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Maharashtra government to pay salaries in instalments

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Air India pilots flag poor protective equipment

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'Megxit': Harry and Meghan formally quit royal life

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NEARBY



Noida administration seals fire safety firm

GHAZIABAD
The newly appointed District Magistrate of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Suhas L.Y., on Tuesday sealed a fire safety firm in Noida which is being linked to 29 COVID-19 cases in the district besides Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr and Bareilly. On Tuesday, another employee of the firm tested positive in Dhuhai village of Ghaziabad.

REGION PAGE 4

COVID-19: MoUs signed with private hospitals

JAIPUR/GUWAHATI
Scaling up its efforts to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak, the Rajasthan government has reserved 84 private hospitals, with a total bed capacity of 9,377, in Jaipur. The order came following a decision taken last week in Assam, where the Rajasthan government signed MoUs with private hospitals for "transferring the load of other patients".

NEWS PAGE 10

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OPPORTUNITIES PAGE BACK

Officials of Tablighi Jamaat charged with defying restrictions

Over 400 people with COVID-19 symptoms hospitalised, over 1,000 quarantined

NIKHIL BABU SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

With at least 24 of its occupants testing positive for the novel coronavirus, an Islamic centre in the national capital has turned out to be the latest hotspot of COVID-19. More than 400 people with symptoms were admitted to different hospitals and over 1,100 shifted to government-run quarantine facilities in Delhi alone over Monday and Tuesday, officials said.

Hundreds of others who returned home after staying at the centre over the last fortnight might have carried the virus to several States, authorities fear.



Thousands of people from across the country, as well as from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Saudi Arabia, attended a gathering at the centre earlier this month over a number of days, officials said. A large number of them were on the premises as the country went into lockdown on March 24. Markaz Nizamuddin is the international headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat, a puritanical Islamic sect.

The Delhi police on Tues-



Under watch: People being evacuated from the Tablighi Jamaat centre in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi on Tuesday. ■R.V. MOORTHY

day registered a case against Maulana Saad and others from Tablighi Jamaat under Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, read with Sections 269, 270, 271 and 120-B of the IPC, for violation of government directions in respect of restriction of gatherings and safety measures, including physical-

physical-distancing.

‘No transport available’

The centre said, in a statement, that many participants could not leave as all means of transport came to an abrupt halt on March 24,

though it tried to make special arrangements with permission from the authorities. “Under such compelling circumstances, there was no option for Markaz Nizamuddin but to accommodate the stranded visitors with prescribed medical precautions till the situation becomes conducive to their movement or arrangements are made by the authorities.”

Close community interactions in prayer, dining and travel among Jamaat followers put them at a high risk of the contagion. Participants at the recent congregation

included people from Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala – in cases already known.

One of those who attended, a Srinagar-based businessman, died on March 26. He had travelled by air, train and road to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and back to Jammu and Kashmir. At least 300 people who came in contact with him have been put under quarantine.

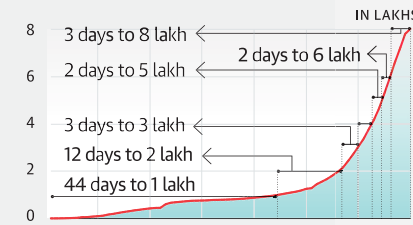
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SOUTHERN STATES LAUNCH OPERATION PAGE 5
MORE REPORTS PAGE 4, 8, 9, 10, 11

Exponential increase

The number of COVID-19 cases crossed 8 lakh globally. The infections in India breached the 1,50,000-mark on Tuesday.

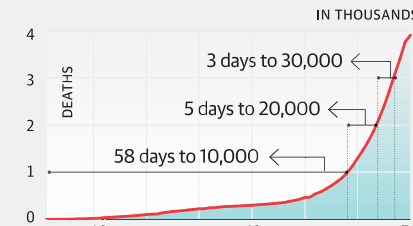
GLOBAL CASE COUNT

While it took 44 days for the global confirmed cases to reach the 1 lakh mark, it took only 3 days for a jump from 6 lakh to 8 lakh



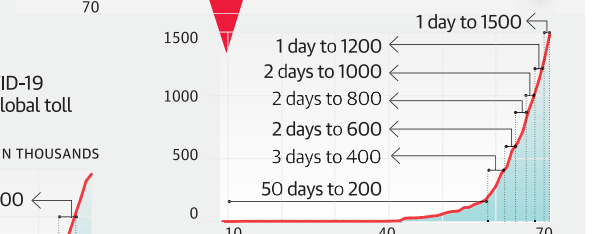
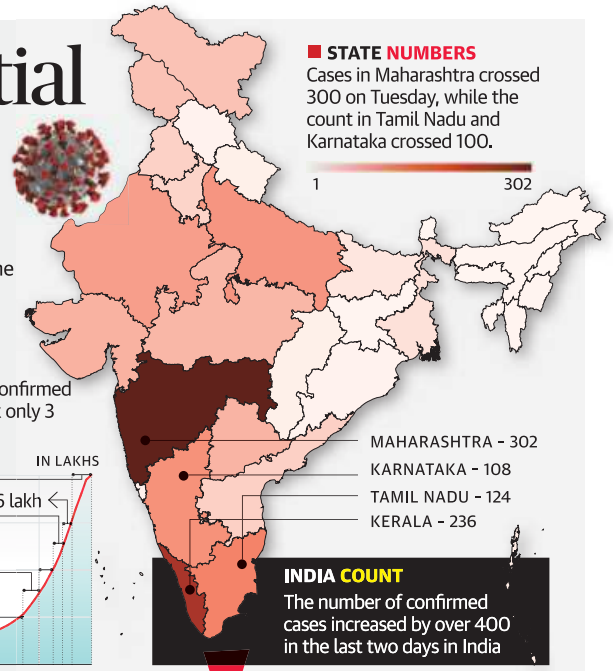
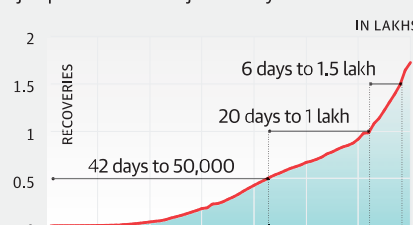
GLOBAL DEATH TOLL

It took 58 days to record 10,000 COVID-19 deaths, but just 8 more days for the global toll to cross 30,000



GLOBAL RECOVERED CASES

While it took 62 days for the number of those who recovered to reach 1 lakh, the count jumped to 1.5 lakh in just six days since then



260 Cases recorded in India on Tuesday

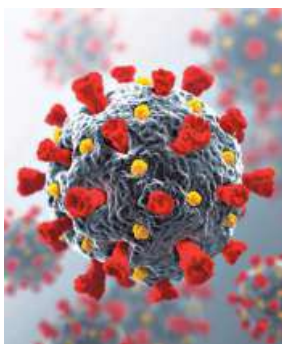
Three quasi-subspecies of virus in circulation, says ICMR

Scientists yet to classify variant as Indian strain

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A mixture of three quasi-subspecies of SARS-CoV-2 is in circulation in India, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said on Tuesday. These imported variants showed no differences from how they behaved in the place of origin. Scientists are yet to classify a SARS-CoV-2 variant as an Indian strain.

R. Gangakhedkar, head of the ICMR's Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases-I Division, said, "India's COVID-19 cases were mainly from people with travel history and their immediate contacts, which is to say that this virus was brought in from outside. We are not



A representational image of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. ■GETTY IMAGES

seeing any variation from what is being seen on how this strain is behaving around the world. So there is no difference in its severity. However, in a large country like India, it's difficult to predict an accurate trend about the progression of COVID-19 because we still don't have enough time gap between the upswing of cases."

Indore cases cause concern

As most COVID-19 patients in Indore, where 17 persons tested positive on Tuesday, have no contact or travel history, health workers are grappling to identify the source, indicating that the city may already be witnessing the community transmission stage. PAGE 9

This, he explained, did not change India's reporting, isolation or testing protocol.

He said the progression in terms of cases could not be compared with any other country as of now and people should be looking at the risk of exposure and adherence to physical distancing.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Treat migrants humanely, SC tells officials

It asks govt. to set up a panel and open a portal to put out authentic information about the virus

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the police and the authorities to treat migrant workers journeying home in a humane manner.

"We expect those concerned to appreciate the trepidation of the poor men, women and children and treat them with kindness... The anxiety and fear of the migrants should be understood by the police and other authorities. As directed by the Union of India, they should deal with the migrants in a humane manner. Considering the situation, we are of the opinion that the State governments/Union Territories should endeavour to engage volunteers along with the police to supervise the welfare activities for the migrants," a Bench, led by Chief Justice of India



Stopped enroute: Migrants at a 'gaushala', which has been turned into a relief camp in Manesar, Haryana. ■V.V. KRISHNAN

Sharad A. Bobde, said.

The court ordered the government to ensure that migrant workers stopped from crossing the inter-State borders were given food, shelter and medicines. The government said it was imperative to stop the mass migration as there was a likelihood that

three out of every 10 workers might be carrying the coronavirus. The court expressed its satisfaction with the government measures.

The Bench, comprising Justice L. Nageswara Rao, asked the government to follow up on persons identified as infected and quarantined.

lodge in shelters. It asked the government to have trained counsellors talk to the workers.

Authentic information

The court directed the government, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, to set up an expert committee and a dedicated portal within 24 hours to disseminate authentic information about the virus and stop the spread of fake news. A status report filed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said the propagation of deliberate or inadvertent false information was the "single most unimaginable hindrance" faced by the government in its battle against the virus.

The Bench, comprising Justice L. Nageswara Rao, asked the government to follow up on persons identified as infected and quarantined.

Mr. Mehta said the lockdown was necessary to stop the spread of infection, and all the people found walking back were shifted to the nearest shelters.

Chief Justice Bobde said that Section 188 (disobedience to order promulgated by public servant) of the IPC makes it a penal offence to disobey orders made by government authorities in public interest.

The court, on March 30, sought a report from the government on the steps taken about the largescale movement of workers. Tuesday's order came on petitions by advocates Alakh Alok Srivastava and Rashmi Bansal for a direction to the government to redress the "heart-wrenching and inhuman plight of thousands of migrant workers" walking back to their villages from the cities without essentials.

Youth beaten to death in Bihar village

He had informed authorities about two migrants who had returned from Mumbai

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

A youth in Bihar's Sitamarhi district was beaten to death on March 29 for allegedly alerting the local authorities that two villagers who had returned from Mumbai recently could be infected with COVID-19. Two accused in the case have been arrested and sent to jail.

Officials said Bablu Kumar Mahto, 20, had informed medical officials about two men from Madhau village under Runni Saidpur block who had returned from Mumbai on March 20 following the lockdown. A team of doctors and officials reached the village on March 24 to take their samples for test.

The two villagers and their families were furious with Bablu. "They caught him alone on March 29 and beat him up. He was severely in-



A traffic policeman punishing people for violating lockdown guidelines in Patna on Tuesday. ■RANJEET KUMAR

jured and taken to Runni Saidpur primary health centre from where the doctors referred him to Shri Krishna Medical College and Hospital in neighbouring Muzaffarpur district. Bablu succumbed to his injuries on the way to hospital," alleged Guddu Mahto, his brother.

Later, Bablu's father Vinod Kumar Mahto lodged a

complaint at the local police station against six persons. The police have arrested two of them, Sudhir Mahato and Munna Kumar Mahato.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan expressed his grief in a tweet. "The killing of a youth in Bihar for giving information about COVID-19 suspects is very unfortunate. There is a need for all of us in

society to stand united in these difficult times... Don't shirk your responsibilities," he tweeted in Hindi.

'Personal enmity'

Senior police officers later said Bablu was killed due to personal enmity and not in a COVID-19-related scuffle.

In another incident on March 30, a group of villagers attacked local administrative officials who went to Dayali Bigha in Jehanabad district to identify some people who had recently returned to the village.

Several villagers *The Hindu* spoke to said no one returning to their villages from other States wants to go through the mandatory COVID-19 test fearing stigma. They get enraged whenever someone comes to identify them or inform about them to the authorities.

Govt. cuts interest rates on NSC, PPF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate and Public Provident Fund, by up to 1.4% for the first quarter of 2020-21, in line with the moderation in bank deposit rates.

Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis.

With the reduction, term deposits of 1-3 years will now fetch an interest of 5.5% from the existing 6.9%, down 1.4%, according to a notification by the Finance Ministry.

Interest rates are paid quarterly, while the five-year term deposit will earn 6.7%, down from the current rate of 7.7%.

Forced to stay back, these workers now battle hunger

Their ration cards are in Bihar and they have no money left

SOBHANA K. NAIR
PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

'Stay home and stay safe', the global slogan to contain the spread of coronavirus doesn't sound too convincing to Mohammed Hakim and his associates who, unlike many other migrants, were forced to stay back and are battling hunger each day.

Their names are listed on ration cards but the cards, along with their families, are at home in Bihar. Living five to six persons in one windowless room at shanties behind the Jal Vihar bus terminal in the shadow of the posh Lajpat Nagar 1 colony in Delhi, they are now struggling to get one meal a day. "There are about 180 of us



Double whammy: Migrant workers Mohammed Hakim (in blue mask) and others in south Delhi. ■SOBHANA K. NAIR

from Katihar who live here. Majority of us drive auto-rickshaws or pull cycle-rickshaws for a living. On March 28, many of us, by then having exhausted whatever little money we had, couldn't get anything to eat. Then there were rumours that the lockdown will continue for three

months. That jolted the others who still had some money to head home," Mr. Hakim says.

For them it's a race between the fear of an unknown virus and very real hunger pangs.

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