## 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 nonessential 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'

thronging in complete violation of social distancing norms in Raiabazaar, Narkel Danga, Topsia, Metiaburz, Gardenreach, Ikbalpur and Maniktala in Kolkata... areas such as Narkel Danga are reportedly witnessing more COVID-19 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

Success of local

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 lagdeep 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.

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 threemember Italy-returned family and their relatives testing positive. The count would eventually go up to 16.

first 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 contacttracing 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

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

**National Health Mission District** 

Programme Officer Dr Abey

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

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.

#### shutdown: Centre holds up Agra model of containment As the Bhilwara model

**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 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

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 microplan 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.

**FULL REPORT ON** www.indianexpress.com

# Delay in supply of kits hits rapid test plan

**ABANTIKA GHOSH** NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

WHILE RAPID antibody tests to check for novel coronavirus (COVID-19) were set to begin this past week in high density

clusters (containment zones)

and large migration gatherings/

evacuee centres, the plan has hit

a roadblock as the testing kits are

yet to arrive. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had ordered 5 lakh kits, of which 2.5 lakh were to be delivered this

"The supplier said he will deliver (the rapid testing kits) but it has not come so far. He says he will deliver in the next two-three days... kits will come," Dr R R Gangakhedkar, head of epidemiology and infectious diseases at ICMR, said on Saturday.

past week.

Following the successful South Korea model, the serological tests were to be used to speed up the rate of detection of cases and isolation to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The delay will affect the government's plan of incremental testing to get a more accurate assessment of the status of transmission.

With 768 new cases and 36 deaths reported in the last 24 hours, the total number of cases

detected across the country is now 7,529, of which 242 died while 652 recovered.

With 18,044 samples being tested in the last 24 hours, the number of tests has now gone up to 1,79,374.

Responding to a question on the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommending rapid tests only in research settings, Dr Gangakhedkar said: "The tests will show whether a person has been exposed to the virus and whether the virus is still inside the body. This has two advantages: in hotspots, it gives you an idea about the spread of the disease; and in healthcare workers, it reduces the fear factor by telling you whether the person has become immune and can get back to work. This is a first generation

test. It will get better with time." Meanwhile, a day after denying a study that the Ministry of External Affairs had attributed to the ICMR, which said the number of COVID-19 cases in India would have crossed 8 lakh by April 15 if there was no lockdown, Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said on Saturday: "I would like to bring to your notice that this is not a study but a modelling exercise we had done to extrapolate the course of the disease in India without a lockdown, based on the rate of growth."

"Before the lockdown we were at a cumulative growth rate of 41%. Then the number of cases would have been 8.2 lakh by April 15. Post-lockdown, the growth rate is down to 29%; we have 7.447 cases today, it would have been 45,000 without a lockdown. We could be at 1.2 lakh cases by April 15 had there iust been containment and no lockdown; would have been 2 lakh today without any measures. But this is a modelling exercise we had done internally, not

an ICMR study." On the state of preparedness Agarwal said 586 dedicated COVID hospitals with 1,04,613 isolation beds and 11,836 ICU beds were ready so far, and the numbers were increasing.

"The Government of India in its continual efforts, following a graded response approach, is ensuring that there is no shortage of supplies of critical items which includes PPEs, N95 masks testing kits, medicines and ventilators, with each state across the country," the Health Ministry said in a statement.

In a letter to states, the Ministry of Home Affairs has asked them to provide police security to doctors and other medical staff whenever required, especially when they go for screening.

#### 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.

The state health services were prepared to ship them to various districts and had trained health workers to administer

"When the shipments from

China are cleared, we will get at least 50,000 kits in the first despatch," Shanmugam said. He said the state has enough standard swab test kits and that they will continue aggressive testing of family members and secondary contacts of positive cases with available stock. "Rapid test is for a larger population setting. For example, if we had it, we could have tested everyone in the quarantine, containment zones as well as all frontline workers," the chief secretary

Unlike Kerala's rapid-polymerase chain reaction (rapid-PCR) testing kits from Punebased Mylab, which take nose or throat swabs and give a result within three hours, antibody rapid test kits give the result in 30 minutes. Blood samples are taken for the test with a lancet provided for finger-pricks. If the test is positive, samples are sent for a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test.

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 Chennal 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 opera-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.

### essential services pass for travel does not come easy for others

Unlike Wadhawans,

**MOHAMED THAVER** 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 kid-

ney 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 commis-

sioner 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

connected to Yes Bank.

The brothers received an authority letter from IPS officer Amitabh Gupta, who described them as "family friends" and granted them permission to travel with a cavalcade of five cars carrying 23 people, including family members and a retinue of domestic help. Gupta is now on forced leave.

According to rules, those who want to travel within the city can approach the local police station, while those who want to move across the state or cross state borders in cases of emergency have to approach the office of DCP (Operations) Pranaya Ashok.

"Eight out of 10 cases are rejected," Ashok said. "We have to screen every application carefully and ensure that only essen-

tial cases get permission.' Another staffer from the department said in some cases, even after the Mumbai Police provides the essential services pass, the SP in a particular district may not allow entry. "Given that there is a high number of cases from Mumbai, other districts, especially those with lower number of cases, aren't keen on allowing entry to anyone coming from Mumbai... police permission is no guarantee," the staff member

added. According to an estimate, the Mumbai Police headquarters has received anywhere between 6,000 and 10,000 applications seeking "essential" passes.

#### Ayurveda practitioner from UP dies, patients quarantined The administration also

**AMIL BHATNAGAR** NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

A 58-YEAR-OLD Bulandshahrbased 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," Bulandshahr District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar.

According to officials, the Avurveda 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.

sealed the private hospital in which the Ayurveda practitioner first got admitted on April 7. The district magistrate has initiated proceedings to declare the residence and clinic area in Shikarpur as hotspots.

The body was brought for cremation at Nigambodh Ghat in the capital at around 4 pm. His wife and son were accompanied by two mortuary attendants of Safdarjung Hospital, apart from the driver of the hearse.

However, the cremation was held up for nearly two-and-ahalf hours due the "absence of an operator" for the CNG crematorium, the hospital staffers said.

## 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

ple from entering. "Till date, we

have no coronavirus case in our

area and residents decided to

block entry. We have to take pre-

In parts of Srinagar, residents have setup barricades to stop peo-

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,

cautions of our own," said a resi-

dent of Yatoo Mohalla in Shivpora

In a village in north Kashmir's

area in Srinagar.

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

not the other; he can be you, me, anybody. Understand and maintain social distance and stay home," Kashmir's leading psychiatrist Dr Arshad Hussain wrote in a post on Facebook.

Residents said that alternate routes were available in order to deal with any emergency.

A senior government official said that "they have come to know about some cases and they are looking into it". Several in the Valley said the

administration should ensure that

entry of vehicles in case of a med-

blocks are placed in a way that medical emergency services are not hampered. "Areas should be blocked in a manner that it should not block

ical emergency. At several places, poles have been used to seal a particular area," said Srinagar resident Shoaib Ahmad.

On Saturday, 17 new cases were reported in J&K, taking the total number of positive cases in the UT to 224. An official release on Saturday said that so far, 98 per cent of the cases detected in the UT have a travel history or are contacts of patients who have tested positive.

Officials also said on Saturday that Srinagar, which has the highest number of cases in I&K, reported no new cases for the first time. "This shouldn't thrill us. No lowering of guard till we are declared COVID-free," Srinagar DM Shahid Choudhary tweeted.

#### 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-

tive for coronavirus. Police said 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 is such acts are reported in future, SSP (Meerut) Ajay Sahni told *The* Sunday Express.