

IN BRIEF

15 Dubai passengers flee from airport, traced

MUMBAI  
Fifteen passengers, who were given 'home quarantine' stamp on hands after their arrival in Mumbai from Dubai on Sunday, fled from the airport without informing the authorities, but were later found outside a railway station, police said. The passengers were planning to go to Punjab by train. PTT

Pollution watch

FORECAST TODAY (AQI*)	
Bhandup	73
Colaba	83
Malad	76
Mazagaon	51
Worli	57
Borivali	70
BKC	152
Chembur	68
Andheri	90
Navi Mumbai	89

  

*AIR QUALITY INDEX	
Good 0-50	Satisfactory 51-100
Poor 201-300	Very poor 301-400
Moderate 101-200	Severe 401-500

  

IN MAJOR CITIES			
	PM10	PM2.5	AVG.
Mumbai	59	35	70
Delhi	121	63	108
Pune	49	76	63
Ahmedabad	108	65	105

# Senior citizen denied hospital admission over virus fears

Spokesperson cites realigning of ICUs and beds as reason

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

The family of a 70-year-old person from Kalyan who was suffering from breathlessness, fever and throat pain, has alleged that he was refused entry by a leading private hospital as his symptoms were akin to that of COVID-19.

The patient's son alleged that his father was made to sit in their vehicle for nearly an hour and was later taken to a "safe room" near the security guards' cabin outside the hospital, where he was provided medication through intravenous fluids. The family's trauma did not end there. A driver of the ambulance that was called by the hospital staff also refused to ferry the senior citizen to a government hospital. Another ambulance had to be called in to shift the patient.

According to the patient's 26-year-old son, the incident took place on March 17 at the P.D. Hinduja Hospital in Mahim. "My father had nasal congestion and cough. Since he started having difficulty in breathing, we rushed him to a private hospital in Kalyan where the doctors said he could be ailing from COVID-19 and referred us to the government-run Rukminibai



Scary situation: A hoarding in the city advises citizens not to panic about the coronavirus pandemic. PPT

Hospital. The doctors at Rukminibai gave him an injection and referred us to Kasturba Hospital for the COVID-19 test," he said.

The senior citizen had no history of international travel, but he had been to Bengaluru, Mangaluru and Tirupati over the past one month for religious rituals. "When we drove all the way to Kasturba Hospital, we were told that he was not indicated for the COVID-19 test as he had no history of international travel or contact with a posi-

tive patient," the son said, adding that he then drove his father to Hinduja Hospital.

"At the Hinduja Hospital, they refused to take us in. I showed them the medical paper from Kasturba Hospital but they still insisted that he could be a COVID-19 patient," he said. The patient was eventually taken to the KEM Hospital, where the doctors diagnosed pneumonia and started treatment. The family shifted him to Hiranandani Hospital the next

day. "He is out of the intensive care unit (ICU) and recovering well now," the son said.

The contagious novel coronavirus has posed a challenge for all hospitals as any positive patient walking into their premises could be a threat to other patients, who already have compromised immunity. Hinduja Hospital has been extra cautious as it had recently admitted a 64-year-old person with a heart ailment who later tested positive for COVID-19. While the patient succumbed after being shifted to Kasturba Hospital, eight hospital staff members who came in contact with the patient have since been in isolation, while many others have been advised home quarantine.

A Hinduja Hospital spokesperson said that after the detection of a COVID-19 case at the hospital on March 12, they had been realigning ICUs and beds for the safety of patients and their treatment of as per guidelines. "The patient arrived with severe respiratory issues and needed ICU care, which was not possible at that time in view of the realignment. Therefore, the patient was attended to, stabilised and then referred to other hospital," the spokesperson said.

# Four pvt. labs get approval to carry out COVID-19 tests

16 more in pipeline; names to be added within the week

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

Four private laboratories – Thyrocare, Suburban Diagnostics, Metropolis Healthcare Ltd. and HN Reliance Foundation Hospital – have received approval from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to carry out COVID-19 tests. At least 16 more laboratories are in the pipeline for approval and more names will be added to the list within this week.

Dr. Sujata Baweja, head of microbiology, Sion hospital, who is coordinating with the private labs said at least 20 had applied for approval. "The approvals are in the process as the government is looking at scaling up the testing facilities. Within this week a majority of them will get the approval and will start testing," she said.

Dr. Baweja said all laboratories will use their own kits. The ICMR has said the price of the test cannot exceed ₹4,500 and urged private players to offer free or subsidised testing.

Earlier, the State government had on Saturday issued an advisory to private hospitals asking them to postpone non-emergency services and prepare isolation wards in view of the outbreak of the virus.

(With inputs from PTT)

### PRIVATE TESTING FACILITIES

- Thyrocare Mumbai
- Suburban Diagnostics
- Metropolis Healthcare Ltd
- Sir H.N. Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre

### PUBLIC TESTING FACILITIES IN MAHARASHTRA

- National Institute of Virology, Pune
- Armed Forces Medical College, Pune
- BJ Medical College, Pune
- Kasturba Hospital, Mumbai
- KEM Hospital, Mumbai
- Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur

### WHO SHOULD BE TESTED

- Individuals who have undertaken international travel in the last 14 days should be tested only if they become symptomatic (fever, cough, difficulty in breathing)
- All symptomatic contacts of laboratory confirmed cases
- All asymptomatic health care workers
- All hospitalised patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (fever AND cough and/or shortness of breath)
- Asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of a confirmed case should be tested once between day 5 and day 14 of coming in his/her contact
- Direct and high-risk contacts include those who live in the same household with a confirmed case and healthcare workers who examined a confirmed case without adequate protection as per WHO recommendations

# Mumbai Bagh protests suspended

Women agree to restrict protest to online space; police say structure will stay

GAUTAM S. MENGLE  
GAREEMA BANGAD  
MUMBAI

Close to two months after it began, the Mumbai Bagh protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register was temporarily suspended on Sunday in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

The protest, which was modelled on Shaheen Bagh in Delhi, started on the night of January 26 on Morland Road in Mumbai Central and has continued on a relay basis since then. On Sunday, shortly after the Mumbai Police issued orders declaring a lockdown in the city, senior police officers held a meeting with the organisers of the protest on its 56th day.

It was decided that the structure set up at the protest venue as well as the chairs placed for the convenience of the women would



Careful agitation: Women at Mumbai Bagh maintain social distance on Sunday afternoon, before the protest was called off. EMMANUEL YOGINI

be allowed to stand. Also, the police would not summon for inquiries or bother any of the women till the crisis had passed. The protesters, too, agreed that nothing was to be gained by putting each other at risk.

"We may have differences with the government on the CAA, NRC and NPR, but we are with them in the fight against COVID-19. All the protesters at Mumbai Bagh are withdrawing due to the coronavirus pandemic and

the imposition of Section 144 in the State. A symbolic protest will continue online and the physical protest will resume after the crisis is behind us," said Rubaid Ali Bhojani, who has been part of the protest since the beginning.

# BMC to take testing facilities to homes

Corporation aims to ease load on Kasturba, prevent further infections

TANVI DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will be giving at-home COVID-19 testing services so as to ease the load on Kasturba Hospital, where people with flu-like symptoms are queuing up by the dozen.

If a doctor has advised a patient to undergo testing, the BMC or affiliated private hospitals will collect the sample from the patient's home. Kasturba Hospital is the city's only infectious diseases public hospital. As on Friday, it had received 3,682 people in the COVID-19 outpatient department. Private practitioners refer 60% of the patients to the hospital without taking their travel history. Often, the patients come to get themselves tested. Doctors on the front line say such referrals put people at unnecessary risk.

Municipal Commissioner



Kasturba Hospital has so far received 3,682 people in its COVID-19 outpatient department. PRASHANT NAKWE

Praveen Pardeshi said the BMC will soon start an at-home testing facility.

"All private laboratories or those belonging to hospitals that have been registered with NIV, Pune, will set up a van. We are setting up a dedicated helpline," he said. If a person feels he or she has COVID-19 symptoms, they need to talk to the team of doctors on the helpline and if the doctors feel their case

is justified, a team of municipal doctors or those who have extended support to the BMC will collect a swab, he said. "If the sample tests positive, the patient will be moved to an isolation centre."

The BMC will enlist the help of the 40 doctors released from airport duty, now that no international flights are landing in the city. "As of today, 800 people

are queuing up outside Kasturba Hospital while they have 100 COVID-19 patients to look after," Mr. Pardeshi said. In Italy, he said, the doctors were also infected and their hospital system collapsed. "When patients come to a hospital, everyone is exposed. Instead, a person wearing protective equipment will collect the sample from their homes."

This, he said, will reduce the load on Kasturba and prevent people from commuting to the hospital. The facility will also be used for collecting swab samples of those in home quarantine.

**Cop admitted for testing**  
Meanwhile, a police official posted on duty at Kasturba Hospital was admitted for COVID-19 testing on Sunday after he developed throat irritation. The 22-year-old had been posted in the hospital for the last five days. His reports are awaited.

# All quiet in the city that never sleeps



All in a day: (Clockwise from above) The Bachchan family joins the initiative to applaud essential service workers; Marine Drive is deserted during Janata Curfew; the lockdown leaves arriving passengers stranded at the domestic airport; police cordon off Western Express Highway at Kandivali for vehicles coming into the city after Section 144 is imposed.

VIJAY BATE PRASHANT NAKWE ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY AADESH CHOUDHARI



# BMC announces special buses for municipal employees

Closure of locals, BEST had essential service providers worried

TANVI DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

With the Centre announcing suspension of suburban trains and Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking buses shutting down, several municipal employees were in a fix about how they would get to work on Monday.

The civic body provides essential services such as water supply, sewage disposal, solid waste management, municipal hospitals, pest control officers and the fire brigade to citizens. Municipal unions said most employees come from far away suburbs such as Panvel, Ulwe, Badlapur and Virar. They said Saturday's decision to allow trains to run with only these employees on board was better than a complete ban.

Milind Ranade, secretary of Kachra Vahtuk Shramik Sangh said, "Most conservancy workers live in the farthest corners of the city and have to report at their motor loading chowkies. We have no idea how they will get to work."

However, their worries



Deserted: A lone passenger on a platform at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus on Sunday. PRASHANT NAKWE

were put to rest by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's announcement that BEST and State transport buses will now be used to ferry these municipal employees.

A joint action plan has been created to ferry municipal employees, police personnel and bank employees. As per this plan, Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) buses will ferry those living outside municipal limits up to a cer-

tain point within municipal limit. For example, employees living in Asangaon, Badlapur, Kalyan will be dropped at Thane station. From this point, the employees can take a BEST bus, which will drop them at their workplace. The MSRTC has set aside 540 buses for this. Private hospital staff, pharmacy employees, grocery shop staffers, and telephone and electricity company staffers can also avail this service.