



Ex-CJI Ranjan Gogoi defends nomination to Rajya Sabha
 page 12



Rahul Gandhi bats for Tamil Nadu MPs in Lok Sabha
 page 12



Sensex plunges 811 points, or 2.58%, to close at 30,579
 page 15

UEFA postpones Euro 2020 by a year; French Open moved to September
 page 18

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NEARBY



Nirbhaya case: court dismisses Mukesh's plea
 NEW DELHI
 A Delhi court on Tuesday rejected the plea of Mukesh Singh, one of the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, seeking to quash his death penalty claiming that he was not in Delhi on the day of the incident. Mukesh claimed that he was arrested from Rajasthan and brought to Delhi on December 17, 2012.

NORTH ▶ PAGE 5

Farooq visits family of Mehbooba Mufti

Srinagar
 National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday visited the family of Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti in Srinagar. Sources said Dr. Abdullah, who was released on March 13 after over seven months of detention, enquired after the family members of Ms. Mufti, who remains in an isolated detention centre in Srinagar.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 13

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OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 7

COVID-19 claims third victim in country

Number of cases rises to 137; Centre bans entry of passengers from Afghanistan, Philippines, Malaysia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

India reported its third death from the COVID-19 pandemic on Tuesday, with the Union Health Ministry putting the number of positive cases at 137.

The deceased person had a history of travel to Dubai and was being treated in Mumbai, Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said at a press conference.

Earlier, a 76-year-old man from Kalaburagi in Karnataka with a travel history to Saudi Arabia and a 68-year-old woman in Delhi, whose son had tested positive, died from the infection.

Fourteen of those who had tested positive have been "cured/discharged" and 24 of those who had tested positive in India were foreigners, the Ministry said. With 23 fresh cases reported across the country in the last 24 hours, Maharashtra continues to top the list at 36, followed by Kerala with 24, Uttar Pradesh at 14 and Karnataka at 11.

However, reports from the States put the number of positive cases at 143, including 41 from Maharashtra. West Bengal reported its first case of an 18-year-old youth, who recently returned from England, and was admitted with symptoms on Tuesday.

Extending travel curbs, the Centre prohibited the entry of passengers from Af-

Case count
 With 31,506 cases, Italy had the most confirmed COVID-19 cases outside China as on Tuesday night. India's count was 137, according to the Union Health Ministry



COUNTRY	CONFIRMED CASES
China	81,058
Italy	31,506
Iran	16,169
Spain	11,309
Germany	9,257
South Korea	8,320
France	6,664
U.S.	5,702
Switzerland	2,700
United Kingdom	1,960
India	137

The big fight: Chennai Corporation workers spraying disinfectants at Sri Parthasarathy Swamy temple in Triplicane. • R.V. SHINWASAN

ghanistan, the Philippines and Malaysia from 3 p.m. on Tuesday and advised the closing of all educational institutions, gyms, museums, cultural and social centres, and theatres. Students were advised to stay at home.

Assisting State govts.
 Thirty Additional Secretaries and Joint Secretaries have been deputed to assist State governments in managing the outbreak.

Mr. Agarwal said the government was increasing the number of bed and health care facilities across States and emphasised that there was as yet no "community transmission", or instances of the virus being found in people who had no travel history abroad since March or links with those who did.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 4, 8 & 9

51 private labs will soon be allowed to conduct tests

WHO prescription on tests not for India: ICMR chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

The "test, test, test" prescription of the World Health Organisation (WHO) is not for India, Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Balram Bhargava said on Tuesday, stressing that community transmission of COVID-19 has not yet occurred in the country.

Dr. Bhargava, however, also announced that 51 private laboratories [accredited to the National Accreditation



ICMR D-G Balram Bhargava
 • V.V. KRISHNAN

Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) will soon be allowed

COVID-19

to test for COVID-19 to enhance capacity for diagnosis in addition to the 72 func-

Two new virus cases in Noida

Two new cases of COVID-19 came to light in Noida on Tuesday. "One of them is a woman resident of Sector 100 who has a travel history to France. The other lives in Sector 78 and is a colleague of a senior executive who tested positive on March 12," said Anurag Bhargava, CMO, Gautam Buddh Nagar.

▶ PAGE 4



Drama continues: BJP national vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan and M.P. State president V.D. Sharma after meeting with Governor Lajji Tandon in Bhopal on Tuesday. • PTI

Floor test: SC asks M.P. govt. to respond today

Order on plea by Shivraj Chouhan

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
 NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave the Kamal Nath government time till 10.30 a.m. on March 18 (Wednesday) to respond to a petition filed by former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and nine other BJP MLAs, seeking a vote of confidence on the floor of the Legislative Assembly against the Congress ruling dispensation in the State.

'Urgency of situation'

A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta said the "urgency" of the situation demanded a hearing on March 18 itself.

"We will have to issue notice. The appropriate thing would be to issue a short notice and keep it for tomorrow," Justice Chandrachud orally addressed se-

Cong. moves SC on MLAs

The Madhya Pradesh Congress on Tuesday approached the Supreme Court for a direction to grant it access to and communicate with its 16 'rebel' MLAs spirited away to Bengaluru ahead of the Assembly floor test. ▶ PAGE 13

nior advocate Mukul Rohatgi for Mr. Chouhan and nine other MLAs. "Issue notice in view of the urgency of the situation and notice is returnable at 10.30 a.m. at March 18. Liberty to serve the notice through email," the court ordered.

It also gave liberty to serve notice on 16 MLAs who have tendered their resignations.

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