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Amid pandemic, Joe Biden sidelined by omnipresent Trump
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NEARBY



Capital sees biggest single-day jump in cases
NEW DELHI
Two deaths and 141 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Thursday, taking the total number of deaths to four and total cases to 293, an increase of 92.7% from Wednesday, said the city government.
CITY • PAGE 3

M.P. breaches 100 mark, two deaths reported
BHOPAL
A man and a woman from Indore died of COVID-19 on Thursday, taking the toll owing to the illness to five in the city. Madhya Pradesh reported nine new cases during the day, said Principal Secretary, Health, Pallavi Jain Govil. Bhopal reported four new cases. The State count stands at 111.
NORTH & EAST • PAGE 4

Bus driver allegedly beaten by U.P. police
LUCKNOW
A Haryana Roadways bus driver, who was asked to drop migrants returning home during the lockdown, was allegedly thrashed by Uttar Pradesh police on the outskirts of Lucknow for merely asking for directions. Khurshid Ahmed was taking the migrants to Gorakhpur from Ghaziabad.
NORTH & EAST • PAGE 4

PM asks States to suggest plan for staggered end to lockdown

‘Appoint disease surveillance officers in all districts, collate data from private labs’

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at his second video-conference with Chief Ministers, on Thursday told them that it was “important to formulate a common exit strategy to ensure staggered re-emergence of the population once the lockdown ends”. Mr. Modi emphasised that the collective goal of all should be to “save every Indian”. He asked the States to brainstorm and send suggestions for the exit strategy.

He listed certain “must do steps” that need to be taken as the nation entered the second week of the total lockdown. “Our first priority for the next few weeks should be testing, tracing, isolating and quarantine. For this, all State to district level efforts must be coordinated,” he pointed out.

Mr. Modi urged that district-level disease surveillance officers should be appointed as soon as possible to make sure that penetration of this strategy is optimum. Data collected from private laboratories allowed to test should be collated district-wise to be utilised for further strategising on tackling the pandemic.

In his opening remarks, he emphasised that the sup-



The way forward: Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacting with Chief Ministers via video conference on Thursday. •PTI

ply lines for medical equipment and drugs and raw materials needed for the manufacture of these products need to be kept seamless, even more than supplies of other products.

Separate hospitals

“Every State should ensure that there are separate hospitals for COVID-19 patients, and the doctors attending to them need to be protected. I would also urge you to step up online training of doctors in the treatment of COVID-19,” he said.

This being the harvest season in many parts of the country, farmers and labourers, exempted from the lockdown, were engaged in har-

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Cong seeks more relief

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) held its first-ever virtual meeting on Thursday to discuss the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, where party president Sonia Gandhi asked the Union government to come out with a “common minimum relief programme”. The unplanned lockdown caused “chaos and pain for migrant workers”, she said. • PAGE 8

‘Supply of essentials hit’

With transportation and supply woes continuing, there is concern over depleting reserves of essentials. “Demand for movement of essential goods is increasing. But supply is not even close to matching it,” Abhishek Gupta, managing director, Prakash Parcel Services Ltd said. “Instructions of the Ministry of Home Affairs to allow trucks to operate has not gone down yet in many places,” he said. • PAGE 12

Release ₹1 lakh crore to States, Gehlot suggests to Modi

Many CMs asked PM about possibility of lockdown extension

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot suggested to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday that the Centre release ₹1 lakh crore to States to enable them to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and the ramifications of the nationwide lockdown. The grant could be based on the number of patients in each State, its population or the GST Council’s guidelines, Mr. Gehlot said during Mr. Modi’s videoconference with Chief Ministers.

Mr. Gehlot proposed that the borrowing limit of States should be increased by 2% so that the people felt comfortable. “The States also expect a moratorium on the payment of their dues to the financial institutions under RBI. This should be deferred,” he said.

The Rajasthan CM also raised the issue of MGNREGA workers with the Prime Minister, saying that the government must consider giving these workers an advance payment during the lockdown period.

‘Bihar short of PPE’

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said the State had asked for 10 lakh N95 masks but received only 50,000. After seeking five lakh PPE



Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot

kits, Bihar has received 4,000; and against a demand for 100 ventilators, the State is yet to get a single one, he said. “Whatever decision the Prime Minister has taken to fight coronavirus, we’re following it,” Mr. Kumar was quoted as saying in a release. “Though some problem had cropped up earlier as people were sent from Delhi during lockdown, all those who came here were taken to their homes and are being provided medicine, food and being quarantined,” the statement said.

A total of 1,70,470 people had come to Bihar from outside the State, of whom 12,051 had travelled from overseas. All are being kept under home quarantine, the statement said.

On his part, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that his government had decided to roll out tele-medicine services in the State immediately since people are unable to visit hospitals.

Apprising Mr. Modi of the situation in Indore, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivaraj Singh Chouhan said the city had a dedicated hospital to help combat the disease. Similar arrangements were in place in Bhopal too.

Mr. Chouhan informed the Prime Minister that in the form of “alternative treatment”, AYUSH medicines were also being given in Madhya Pradesh. Around six lakh persons had been administered such medicines. In addition, to boost immunity, homeopathy medicines were given to 17,50,000 individuals.

Sources in the Odisha Chief Minister’s Office said several queries during the interaction pertained to the possibility of the lockdown being extended, with many Chief Ministers stating that it was affecting the economy.

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee skipped the interaction, deputing their Chief Secretaries instead.

Virus cases double in India in five days

Testing protocol to be tweaked

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The number of COVID-19 cases in India has doubled in the past week, with 328 more cases and 12 deaths reported on Thursday. The tally now stands at 2,069 cases, with 53 deaths and 155 cured of the novel coronavirus infection.

The Health Ministry said there were reports of sever-

ing the testing protocol, with a rapid anti-body test in hot-spots, where those indicating a positive would be sent for confirmation and the others would be quarantined.

“We will be releasing the details soon,” R. Gangakhedkar, head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases-I, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said at a press conference.

The Health Ministry said extensive action was being taken in Asia’s largest slum, Dharavi in Mumbai, after a death due to COVID-19 was reported there.

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MORE REPORTS ON • PAGES 5, 6, 9, 10, 12

9,000 with Tablighi Jamaat link sent into quarantine



Far and wide: A locality at Tondiarpet in Chennai was quarantined after a few residents who reportedly attended the Nizamuddin conference were taken away for testing by the authorities on Thursday. • B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

129 more from the sect’s headquarters test positive; 2 died on Thursday

NIKHIL M. BABU
SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

At least 9,000 Tablighi Jamaat workers and their primary contacts have been quarantined across the country after the sect’s headquarters in Nizamuddin, New Delhi, emerged as a hotspot of novel coronavirus, the government said on Thursday.

Around 500 COVID-19 cases in the country are linked to a gathering of Indian and foreign members of the organisation last month. The number in Delhi alone stood at 182 on Thursday, when 129 more people from the centre tested positive and two died.

The government has cancelled the visas of 960 foreigners who participated in the meeting. They have been

blacklisted, and legal action under the Foreigners Act and the Disaster Management Act against them will follow, a tweet from the office of the Union Home Minister said.

There are 1,306 foreigners among the 9,000 in quarantine, Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary in the Ministry, told reporters. Around 250 of them were at the Delhi centre when the authorities evacuated it this week, but the rest had fanned out to other parts of the country.

A total of 2,346 people were evacuated and 536 were sent to hospitals and 1,810 were quarantined in an operation on Wednesday, the Delhi government said.

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ANOTHER REPORT • PAGE 8

Geo-fencing app will be used to locate quarantine violators

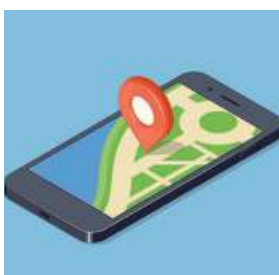
It triggers alerts to govt. agency if anyone jumps quarantine

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Centre is using powers under the Indian Telegraph Act to “fetch information” from telecom companies every 15 minutes to track COVID-19 cases across the country.

The government has tested an application that triggers e-mails and SMS alerts to an authorised government agency if a person has jumped quarantine or escaped from isolation, based on the person’s mobile phone’s cell tower location. The “geo-fencing” is accurate by up to 300 m, a government communication said.

Used by Kerala
Kerala was one of the first States to use geo-fencing to track COVID-19 cases.



On March 29, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) shared a standard operating procedure (SOP) with all telecom service providers regarding the application called COVID-19 Quarantine Alert System (CQAS).

The system will collate phone data, including the device’s location, on a common secured platform and alert the local agencies in case of a violation by CO-

VID-19 patients under watch or in isolation.

Secure network

The SOP says that the DoT and C-DOT, in coordination with telecom service providers, have developed and tested the application. It said the location information is received periodically over a secure network for the authorised cases with “due protection of the data received”.

The States have been asked to seek the approval of their Home Secretaries under the provisions of Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, for the specified mobile phone numbers to request the DoT to provide information by email or SMS in case of violation of “geo-fencing”.

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AIIMS doctor and wife test positive for COVID-19

CMO of CRPF hospital also infected

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

A resident doctor of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, and his nine-month pregnant wife have tested positive for COVID-19, according to a source at the hospital.

“The doctor posted at the Physiology Department of AIIMS was the first to show symptoms and later his wife was also brought in and both have tested positive,” said the source. The other family/close work contacts of the couple have been isolated and screened, the source added. The AIIMS administration noted that contact tracing protocol has been started in the cases.

In another development, a senior CRPF doctor, working as the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) at a Delhi-based hospital of the force, has tested positive for COVID-19,

officials said on Thursday.

The doctor has been admitted to AIIMS in Haryana’s Jhajjar. He was currently posted at the office of the Additional Director General (medical) of the Central Armed Police Forces.

Infection source unclear

The medical officer reported cough, fever and breathing problems on March 30 and his samples came positive on Thursday, a senior official said. It was not immediately clear how the doctor contracted the infection.

He was staying at a transit officers’ mess of the CRPF in south Delhi’s Saket area, the officials said. The mess has since been sanitised and orders issued to immediately quarantine the staff and guests/officers living there. (With inputs from PTI)

MORE REPORTS • PAGES 2, 3 & 4

Conviction of four accused in Daniel Pearl case overturned

No evidence to link them to murder, says Sindh court

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

The Sindh High Court on Thursday overturned the conviction of four persons accused of kidnapping and killing Daniel Pearl, a reporter of *Wall Street Journal*, in Pakistan for lack of evidence.

“No evidence has been brought on record by the prosecution to link any of the appellants to the murder of Pearl, and as such, all the appellants are acquitted of murder u/s 302 PPC,” said the court in its judgment.

The main accused, British-Pakistani Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh who was on death row for the murder, was found guilty of a lesser charge of kidnapping and sentenced to seven years in prison and a fine of ₹2 million to be paid to Pearl’s widow and his orphaned son,



Omar Saeed Sheikh, the main accused, was among the three released by India after the Kandahar hijacking. •AP

who was born after the murder.

Sheikh has been in custody since 2002. The seven-year prison sentence will be counted as served as he has been in prison for 18 years. The incident came three years after Sheikh, along with Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was

released by India in 1999 and given safe passage to Afghanistan in exchange for the nearly 150 passengers of hijacked Indian Airlines Flight 814. He was serving a prison term in India for kidnappings of Western tourists in the country.

Pearl was *Wall Street Journal*’s South Asia Bureau Chief. He was working on a story about links between religious extremists in Karachi and ‘show-bomber’ Richard Reid, who tried to blow up a passenger plane.

Pearl went missing in January 2002 from Karachi. A month later, a video of his beheading was delivered to the U.S. Consulate in Karachi.

(With PTI inputs)

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