

Mamata hits back over MHA lockdown warning

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 11

A DAY after the Home Ministry wrote to the West Bengal government to take action against "gradual dilution" of coronavirus lockdown measures, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee hit back sharply. "This is not a communal virus," Banerjee said, adding that everyone is aware of the community that resides in the areas mentioned in the letter.

"This is not a communal virus. This is a disease," Banerjee said at a press conference in the state secretariat here.

In a letter on Friday, the MHA

said that West Bengal was allowing sale of non-essential items and gatherings at vegetable and meat shops, and that police were allowing religious gatherings.

Drawing reference to a letter it had written to the state on April 4 about violation of lockdown measures, the letter said, "As per further reports received from security agencies, gradual dilution of lockdown has been reported from West Bengal with an increase in the number of exceptions being provided by the state government. For instance, shops relating to non-essential items have been allowed to function. There is no regulation in vegetable, fish and mutton markets where people have been



'This is not communal virus'

thriving in complete violation of social distancing norms in Rajabazaar, Narkel Danga, Topsia, Metiaburj, Gardenreach, Ilkbalpur and Manikata in Kolkata... areas such as Narkel Danga are reportedly witnessing more COVID-19

like cases."

It asked the state to take strict action and send a report to the Union government.

At the press conference, Banerjee said, "The Indian government has asked to keep a watch on some specific areas, I hope you all understand which are the areas the Centre wants us to keep special vigil." She said she has raised the matter of politics being played by central leaders at a time when everyone should cooperate.

Reacting to Union minister Babul Supriyo's allegation that COVID-19 figures in West Bengal were not accurate, she said, "We are maintaining cooperation with the Centre. I said the Prime

Minister, Centre should also maintain this. Don't play dirty games."

Supriyo had on Friday alleged that Kolkata Municipal Corporation listed 10 people who had been cremated after testing COVID-19 positive, which was in contradiction to the state's count of five deaths.

On Saturday, a BJP delegation led by Dilip Ghosh met Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and alleged that the state government was suppressing information. Later, a Raj Bhawan statement said, "The delegation felt that the government is suppressing real time information... It urged the Governor to take steps to ensure that the data is accurate..."



A woman sanitises her hands at a bank in Meja village of UP's Prayagraj district. Ritesh Shukla

2 models shine in different corners

Route map, geo-tag, screening: How a Kerala district did it

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 11

AMONG THE people to test positive for coronavirus in Kerala following an alert about the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi was a 19-year-old, whose sample was taken after she had been asymptomatic and in home quarantine for 14 days, because she had boarded a train from a railway station nearby.

As Kerala hotspot Pathanamthitta is discussed as one of the successful examples of how to contain COVID-19, what makes it different is this level of detail, including successful use of technology.

The district has kept under observation almost all those who have entered it via air, rail or road, and put out route maps of positive cases to ensure no contacts slip through, even as it tests groups determined as high-risk. By Saturday evening, the district had tested 2244 samples.

During a meeting on last Sunday, Union Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba said the strategy adopted by Pathanamthitta was worth emulating.

The district saw its first cases in early March, with a three-member Italy-returned family and their relatives testing positive. The count would eventually go up to 16.

As a first step, Pathanamthitta sealed its borders. Unlike other parts of the country where only persons with travel history from abroad were being screened, it decided to do so for all entering the district, from overseas, other states or even districts, creating a database of the same. Details of those who entered the district from



Medical staff collect swabs to carry out tests for COVID-19 in Ernakulam, Kerala. Reuters

abroad and across the country since January were added to the database.

About their first challenge, Collector P B Nooh said, "The importance of social isolation, quarantine and containment strategies was not familiar to people then."

In a first, the district administration also decided to prepare route maps of the positive cases. "This was not a part of the contact-tracing procedure. A flow chart was publicised to help people see if they had been present at a stated travel path at a particular time. After the chart was published, we could trace more people, and many voluntarily reported to us. Later, all districts emulated this model," said National Health Mission District Programme Officer Dr Abey Sushan.

The administration launched a call centre from where enquiries were made twice daily to those under quarantine, regarding medical and non-medical requirements. Fourteen teams of health workers monitored nearly

4,000 road and rail entrants on a daily basis.

A group of engineering students of IHRD College, Chengannur, designed a 'Corona RM' app, where the call centre counsellors would upload requirements of those under home quarantine.

The administration next put in place geo-mapping of those under observation.

Nooh said selecting the right population for sampling was a key intervention. "With limited kits, we could test only 200 samples a day. So we chose categories like international travellers, inter-state travellers, health workers, and their primary contacts, migrant workers, senior citizens under observation, symptomatic persons and those who had returned from COVID-19 hotspots, including in India." The Collector said this is how they zeroed in on the 19-year-old college student from Delhi, an asymptomatic person from Dubai, and three people from Dharavi in Mumbai.

Success of local shutdown: Centre holds up Agra model of containment

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

A POSITIVE report at 2 am, 259 teams swinging into action and intensive contact tracing in pre-lockdown era covering over 1,65,000 households in Lohamandi area of Agra. As Bhilwara model gains currency as a viable model for cluster containment of coronavirus, the Agra model has emerged as an alternative way of achieving the same results.

The Centre showcased the Agra model on Saturday at the daily COVID-19 briefing, and it is also being shared with other states as best practice.

It was discussed in the meeting of the Cabinet Secretary convened a few days ago with district magistrates, and also came up for discussion on Tuesday during a meeting at the highest political level, top sources in the government said.

Agra, which saw early cases after two people who had travelled to Austria along with a resident of Delhi's Mayur Vihar — Delhi's first confirmed coronavirus case — travelled back home to Agra in early March. Soon, six cases were reported from the city.

A senior official associated with the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, who oversaw the combing operations that followed, said: "The confirmation from the airport tests came at 2 am; we got into action immediately. A 3-km radius around the house was sealed and 259 teams were formed of two members each. We covered 1.63

As the Bhilwara model gains currency, the Agra model has emerged as an alternative way of achieving containment of the virus

lakh households in a few days, took about 1,000 samples, used S N Medical College as our base. It was an exercise where nothing could be left to chance — a security guard was roped in to supply daily needs to the families."

Each team covered about 100 homes per day; doctors sat at a nearby civil dispensary, and people who showed symptoms could visit them.

The Union Health Ministry said: "The State, district administration and frontline workers coordinated their efforts by utilising their existing Smart City Integrated with Command and Control Centre as war rooms... the district administration identified epicentres, delineated impact of positive confirmed cases on the map and deployed a special task force as per the micro-plan made by the district administration."

Agra, incidentally, was also the earliest reference to community transmission in an official statement; experts such as AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria are now talking about "localised community transmission" in hotspots.

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Unlike Wadhawans, essential services pass for travel does not come easy for others

MOHAMED THAYER
MUMBAI, APRIL 11

FOR TWO days in a row, Prof Laxman Kamble has been forced to wait outside the Mumbai Police headquarters to get an essential services pass to move his father to Kolhapur.

His father, who has to undergo dialysis, is facing difficulty using the common toilet, located nearly 200 metres from Kamble's residence at a chawl in Ghatkopar (East). "Two people have to carry him to the toilet," Kamble said.

Their Kolhapur residence has an attached bathroom that will be safer and more convenient for his father, who came to Mumbai to undergo treatment for his kidney ailment.

"Yesterday (April 10), I submitted an application seeking permission for six people, including a driver, which was rejected. Today (April 11), I have come with an application for four people," he said, as he waited for his turn on the fifth floor of the new police commissioner office on Saturday.

Kamble's case is in stark contrast to the ease with which the Wadhawan brothers — Kapil and Dheeraj — managed to get police permission to move from Khandala to Mahabaleshwar without even having to approach the police. The brothers have been on the run since being named as accused in a multi-crore scam

Ayurveda practitioner from UP dies, patients quarantined

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

A 58-YEAR-OLD Bulandshahr-based Ayurveda practitioner died due to COVID-19 in Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital on Saturday. The Ayurveda practitioner was admitted to the hospital on April 8. On Saturday, the Bulandshahr administration sealed parts of Shikarpur area where his clinic was situated.

"The doctor first fell ill on April 3 and his condition deteriorated in four days. As his condition worsened, he got himself admitted to a private hospital in the district and was later referred

to Delhi. The health department has begun the sanitisation of his residence and clinic to prevent further spread," said Bulandshahr District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar.

According to officials, the Ayurveda practitioner tested positive on Friday. "The patient reached the hospital in a critical condition... a sample was collected for testing. He was initially not screened for COVID-19 at any hospital," said a senior doctor at Safdarjung hospital.

His family has been placed in home quarantine while his patients are being sent to institutional quarantine. Their samples are being taken.

Valley residents take up station outside localities to bar entry of outsiders

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, APRIL 11

WITH CORONAVIRUS cases increasing in Jammu and Kashmir, local residents in some parts of the Valley have taken to sealing their areas to prevent the movement of vehicles and entry of outsiders.

Doctors in the region, however, have expressed concern over these blockades and their effect on smooth functioning of health services.

In parts of Srinagar, residents have setup barricades to stop people from entering. "Till date, we have no coronavirus case in our area and residents decided to block entry. We have to take pre-

cautions of our own," said a resident of Yatoo Mohalla in Shivpora area in Srinagar.

In a village in north Kashmir's Bandipora, volunteers guard the entry points. "We have to take these steps because no one knows if someone is carrying infection. They can infect others," a villager said. "Volunteers from the village guard the main entry of the village so that everyone in the village remains safe," he added.

Doctors in the Valley, however, have a word of caution. "This is stopping nothing; this will only impede your way to reach a hospital in case of an emergency. Please understand that corona doesn't live in another mohalla. He (suspected case) is

China test kits for TN delayed

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, APRIL 11

TAMIL NADU's plan to increase the number of sample tests with rapid antibody test kits has hit a roadblock, with consignments from China getting delayed.

State Chief Secretary K Shanmugam confirmed reports that the kits from China were delayed because a consignment for India was sent to the US.

It will take 24 hours to get the consignment after China allows the shipment, but there was no indication of a decision until Saturday evening, said a senior official of Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation.

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu reported 58 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on Saturday. One death was reported in Erode, said Shanmugam. The total number of tested samples also increased from 8,410 on Friday to 9,527 on Saturday.

The state had placed orders for 4 lakh rapid antibody-based kits in addition to those expected from the ICMR. The first despatch of 1 lakh kits was to reach Tamil Nadu on Thursday.

Cleric among 8 arrested for stone-pelting on health workers, NSA invoked

AMIT SHARMA
MEERUT, APRIL 11

EIGHT PERSONS, including a cleric of a mosque, were arrested and booked under stringent National Security Act (NSA) here on Saturday in connection with the attack on a team of health workers and administrative officials in the town's Jaali Kothi area late Friday night.

According to police, a team of health workers and officials had gone to Jaali Kothi to seal off the area after three of the four Tablighi Jamaat members, who had attended Delhi Markaz last month and were traced to a mosque in the area, tested posi-

Until Friday, Tamil Nadu reported 911 confirmed COVID-19 cases and tested 7,267 samples. Amid criticism that testing was not adequate, the state has maintained that it has been following ICMR guidelines. On Friday, the state ordered district health departments to test all secondary contacts and everyone with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness irrespective of travel history.

Over 20,000 health workers, including those attached with local bodies, are surveying vulnerable spots for potential cases and people with symptoms. For example, 11,000 health workers and volunteers visited 9 lakh houses in the Greater Chennai region on Friday and identified 515 people with symptoms. G Prakash, Corporation Commissioner, said that 2488 people were identified with symptoms like cold and fever since the containment operations started.

Dr K Kolandaswamy, Director of Public Health, said they would continue the existing procedure of screening and testing samples until the rapid test kits arrive from China.

As soon as the team reached the area, they faced resistance from residents who opposed barricading of the area. Stones were thrown from rooftops in which Meerut City Magistrate Satendra and Sub-inspector Mukesh were injured, said police.

"All eight, including a cleric, have been arrested and booked under the National Security Act. We took out a flag march in the area after the incident on Saturday morning and have appealed the residents to not come out of their homes. We have warned them of direct action if such acts are reported in future," SSP (Meerut) Ajay Sahni told The Sunday Express.