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NEARBY



Shivraj Chouhan tipped to return as M.P. CM

NEW DELHI
The BJP is likely to hold a meeting of its legislature party in Madhya Pradesh on Monday, with Shivraj Singh Chouhan tipped to return as CM. Sources said the delay in decision was because of the "janata curfew" announced by the PM.

NEWS PAGE 10

Vasundhara, Dushyant test result negative

LUCKNOW
Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh, former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and her son Dushyant Singh have tested negative for COVID-19 after attending a party with singer Kanika Kapoor, who has tested positive.

NEWS PAGE 11

Jamia panel suspends anti-CAA demonstration

NEW DELHI
The Jamia Coordination Committee on Saturday announced that the anti-CAA protest outside Jamia Millia Islamia would be temporarily suspended in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. It said the fight against CAA-NPR-NRC "remains uncompromising".

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No community transmission of coronavirus, says Centre

271 cases confirmed nationwide, with 12 new ones in Kerala and Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As India braced for a nationwide 14-hour lockdown on Sunday to break the spread of the novel coronavirus, and several State governments announced new, stringent measures to enforce social distancing, the Centre said there was no evidence of community transmission yet in the country.

The total number of people testing positive for the virus stood at 271 with 65 new cases on Saturday, the Union Health Ministry said.

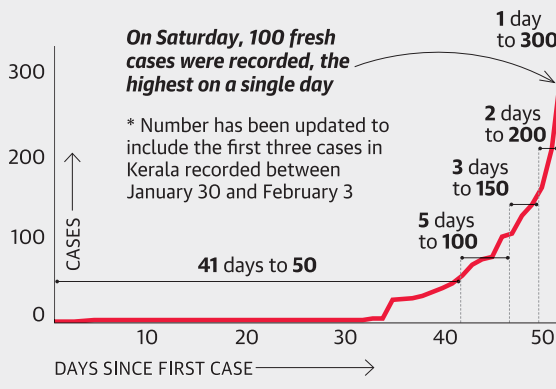
Authorities are tracing 7,000 people who have come in contact with the affected persons, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said. All cases confirmed so far could be linked to imported cases, the official insisted, adding: "So far there's no confirmation of any community transmission."

Mr. Agarwal was responding to questions on reports of suspected COVID-19 infected persons in Tamil Nadu, Pune and Nagpur, who had no travel history or known history of contact with people from abroad.

Reports from the States put the number of cases at 323.

Massive spike

A total of 100 COVID-19 cases were detected on Saturday, with the overall numbers crossing 300. While it took 41 days* for the first 50 cases, the last 100 took just one day



FIGURES FROM UNION HEALTH MINISTRY AND STATES | AS OF 9 P.M.

Maharashtra and Kerala reported 12 new cases, Gujarat seven and Karnataka five. The government held a

COVID-19

conference call with Chief Secretaries of the States. Critical care training was imparted to 1,000 hospitals across the country and State health centres are scheduled to take part in a "mock drill" on Sunday on preparing for ventilator use and advanced care to patients, Mr. Agarwal added.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi has called for people to stay at home from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday, observing a 'Janata Curfew'. Essential services will not be disrupted during the lockdown.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the national capital could be put under an extended lockdown, if needed. The Chhattisgarh government ordered closure of all its offices, except those providing essential and emergency services, till March 31.

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COVID-19 VACCINE PAGE 14

Aid for U.P. labourers

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced that 35 lakh labourers in the State will get ₹1,000 each as financial aid, while free ration for a month will be provided to 1.65 crore construction workers and labourers amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The money will be directly sent to them through direct bank transfer.

ICMR revises testing norms

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) revised its testing strategy, saying all hospitalised patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (fever and cough and/or shortness of breath) will be tested for COVID-19. Asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of a confirmed case should be tested once between day 5 and day 14 of coming in his/her contact.

Centre likely to postpone Census and NPR exercise

Decision due to Health Ministry guidelines on mass contact

AMIT BARUAH
NEW DELHI

The Union government looks all set to postpone the house-listing Census and updating of the National Population Register (NPR), which was scheduled to kick off in certain States on April 1, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two government sources confirmed to *The Hindu* that the Census and NPR exercises would not go ahead, given the Health Ministry's guidelines limiting mass contact on account of the pandemic. A formal announcement is, however, awaited.

In line with Odisha, the Delhi government has written to the Centre asking that the Census-NPR operations be deferred by "at least one month" and the rescheduling of this exercise may be "reviewed in the last week of the deferment".

President Ram Nath Kovind was supposed to be the first Indian to be enumerated in the Census and NPR exercise. In a letter to Census Commissioner of India Vivek Joshi, the Delhi government, on March 18, pointed out that a "high state" of alert had been declared in the capital territory and the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, invoked.



President Ram Nath Kovind was supposed to be the first Indian to be enumerated in the Census and NPR exercise.

The letter to Mr. Joshi also pointed out that since enumerators will have to go house to house to collect details, the "spread of COVID-19 may be exacerbated".

Earlier in the week, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that mobilisation for the Cen-

sus-NPR would pose a great risk for field functionaries and a decision to postpone the two exercises be taken immediately.

Multiple efforts to contact Mr. Joshi on his response to the letters of the Odisha and Delhi governments were to no avail. He did not respond to either text or telephone calls on the issue.

In December 2019, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Mr. Modi, approved over ₹3,941.35 crore for updating the NPR across the country, barring Assam, and ₹8,754.23 crore for conducting the Census of India, 2021.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Special aircraft to bring 100 Indians home

KLM flight was turned back from Delhi

SUHASINI HAIDAR
JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

After a harrowing 10 hours aboard a flight from Amsterdam, more than 100 Indian passengers, who were not allowed to land in Delhi early on Saturday due to worries over the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to be brought to the national capital on Sunday by a special flight.

The decision was taken by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, which had earlier disallowed the KLM flight, forcing it to return to Amsterdam's Schiphol airport.

Among the passengers kept waiting at the Amsterdam airport for three days was a pregnant woman, who developed complications as a result of the tense situation on board, and had to be hospitalised on returning to Amsterdam. Another passenger gave up waiting to return to India and



The stranded passengers of the KLM flight.

caught a flight to Canada, taking the final number of passengers to 102.

"[There were] some gaps in interpreting the advisory, which led to this problem," a senior Ministry of External Affairs official told *The Hindu*, indicating that the interpretation by the DGCA of an advisory dated March 16 that prohibited "travel of passengers from" Europe was wrong, as these were passengers transiting from North America.

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Curbs at Kolkata prison trigger violent clash

Visits put on hold after virus outbreak

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Widespread violence erupted at the Dum Dum Central Correctional Home in the northern fringes of Kolkata on Saturday after prison authorities announced that family members of inmates cannot meet them till March 31 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As clashes erupted between inmates and police personnel, some buildings inside the complex were set on fire and prisoners indulged in stone-throwing. The violence that started in the afternoon continued for several hours, leaving many inmates and police personnel injured. Gun shots were heard and the police fired teargas shells to control the situation. At least three fire tenders were called in to tackle the fires.

A senior official of the West Bengal Correctional Services Department said on Friday that allowing fa-



Prisoners indulging in violence. • SUBHAM DUTTA

milies to wait outside the prison was against the concept of social distancing, essential to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"Keeping this in mind, a decision was taken not to allow the meetings till March 31," he said.

"The inmates were upset at being denied meetings with family members. Some people have sustained injuries," Prison's Minister Ujjwal Biswas told *The Hindu*.

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Shoppers stop



A closed City Square Mall at Rajouri Garden in west Delhi on Saturday amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

'We're suffering because rich people brought virus with them'

Daily wagers, weavers, traders worst-hit as pandemic keeps customers away, want govt. to provide relief

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The clientele at Montu Nag's stationery and tea shop in Guwahati's Ulubari area began thinning when social distancing became the buzzword a week ago.

He sold three cups of tea by noon on Saturday. The total sale on Friday was ₹134 while people, driven by panic to stock up essentials, crowded the shop of the adjoining grocer.

"We are suffering because

rich people who went abroad brought the virus with them. They should be made to pay for our loss of business," Mr. Nag said.

For Santosh Kumar from Bihar's Madhubani, things were never so bad in the last 10 years, not even during the three days of shutdown due to violent protests against the CAA in December 2019. "First came the battery-operated three-wheelers, then the agitation and now this dangerous disease. I earned



Workers engaged in a drainage project in Guwahati. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

only ₹20 from one passenger against an average ₹300 by noon on normal days," said the rickshaw-puller.

Labu Pator of Bonda near Guwahati has switched over from selling chicken to fish. "Chicken prices halved because of the fear that meat increases the possibility of catching the virus," he said.

Assam's weavers and silk traders have been worst-hit by the COVID-19. "We received the first blow when raw yarn from China stopped coming after the Wuhan outbreak. Now the buyers have vanished. We may take a year to recover,"

said Nihar Ranjan Kalita, secretary of a weavers' association. He said the government should come up with a package for weavers - and workers in other sectors too - like France has done.

Some like Mehboob Husain, a construction worker engaged in a drainage project, prefer the quietness around. "We cannot afford to miss a day's work and with the streets almost empty, we can work in peace and with less fear of contamination."

Free ration, double pension in Delhi

Govt. caps gatherings at 5, may consider lockdown if needed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced several measures, including doubling pension under various categories, in a bid to alleviate the financial stress on economically backward citizens of the Capital amid a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Mr. Kejriwal said that free ration would be provided to 72 lakh beneficiaries in addition to government arrangements for free food at night

shelters across the city.

Speaking at his first "digital-only" press conference, Mr. Kejriwal said, had not imposed a lockdown in Delhi for now but would have to do so if the need arose in the future. He announced that the number of people allowed at social, religious and cultural gatherings have been brought down to five from 20.

"The Delhi government is taking all possible measures to tackle coronavirus in close coordination with the Cen-

tral government and the people of Delhi," he said. "We have decided to provide 7.5 kg free ration to 72 lakh beneficiaries of our ration scheme for one month," he said.

The Delhi government, he said, has also decided to double the pension under the widow pension scheme for 2.5 lakh beneficiaries, old age pension scheme for 5 lakh beneficiaries, and disability pension scheme for 1 lakh beneficiaries.

MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 2, 3 & 4