2020*

*In mid-May, the companies will add the ability for iPhones and Android phones to exchange anonymous information via apps run by public health authorities. Apple Inc and Google unveiled a rare partnership to add technology*