

5 THE OUTBREAK NATION

Some anxious moments, but grid holds up

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

IN THE run-up to the 9-minute lights-off exercise, the frequency of the synchronised grid plummeted briefly below the mandated lower range of 49.9 hertz — falling to its lowest point of 49.73 hertz at 8.49 pm, and causing some anxious moments among those manning the country's electricity grid.

This slide in frequency, in part, reflected the transition orchestrated by grid manager POSOCO in India's power generation mix — hydro generation being reduced "and conserved" for providing flexibility for the 9 pm event, and major thermal stations also being ramped down progressively, in anticipation of the fall in load.

While there was never really a point during the entire episode that seriously threatened the grid's operations, a point of concern was that frequency drifted steadily upwards over the 9-minute period, and ended at 50.3 hertz at 9.09 pm — marking a frequency jerk of around 0.57 hertz over a span of a little over 20 minutes.

An official involved in the exercise said the frequency was reduced to 49.73 Hz just before 9 pm in an effort to ensure that it did

GRID FREQUENCY ON APRIL 5

8.30pm	50.01Hz
8.49pm	49.73Hz
8.54pm	49.94Hz
8.59pm	50.03Hz
9.04pm	50.2Hz
9.09pm	50.27Hz
9.14pm	50.13Hz
9.19pm	50.19Hz
9.24pm	50.19Hz
9.29pm	50.11Hz
9.34pm	50.12Hz

not overshoot when the lights were switched off at 9 pm.

"During the 9 minute period the frequency was steadily ramped up to 50.3 Hz by 9.09 pm so that it doesn't dip low when the lights are back. That seems to have worked," the official said.

The gradual ramping up of hydro and gas-based generation post 9 pm ensured that the drop in the load and subsequent load increase over the next 9 minutes was handled by the grid operators without any significant problems. How much load reduction took place could not be ascertained and the National Load Despatch Centre data compiling the trend was awaited at the time of going to press.

Modi dials ex-PMs and CMs: 'He asked for cooperation'

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi Sunday reached out to his predecessors Manmohan Singh and H D Deve Gowda, former Presidents Pranab Mukherjee and Pratibha Patil, and a host of chief ministers and Opposition leaders, including Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, seeking their cooperation for the measures that his government is taking to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

"He told me that the country is facing such a serious threat and he wants the cooperation of all to overcome this problem. He said that his government is trying to the best of its ability, and that senior leaders should extend your cooperation to overcome the crisis," Gowda told *The Indian Express*.

"I had made a suggestion to him few days back to look after the agricultural workers, landless workers, construction workers... I said you are taking certain decisions, do you best you can to fight corona," Gowda said.

Modi did not indicate whether the government plans to lift the lockdown after the 21-day period, he said. The former prime minister, however, did not appear too happy with the government's response to the crisis. "The country is facing a critical situation. I don't want to mix politics. There are so many issues, which is going to



PM Modi lights a lamp during the 9-minute exercise. ANI

crop up. The way in which they are ordering for ventilators, the kits... we need so many kits. Even America is getting from China, the situation is not being properly handled," he said.

Congress sources said Sonia Gandhi drew the Prime Minister's attention to the multiple letters

that she and her son Rahul Gandhi had written to him in the recent days. The Prime Minister assured that he will look into them.

"Mrs Gandhi drew his attention to the letters that she and Rahul had written suggesting a complete architecture to deal with the COVID pandemic. She also told

the Prime Minister that we will support the government in every endeavour. The suggestions are basically two-pronged — how to deal with the health emergency and the economic crisis," sources said.

Modi, meanwhile, also spoke over phone with SP veteran and former Union minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and son Akhilesh Yadav, DMK chief M K Stalin, Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Odisha Chief Minister and BJD leader Naveen Patnaik, Telangana Chief Minister and TRS chief K Chandrashekar Rao and SAD chief Parkash Singh Badal.

The conversation comes ahead of his scheduled meeting with leaders of political parties Wednesday through video conferencing.

Sources said Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will attend the meeting with the Prime Minister.

Modi's call to Sonia comes at a time when the Congress is increasingly turning critical of the government's response to the outbreak — and today's reachout is perhaps the first in several years.

Modi had met Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi in November 2015 in an attempt to break the deadlock over the Goods and Services Tax Bill.

Don't need theatrics, give stimulus to economy, says Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

EVEN AS Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephonic conversation with Congress president Sonia Gandhi and sought her party's cooperation in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the opposition party on Sunday pointed out shortcomings in the government's response to the outbreak.

Senior party leader Anand Sharma said that "theatrics is not a substitute for concrete action" and demanded that India commit 5 to 6 per cent of its GDP as a stimulus to restart the economy.

Addressing the media, Congress spokesperson Sushmita Dey said lighting lamps alone will not help with the war against coronavirus and demanded answers from the government on the safety of health workers. She claimed there is a shortage of adequate protective gear, and maintained that lifting of the nationwide lockdown should not be done in an unplanned manner, as it was implemented.

Sharma focused more on the economy, arguing that "time is running out to prevent a grave and prolonged economic crisis." He said: "Bold measures and sector-specific stimulus alone can save the economy from threatened collapse. The first package was small and far too inadequate for economic revival. Fiscal deficit and inflation cannot be a consideration. These should be kept in abeyance. India should commit 5-6 per cent of its GDP for a stimulus to be meaningful and effective. Extraordinary situation calls for more than ordinary response."

Sharma pointed out that the US and major European countries have announced huge economic packages, which include cash transfers, central bank injections, spending pledges and loan guarantees. Arguing that revival of economic activity is now essential, as millions have lost wages and jobs, he asked the government to announce a staggered "unlocking plan for factories and businesses" and restoration of interstate movement of cargo containers.

Govt asks BHU V-C to explain absence from campus amid pandemic

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

THE UNION HRD Ministry has asked the vice-chancellor (V-C) of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) to explain his absence from the campus given the gravity of the coronavirus outbreak even as the BHU hospital is designated for COVID-19 testing and treatment.

Vice-Chancellor Rakesh Bhatnagar has not been in BHU since March 14.

The ministry discovered this during a video-conference with all university heads on Saturday. A showcause notice seeking an explanation was issued to Bhatnagar the same day.

Bhatnagar told *The Indian Express*: "There were four meetings in Delhi on different dates - from March 14 to 19 - and I was attending all those meetings. (While in Delhi) I felt cold and feverish. Suspecting that I was infected (with COVID-19), I decided to stay back in Delhi and quarantine myself."

By the time he recovered, the V-C said, the lockdown was implemented and he couldn't travel to Varanasi.

"Whether I am in Banaras or Delhi it doesn't matter, as I was working from home using communication technology," he said.

During Saturday's meeting, HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal is learned to have asked how the BHU V-C is managing such a large campus from Delhi. Bhatnagar is a professor at JNU and was appointed the BHU head in April 2018.

Bhatnagar has a week to respond to the notice.



A walk-through disinfectant tunnel in Hubbali, Karnataka. PTI

GUJARAT 14-month-old boy youngest case in state

Rajkot: A 14-month-old child, son of a migrant labourer couple from Uttar Pradesh, tested positive for coronavirus in Jamnagar district on Sunday, making him the first COVID-19 case in district and the youngest to be infected in Gujarat. The baby is in a critical condition and on ventilator; Jamnagar District Collector Ravi Shankar said in a video on Sunday, appealing to the people in the neighbourhood to stay indoors. The total cases in Gujarat are now 128. ENS

HP Facing 'social boycott', man kills self

Shimla: A 37-year-old man killed himself in Una district on Sunday after allegedly facing "social boycott" by some villagers, who suspected him to be suffering from COVID-19 despite testing negative for it. Mohammad Dilshad committed hanged himself under a shed at his residence in Bangarh village. Una Sadar SHO Darshan Singh said Dilshad was one of the contacts of a Tablighi Jamaat member who had returned from New Delhi. PTI

BIHAR Bajrang Dal worker held for rumours

Patna: A Bajrang Dal worker in Munger was arrested Sunday for spreading rumours that members of a Tarapur family had attended the Tablighi Jamaat meet in Delhi, and that one of them had tested positive for COVID-19. Authorities clarified that no member of the family was on the list of Tablighi Jamaat attendees from Bihar, and dismissed social media rumours of a person testing positive from Tarapur. Gautam Singh Kushwaha, a district-level Bajrang Dal functionary, had on Saturday posted the rumours on on Facebook. ENS

J&K Hours after death, man tests negative

Jammu: Twelve hours after his death at a quarantine facility in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur town, a 100-year-old man was tested negative on Sunday. The deceased was asymptomatic. He and his brother were shifted to a quarantine facility after they came in contact with a person in Magheni village who tested positive for the coronavirus, said Udhampur Deputy Commissioner Piyush Singla. Meanwhile, Udhampur district, which had reported nine positive cases so far, saw 45 samples testing negative during the day. ENS

NSO, Israeli firm that built spyware Pegasus, testing corona tracker

SEEMA CHISHTI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

THE ISRAELI technology company NSO Group, whose surveillance tool Pegasus was used last year to spy on at least 1,400 mobile phones and devices including those used by human rights activists, lawyers and journalists in India, is testing software to track the novel coronavirus pandemic sweeping through the globe.

"The use of technology in a medical context to monitor the spread of the coronavirus raises concerns about privacy. But using it properly and proportionately will not compromise privacy and can really save lives," Shalev Hulio, founder and CEO of the NSO Group, has written in an opinion piece in an Israeli online publication that has been linked on the company's website.

"All that is needed for a reliable and simple epidemiological investigation is - with the knowledge of the patient - to access cel-

lular companies' data and understand where the patient had been in the previous 14 days," Hulio wrote in the article that first appeared online on March 23.

"It is important to appreciate that the historical information for each mobile subscription is already and routinely available to the cellular companies.

"This information only includes cellular locations for that subscription and does not require any collection of information from the device itself.

"In other words, with the exception of retrieving the historical location of the device, there is no listening in on calls and no data, personal information or messages that exist on the device can be gathered," he said.

"The decision", Hulio wrote, has been "approved by the Israeli government". It allows the (Israeli) Ministry of Health to obtain "two critical pieces of data to help stem the spread of the virus - locating the places where those patients have been and mapping the people who were in their

vicinity", he said. "Through mapping the path of the patient, we can see the people around them and they can be directly alerted." After the analysis has been completed, the government will have a "fairly accurate statistic of the number of people who were in the vicinity of verified patients" - however, at this stage "without any personal information or identification".

The next step would be to "send a message to people with a high potential for infection who were in the vicinity of the patient and ask them to go into self-isolation". This, Hulio said, would allow the authorities to build a "tree of infection" - important because medical officials are currently "struggling to track source of infection for a number of patients".

Over the past few days, multiple tech websites have quoted unnamed sources and those claiming to have seen a demo of the tracking system, as saying that several governments and agencies around the world have car-

ried out test runs of the NSO's coronavirus tracking software.

The NSO Group has not denied these reports. An email sent to the company by *The Indian Express* was not answered.

Pegasus used a security vulnerability in the world's most popular messaging app, WhatsApp, "to send malware to approximately 1,400 mobile phones and devices ('Target Devices') for the purpose of conducting surveillance of specific WhatsApp users ('Target Users')", according to a lawsuit filed in the US last year.

WhatsApp confirmed to *The Indian Express* (October 31, 2019) that it was aware that journalists, lawyers and human rights activists in India were targeted for surveillance, and that it had contacted each of these "targets". The NSO Group says it sells only to governments and institutional buyers and there were calls for an inquiry into the purchase of the Pegasus spyware from the governments of Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra.

4 Kerala expats lose corona battle in 24 hrs

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 5

IN ITS devastating journey from one country to another, COVID-19 has so far claimed the lives of eight expatriates from Kerala, four of them on Sunday.

According to information reaching here, a nurse from Kottayam, who was settled in Ireland; a Malappuram youth who worked in Saudi Arabia as a driver; and a 51-year-old from Idukki, who worked with metropolitan transport authority in New York, died on Sunday.

On Sunday, the virus also claimed the life of a 21-year-old student belonging to an expatriate family in New York.

Beena George, 58, a nurse, was settled in Ireland for two decades with her family. A cancer patient, she was tested positive for COVID-19 two days ago. Her husband and daughter are under isolation, a relative in Kottayam said.

In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, P Safwan, 37, died on Sunday after being in hospital for five days. From the hospital, he had sent a voice clip to a relative in Malappuram, expressing his helplessness in fighting acute

breathing troubles and fever.

On Saturday, a youth named Shabanas, a native of Kannur, had died in Saudi Arabia's Medina. He had been hospitalised with symptoms of COVID-19 on March 28.

On Sunday, Shone Abraham, 21, who belonged to a Kerala family settled in New York, died after battling the virus for four days.

A native of Idukki, E Thankachan, 51, also died in New York, where he worked with the metropolitan transport authority. Relatives at Thodupuzha in Idukki were informed on Saturday that Thankachan, settled in New York for two decades,

had contracted the virus. Last week, another expatriate Thomas David, 43, who also worked with the same transport authority in New York, also died. He hailed from Kerala's Pathanamthitta district.

Another expatriate who lost the battle to the disease was Kunjamma Samuel, 85, who came from Ernakulam. She died in New Jersey last week.

In Birmingham, England, retired expatriate doctor Pachiri Hamsa, 80, died on April 1. A native of Malappuram district, Hamsa was undergoing treatment for the infection for several days.

Visits, time spent at retailers down 77%; at workplaces 47%: data

SUSHANT SINGH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

TRACKING CHANGE following measures implemented to check COVID-19, Community Mobility Reports, prepared by Google on the basis of data used in its products, show a huge decline in visits and length of stay at retail and recreation sites, grocery stores and pharmacies, parks, public transport hubs and workplaces. These reports, on the other hand, show a marked increase in mobility trend to the place of residence.

According to the report with data as of March 29, mobility trends — visits and length of stay — for places like restaurants, cafes, shopping centres, theme parks, museums, libraries, and movie theatres have gone down by 77 per cent from the baseline. This is on anticipated lines since all recreation sites, restaurants and cafes have been shut down after the government announced a three-week lockdown, starting March 24 midnight.

The baseline for the report — to make the comparison with the latest data — is the median value for the corresponding day

of the week, during the 5-week period from January 3 to February 6.

The report charts movement trends over time in India, across different categories of places such as retail and recreation, groceries and pharmacies, parks, transit stations, workplaces, and residential areas. It is useful in understanding the impact of government's measures on social distancing efforts as well as access to essential services.

Incidentally, there has been only a 47 per cent decline in visits and stay for workplaces, despite the lockdown period forc-

ing most companies to adopt work-from-home measures for their staff. Offices involved in essential duties and factories producing essential goods, however, have been exempt from these measures during the lockdown period.

Even though the lockdown exempted these as essential services, there is a 65 per cent decline in the visits and length of stay to places like grocery markets, food warehouses, farmers markets, speciality food shops, drug stores, and pharmacies, as on March 29.

Mobility trends for places like

national parks, public beaches, marinas, dog parks, plazas, and public gardens, which have all been shut during the lockdown, show a decline of only 57 per cent.

There is a 71 per cent decline in visits and stay for places like public transport hubs such as metros, bus and train stations, as per the Google report. Most public transport hubs have been closed for the lockdown, although certain public transport facilities have been kept functional for transporting staff on essential duties.

Mobility trends for places of

residence have gone up by 22 per cent during the lockdown, compared to the baseline period. This is on expected lines during the lockdown period, where the whole country has been brought to a halt to check the spread of COVID-19.

According to Google, these insights have been calculated based on data from users who have opted-in to Location History for their Google account, so the data represents only a sample of our users. This, Google says, may or may not represent the exact behaviour of a wider population.