

An unending journey for the migrants

Those who reached Bihar after walking for days are confined to quarantine facilities in Patna

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

At 11 a.m. on Monday, 15-year-old Balmiki Kumar is sitting on a wooden bench under a tree on the campus of the Patna High School in the Gardanighah locality.

His tattered black backpack is bloated with things he packed for the journey. He is unwilling to go inside the vacant rooms of the school to rest. "I want to go to my home in Sitamarhi district as soon as possible and be with my family," he says. He wants to say more, but is exhausted after his long journey of over 1,000 km from Delhi's Noida.

For the last five months Balmiki was staying in Sector-12, Noida, where his elder brother Rakesh Kumar works as a tailor. Both the brothers were living in a room they rented for ₹2,000 a month and were earning around ₹15,000 on an average. Their father, Hari Kishore Mahto, is

a marginal farmer in Dhanushi village in Sitamarhi district of Bihar. Their youngest brother, Rishi Kumar, stays with father at the village.

When Balmiki, a school dropout, saw people leaving for their home States in hordes in the third week of March, he didn't understand what was happening. "I didn't realise the gravity of the situation even when my elder brother told me an unknown virus is killing people and everything is going to be shut soon. I chose to stay back while my brother left with the others," he says.

Asked to vacate room

When his landlord asked him to vacate the room and it became increasingly difficult to get food, he too decided to leave. "I stuffed some clothes and packed flattened rice and some snacks in my bag and set off on my journey on March 25 with only with



Balmiki Kumar, a migrant worker in Patna.

₹1,000 in my pocket," he says. "I survived on water and the flattened rice for five days."

How did he find his way on the road? "Using GPS on my mobile," he says, pulling out a big-screen phone from his pocket. "What option did I have? I walked all day and through the night, only resting briefly by the roadside," Balmiki says, holding up his worn-out rubber slippers.

When he crossed the Uttar Pradesh border at Kaimur and reached Danapur near Patna early on March 30, the district officials took him to

the Patna High School campus – one of the four places in the city where arrangements have been made for food and shelter for migrants.

Robbed on train

K. Raju, 50, was not so lucky. Resting in a corner classroom on the first floor of the school, he says all his belongings, including mobile phone and Aadhaar card, were stolen on the train. "Now I am an identity-less Indian," he says. He is from Vijaywada in Andhra Pradesh and worked in a hotel in Secunderabad in Telangana. "When the lockdown was declared, everyone was leaving for their homes. I too boarded a train but it brought me to Danapur station near Patna on March 28. From there, some officials dropped me here at the school and now I have no money, no phone, nothing at all to go anywhere or connect with anyone," he says.

Mr. Raju has an elder brother who is stuck in Mumbai. Clad in a lungi and a half-sleeve shirt, his only belongings are a polythene bag and a towel.

Most of the school's 30 rooms the district administration has taken under its control are empty. Some local social activists are helping with the food. "Hardly five-six people are staying here. Most of them have left for their villages," says social activist Raj Shekhar Gupta. A policeman is stationed on the campus and an official maintains a logbook. A large room is cluttered with cooking gas cylinders, beds and cots. Under a tent in one corner, food is being served. "Most of those in the queue are poor people from nearby areas. How can we deny food to anyone in such difficult times," says Mr. Gupta. Bihar, so far, has had one COVID-19 death and 15 positive cases.

Two COVID-19 deaths take toll to four in Madhya Pradesh

Sample of man from Ujjain tests positive after his death

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

A man from Indore and Ujjain each were confirmed dead owing to COVID-19 on Monday, taking the toll due to the illness to four in Madhya Pradesh.

While the man from Indore died at 3 a.m. on Monday, the Ujjain resident had died on March 27, but his sample tested positive for the disease on Monday.

"A 41-year-old man from Indore has died," confirmed Rahul Rokde of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College, Indore. He was first admitted to a private hospital on March 23, his sample tested positive on March 26, and he was then admitted to the government-run MRTB Hospital on Saturday at 9 p.m..

"The patient didn't have a

Patient came with chest pain and soon after died, later his test came out positive for COVID-19

DR. A.G. SINHA
Chief Medical Health Officer, Ujjain

travel or contact history," Dr. Rokde confirmed.

Meanwhile, a 38-year-old man from Ujjain who had died on March 27 while undergoing treatment for chest pain at a hospital tested positive for COVID-19.

"He came with chest pain and was admitted to the hospital, and died soon after. We had taken a sample while he underwent treatment," said A.G. Sinha, Chief Medical Health Officer, Ujjain.

After the patient was admitted at 7.50 p.m., doctors had sent swab samples to

the college, which tested them positive at Monday noon. The patient died at 9 p.m..

"The patient was obese and asthmatic and had hypertension too," said Ujjain isolation ward nodal officer H.P. Sonaniya.

"It appears to be a case of comorbidity, as the immune compromised patient contracted the virus easily and died of cardiac arrest. Therefore, the death can be partly attributed to COVID-19."

Earlier, two patients from Ujjain and Indore each had succumbed to the illness. Madhya Pradesh has recorded 48 cases so far, with Indore, the most populous city in the State, registering 27 cases alone.

To seek assistance, call the State control room at 181 or 0755-2527133.

Jails being decongested in J&K

700 lockdown violators were held, kept together for hours

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The J&K administration has started decongesting jails and lock-ups only after rounding up around 700 "violators" of the lockdown and huddling them in police stations and exposing them to the dangers of contracting COVID-19.

In a major step to decongest the prisons, the J&K administration revoked the Public Safety Act, a law dealing with preventive detention, on 31 prisoners. "Eleven of those to be released are lodged in Kotbalwal jail, 14 in Srinagar jail, four in a Rajouri jail and two in Kathua," an official said.

However, at least 700 civilians, who were designated as violators by the police and booked for their movement on the roads, were detained for hours together in police stations and many were detained for several days.

Police sources said Block Development Council chair-



A policeman checking people in Srinagar on Monday.

man Muhammad Yasin Sheikh from Handwara's Dolipora was arrested and detained for at least three days for "his movement in Dolipora and arguing with the policemen". He was lodged at the Vilgam police station, Handwara, and booked under Section 353 and 506.

The Vilgam police detained 15 "violators" on March 24 and huddled them into the police station. A total of 35 civilians were arrested in the whole of Handwara area that day.

Valley's Bandipora, Handwara and Ganderbal districts top in detention of "violators" and lodging them in lock-ups and police stations. In the past two days, over 50 "violators" have been detained in these districts.

After a video went viral of a father-son entering into an argument with the police and later exchanging blows on March 27, the duo, identified as Azad Wani and Suhail Ahmed Wani, were booked under Sections 269 and 353 (non-bailable offence with two years to five jail) of the Indian Penal Code and arrested by the Delina police station.

Duo released

A police officer said the father-son duo was released on Monday.

Meanwhile, in a fresh drive on Monday, a police spokesman said 44 civilians were booked in Handwara and Sopolore "for violating the prohibitory orders".

Chandigarh police step in to prevent migration of workers

Personnel convincing those on the move to return, making arrangements for them in shelters

VIKAS VASUDEVA
ZIRAKPUR/CHANDIGARH

On his way to Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, after walking from a town in Himachal Pradesh, Lachman Singh – a truck driver – reached Chandigarh on Monday morning where the police stopped him. He along with a few others were asked to go back even as they said that they hardly have any money left.

"They (police) took my details and asked me to return from where I had come. I don't have any option but to go back. I hardly have any money left. I don't know how will I return," said Mr. Singh, who claimed that he was stuck near a village in Himachal Pradesh's Swarghat town, 78 km from here.

"I had taken my truck to deliver bitumen mixture at a plant near Swarghat from Bathinda. After the lockdown was announced, I couldn't go anywhere. I had

around ₹3,500 with me and almost all of it was spent in my stay over there. I was sleeping in the truck. As I ran out of money, I decided to leave my truck and head to my home town," he said.

"No one stopped me in Punjab or Himachal... since morning I have just had a cup of tea and biscuit that the police here has offered," he added.

Pradeep Kumar, an operator at a rice mill based in Mandi Kharar in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar district, said he wants to reach Moradabad in U.P. He was among those who were stopped by the police at the (Punjab-Chandigarh) border in Sector 48. "They have directed me to go back. I don't have much money left now. Since, the lockdown, the mill has been shut and workers like me were asked to make travel and food arrangements ourselves. They cleared my dues



Migrants in Chandigarh's Manimajra area who were asked by a tavern owner to vacate premises.

till the lockdown date," he said.

Expressing similar sentiments, Rahul and Vishnu, who had been working at a local sweets shop in Kharar in Mohali, said they were headed for Agra but now are going back to the shop owner's "godown" where they had been staying.

Meanwhile, to ensure that migrant labourers do not suffer due to lockdown, the

who forced labourers working in his tavern to leave. Chandigarh police spokesperson Charanjit Singh Virk said the labourers, who were stopped at Sector 48 border, were persuaded by the police to stay at the local shelter, but they opted to go back.

In neighbouring Mohali, at a construction site in the aero city, visibly distressed Shankar Mandal, a daily wagger, said he was running out of ration. "I and my brother had come from Bihar's Araria a few days ago. We earned around ₹400 daily but since the lockdown we haven't been paid anything by the contractor," he said.

In Punjab's Jalandhar cantonment, around 40 people have sought assistance. "We want the government to arrange transport for us to our village in Supaul district in Bihar. Otherwise, arrange food for us," said Mohammed Sheraj.

Chandigarh police have been on its toes. The police on Monday shifted 72 migrant labourers, who were about to leave Chandigarh for their native places, to their current place of stay and a few others to a shelter home in Maloya.

Also, a case has been registered under Sections 188, 269, 270 of the IPC at Manimajra against Mahesh Kumar, of Panchkula (Haryana),

Second death due to virus in West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal recorded its second death from COVID-19 on Monday, when a 44-year-old woman passed away at North Bengal Medical College and Hospital.

"She passed away early morning. We are trying to isolate the doctors and medical staff who treated her. Attempts are also being made to isolate the patient's relatives who seem to spread across north Bengal," P.K. Deb, principal of the medical college and hospital told *The Hindu*.

The lady hailed from Kalimpong town in West Bengal's Darjeeling district and was admitted to hospital almost a week ago. On Saturday tests reports confirmed that she was infected with COVID-19.

Lockdown: Assam police lauded for adopting 'soft' policing practices

The force is providing rations to the needy, feeding stray dogs

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The Assam police is documenting the best practices by its personnel in handling people during the lockdown to be used as templates for epidemics and social crises in the future.

Hours after the country-wide lockdown began, the State police attracted flak for many constables and home guards using the stick and making violators of prohibitory orders undergo other forms of punishment. Clashes with vendors and traders were also reported from western Assam.

Such instances of aggressive policing overshadowed those of "soft policing" that the State police had adopted a couple of years ago.

A message of appreciation from The Paw Foundation, an animal welfare organisation, made Assam's Director-General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta decide to record the humanitarian services provided by his force.



"Thank you very much for your help. TPF will always remember the cooperation extended by the Assam police," said the message from TPF founder Indra Amma, accompanying photos of police personnel feeding stray dogs.

The patience of some policemen with people unable or reluctant to understand the gravity of the threat from COVID-19 has been appre-

ciated. For instance, a constable took almost 15 minutes convincing an elderly woman in Majuli that staying at home was a safer option for her.

Elsewhere, policemen delivered food grains to villagers who ran out of provisions.

On Friday, the police in north-eastern Assam's Biswanath district dropped an 80-year-old home at Laluk in the adjoining Lakhimpur district from a hospital in Biswanath Chariali town. The octogenarian, Khagen Baruah, had been exhausted after walking from a place 100 km away. Mr. Baruah had been stranded as the lockdown was declared the night before he was supposed to board a bus home.

Dairy and vegetable farmers count losses

They are unable to transport their produce to markets because of restrictions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Inability to transport their produce because of lockdown has made small dairy farmers in Assam throw away hundreds of litres of milk while vegetable growers are letting their crop rot or dump nearby for animals.

Some 1,500 members of Sitajakhala Dugdha Utpadak Samabai Samiti Ltd in Morigaon district dumped about 10,000 litres of milk in rivers and streams during the first two days of lockdown. This was because the milk could not be consumed locally after efforts to transport them to the urban centres failed.

The milk processing plant of the 58-year-old cooperative society is situated about 65 km east of Guwahati.

"Our farmers face a combined average loss of ₹12 lakh per day with production



Workers carry potatoes to a market in Guwahati.

dropping from the daily mark of 20,000 litres before the lockdown. But the main problem is availability of cattle feed, which is procured primarily from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal," said Ranjib Sharma, the society's chairman.

Smaller cooperative societies at Jorabat and Rangiya

near Guwahati have been facing similar problems. A major reason, said milk trader Dilip Chhetri of Jorabat, is the closure of all hotels, restaurants and sweetmeat shops that were the bulk buyers.

District authorities claimed they have streamlined the supply of milk after the initial hiccups as dairy and milk products and shops selling animal fodder fall under essential services according to the Union Home Ministry's guidelines.

But small dairy farmers said this has benefited major firms and a State government-run dairy unit who have massive refrigeration units to store milk not offloaded for two-three days.

At Singimari in Kamrup district, Mukalmua in Nalbari district and Kharupetia in Darrang district, most vegetable farmers have not been

able to find transporters to market their produce. These places are considered the vegetable bowls of Assam.

"Officials are saying the government has relaxed restrictions on farming activities, but I lost more than 50 kg of tomatoes and other vegetables because of this *bandh* (lockdown). I hope the government compensates some of my loss," said Ramzan Ali, a farmer of Bechimari area near Kharupetia.

Minister's assurance

Assam's Agriculture Minister Atul Bora said district officials have been told to assist farmers in marketing their produce while ensuring social distancing.

NGOs have also been allowed to deliver vegetables and other perishables through telemarketing and e-marketing, officials said.

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Address of proposed station - Kharsa No. 23/25, Village-Ranholha, Nangloi-Najafgarh Road, West Delhi-110041.
However, if any person has any objection or claim regarding the setting up of CNG Station at the said site, kindly contact us within 7 days from the publication of this notice, with the relevant and appropriate proof to substantiate the objection/claims, failing which, it shall be deemed that there is no objection/claim for the setting up of CNG station at the said site.
Contact us : IGL Bhawan, Plot No. 4, Community Center, R.K. Puram, Sector-9, New Delhi-110022
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Name of Applicant - Mr. Vikrant Dhama
Address of proposed station - Kharsa No. 56/13/1 & 13/2, Village-Dichaon, Kalan, Tehsil-Najafgarh District-South West Delhi, New Delhi-110043.
However, if any person has any objection or claim regarding the setting up of CNG Station at the said site, kindly contact us within 7 days from the publication of this notice, with the relevant and appropriate proof to substantiate the objection/claims, failing which, it shall be deemed that there is no objection/claim for the setting up of CNG station at the said site.
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Free treatment for COVID-19 patients

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Monday announced that all expenses relating to treatment of any person testing positive for COVID-19 in the State will be borne by the government.

Two hospitals being set up in association with two private medical colleges in Bhubaneswar will exclusively take care of virus cases and all expenses for treatment will be borne by the government, State government's chief spokesperson for COVID-19 Subroto Bagchi said.

'1.2 lakh Odia workers stranded'

Efforts to provide all help to them, says Odisha govt.

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Monday said about 1.2 lakh Odia migrant workers are stranded in other States.

"The State government has set up a control room led by 12 senior bureaucrats who are assigned to coordinate with their counterparts in other States. The government is making all effort to provide assistance to all stranded Odia people," said Subroto Bagchi, Odisha's chief spokesperson on COVID-19, here.

"As of now, 4,700 calls have been received from people in distress. We are in

close contacts with others States about the safety of 1.20 lakh people. Most of them are now stranded in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Telangana, Karnataka and Kerala," he said.

Helpline calls

Mr. Bagchi pointed out that among all the calls received through the helpline number, 200 pertained to groups having 100 or more people stranded in other States. "All help is being extended to them through the respective State governments."

"It is matter of concern that people are stranded away from their homes. Till

the situation is normalised, they will have to wait there. All assistance is being extended to them through highly placed Odia officers and Odia organisations," said Mr. Bagchi.

The State government had earlier announced that it will bear the expenses incurred for all migrant workers stranded in other States.

Meanwhile, the Naveen Patnaik government has ordered government officials to treat workers of other States stranded in Odisha as guests.

Till now, about 18,000 labourers have been sheltered in 252 temporary camps.

Appropriation Bill gets the nod in Odisha Assembly

Govt. allowed to spend ₹1.55 lakh crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Assembly on Monday unanimously passed the Odisha Appropriation Bill, 2020, allowing the State government to spend ₹1.55 lakh crore during the financial year 2020-21.

The Bill was passed when proceedings of the House were held at the convention centre of the Lok Seva Bhawan instead of the State Assembly building, after it was found that State's third COVID-19 patient had come in contact with a staff member

of the House.

The Appropriation Bill, which was introduced by Finance Minister Niranjan Pujari, was supported by Leader of Opposition Pradipta Kumar Naik of the BJP and Congress Legislature Party Leader Narasingha Mishra.

Demands on grants

The Finance Minister had presented the ₹1.55 lakh crore budget in the Assembly on February. But due to the outbreak of COVID-19 discussion on demands for grants of all the Departments could not be taken up.