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**Gogoi takes oath as Rajya Sabha member amid Oppn. walkout**  
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**I work every day, listen to what people want. I am not a Tsar, says Putin**  
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**World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe says Tokyo Olympics could be delayed**  
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## NEARBY



**Those suspected of COVID-19 stamped**  
NEW DELHI  
People arriving from abroad at the IGI Airport are being checked for COVID-19, and if directed to remain at home, are being stamped 'Home Quarantined'. It states "Proud to protect Delhiites. Home quarantined" and has a date of the stamp.  
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**Maintain one-metre distance: DMRC advisory**  
NEW DELHI  
The DMRC on Thursday issued an advisory in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and asked commuters to use metro services only in "essential and unavoidable" circumstances. Passengers will be required to maintain one-metre distance and "standing passengers will not be allowed".  
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**Will police pay for Jamia library damage, asks MP**  
NEW DELHI  
Will the Delhi police pay for "vandalising" the Jamia Millia Islamia library on December 17, on the lines of the U.P. government's order to make the anti-CAA protesters pay for the damage to public amenities, a Samajwadi Party MP asked HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.  
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# COVID-19: PM calls for social distancing, people's curfew

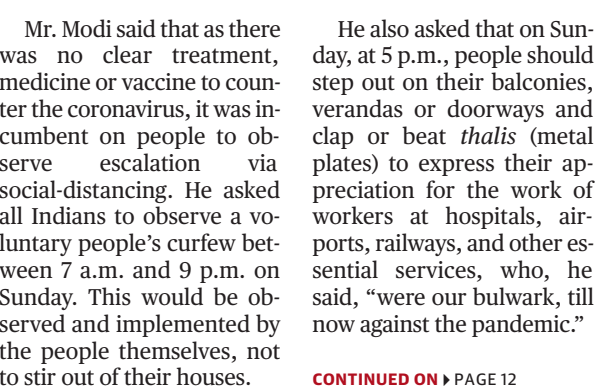
Task force to reduce economic impact; employers told to pay employees in full

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged Indians across the country to face the coronavirus pandemic with collective determination and patience to make sure that "humanity and India prevails". In his address to the nation on television, Mr. Modi also announced the setting up of the COVID-19 task force, under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, for measures to mitigate some of the economic hardships engendered by the pandemic.  
There were nine calls to action in Mr. Modi's address, including a self-imposed 'janaata curfew' (people's curfew) on March 22, not to resort to panic-buying, asking senior citizens to stay indoors, social-distancing, avoiding elective surgery or routine health check-ups not to overburden health services, asking employers to pay employees in full when they have to stay home and to stay away from rumours.  
**Serious situation**  
The pandemic, he said, was a serious, global crisis, "involving more countries than any previous natural or political crisis, even during World War I or World War II."

## Fighting a crisis

There were several calls to action in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation. The key ones are:  
**Janaata curfew:** People were urged to follow a curfew on Sunday (March 22) from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. They were requested to not go out or gather in their societies, and stay at home  
that all was well or that they would escape the disease  
**Health services:** People should avoid elective surgery or routine checkups to not overburden health services. On Sunday, at 5 p.m., he urged them to express appreciation for those employed in hospitals, airports, railways & police  
**Panic buying:** Amid reports that some were stocking up on food items, the PM said essentials, including medicines, should not be hoarded  
**For senior citizens:** Those above 60 were urged to avoid going out in the next couple of weeks  
**Social distancing:** He told people to give up the attitude  
**For employers:** Traders as well as the affluent have been asked to look after the interest of their staff and not penalise them for being not able to attend work due to travel and other restrictions



Mr. Modi said that as there was no clear treatment, medicine or vaccine to counter the coronavirus, it was incumbent on people to observe escalation via social-distancing. He asked all Indians to observe a voluntary people's curfew between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. on Sunday. This would be observed and implemented by the people themselves, not to stir out of their houses.  
He also asked that on Sunday, at 5 p.m., people should step out on their balconies, verandas or doorways and clap or beat *thalis* (metal plates) to express their appreciation for the work of workers at hospitals, airports, railways, and other essential services, who, he said, "were our bulwark, till now against the pandemic."  
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## No new local cases in China

China on Thursday reported no new local infection for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak three months ago, a milestone in its battle against the virus. China has hailed its success as evidence of what can be achieved when a vast, top-down bureaucracy is mobilised in pursuit of a target. However, China is not out of danger from a revived contagion. Questions have been raised about the accuracy of its statistics. > PAGE 14

## Indian pilgrim dies in Iran

One of the 255 Indian pilgrims in Iran suffering from COVID-19 has died, the government announced on Thursday. The death of the unnamed pilgrim came on a day when the Indian Embassy opened a hostel to house a part of the pilgrims who had tested positive for the virus. The Ministry of External Affairs has assured those unaffected by the infection that they will be evacuated to India. > PAGE 9

# Virus toll touches 5; Gujarat, Chhattisgarh report first cases

Ban on all international passenger flights from March 22-29

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Two more Indian nationals succumbed to COVID-19 on Thursday - one in Punjab and the other in Iran - taking the death toll to five on a day the government announced a total ban on flights by scheduled international passenger aircraft at Indian airports from March 22 to 29.

Globally, the number of deaths due to the epidemic crossed 9,200, while the number of cases rose to over 2,25,000 from 200,000 in the last 24 hours.  
The number of COVID-19 positive Indians rose to 424, of which 148 contracted the disease in the country and 276 overseas. Twenty-five foreigners have already tested positive in India.

**148 active cases**  
"The total number of active COVID-19 cases across India stands at 148 so far," the Union Health Ministry said.  
Twenty others have been cured/discharged/migrated. Till Thursday, 14,31,734 people were screened across airports, the Ministry said.  
Reports from the States put the number of persons in the country who have tested positive at 186, with 167 active cases.  
Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh reported their



**In the shadow of the gun:** A newly married couple being scanned at Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada. > K.V.S. GIRI

## Stay wherever you are: MEA

The Ministry of External Affairs has urged Indians who are stranded abroad to find alternative accommodation locally at least until the month-end. Indian missions are helping them make arrangements and they must "stay put where they are". The government is requesting other countries to extend the visas for Indians who have to stay on. > PAGE 9

**Samples test negative**  
According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a total of 826 samples of people suffering from severe acute respiratory infection/influenza-like illnesses had been tested, and all were found negative.  
"We advise anyone over 65 years and below 10 to stay indoors and limit any exposure," said a senior health official.  
Speaking at a press briefing, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said there had been no community transmission in the country so far. "We will continue surveillance."  
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LOK SABHA EXPRESSES CONCERN > PAGE 13

# Supreme Court orders M.P. floor test today

It says uncertainty can't continue  
KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI  
The Supreme Court ordered a floor test in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly on March 20, agreeing that uncertainty over whether the Kamal Nath-led Congress government enjoys the confidence of the House cannot go on for ever another day.  
A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta overrode a decision by Speaker N.P. Prajapati to adjourn the session to March 26. Justice Chandrachud remarked that a floor test was best before the politics got any murkier.  
"The state of uncertainty in Madhya Pradesh must be effectively resolved by issuing a direction for convening a floor test... The session of the Legislative Assembly which has been deferred to March 26 shall be reconvened on March 20," the court said in a short order.  
It agreed with Governor Lalji Tandon that every day of delay in conducting the floor test would be a win for horse-trading.  
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# As plea before court fails, four Nirbhaya convicts to be hanged

HC rejects eleventh-hour petition seeking stay on execution  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI  
The four death-row convicts in the December 16, 2012 gang-rape and murder case are scheduled to be hanged on Friday morning after the Delhi High Court dismissed a eleventh hour petition seeking a stay on the execution.  
The High Court, which heard the petition of the convicts till late night, pronounced its order around 12 a.m. and said the plea was without any merit.  
Having exhausted all available legal remedies, including mercy petition before the President, three of the convicts have met their respective families for the last time. The family of one of the convicts did not come to visit him.  
Earlier during the day, a Delhi court rejected the plea of death row convicts Akshay Kumar, Pawan Gupta and Vinay Sharma seeking stay on their executions on the ground that the second mercy plea of one of them was still pending.  
**Divorce plea**  
Advocate A.P. Singh, representing the convicts, argued that Akshay's wife has filed for a divorce in a city court in Bihar which was pending. Responding to this, the special public prosecutor said the petition does not fall under the purview of legal remedy in the present case.  
On March 5, a trial court had issued fresh death warrants for March 20 at 5.30 am, as the date for the execution of convicts Mukesh Singh, 32, Pawan Gupta, 25, Vinay Sharma, 26, and Akshay Kumar Singh 31.  
This final court order comes seven years after the horrific incident in which the four death row convicts and Ram Singh, the fifth accused who died in prison; and a minor, brutally gang-raped a paramedical student. The victim succumbed to the injuries after 13 days.  
The March 20 date has come after a series of postponements. The first death warrants were issued by a trial court on January 7 for execution on January 22 but it was postponed by the court to February 1 and then further to March 3.  
The convicts witnessed a flurry of dismissals of their petitions in the Supreme Court on the eve of the execution of their death sentences.  
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# Delhi shuts eateries, caps gatherings at 20

Announcing a whole host of measures, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said all educational institutions have been directed to remain shut till month-end for both teaching and non-teaching staff. Non-essential public services will be disallowed from Friday, he said after a meeting with Lieutenant-Governor Anil Bajjal. The number of people allowed to gather for any event was also modified from 50 to 20.  
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# Rajasthan wakes up to life in the slow lane

Normal life disrupted with prohibitory orders imposed in State; fear of lockdown triggers panic buying  
MOHAMMED IQBAL  
JAIPUR  
The prohibitory orders imposed in entire Rajasthan after the detection of three fresh COVID-19 positive cases in Jhunjhunu disrupted normal life in several parts of the State on Thursday, with the roads and markets wearing a deserted look, public and private functions being called off and people mostly staying indoors.  
Residents of Jhunjhunu town, where curfew was clamped in a one-km radius area around the infected family's house for two days, were in a state of shock. Jhunjhunu Collector U.D. Khan said about 350 teams of the Medical & Health Department had started surveillance in three zones to trace those who came in contact with the COVID-19-positive couple and their daughter. "The screening of the entire population will be done to ensure that no positive cluster is formed in the town," said Mr. Khan. About 20 persons whom the family had met during the last 10 days after their arrival from Italy were shifted to a special isolation ward in Churela village.  
The prohibitory orders imposed under Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code, disallowing the assembly of 20 or more persons at public places, led to panic buying of essential items by people in Jaipur, who fear a complete lockdown in the days to come. Pappu Meena, handling the counter at Taza Phal Sabzi Bhandar in Jawahar Nagar locality, said buyers were stockpiling vegetables and fruits because of uncertainty. "The supplies are unhindered, but Section 144 has instilled an apprehension among the people," he said.  
**Rumours hit business**  
Arif Ali, a shopkeeper selling fish and chicken in the nearby Gole Market, said people were eating lesser quantity of non-vegetarian food after a rumour spread about infection in meat. "We are in the market to sell our goods. Why should people panic?"  
The tourism and hospitality industry in the desert State is set to get the shock of prohibitory orders with the closure of all tourist places and historical monuments. Ramakant Saini, a security guard outside Pink Square Mall, said the government's decision to curtail movements would lead to loss of livelihood for thousands of poor people in the city.  
R.S. Khangarot, principal of Agrawal Post-Graduate College, said the institution was open for routine administrative work and faculty members were attending the college for planning of the next academic session. "Section 144 is not applicable inside the college," he remarked.



A deserted Badi Chaupar in Jaipur on Thursday after the imposition of prohibitory orders in Rajasthan. > ROHIT JAIN PARAS

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