

75 DISTRICTS IN 22 STATES
placed under complete lockdown

PASSENGER TRAINS, BUS,
Metro services stand suspended

BEGINNING OF LONG BATTLE,
says PM after Janata Curfew success

A billion plus hunker down

A 14-HOUR CURFEW AND A BURST OF APPLAUSE FOR CORONA FIGHTERS SETS STAGE FOR THE CHALLENGE AHEAD



The deserted Bandra Worli Sealink in Mumbai during the Janata Curfew on Sunday; people in Noida applaud those fighting the virus threat. Prashant Nadkar/Abhinav Saha



15 injured personnel were airlifted. Express

Naxal ambush: Bodies of 17 personnel found inside Bastar forest, their weapons looted

GARGIVERMA
SUKMA, MARCH 22

CONFIRMING THE worst fears, bodies of 17 security personnel, who had been declared missing after an encounter with Maoists Saturday in the jungles of Minpa in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, were recovered Sunday. Officials said this is the biggest Maoist attack on security forces since the attack in Sukma in 2017 when 24 CRPF personnel, part of a road opening party, were killed.

Chhattisgarh DGP Durgesh Awasthi said: "We have recovered all 17 bodies. All of them are from Chhattisgarh. Our men came under very heavy fire for over five hours, and they fought valiantly."

Bastar IGP P Sundarraj said: "We are unable to trace 12 AK-47s, one each of UBGL, INSAS, LMG that the men had on them. We have reason to believe that these were stolen by the Naxals."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a tweet, said: "Strongly condemn the Maoist attack in Sukma, Chhattisgarh. My tributes to the security personnel martyred in the attack. Their valour will never be forgotten. Condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for a quick recovery of those injured."

Based on information that a large number of Maoists were gathering near Elmagunda, a team of over 600 personnel of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Special Task Force (STF) of the state police and CoBRA



EXPLAINED Why this is a worrying sign

THE FIRST such major attack in nearly three years, it reinforces the suspicion that the relative calm is misleading. There are worrying signs, pointers to tactical anomalies — the men remained untraceable till their bodies were recovered. There are suggestions within Chhattisgarh that its heartland politics is turning the focus away from anti-Naxal operations, and that Bastar needs priority, efficient handling.

commandos of the CRPF were sent on an operation on Saturday morning. The personnel didn't find any Maoist presence near Elmagunda and were on their way back when they were ambushed by over 250 Maoists in

Delhi, Mumbai too under lockdown till March 31 to check the spread of virus

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR & ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

AS THE Janata Curfew called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi wound up Sunday with people across the country responding by staying indoors and applauding those working to battle the coronavirus threat, the government prepared the nation for a long lockdown to contain the spread of the virus.

In a slew of extraordinary measures, authorities announced a complete lockdown of 75 districts in 22 States and Union Territories and suspended all passenger trains, inter-state buses and metro services across the country till March 31.

Delhi, Jharkhand, Punjab and

All passenger trains stopped for 10 days, 2.3 cr people daily

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

MOVING TO shield crores of people from the risk of community transmission of the coronavirus, the government has suspended all passenger train operations across the country till March 31.

The decision was taken after a meeting chaired by Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister P K Mishra and Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba with Chief Secretaries of states Sunday morning. Officials said the move will also cover local trains and Metro rail systems, but exclude freight operations.

Government sources told *The Indian Express* that some of the sanitised trains can be earmarked for isolation facilities — possibly two patients in one coach — as part of preparedness, if needed.

While medical experts have described the government's



Stranded passengers at Sealdah station during the Janata Curfew in Kolkata on Sunday. Partha Paul

decision as "a timely step", its impact on the Railways is significant, especially in terms of numbers.

According to latest figures, the national transporter carried 2.3 crore passengers on 13,523 trains across the country on an average every day — daily commute and long-distance. And officials estimate that given the pattern of

CORONA COUNT

3607 CASES DEATHS

24 RECOVERED

18,127 samples from 17,237 individuals tested

AMONG EXEMPTIONS

- Food, grocery stores
- Ration shops
- Petrol pumps
- ATMs, cashier, teller operations
- Chemists and pharmacies
- Cleanliness, sanitation staff
- Print and electronic media
- E-commerce
- Telecom and Internet services

Nagaland declared a statewide lockdown, exempting only essential services, while similar

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Inside a Delhi screening lab: 100 tests a day, 17 hours at work, no family time



FROM TESTING SAMPLES TO TRACKING CONTACTS AND TREATING PATIENTS, MEET THE MEN AND WOMEN, UNSEEN AND UNHEARD, ON THE FRONTLINES OF INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

THE DOCTOR is out. And, that's a rare sight at the Civil Lines campus in Delhi of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Especially over the last two months, where he has been putting in 17-hour workdays at the microbiology lab, dressed head to toe in protective gear.

Dr Partha Rakshit is not out for a morning break, though. The deputy director is on the phone with a manufacturer, discussing specifications for more equipment to boost his lab's fight against the coronavirus.

The lab that Rakshit heads is one of 111 across the country, where tests are conducted on blood samples of suspected cases



Samples for testing at NCDC lab in Delhi. Abantika Ghosh

— close to 100 a day at his lab alone these days, he says, from Delhi, UP, J&K and even Ladakh. "We cannot see the virus, so we try to detect its genes in a

INSIDE
RWAs OSTRACISING CREW: AIR INDIA
OVER 300,000 CASES, HALF IN EUROPE
PAGES 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14

BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY UNNY

Thanks to lockdown, can clearly count more public statues than primary health centres.

A thank-you and some notes from a hospital ward

For every belief or action, let's ask the question, writes the author who tested positive and is in hospital, what if every other citizen were to think or act like me?

AJIT MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS

IT WAS shortly before midnight that I, along with another gentleman, was moved from Ram Manohar Lohia to Safdarjung Hospital, after having tested positive for COVID-19. As we moved down the stairs and through the gate towards the waiting ambulance, there were onlookers, about a dozen, even at this time of the night.

chance of anyone catching anything from us as we were in full protective gear. It was obvious that they were trying to get a good look at us. It didn't feel too bad because we were indistinguishable from the medical staff and ambulance driver accompanying us, until we reached the rear door to the ambulance.

This may or may not be a stray incident but it describes our general attitude to the cur-



Safdarjung Hospital, where the writer is admitted. Tashi Tobgyal

rent corona crisis: obsessive curiosity, fear and ignorance. Despite loads of useful information supplied by various government agencies and WHO, and continuous updating of informa-

tion and instructions, people still treat WhatsApp (or similar media) as the source of their life-saving information and recipes. There is a tendency by many to treat the infected (or even po-

tential patients) as dangerous criminals. I read reports that some residents objected to asymptomatic individuals, under home isolation or observation, stepping out to their balcony or verandah to get some fresh air — even though they were at a distance more than 10-15 metres.

Mind you, these people objecting are not uneducated, they probably know that the virus is not going to travel that far, but being self-centered that they are, they don't want to take any chance. Very soon they may refuse to breathe the same air! We may degenerate into some of the unthinkable World War II scenarios.

The sad part is that we refuse to learn from the exemplary courage and dutifulness of our

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