

4 THE CITY



TOTAL CASES 5,89,544		Total		Vacant
		HOSPITAL BEDS	18,866	12,521
		VENTILATORS	1,531	456
	Daily cases	Recoveries	Deaths	Tests
Dec 4	4,067	4,862	73	85,003
Dec 5	3,419	4,916	77	81,473
Total	26,678*	5,53,292	9,574	66,67,176

Total active cases



At Singhu, Saturday; (right) trucks wait to cross Mukarba Chowk. Photos: Praveen Khanna



30-40% IMPACT; INVENTORY DOWN AT AZADPUR MANDI

Stir enters Day 10, vehicle flow in & out of city down

ANANYA TIWARI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

VEHICULAR TRAFFIC in and out of the capital has reduced by 30-40 per cent since farmers began their protest at the borders, which could have an effect on Delhi's commerce, officials say.

"Vehicular traffic of all kinds passing through Delhi's toll plazas has seen a significant reduction by 30-40 per cent," a senior official at the South MCD told *The Indian Express*.

This, the official said, is based on data from the RFID system at 13 toll booths — from where 80 per cent of vehicles pass through — to deduct toll and Environment Compensation Charges automatically from commercial vehicles.

Delhi's routes to Haryana at the borders are open at Dhansa, Daurala, Kapashera, Rajokri NH-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundahera, the Delhi Traffic Police tweeted Saturday. On the Uttar Pradesh side, the Chilla border on Noida Link Road and Ghazipur border on NH-24 were closed, with NH-24, Apsara, Bhopra and DND open to traffic.

J P Sinha, member of the All India Transporters Welfare Association, said, "Delhi is a hub, a stoppage point where goods to and from north India pass. The trucks have had to come from longer routes through UP, adding to the costs of transportation as well as increasing the time."

Atul Bhargava, president of New Delhi Traders' Association at Connaught Place, said, "Right now, we are not facing any such issues. We are doing alright."

Rajeev Batra, member of the National Conveners for Toys and a trader at Chandni Chowk's cycle market, said, "For the next few days, we can manage, since our goods are not perishable... Once scarcity of goods begins, it will affect business as transportation cost will increase." Adeel Ahmed, chairperson of Azadpur Mandi, said, "We are getting 50 per cent of the regular supply. There has been no fluctuation in price."

Industry groups said they are not facing major issues at present. Arun Popli, president of the Okhla Chamber Industries, said, "The industries here are not facing any obstacles due to the protests."

Manmohan Mehra, general secretary of the Patparganj FIE Entrepreneurs' Association, said, "As it is business is low — we are not facing any issues. Besides, being near UP, we are fine."

Virus shadow looms but few takers for masks, Covid test at protest site



Praveen Khanna

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

MEDICINES TO cure diarrhoea, cold and fever are finding many takers at makeshift medical camps dotting the highway. Face masks, hand gloves and sanitisers, though, remain largely untouched. And three teams deputed to collect nasal swabs do not have much to do either.

A walk through the encampments of farmers at Delhi's Singhu border quickly makes it apparent that the protesters, young and old, are mindful of the looming harsh winters. But the threat of Covid-19 is far less apparent.

For protesting farmers, the fight against the new agricultural laws, which they say threaten to upend their way of life, clearly outweighs fears of a viral disease. But at the gathering, one of the largest since the pandemic, another view prevails among several protesters — misinformation about the disease and mistrust against the government. "There is no such thing as coronavirus. It is all a hoax whipped by the authorities to curb all forms of resistance," said Avatar Singh (72) who hails from Mohali district.

The sentiment is echoed even by the young. Said 22-year-old Amandeep Singh from Patiala who reached Singhu on a scooter with his friend: "For the government, coronavirus is a way to make money as the World Health Organisation sanctions Rs 3 lakh for every Covid-positive patient."

On Saturday, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar made an appeal that the elderly and children leave the protest site and return home.

Tarsem Singh, a resident of Gurdaspur, came looking for a medicine at a camp run by the Haryana Red Cross Society, complaining of diarrhoea. "I have a cough as well but the diarrhoea is troubling me more," he said. Asked if he fears his symptoms could be linked to the viral disease, he said: "I believe corona is a bogey pushed by the government to crush such movements."

Om Pal, who manages the camp, said the majority of those turning up for medicines are complaining of a cold and an upset stomach, a view shared by Dalbir Singh, who is attached with a camp run by a group of Sikh volunteers.



At Singhu border. For protesting farmers, the fight against the new agricultural laws appears to outweigh fears of a viral disease. Amit Mehra

These camps also maintain a register containing names, contact details and health complaints of every person collecting medicines.

Dinesh Chillar, a senior official with the Sonapat administration, told *The Indian Express* that three teams have been deputed to the site to collect samples to test for Covid, but no swab has been collected so far due to lack of consent.

"We have handed over a list of those who complained of fever and cold to the persons leading the protests so that at least they can be tested and isolated," the official said.

Volunteers of the Khalsa aid were also seen spraying disinfectants to keep mites and mosquitoes at bay.

Various political parties, including the Congress and AAP, are also running langars at the protest site, which was growing in size by the hour as more and more farmers arrived from various parts of Punjab. Indian Youth Congress president Srinivas, who is also camping at the site, said the party is running two bannerless langars, while the AAP said it is running two community kitchens.

The Delhi government has also stationed two medical vans at the venue. However, testing is not being carried out by the government at the moment.

Singh also made arrangements at a gurdwara in Vaishali for at least 30 farmers to bathe every morning: "I could not personally accommodate so many at my home so I reached out to a friend who is a gurdwara pradhan."

Said Gurpreet Atwaa (26), a farmer from Uttarakhand's Rudrapur: "Another lady in the area insisted that she would cook for us. She asked me what I like to eat. I told her *matar-paneer* and the next day, she got it for us."

Help also reached protesters from Kuldeep Singh, who runs a soap business and distributed 250 bottles of shampoo, soap and detergent at the site. "I realised

Some locals open homes, others their purse strings

ASHNA BUTANI &
JIGNASA SINHA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

AT THE crack of dawn daily, at least 25 farmers at Ghazipur border walk till boutique owner Meenu and Rajesh Sharma's home in Vaishali 500 metres away and take a quick shower. The Sharma family has emptied one of their two apartments in the area for farmers to bathe, wash clothes, and charge their phones before they begin their day.

Sandeep Chaudhary (47), a farmer from UP's Rampur, said it was a chance encounter with the Sharmas eight days ago at the site that led to the family opening their home and hearts to strangers. Meenu told *The Indian Express*, "Be it day or night, we will help them with whatever they need. If we don't, despite living so close to the borders, who will?"

At Delhi's borders, there are several glimpses of camaraderie between locals and protesters, with some residents trying to ensure a comfortable stay for farmers. "Everyone cares about us except this government," said Chaudhary. Also at Ghazipur is taxi driver Dalveer Singh (45) from Mayur Vihar Phase III, who is seen walking around the site with a power bank in case anyone needs to charge their phone. He said: "We have food on our plates because of them, so it is our duty to help them when they need us."

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At Singhu border. Amit Mehra

farmers were not able to wash their hair or clothes because they did not pack these items when they left home. Since I have a soap business, I decided to get these bottles made especially for them. One bottle of detergent liquid will be enough to wash around 30-40 clothes," said the Delhi resident.

At Tikri border, though, the going is a little tougher. While several locals opened their homes for farmers at first, some reluctance has now set in. Nishan Singh (45), a farmer from Punjab's Basiyan, said, "The toilet situation is an issue — there are hardly any lodges, hotels nearby. A few locals helped us earlier but now they don't. We go to empty plots or try looking for factories where they might have toilets. Some people now lock the gates of their factories."

There's a porta cabin at the border with five toilets, which are usually dirty and unusable. Gurnaam (50), a farmer from Punjab's Mansa, said he walks to a gurdwara 6 km away daily to take a shower: "I have my truck here and my friends sleep in it. I can't take it out daily." Others find themselves taking a hurried shower on the footpath. "I start preparing meals for my brothers at 5 am, so I fill a bucket with water and take a bath near my tractor... I wish there was a toilet but we have to adjust," said Jagroop (64), a farmer from Mansa.

AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj, who is looking after arrangements for farmers, said the Delhi government has put up 300 mobile toilets at Singhu and 100 at Tikri.

MEANWHILE

Haryana, MP farmers inch closer to city

Gurgaon: Around "50-70" farmers from Madhya Pradesh and Haryana's Palwal and Faridabad districts inched closer to the Delhi border Saturday, a day after they entered Faridabad from Palwal, while their counterparts in Palwal staged a protest on NH-19. Officials said although no new contingent of farmers crossed the Sikri border from Palwal into Faridabad Saturday, farmers who had entered the district Friday made their way deeper into the city on foot, halting at Ajrona. "They have reached Ajrona today where they are going to halt for the night... We will not stop them from crossing the border into Delhi but they cannot do so from Badarpur if they are in vehicles," said Deputy Commissioner Yashpal Yadav.

Chadha visits Singhu border



He distributed fruits among the farmers

New Delhi: AAP MLA Raghav Chadha Saturday visited Singhu border and distributed fruits among farmers protesting against the three farm laws. "Chadha spent the day at the protest site, acting as a 'sewaadar' or serviceman for the farmers," the party said in a statement. **ENS**

Granthi at RK Puram gurdwara hit on the head with tabla, dies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

A MAN who worked as a granthi at a gurdwara in RK Puram was killed while performing kirtan, police said Saturday, adding that the victim, Ravinder Singh, was thrashed with a tabla by the accused, also a granthi.

Both the victim and the accused lived in the staff quarters at the gurdwara. The incident took place on Friday morning, around 8.30 am at the RK Puram Sector 6 gurdwara.

Granthi read the Guru Granth Sahib and are caretakers

of the gurdwara.

Police said Ravinder got into a fight with Darshan, the accused, who allegedly hit him multiple times on the head with a tabla.

The victim's family claimed Darshan was jealous of Ravinder's wealth and his job as he was the head granthi at the gurdwara. He had been working there for the last 16 years.

DCP (Southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said, "Ravinder's wife Maninder Kaur came to save her husband but she was also hit and sustained injuries to her eye. The crime team has inspected the spot and collected evidence."

The couple were rushed to Safdarjung Hospital for treatment and Ravinder succumbed to his injuries Saturday.

The victim's family alleged Darshan had attacked Ravinder a few months ago as well.

"How can a man kill inside the gurdwara? This is not the first time he has attacked my family. A few months ago, we filed a complaint against him when he tried to kill our father. Police came here but the gurdwara committee told us to resolve the issue. They should have removed Darshan from here," alleged Lakhvinder, Ravinder's daughter.

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

WITH DELHI University set to commence its second round of Open Book Examination (OBE) on December 12, tweaks in the exam guidelines have been made to make the process smoother.

This time, the university will be conducting the exam for third- and fifth-semester undergraduate students and third-semester postgraduate students in a "blended mode" — which means students can either opt to write the exam from their homes or their respective colleges,

where ICT facilities will be provided.

According to data shared by university officials of exam forms submitted so far, only 5,700 have opted for the physical mode, while 1,49,345 students have opted for the online mode.

In August, DU had conducted the OBE for final-year undergraduate and post-graduate students completely online, which saw technical glitches, and a second phase of the exam was held in a "blended mode" in September for those who had missed their papers. When results were released, many students found they were marked absent for pa-

pers which they had written.

This time, the university's exam guidelines state that students can only upload and submit their scanned answer sheets through the OBE examination portal. Last time, students could either submit through the portal or send through email, and many students had made multiple submissions of the same paper through both channels.

"We made this decision based on the fact that 92% of the submissions last time had been made on the OBE portal. Through the course of the exams, we had received 5.5 lakh emails which had to be streamlined, segregated and

uploaded to the portal on our end for evaluation; this was a time-consuming process, for which we had to hire 40 additional people. The confusion over students being marked absent was also because of this," said Dean, examination, D S Rawat.

Like last time, students will be given three hours to write their exams and one hour for IT-related activities such as downloading the question paper and scanning and uploading answer sheets. This time, there is an additional window of an hour for submissions in case of technical issues.

Some teachers are also giving students tips on writing the

exam to avoid errors of last time. "Our teachers told us to prepare our answer sheets before the exam by writing our roll numbers on every sheet to prevent confusion. They have also advised us to have someone else with us to scan and convert each completed page into a PDF, while we are still writing the rest of the paper, to save time," said a student of Kalindi College.

Said a teacher in Hindu College, "Till today, we are dealing with errors of last time. This time, there will be two batches of undergraduate students writing the exam instead of one, so the load will be even greater."