



on Sunday



Lockdown alone will not help: Dr. Soumya Swaminathan of WHO
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States must evolve ways to help migrant workers return: Nitin Gadkari
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TRAI says all set top boxes must support interoperability
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Trump announces sanctions on nations not willing to repatriate citizens
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NEARBY

City reports 5 deaths, 166 new COVID-19 cases
 NEW DELHI
 Five more deaths and 166 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Saturday, taking the toll to 19 and cases to 1,069, stated a bulletin released by the Delhi government. A total of 26 persons have been discharged after recovery.

Four charged under NSA for preventing sealing
 GHAZIABAD
 Four persons, including the imam of a mosque in Meerut, were arrested on Saturday after a crowd allegedly stopped police from sealing Jali Kothi area in the city.

Three persons from the area had tested positive on Friday. "Action has started against the four under the National Security Act," said Meerut SSP Ajay Sahni.

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14-day extension of lockdown likely

In four-hour video-conference with Chief Ministers, PM hints at resumption of economic activity

NISTULA HEBBAR
 NEW DELHI

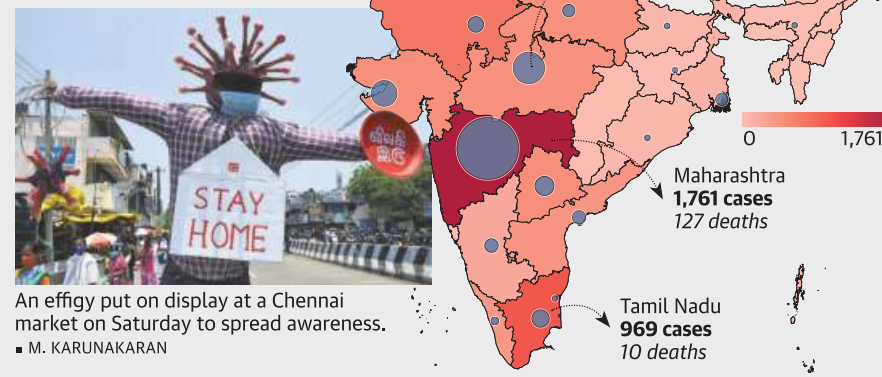
Prime Minister Narendra Modi indicated on Saturday, after a marathon four-hour video-conference with Chief Ministers, that the country could see a 14-day extension of the COVID-19 containment lockdown as that was the common demand of a large number of States, including West Bengal. The Central government will announce guidelines for the same in the next couple of days.

Remarks by Mr. Modi at the meeting, however, also indicated the possibility that some economic activity may be resumed in the extended lockdown period. "For the last two weeks or more, people have shown great discipline and stayed indoors and tried to follow social distancing since, as we say *jaan hai jahan hai* [the world is for who is alive], now we must also say *jaan bhi jahan bhi* [for both life and world]," a statement from the PMO quoted the Prime Minister as saying.

Farming operations
 Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanswamy, after the meeting, said Mr. Modi felt farm activity should continue, and said guidelines for the construction industry

Rising fatalities

The total number of deaths related to COVID-19 was 275 as of 8.45 p.m. on Saturday. Chart indicates the number of cases (colour), and deaths. Larger the shade, greater the number of cases. Bigger the circle, higher the number of deaths



An effigy put on display at a Chennai market on Saturday to spread awareness.
 M. KARUNAKARAN

would be issued by the Centre in a phased manner.

The lockdown was formally announced from March 25 to April 14 (21 days) but the trajectory of COVID-19 cases has led most State governments to recommend an extension. Mr. Modi, government sources said, was considering the request favourably. Sources said a formal announcement would be made after the weekend.

"Most States requested Prime Minister Modi to extend the lockdown for two more weeks," said govern-

ment sources.

Punjab, Telangana, Odisha, Maharashtra and Karnataka have already declared an extension till the end of the month, and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal preempted a formal announcement by the Prime Minister by taking to Twitter and offering unstinted support to the decision.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, in his intervention at the video conference, said activity within districts unaffected by COVID-19 should be allowed to

restart, albeit with sealed borders between districts and States very much in place and no train and air connectivity.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy suggested that zones within districts be colour coded, and only the red zones undergo a containment lockdown.

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CMs raise funds crunch with Modi

Almost all want lockdown extended



Talking strategy: PM Narendra Modi in a meeting with Chief Ministers via video conference in New Delhi on Saturday. ▶PTI

SOBHANA K. NAIR
 NEW DELHI

A majority of the Chief Ministers who participated in a video-conference meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday flagged the issue of a crippling shortage of funds, with the lockdown choking revenue sources and also due to the delayed GST payouts from the Centre.

COVID-19

The video-conference, on the 18th day of the lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, was attended by 13 Chief Ministers.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot favoured a

"uniform model" of restrictions for the entire country if the lockdown was extended. He said since the Centre and the States were jointly fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the States must get adequate financial assistance.

He highlighted the difficulties in handling the issues arising out of the lockdown in the State.

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu said his State used to get ₹40,000 crore each month in revenue, but this had now come down to a mere ₹4,000 crore. He expressed his helplessness in handling the pandemic with limited resources.

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Despite lockdown hurdles, sowing of summer crops up

More area under rice, pulses, oilseeds: Agriculture Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

Early sowing of the summer rice crop has covered 37% more area than the same time the previous year, despite the COVID-19 lockdown limitations, Agriculture Ministry data show. This is the pre-monsoon sowing of paddy, with the major kharif crop sowing to be done after the rains begin in June.

Overall sowing of summer crops, including rice, pulses, coarse cereals and oil seeds, is about 31% higher than usual. In total, 48.8 lakh hectares have been sown so far.



A farmer readying his field in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. ■G. MOORTHY

Availability of fertilizers
 The Centre has exempted agricultural activity from the lockdown restrictions and has also taken steps to ensure availability of fertilizers and pesticides for the coming season.

So far, more than 32 lakh hectares of rice have been sown across the country, mostly in eastern India, including 11.3 lakh hectares in West Bengal, 7.5 lakh hectares in Telangana, 3 lakh hectares in Odisha and 2.7

lakh hectares in Assam. This is more than a third higher than the 23.8 lakh hectares sown with rice during the same period last year.

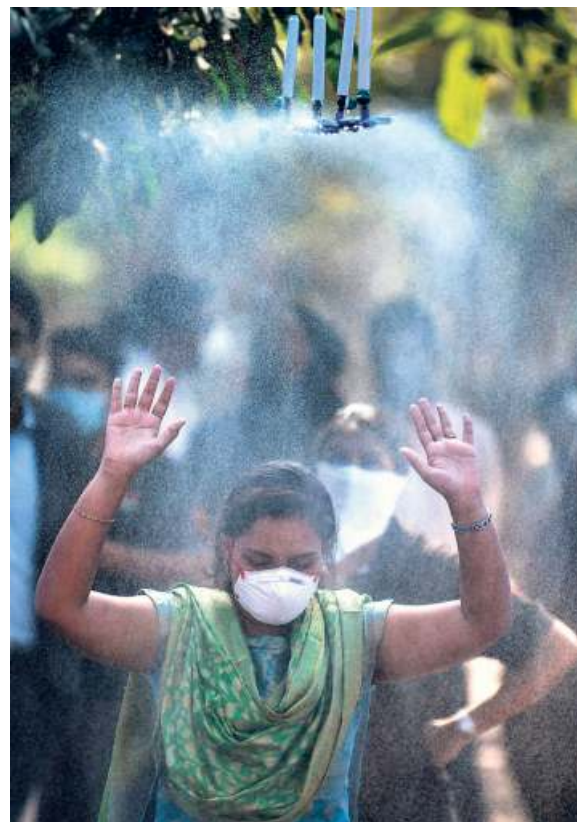
Pulses have also seen a significant increase in early sowing, with more acreage covered in green gram and black gram. Overall, there was a 32% jump from about 3 lakh hectares to 4 lakh hectares.

The growth in oilseeds is more modest with a 12% increase in sowing area to 6.7 lakh hectares. Most of the hike comes from more land sown with groundnuts.

Among coarse cereals, more maize and bajra have been sown than in the previous year resulting in a 27% jump to 5.6 lakh hectares under cultivation.

WORK RESUMES IN A FEW TEA GARDENS IN ASSAM ▶ PAGE 8

Safe passage



All hands on deck: People get sprayed with disinfectants at a sanitising tunnel set up at a farmers' market in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Saturday. ■K.R. DEEPAK

Migrant workers' protest turns violent in Surat

Allow us to return to home States, say desperate men

MAHESH LANGA
 AHMEDABAD

Lack of work has pushed several thousand migrant workers in Gujarat to the edge of starvation, sparking protests.

In the second such incident in the last 10 days, more than 2,500 workers in Surat took to the streets late on Friday, demanding wages, food and permission to return to their home States of Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

As the crowd of protesters grew, some elements turned violent, setting vegetable carts on fire and vandalising shops and properties along the road in the Laskana area, a migrant hub. Within an hour, about a dozen properties and as many vegetable carts were gutted. The police used force to disperse the mob, and more than 70 per-



Swift action: Fire services personnel dousing fires set by migrant workers in Surat on Friday. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sonts were detained. Gujarat DGP Shivanand Jha, in a letter to the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sangeeta Singh, flagged the worsening plight of the workers in shelter homes and migrant localities due to a lack of food and other basic amenities.

In his letter, Mr. Jha said

there were 778 shelter homes in the State. The 194 homes where 9,351 migrant workers – mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha – are housed lack adequate arrangements for food and sanitation, the letter said.

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3 shelters set afire over 'missing' homeless man

Six arrested, rioting case registered

STAFF REPORTER
 NEW DELHI

Three night shelters at Kashmere Gate were set on fire allegedly by homeless people on Saturday evening after a body was recovered from the Yamuna and they suspected it to be that of a fellow shelter inmate.

Delhi police Additional Public Relations Officer Anil Mittal said no one was injured in the fire. A case under sections of rioting has been registered and six persons have been arrested.

The police said four-five inmates of the night shelters jumped into the Yamuna on Friday when civil defence officials started beating them up for creating chaos during food distribution.

"When they came out of the river, they claimed one of

them was missing. Divers were called but no one could be found," the officer said.

On Saturday, a body was seen in the river and the word spread that it was the same person who had jumped a day before. "They brought the body to the Kashmere Gate shelter. The angry inmates pelted stones at the PCR van which arrived to take the body," Mr. Mittal said. The police have taken the body to Sabzi Mandi mortuary. It has not been identified yet, he said.

Around 6 p.m., the angry crowd set three shelters ablaze. Delhi Fire Service Chief Atul Garg said five fire tenders were pressed into service and the blaze was doused in an hour. The extent of damage to the shelters hasn't been ascertained.

Odisha youth pedals 1,700 km to reach home

Left without a job after the lockdown, he cycled across four States over 7 days

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
 BHUBANESWAR

Sitting idle doesn't come easy to 20-year-old Mahesh Jena, stuck at a COVID-19 isolation centre in Bichitrapur in Odisha's Jajpur, more so because he cycled 1,700 km across the country from Maharashtra to reach home.

"The seven-day journey was easier than tackling the boredom here," said Mr. Jena, who pedalled home after the nationwide lockdown on March 25 pulled down the shutters at his workplace and snapped all public transport systems.

Mr. Jena was working in an iron casting facility in the Sangli Miraj MIDC Industrial Area in Maharashtra, earning ₹15,000 a month. Soon after the lockdown



Dependable wheels: Mahesh Jena covered close to 200 km daily. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

was announced late on March 24, there was talk that the unit would remain closed for three months. Mr.

Jena needed at least ₹6,000 to pay for accommodation and food, but had just ₹3,000 with him.

Matter of survival

After remaining idle for a week, he realised that the lockdown was not likely to end soon. "All of sudden, I decided to go back home to Badasuri village in Jajpur by bicycle. It was a matter of survival," he said.

"On April 1, I set out. Though I did not have a map, I remembered the names of major stations during my train journey here," said the youth.

On the week-long, cross-country ride, Mr. Jena made most of the cool, pre-dawn hours, cycling till lunch before taking a break. He would stop at the few, still

open dhabas for a bath, lunch and a nap before getting back on his cycle. "I was averaging close to 200 km per day," he said.

And so Mr. Jena continued pedalling – from Solapur to Hyderabad, then Vijayawada through Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam, before entering Odisha via Ganjam, cycling almost 16 hours a day. "Heat exhaustion was taking a toll, but it did not distract me. I was determined to reach home," Mr. Jena said.

He reached Jajpur late on April 7 only to be stopped by villagers, who were reluctant to allow him in without a check-up. They informed the district administration, and he was sent to a quarantine centre at a school in Bichitrapur.

West Bengal pulled up for lockdown violations

MHA points to religious meetings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sought a report from the West Bengal government regarding dilution of lockdown measures that could have resulted in spread of the COVID-19 infection. The MHA alleged that the State police were allowing religious congregations and distribution of free rations by political representatives, spurring the spread of the virus.

In an April 10 letter to the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, West Bengal, the MHA said it had received reports from security agencies about "gradual dilution of lockdown" with an increase in the number of exceptions being provided by the State



Villagers protesting against the setting up of quarantine centres at Sian in Birbhum district of West Bengal. ▶PTI

government. "Shops selling non-essential items have been allowed to function. There is no regulation in vegetable, fish and mutton markets where people have been thronging in complete violation of social distancing norms," the letter said.

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