



Travel nod for Yes Bank case co-accused Kapil Wadhawan triggers row

page 8



Punjab government extends preventive lockdown till May 1

page 8



India has sufficient hydroxychloroquine stocks, says Centre

page 10

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson out of intensive care unit

page 14



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

NEARBY



Sonia concerned over low COVID-19 testing

NEW DELHI
Reviewing the Congress's efforts to provide relief to people hit by the COVID-19 lockdown, party president Sonia Gandhi on Friday expressed concern over the low testing and shortage of testing facilities. She agreed on a Corona Action Strategy that will seek to utilise the network of party workers.

NEWS PAGE 8

23 members of a family in Siwan test positive

PATNA
As many as 23 members of a family in a village in Bihar's Siwan district have tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases in the district to 29. The borders of Siwan, Begusarai and Nawada districts have been sealed by the State administration.

NEWS PAGE 9

Bengal Chemicals gets COVID-19 drug boost

KOLKATA
In an overnight decision, Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd. was issued a licence to manufacture hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug that is being used in the treatment of COVID-19, on Friday.

NEWS PAGE 11

No evidence of community transmission: Health Ministry

States cite surge to extend lockdown; death toll across country climbs to 206

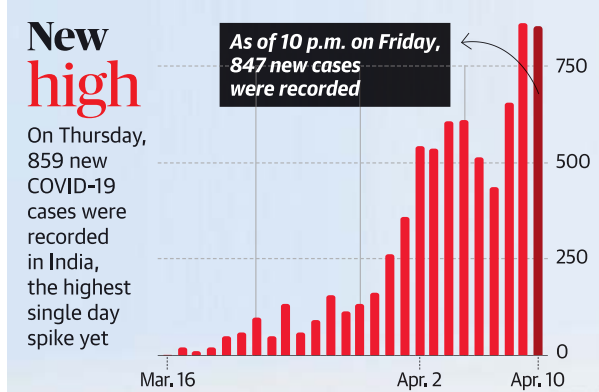
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Friday denied evidence of community transmission (CT) of COVID-19 while reporting at least 700 new cases since Thursday evening. The nationwide death toll from the epidemic touched 206, and the Ministry confirmed 6,761 positive cases.

The Ministry's response follows an Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report on Thursday of nearly month long surveillance of 5,911 randomly chosen samples of patients who exhibited Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI), whom 104 tested positive for COVID-19.

COVID-19

All but two were tested between March 21-April 2 and 40 had no history of international travel or contact with someone with travel history but had picked up the infection, indicating community transmission, the ICMR said. Over the last few weeks, there have been reports from several States of people testing positive but who were unable to explain the possible source of the infection. However, the Health Ministry has consistently



No distancing: A jostling crowd at the Keshpur vegetable market in West Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

maintained that this was not evidence for CT.

Health Ministry spokesperson Lav Agrawal said all of the cases of SARI were from districts where there were confirmed cases of the disease and that travel histories of those SARI patients were being investigated. "We'll be the first ones to tell if you if such transmission has begun," he said.

The Health Ministry response comes even as States have announced an extension of the lockdown beyond April 14 citing CT; Chief Minister Amarinder Singh declared on Friday that CT had been observed in Punjab.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

STAGE FRIGHT EDITORIAL

MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 2, 3,

4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12

Have enough facilities, says Harsh Vardhan

India is unlikely to face an "unmanageable crisis" from COVID-19, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said at an online conference in New Delhi. Should matters deteriorate, India had enough infrastructure to tide over, he said. "We have 500 dedicated COVID hospitals, 2,00,000 beds across hospitals and 50,000 ICU beds." ▶ PAGE 9

70 health staff in Bhopal test positive

As many as 20 health workers, including two doctors, tested positive for COVID-19 in Bhopal on Friday, taking the number of the affected staff in all to 70 in the city, according to the district administration. On the day, the patients' tally in Bhopal soared to 119 as 24 fresh cases were reported. Health workers make up 59% of the cases in the city. ▶ PAGE 9

Scarcity of drugs, devices imminent, govt. warned

Ensure resumption of units, urges Dept. of Pharmaceuticals

VIKAS DHOOT
MUMBAI

A countrywide shortage of medicines and medical devices is likely in the coming weeks, the Department of Pharmaceuticals has warned the Home Ministry, urging it to take immediate steps to help drug makers resume production under the current lockdown.

Drug and medical device makers are functioning "...on an average, at only 20%-30% capacity during the lockdown," as per feedback from various industry formations, Department of Pharmaceuticals Secretary P.D. Vaghela pointed out in an April 9 communique to Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, which has been reviewed by *The Hindu*.

Export demand

"If the production does not reach the pre-lockdown level soon, it could lead to shortages of medicines and medical devices in the coming weeks," the letter said.

Underlining that half of India's output of pharmaceuticals is exported as global markets offer better prices, the Department of Pharmaceuticals stressed that this could lead to disproportionate shortages in the domestic market, calling for suitable measures to be

taken "in the right earnest" to prevent this "avoidable" situation. Production units engaged in making essential commodities, including medicines, vaccines, masks and their ancillaries had been exempted from the restrictions imposed as per the three-week national lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24.

Though several States had already imposed restrictions on mobility and production by then, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba and Principal

A bitter pill

The Indian pharma industry is hit hard by the restrictions imposed during the lockdown

Pharma and medical device producers are operating at just 20 to 30% of their capacity	Mistreatment by police and local officials	Ancillary industries such as packaging and raw material suppliers are shut
Reverse migration and the inability of local workers to turn up has reduced their labour force	Lack of clarity on permits for factory operations	As close to 50% of the pharmaceutical output is exported by India, the domestic market is more vulnerable to such production shocks
Lack of adequate transport and logistics services (such as couriers)		

Secretary to the Prime Minister had urged State governments to ensure such production work continues, at a review meeting on March 22.

Since then, repeated misfires from the Home Secretary to the State governments to ensure that the production and movement of essential goods is not hampered hasn't changed things on the ground, prompting the Department of Pharmaceuticals to raise the issue afresh.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

India pounds LoC terror launchpads, Pak. Army sites

Villagers forced to flee firing, despite COVID-19 lockdown

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The Army on Friday said it had inflicted heavy damage on the Pakistani army's gun areas and terrorist launchpads after unprovoked ceasefire violation by the "enemy side" in two areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir.

A defence spokesperson said the Army retaliated "effectively and strongly" to the ceasefire violation in Keran sector in Kupwara district in the afternoon.

Police officials said Pakistan had violated the ceasefire in Uri area of Baramulla district as well.

The heavy exchange of fire amid the ongoing lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced scores of villagers living along the LoC



On guard: BSF jawans at the international border near Jammu on Friday. ■ PTI

in Kupwara to shift their families to safer locations.

Nazir Ahmad Khatana, a resident of Panzgam, said he had to shift his family to Kupwara town after artillery shells and bullets hit his village in the morning.

"The whole world is battling the coronavirus. This is the time to allow people to be safe in their houses rather than sending them in hordes looking for shelters," he said. Following the firing, Internet was suspended in Kupwara district.

'Bid to disrupt peace'

Director General of Police (DGP), Kashmir, Dilbag Singh said it was condemnable that when the entire world was coming together to fight the pandemic, Pakistan and its sponsored terrorists were making attempts disrupt peace.

The shelling comes days after a gunfight between the Army and infiltrators resulted in the death of five elite paratroopers and an equal number of infiltrators.

Field day



New threat: Pigeons hovering over a wheat field on the outskirts of Mohali in Punjab on Friday. These birds feast on the crop, which is yet to be harvested owing to shortage of farm workers due to the COVID-19 lockdown. ■ AKHILESH KUMAR

'Not one case from Dilshad Garden in 10 days'

Delhi govt. claims to have halted community spread of COVID-19 in the area

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

'Operation SHIELD', announced by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday to counter the community spread of the novel coronavirus, has succeeded in its objective in north-east Delhi's Dilshad Garden, the State government has claimed a day later.

There have been no cases reported from the Dilshad Garden area in the last 10 days, the AAP government said in a statement, terming it the first instance of "successful implementation" of the initiative based on sealing, home quarantine, isolation and tracking, ensuring supply of essentials, local sanitisation and door-to-door checking.

At least four pockets in Dilshad Garden were among the 'containment zones' an-



A worker spraying disinfectant on a street in Dilshad Garden. ■ FILE PHOTO

nounced by the government recently, which went up to 30 on Friday.

First SHIELD spot

"I feared a massive COVID-19 outbreak in the Dilshad Garden area after seven persons were found positive. It was transmitted from an infected woman who had returned from Saudi Arabia. Thereafter Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal issued instructions for the implementation of Oper-

ation SHIELD. Dilshad Garden was the first area where it was rolled out," said Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

"As many as 123 medical teams screened more than 15,000 people living in 4,032 houses. The hard work of the health officials and the successful implementation of Operation SHIELD made Dilshad Garden coronavirus-free," he said.

Sealing, contact tracing

In a massive operation by the Delhi government jointly with Delhi Police, all the people who came in touch with the area's 'patient zero' were traced and quarantined, and curfew was imposed in Dilshad Garden and Old Seemapuri after a Mohalla Clinic doctor who had come in contact with the patient tested positive.

Out of the 11 points that lead to the sector of Dilshad Garden which reported most cases, nine were completely shut with police barricades. Neither vehicles nor pedestrians were allowed, including for essential services.

Each of the 123 medical teams surveyed around 50 homes and asked a set of questions.

Any person who met the patient zero's family was quarantined or shifted to the GTB hospital for medical treatment and testing.

"The Delhi government is still tracking the people of the area and if there is symptom, then they are being quarantined. We will also initiate random testing of the residents soon," said District Administration Officer of Shahdara S.K. Nayak, who oversaw the entire operation.

Red army keeps virus at bay in northeast

Unmindful of risks, village elders work with govt.

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

A 'red army' of wise old men and women are helping villages across some hill States in the northeast keep the novel coronavirus away.

Though a majority of those felled by the COVID-19 pandemic are aged 60 years or more, this hasn't stopped the *gaon buras* (male villager elder) and *gaon buris* (female villager elder) — usually referred to as GBs — from following their predecessors in forming a shield between the villages and the enemy — in this case, the virus.

The village elders across the States are distinguished by their red coats provided by the government, which also pays them a stipend of ₹1,500 per month.



In charge: Village elders putting up a barricade at Salang village in Arunachal Pradesh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"The villagers look up to us in times of crisis as well as happiness. It is our duty to ensure their safety and liaise with the government agencies for guidelines and in maintaining order," said Tonom Mibang, one of the three GBs of Lileng village in Arunachal Pradesh's Siang district.

Mr. Mibang is 64, although the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945, under which

a village decides the number of GBs. During epidemics and disasters, we put our heads together to decide what is best for the villagers and share the responsibilities," he told *The Hindu*.

Imnakumba Longchar, 59, of Khensa village in Mokochung district of Nagaland, plays a similar role. "Keeping everyone calm is a major challenge," he said.

Assisting the GBs in Nagaland are the *dobashi*, the custodians of Naga customary laws who also wear red coats. They have been salaried government employees since 1842 when the British appointed the first *dobashis* for interpreting Naga dialects into Assamese or Hindi.

Arunachal Home Minister Bamang Felix said the importance of the GBs in the Constitution. "They are indispensable," he said.