

Pune, western Maharashtra at standstill

Residential societies respond to 'Janata Curfew'; number of positive cases reaches 27 in Pune district

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Pune, along with other districts in western Maharashtra and Marathwada, came to a standstill during the 'Janata Curfew', while the number of COVID-19 positive cases in Pune rose to 27 on Sunday.

The total number of patients in the city is at 15, while in Pune district, it is at 27. The remaining 12 cases in the district are from Pimpri-Chinchwad.

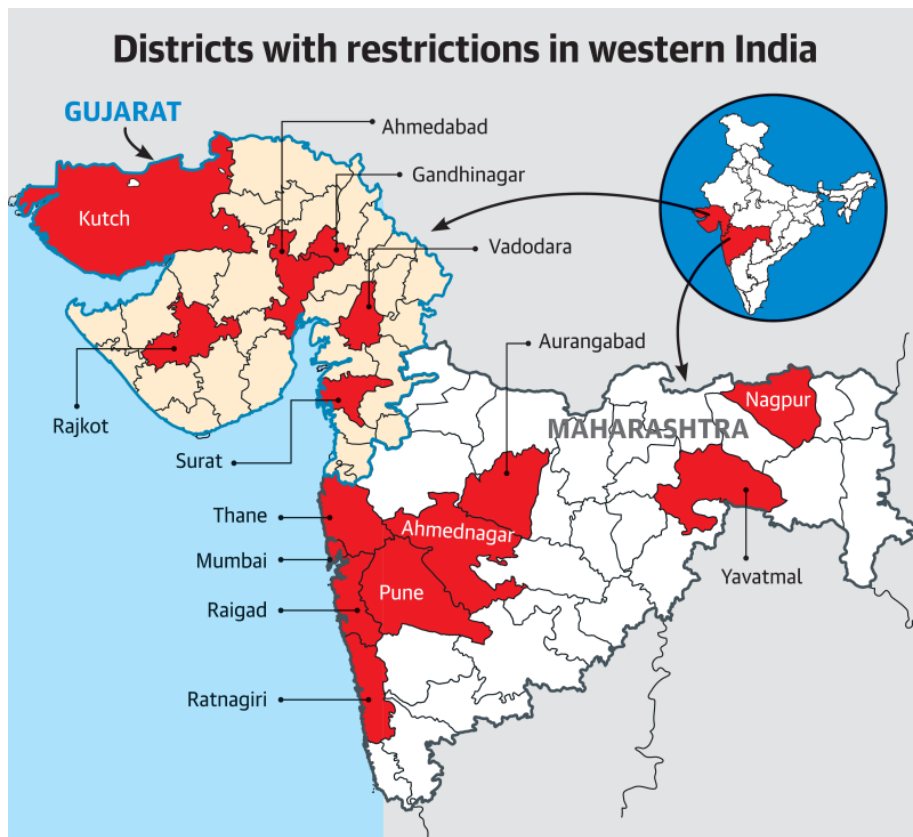
On Saturday, a 41-year-old Pune woman with no history of foreign travel tested positive for the virus and is on ventilator support at the city's Bharti Hospital. Four of her close relatives have al-

COVID-19

so tested positive, said district authorities.

There are 55 patients undergoing treatment in hospitals in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. Of them, 27 have tested positive while the remaining 28 are still awaited from the National Institute of Virology (NIV).

"Till date, 466 patients have been admitted to Pune's Naidu Hospital while 121 are in Pimpri-Chinchwad's Y.C.M. Hospital and a further 16 are at D.H. Hospital in Aundh. From this total of 603 admissions, 548 have been discharged till now; 55



are being treated at the moment, of whom 27 have tested positive for COVID-19," said an official from Pune zilla parishad's health department.

He said, till date, 3,214 passengers who had arrived from the affected countries had been quarantined. Of them, 821 had completed their 14-day observation period while 2,393 were still in quarantine. District authorities also said around one lakh homes across Pune dis-

trict had been covered by home surveillance teams. A total of 3,32,897 residents were screened, of whom 18 had been referred to Naidu Hospital.

'Eerie calm' Meanwhile, there was an eerie calm on the city's bustling roads as residents isolated themselves within their homes to stave off the COVID-19 scourge.

While citizens in several residential societies res-

ponded energetically to the Prime Minister's call to thank those dispensing essential services by banging plates and blowing conch shells, several more questioned the wisdom behind the move. "A lot of superstitious messages and false information about combating COVID-19 are being spread through WhatsApp and other social media," said a resident from a housing society in the city. The messages say making noise by banging

plates and blowing conch shells on your balcony will make the virus go away, and "imply that following the 'Janata Curfew' is enough and that they can stop practising 'social distancing' after that," he said.

With the gravity of the COVID-19 contagion gradually sinking in, few vehicles were seen on the usually clogged Mumbai-Pune expressway which was serene even at its most congested junctions like Amrutanjan Bridge and Bhore Ghat.

Robust police deployment was in place to enforce the curfew with stray two-wheeler riders driven off the streets and sent back to their homes.

With a lockdown officially announced in the State, only up to 400 buses of the Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal fleet of 1,700 will run in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad from Monday to ferry only people dispensing essential services like doctors, municipal cleaners, and other staff. The curfew witnessed a similarly enthusiastic response in Kolhapur and Sangli districts in western Maharashtra as well as in Marathwada.

The Sangli district administration has already sealed its borders with Karnataka and stopped inter-State bus services in a bid to contain the spread of the virus.

Mumbai's local trains to remain shut till March 31

State transport, BEST buses to ferry people providing essential services at three key changeover points

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

Mumbai's local trains, for the first time in their history, will be shut down for nine days. The decision to close the entire suburban network of the Central Railway (CR) and the Western Railway (WR) was taken as part of a larger decision of the Ministry of Railways to shut all passenger trains across the country until March 31 in a bid to arrest the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The decision came barely 12 hours after the State announced to restrict access to

local trains, the lifeline of the city, by deploying teams at every station to check and permit access only to people who were part of essential services such as the police, or had an emergency. On Sunday, with 'Janata Curfew' in place, trains ran empty, and were operating at approximately 60% capacity. The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) also ran only 1,253 buses of a fleet of over 4,000.

According to a notification released by the Railway Board, all suburban trains across the country and the

services of Kolkata Metro shall be cancelled from midnight of March 22 to midnight of March 31. All long-distance trains on both the CR and the WR will also be shut. Mumbai Metro has also decided to stop its operations during this period.

Mumbai's local trains on an average ferry over 80 lakh people daily, of which thousands work in providing essential services. After the Railway Board's announcement, the State government has put in place a joint 'hub and spoke' action plan with the Maharashtra State Road

Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and BEST. The two services will jointly provide transport to people providing essential services like banks, police, and hospital staff, who live in distant suburbs.

MSRTC will arrange for buses at five-minute intervals from key stations in the outer suburbs to three key changeover points - Borivali station (East), Khopat in Thane, and Vashi station, on the Western Line, Central Line, and Harbour Line, respectively. BEST will operate buses from these changeov-

er points to various locations in the city. The entire operations will only be available for persons engaged in providing essential services.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has listed all police and BMC officials, staff associated with hospitals and pharmacy stores as well as staff of telephone and internet providers and electricity distribution companies - BEST, Adani Electricity Mumbai Limited (AEML), and Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited - as essential services.

10 samples sent for testing in Amravati

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMRAVATI

Samples of four people sent for novel coronavirus testing from Amravati on Saturday returned negative, while 10 new samples were sent on Sunday, health officials said.

So far 47 sample sent from the district have tested negative. Another 214 people who returned from cities like Mumbai and Pune have been advised home quarantine, they said.

'Janata Curfew' as well as the 5 p.m. tribute to frontline health and essential services staff got an overwhelming response in the district. Roads were deserted in Amravati and Badnera cities, and shops were closed from 7 a.m..

Meanwhile, one person was admitted to the district civil hospital in Nashik for suspected exposure to coronavirus while the samples of four others, who were admitted on Saturday, returned negative, health officials said.

They said 44 of the 297 people who arrived from coronavirus-affected regions had completed their 14-day observation period, while 253 people were surveyed for symptoms on Sunday.

So far, samples of 55 people have been sent for testing, with 54 returning negative, while the report of one is awaited.

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Sena, NCP ask MPs to skip budget session

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Sunday directed their MPs not to attend the ongoing budget session of Parliament in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Request all MPs of NCP - LS & RS not to go back to Delhi. Please stay where you are and assist Govt Agencies help citizens to fight #Coronavirus pandemic," party president Sharad Pawar tweeted.

Late in the night, Sena leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut said in a tweet that party MPs would not be present in Parliament from Monday.

"Keeping the Covid-19 situation in mind, all ShivSena MPs won't be attending Parliament from today. The decision has been taken by our Party Chief and honourable CM Uddhav Thackeray for helping the government to fight this Pandemic. @CMO-Maharashtra @narendramodi," he tweeted.

The NCP and the Sena are second and third regional parties to do so after Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee issued similar instructions to its party leaders.

An NCP MP from Lok Sabha, who did not wish to be named, said it is deplorable

on part of the Union government to not call off the budget session. "We have several State governments, including that of Maharashtra, which have abruptly ended their budget session due to the spread of COVID-19. At any given point, more than 1,500 people are in presence in Parliament and when Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is advocating social distancing, it was the responsibility of the Centre to cancel the session last week."

The NCP leader also said that a number of senior MPs had requested Mr. Modi to take business of 'vote on account' last Tuesday itself.

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