



Omar Abdullah pitches for immediate release of Mehbooba Mufti

page 10



Prince Charles tests positive for novel coronavirus

page 12



Turkey charges 20 Saudis over Jamal Khashoggi murder

page 12

Photographer Nemai Ghosh, who had a long association with Satyajit Ray, dead

page 16



PRINTED AT • CHENNAI • COIMBATORE • BENGALURU • HYDERABAD • MADURAI • NOIDA • VISAKHAPATNAM • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • KOCHI • VIJAYAWADA • MANGALURU • TIRUCHIRAPPALLI • KOLKATA • HUBBALLI • MOHALI • MALAPPURAM • MUMBAI • TIRUPATI • LUCKNOW • CUTTACK • PATNA



NEARBY

Five new COVID-19 cases in Delhi, total 35

NEW DELHI
Five new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the Capital on Wednesday, taking the total number of positive cases to 35. "One case is of a person who came from abroad. And four cases are from his contact," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said.

Adityanath shifts Ram idol amid lockdown

LUCKNOW
Amid physical distancing protocols and a nationwide lockdown, U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday participated in an event to shift the idol of Lord Ram to a temporary structure in the Ram Janmabhoomi compound in Ayodhya till the construction of a temple.

CAA protesters place shoes to mark presence

KOLKATA
Placards and dozens of pairs of shoes, scarves and dupattas have been kept as a sign of protest at the Park Circus Maidan in Kolkata where an anti-CAA agitation has been going on since the first week of January. On Wednesday, there were five to six people at the ground, each sitting a few metres apart.

NORTH & EAST

▶ PAGE 4

Aim is to win the war against COVID-19 in 21 days: Modi

PM urges citizens to back healthcare professionals working through lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The country is fighting a war against the novel coronavirus and the aim is to win it in 21 days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday, a day after he announced a national lockdown of three weeks to combat the pandemic.

Interacting with people in his Lok Sabha constituency Varanasi through videoconference, Mr. Modi said: "The Mahabharata war was won in 18 days, this war the whole country is fighting against coronavirus will take 21 days."

As the total count of COVID-19 cases in India touched 606 on Wednesday, the Centre said there was still no proof of "community transmission". With one more death on Wednesday, the virus has claimed 10 lives, according to the Union Health Ministry.

Data from the States, however, put the total number of positive cases at 618, with 562 active ones. Thirteen people have died so far.

The Prime Minister urged citizens to support healthcare professionals and others who are working through the lockdown. He said he was pained to hear of inci-



Difficult times: Migrant labourers waiting in a queue to collect food packets being delivered by volunteers during the lockdown in Chennai on Wednesday. *R. RAGU

COVID-19

dents of discrimination and harassment faced by airline staff who helped rescue COVID-19 patients, and doctors and nurses tending to such people.

Strict action

Such acts would "prove costly" to the offenders, he warned, adding: "I have told the Home Ministry and DGPs to take strict action against those who are not support-

ing or not co-operating with doctors, nurses and other professionals who are serving us in this critical time."

Advance salary

Meanwhile, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced that the State would pay salary until the month of July in advance to all its healthcare professionals in April.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 6, 7, 10, 11
SPAIN TOLL RISES ▶ PAGE 12

e-passes for key services, says Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Citizens engaged in essential services in Delhi can call 1031 on WhatsApp to avail e-passes to be able to commute to work, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday.

e-passes were not required for the general public, who were free to visit local shops for the purchase of essential items, even as he sought to assure citizens that Delhi was prepared to ensure the supply of essential goods to residents during the 21-day "total lockdown" ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contain the spread of COVID-19.

No panic buying

"We are here to serve you. Please do not engage in panic buying. It is our responsibility to provide you with all the essential supplies such as vegetables, milk, and medicines. Those who are providing essential services, general store owners, water and electricity department employees, government employees, government hospital doctors, vegetable vendors, will be issued passes by the government," Mr. Kejriwal said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

Delivery issues add to woes for homebound

Firms worried over safety of agents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Many e-commerce firms were forced to suspend deliveries to their customers in major cities across the country on Wednesday with local authorities unable to ensure the safety of delivery persons on the first day of the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Angry customers vented their anger on social media even as police services scrambled to put in place a system where delivery persons for online vendors were able to go about their jobs unmolested.

"The key challenge in the field is that sometimes our delivery partners are getting stopped by the police, and some of them have even got beaten up by the police for no fault of theirs," online grocer BigBasket said in a statement.

"It will help to have better coordination between the Centre and State, and between the State and local police, to ensure that our delivery vans and bikes don't get stopped by the police," the firm added.

Late on Wednesday, the e-commerce firm put out a statement that they were now operational in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Coimbatore, Indore, Mumbai, Mysuru, Noida, Surat



Reports have emerged of delivery persons being assaulted. *FILE PHOTO

and Vadodara. However, services remained suspended in Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Gurugram, Ludhiana, Pune, Vizag, Hyderabad and Vijayawada.

Earlier, e-commerce major Flipkart announced that it had suspended its services, while rival Amazon India halted orders for non-essential products. Gurugram-headquartered Snapdeal also said it was working towards completing delivery of essential goods.

"We are an essential service and our delivery persons must be allowed to perform their duty," Shan Kadavil, CEO & Co-founder, FreshoHome, said in a statement. "The directive from the top is clear but the implementation on the ground level is different."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Terror struck



Bolt from the blue: Sikh women mourning for their relatives near the site of a terror attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Wednesday. At least 25 worshippers were killed by a lone Islamic State gunman at a gurdwara. *REUTERS (REPORT ON PAGE 12)

Sensex gains amid hopes of a stimulus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks registered their third biggest single-day gain on Wednesday on expectations that the government will soon announce an economic stimulus package even as a global rally acted as a catalyst.

The 30-share Sensex gained 1,861.75 points, or 6.98%, to close at 28,535.78.

The rally was primarily on the back of massive gains in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, HDFC twins - HDFC and HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and ICICI Bank.

The broader Nifty ended the day at 8,317.85, up 516.80 points or 6.62%. Incidentally, the India VIX index dipped nearly 8%.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Census, NPR exercise put off over coronavirus scare

It has been 'postponed until further orders', says MHA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, the first phase of Census 2021 and updating of the National Population Register (NPR) that was to begin on April 1 has been "postponed until further orders", the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, high alert has been declared by the Government of India as well as the States/Union Territories... Lockdown has also been declared by many State/UT governments," the MHA said.

On April 1, the Census and the NPR exercise was to be rolled out in Meghalaya, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and the New Delhi Municipal Council area. President Ram Nath Kovind was to be the first one to be enumerated for the Census officials, followed by Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi as all of them reside in the NDMC area that comprises Lutyens Delhi.

The Hindu first reported



A file photo of an official collecting data during Census 2011. *K. MURALI KUMAR

on March 21 that the Census-NPR exercise was all set to be postponed due to the outbreak.

Other States and UTs had notified different dates for the exercise that entailed door-to-door visits by enumerators and field representatives and was not possible under the ongoing 21-day lockdown, said a senior government official.

The Census was scheduled to be conducted in two phases - House listing & Housing Census during April-September 2020 and Population Enumeration from February 9-28, 2021. The updating of the NPR was also proposed to be done along with phase I of the Census in all the States and UTs, except Assam.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Coping with a COVID-19 hotspot

Bhilwara sees massive screening after outbreak in hospital

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

A curfew in force for the sixth consecutive day. A massive screening exercise involving 1,500 health workers. Four fresh cases, taking the total number of infected patients to 17. Bhilwara, considered the hub of textile manufacturing in Rajasthan, has grabbed national attention following a number of positive cases of COVID-19 being detected at a private hospital in the city.

The sheer number of people being screened in Bhilwara, after the administration sealed the district's borders and imposed curfew much before a lockdown was announced in the entire State, has made it possibly the biggest exercise in the country.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Bhilwara occurred last week from the private hospi-

tal where a doctor tested positive after he admitted a patient with pneumonia in the ICU earlier this month. The patient, who was allegedly carrying the virus, later died at a hospital in Jaipur.

Doctors, staff infected

Two medicos and several members of the hospital's paramedical staff were subsequently found positive after multiple testing. The hospital was sealed and its 88 patients were shifted to other health facilities, while contact tracing was undertaken to find out hundreds of people who had come to the outpatient department for consultation.

The doctors and staff are among the 38 persons being kept in the isolation wards of Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital and a few other health facilities. Bhilwara Chief Medical and Health Of-

ficer Mushtaq Khan told *The Hindu* that the doctor who first tested positive and his wife, who was also infected, have been shifted to Jaipur.

As many as 5,392 persons in Bhilwara have been told to quarantine themselves at home. The rapid response teams, which were rushed from Udaipur, are assisting the local health workers in covering about half of the city's 6 lakh population in the first phase.

After the lockdown in the city, the administration has turned its attention to the rural areas as three persons showing symptoms of the disease were found roaming in the villages. Nine villages in Mandal tehsil were placed under curfew as a precautionary measure after it was found that the villagers had earlier visited the hospital in Bhilwara.

Undisturbed mass nesting of Olive Ridleys at Rushikulya

Turtles are safe as tourists and locals stay away from Odisha coast due to the COVID-19 lockdown

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

Restrictions in place for the COVID-19 threat are saving lakhs of Olive Ridley turtles from possible disturbance by humans, especially tourists, while they are continuing mass nesting at Odisha's Rushikulya rookery.

According to the Forest Department's enumeration, over 2,78,502 turtles nested at this coast till Wednesday morning. Since Tuesday evening, over 72,142 Olive Ridleys have arrived at the beach to dig nests and lay eggs.

Day-time nesting

Olive Ridleys began mass nesting at the Rushikulya rookery from around 2 a.m. on March 21. Later in the

day, the unusual phenomenon of day-time mass nesting took place at the coast. As a large number of turtles are still in the sea near this coast, mass nesting is expected to continue for some more nights.

This event normally attracts hundreds of people to the spot, with Forest Department personnel spending considerable time and effort in controlling the crowd. But this year, the COVID-19 lockdown has ensured no such disturbance occurs for the turtles.

Proper maintenance of cleanliness and provision of protection to the turtles at sea since November 2019, when the turtles mate, are major reasons for the large scale mass nesting at



Safe landing: Olive Ridleys began mass nesting at the Rushikulya rookery on March 21. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rushikulya this year, said Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer Amlan Nayak. Two trawlers, two speed boats and a country boat are being used by the Forest Department to patrol the sea, in order to prevent

fishing trawlers from plying along the coast. Trawlers did not cause any deaths of turtles as a result.

In 2019, mass nesting of Olive Ridleys did not occur in Rushikulya, in contrast to

2018, when "double mass nesting" occurred in February and April, with nesting figures rising above 4,73,000.

Cyclone's aftermath

Cyclone Titli in October 2018, and the floods that followed, left huge piles of waste over about 8 km of the Rushikulya coast, which had to be cleaned with excavators. It has been estimated that minute particles of waste remained, keeping Olive Ridleys away in 2019.

This year, the beach received a thorough cleaning long before the mass nesting commenced. The Forest Department also set up 11 off-shore camps early this year to monitor the beach.