

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
(CIVIL ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)

Writ Petition (Civil) No _____ of 2020

IN THE MATTER OF:

HARSH MANDER &AnrPETITIONERS

VERSUS

UNION OF INDIA &AnrRESPONDENTS

ADDITIONAL AFFIDAVIT ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS

I, Harsh Mander, S/o HarMander Singh, R/o C 6 6233, VasantKunj, New Delhi – 110001, do hereby solemnly affirm and state on oath as under:

1. That I am Petitioner No. 1 in the aforementioned writ petition and being familiar with the facts and circumstances of the case, I am competent and authorized to swear this Affidavit. I have also been authorised to file this affidavit on behalf of Petitioner No. 2. That I would like to file certain additional relevant news reports which have an important bearing on the matter in issue and the same are being filed through this additional affidavit.
2. On the day the present petition was filed, during the hearing of an earlier petition relating to some reliefs for migrant workers

(Writ petition no. 468/2020), the government through the Solicitor General seems to have informed this court as recorded in this Hon'ble Courts order dated 31st March 2020, that after the governments instructions and notifications dated 29th March 2020 relating to restricting movement of migrant workers, there is now no exodus of migrant workers, they are no longer on the streets, they have all been put up in shelter homes and are being provided food and other psychological support.

(A copy of the order dated 31st March 2020 in writ petition no. 468/2020 is annexed as **Annexure 1** at page 7 to 16.

3. The government also stated that about 21,064 relief camps have been set up across the country for migrant workers and about 6,66,291 migrant workers have been provided shelter in these camps. Even assuming that these figures are correct, the fact is that there are several times that number of migrant workers in Delhi alone (estimated at 1.5 million). Many of these migrant workers are still in the cities where they work, but in abject conditions, deprived of the means to work, any wages, money and thus access to food. Workers claim that they cannot go out to work because of the lockdown. In Khirki Extension Delhi, there are about 5,000 labourers, but food is distributed to only 300

people. Others claim that the food is inadequate to feed a family and many are forced to go hungry. In ShahpurJat, Delhi, according to the news report, at least 1000 people were working in factories in the area. Half are now getting food but it is not edible. Despite the governments order that contractors pay full wages to these workers, contractors are declining any such payments.

(A copy of the Times of India report dated 2nd April 2020, “Delhi lockdown: Migrant workers are out of job, food and luck” is annexed as **Annexure 2** at Page 17 to 19

4. According to a report in The Hindu, workers stranded in Delhi are forced to cramp into small one room shanties, many living together with no access to food. These workers living in shanties behind JalVihar, Delhi have reported that if they attempt to leave their colony to access the free food, the police first hits them and then shoos them back. Most of them do not know where the food is being distributed. Even if they know of places where food is being given, they are beaten if they attempt to step out to access it.

(A copy of the article in The Hindu, dated 1st April 2020, “Coronavirus, Forced to stay back these workers now battle hunger” is annexed as **Annexure 3** at page 20 to 23

5. Quite apart from this, media reports show, that even after this governments order, in the last two days itself, a very large number of migrant workers have been thrown out of their dwellingby landlords and are thus totally destitute and without any access to proper food and shelter and ofcourse not in a position to send any money to their families for their survival, which they had been doing before the lockdown. According to reports in The Caravan dated 31st March 2020, several migrant labourers have been evicted, rendering them homeless.

(A copy of the report from Caravan Magazine dated 31st March 2020, “A lockdown and a Hard place” is annexed as **Annexure 4**at Page 24 to 32.

6. Even those who are in shelter homes are being herded and crowded together in small spaces which exposes them very seriously to the virus. Keeping migrant workers in shelter homes and feeding them there makes a mockery of social distancing norms as they are invariably forced to crowd together to access food or to sleep and stay in these shelters.

(A copy of the Reuters report dated 1st April 2020, “Some of us will die: India’s homeless stranded by coronavirus lockdown” is annexed as **Annexure 5** at Page 33 to 37

7. Thus the lockdown and the subsequent orders of the government to prevent their migration back to their homes, have left these migrant workers in a state of unimaginable distress and misery. The government has ordered that the employers should pay wages to all labourers employed with them. But where are these labourers going to get the wages from if they have left the cities they were working in?.In such a situation of immense distress due to the lockdown, The State is certainly obliged to ensure the minimal facilities to these workers for survival in a dignified manner. The only practical and effective manner in which the migrant workers can be provided the means of survival in a dignified manner is for the State to immediately make direct transfers (in cash at their door steps or through their banks accounts) of at least minimum wages to all these workers during the period of the lockdown.

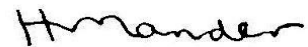
H. Mander

DEPONENT

VERIFICATION:

I, the above named Deponent, do hereby verify that the contents of the above Affidavit are true and correct to my knowledge; that no part of it is false and that nothing material has been concealed therefrom.

Verified at New Delhi on 2nd April 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Mander". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

DEPONENT

Annexure 1

ITEM NO.1 + 2
PIL-W

COURT NO.0

SECTION

(VIRTUAL COURT)

S U P R E M E C O U R T O F I N D I A

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Writ Petition(s)(Civil) No(s).468/2020

ALAKH ALOK SRIVASTAVA

Petitioner(s)

VERSUS

UNION OF INDIA

Respondent(s)

(WITH IA No. 48211/2020 -EXEMPTION FROM FILING O.T. AND IA No.48209/2020 -INTERVENTION APPLICATION AND IA No. 48210/2020 -PERMISSION TO FILE ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS/FACTS/ANNEXURES)

WITH

Writ Petition(s)(Civil) No(s). 469/2020

Date : 31-03-2020 These matters were called on for hearing today.

CORAM : HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE L. NAGESWARA RAO

For Petitioner(s) Petitioners-in-person

For Respondent(s)/ Mr. Tushar Mehta, Ld. SG

Applicant(s) Mr. B.V. Balaram Das, AOR

Ms. Mithu Jain, AOR (Not Present)

UPON hearing the counsel the Court made the following

O R D E R

The petitioners-in-person who are Advocates practising in this Court have filed the instant writ petitions in public interest for redressal of grievances of migrant labourers in different parts of the country.

As the issues raised in both the writ petitions are similar, we have taken up both the writ petitions together.

In the above writ petitions, the petitioners have highlighted the plight of thousands of migrant labourers who along with their families were walking hundreds of kilometres from their work place to their villages/towns.

The concern of the Petitioners pertains to the welfare of the migrant labourers. They are seeking a direction to the authorities to shift the migrant labourers to government shelter homes/accommodations and provide them with basic amenities like food, clean drinking water, medicines, etc.

The writ petitions were listed on 30.03.2020 when we directed Mr. Tushar Mehta, learned Solicitor General appearing for the respondent -Union of India, to submit the response of the Union of India. A status report has been filed on behalf of Union of India today.

The respondent – Union of India has referred to various steps that were taken to prevent the spread of Corona virus [COVID 19]. Reference is made to the institutional response regarding the management of the spread of the disease scientifically at the highest level. Early steps taken by the Government of India to prevent the spread of Corona Virus have been highlighted in the Status Report. It is mentioned in the Status Report that an expert group has been constituted under Dr. Vinod Paul, Member, NITI Aayog to provide guidance for prevention of the spread of the Virus in the country. Experts from cross sections in the medical field and public health fraternity are members of the said Expert Committee.

Various other measures taken by the Central Government in dealing with the needs of the lower strata of the society by providing basic amenities viz., food, clean drinking water, medicines, etc. have been dealt with in the status report.

Apart from the announcement of the relief package totalling Rs. 1.70 lakh crore under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, the Status Report refers to other schemes which were formulated to ensure that the persons in need are taken care of.

In the instant writ petitions, we are concerned about the migrant labourers who have started leaving their places of work for their home

villages/towns located at distant places. For example, thousands of migrant labourers left Delhi to reach their homes in the States Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, by walking on the highways.

We are informed that the labourers who are unemployed due to lock down were apprehensive about their survival. Panic was created by some fake news that the lock down would last for more than three months.

The initial reaction of the State Governments and the Union Territories was to transport migrant labourers from their borders to their villages. Later, on 29.03.2020 the Ministry of Home Affairs has issued a Circular prohibiting movement as transportation of migrant labourers in overcrowded buses would cause more damage than help to the migrant labourers. The very idea of lock down was to ensure that the virus would not spread. It was felt that transportation of migrant labourers would aggravate the problem of spread of the Virus. In such view, the movement of migrant labourers was prohibited and a direction was given to the State Governments to stop the migrant labourers wherever they were and shift them to nearby shelter homes/relief camps. A further direction was issued to the District Collectors/Magistrates to ensure that medical tests were done and the

migrant labourers be provided with basic amenities like food, clean drinking water, medicines, etc. in the shelter homes.

During the course of hearing, the Solicitor General of India made a statement that the information received by the Control Room today at 2.30 A.M. showed that 21,064 relief camps have been set up by various State Governments/Union Territories where the migrant labourers have been shifted and they are being provided with basic amenities like food, medicines, drinking water, etc. According to the Status Report, 6,66,291 persons have been provided shelters and 22,88,279 persons have been provided food.

The Solicitor General of India made a statement on instructions that at 11 A.M. today, there is no person walking on the roads in an attempt to reach his/her home towns/villages. Advisories issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 27.03.2020 and 28.03.2020 have also been mentioned in the Status Report, according to which a direction was given by the Ministry of Home Affairs, to the State Governments/Union Territories to provide adequate facilities for migrant labourers.

The National Disaster Management Authority has also issued an advisory on 28.03.2020 suggesting various measures to be taken by the State and District Emergency Operation Centres. One of the issues

highlighted in the said advisory is that the police and the other administrative authorities have to adopt a humane approach in dealing with migrant workers and stranded tourists.

The Solicitor General of India has also referred to the Status Report to make a submission that the exodus of migrant labourers was triggered due to panic created by some fake/misleading news and social media.

The Status Report refers to an advisory given by the Government of India on 24.03.2020 to the authorities to effectively deal with rumour mongering.

While informing this Court about the steps taken by the Government of India to ensure that the migrant labourers are being shifted to nearby shelters/relief camps from place they were found to be walking and basic amenities being provided to them, the Union of India has sought a direction from this Court to the State Governments and the Union Territories to implement the directions issued by the Central Government. A further direction was sought to prevent fake and inaccurate reporting whether intended or not, either by electronic print or social medial which will cause panic in the society.

Having considered the submissions made by the petitioners-in-person and the learned Solicitor General of India and upon perusal of the Status Report filed on behalf of the respondent – Union of India, we are satisfied with the steps taken by the Union of India for preventing the spread of Corona Virus [COVID 19] at this stage.

As stated above, we are concerned in these writ petitions mainly with the welfare of the migrant labourers. The circular issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 29.03.2020 has been implemented by the various State Governments/Union Territories. The mass migration has stopped according to Union of India. All the migrant labourers who were on the road have been shifted to relief camps/shelter homes which are set up at various points in each State/Union Territory. The directions issued by the Union of India and the State Governments/Union Territories to provide all basic amenities like food, drinking water, medicines, etc. to the migrants are being complied with by the concerned District Collectors/Magistrates.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, World Health Organisation (WHO), recently stated as under:

“We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous.”

The migration of large number of labourers working in the cities was triggered by panic created by fake news that the lockdown would continue for more than three months. Such panic driven migration has caused untold suffering to those who believed and acted on such news. In fact, some have lost their lives in the process. It is therefore not possible for us to overlook this menace of fake news either by electronic, print or social media.

Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for punishment to a person who makes or circulates a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic. Such person shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine.

Disobedience to an order promulgated by a public servant would result in punishment under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code. An advisory which is in the nature of an order made by the public authority attracts section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

We trust and expect that all concerned viz., State Governments, Public Authorities and Citizens of this country will faithfully comply with the directives, advisories and orders issued by the Union of India in letter and spirit in the interest of public safety.

In particular, we expect the Media (print, electronic or social) to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated. A daily bulletin by the Government of India through all media avenues including social media and forums to clear the doubts of people would be made active within a period of 24 hours as submitted by the Solicitor General of India. We do not intend to interfere with the free discussion about the pandemic, but direct the media refer to and publish the official version about the developments.

It is well known that panic can severely affect mental health. We are informed that the Union of India is conscious of the importance of mental health and the need to calm down those who are in a state of panic.

Learned Solicitor General of India states that within 24 hours the Central Government will ensure that trained counsellors and/or community group leaders belonging to all faiths will visit their relief camps/shelter homes and deal with any consternation that the migrants might be going through. This shall be done in all the relief camps/shelter homes wherever they are located in the country.

The anxiety and fear of the migrants should be understood by the Police and other authorities. As directed by the Union of India, they

should deal with the migrants in a humane manner. Considering the situation, we are of the opinion that the State Governments/Union Territories should endeavour to engage volunteers along with the police to supervise the welfare activities of the migrants. We expect those concerned to appreciate the trepidation of the poor men, women and children and treat them with kindness.

List the matters on 07.04.2020.

(SANJAY KUMAR-II)

(VIRENDER SINGH)

ASTT. REGISTRAR-cum-PS
OFFICER

BRANCH

Annexure 2

The Times of India

Delhi lockdown: Migrant workers are out of job, food and luck

Pankhuri Yadav | TNN | Apr 2, 2020

NEW DELHI: Mohammad Shahnawaz, 25, a labourer in south Delhi's Khirki Extension, chafed at the confinement in his one-room house.

With little to feed his family, he wondered if he could survive the three-week lockdown. "I have been living in Delhi for a decade and never faced such a big problem," he despaired. "We can't go out to work so there is little that we can do to make ends meet. There are around 5,000 workless labourers here, but food is distributed for 300 people. Even when people share the dal, roti, rice and pickle, we remain hungry."

Another labourer, Ilyas, disclosed that on the day he realised how bad things were, he asked his contractor for help, only to be rebuffed. "There is nobody to help us through the lockdown. Our only hope is the state government, but we may not survive long enough for its intervention to save us," the 31-year-old said. "The food we are getting here is clear evidence that nobody cares about us."

Mohammed Zafar, 41, who came to Delhi from Katihar in Bihar, went to Anand Vihar bus terminal on two consecutive days but could not

leave the city. He has a family of five and very little savings to sustain them. “Every time we hear of food being distributed, we rush to get our share. But in the past two days, I have only managed a single portion. My wife and I skipped the meal and let our children eat the half-cooked rice,” Zafar said.

Anjali Bhardwaj, founding member of Satark Nagrik Sangathan, and social activist Harsh Mander have filed a petition in the Supreme Court asking the state government to give the beleaguered migrant workers minimum wages. “The Union home ministry issued guidelines saying that the employers pay the workers in full whether they were working or not. But the ground situation is not showing this,” claimed Bhardwaj

Laskar Taboor, 41, originally from West Bengal, works at a factory in Shahpur Jat. His problems are not very different from those of the migrant workers in Khirki Extension. “There are least 1,000 people working in the factories in this area. Almost half are getting food, but it is not edible at all,” alleged Taboor. “When we ask our contractors for money, they turn us away.”

When apprised of the workers’ views, a senior Delhi Government official said that people would be deployed at these areas specifically to

make sure everyone got adequate fooding. He also assured that the quality of the food would be taken care of.

Source:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/delhi-lockdown-migrant-workers-are-out-of-job-food-and-luck/articleshow/74939315.cms>

Annexure 3**The Hindu****Coronavirus | Forced to stay back, these workers now battle hunger****Sobhana K. Nair, Priscilla Jebaraj | The Hindu | APRIL 01, 2020****Their ration cards are in Bihar and they have no money left**

‘Stay home and stay safe’, the global slogan to contain the spread of coronavirus doesn’t sound too convincing to Mohammed Hakim and his associates who, unlike many other migrants, were forced to stay back and are battling hunger each day.

Their names are listed on ration cards but the cards, along with their families, are at home in Bihar. Living five to six persons in one windowless room at shanties behind the Jal Vihar bus terminal in the shadow of the posh Lajpat Nagar 1 colony in Delhi, they are now struggling to get one meal a day.

“There are about 180 of us from Katihar who live here. Majority of us drive auto-rickshaws or pull cycle-rickshaws for a living. On March 28, many of us, by then having exhausted whatever little money we had, couldn’t get anything to eat. Then there were rumours that the lockdown will continue for three months. That jolted the others who still had some money to head home,” Mr. Hakim says.

For them it's a race between the fear of an unknown virus and very real hunger pangs.

Nearly 100 of them left for home. With no trains or buses, they just rode home in auto-rickshaws and cycle rickshaws, that on a normal day was the means of earning a living. Thirty-two of them pedalled cycle-rickshaws to cover a distance of 1,390 Km to Katihar. Three days later, covering a distance of 554 km, they reached Lucknow on Tuesday morning. "Their mobile phones are switched off, so we don't know if the police caught them or if they are still continuing on their journey," Mohammed Nizammudin, another auto-rickshaw driver, whose distant relative is one of the 32 making the journey, says.

For the 80-odd who stayed back, each day is getting more challenging. Coronavirus, the lynchpin of this lockdown, doesn't occupy much mind space, though all of them are wearing masks, some readymade, some fashioned out of gamchas. It's a race between the fear of an unknown virus and very real hunger pangs.

Charge against police

The group complains that the police posted outside the gates of the colony don't let them step out. "They hit first and ask questions later. We are shooed back into the colony each time we try to leave. We

heard on the radio that the Delhi government is providing food, but we don't know where or how to get to it," 38-year-old Abdul says.

After a day without any food on Sunday, the Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan provided Rs. 2,000 for emergency rations on Monday. A government relief centre is providing free cooked food about a kilometre away, but the men say that they are beaten by police enforcing the lockdown if they venture out of the colony, showing the marks of lathis on arms and legs.

As if hunger was not enough, being reduced to running behind vehicles delivering food or standing in queues to get a paltry amount has shaken many. "We never imagined that this day will come. We have always earned a respectful living and spent whatever we got. Never had to beg for food. We used to save enough to send some home too," Mr. Nizammuddin adds.

As the chorus of complaints gets louder their anger against the government erupts. "Modi ji, sitting on a comfortable chair from his air-conditioned home comes up with these declarations. First it was demonetisation and now this. Since he came to power the country has been standing in queues," Ahmed a cycle-rickshaw puller says.

The common grouse is that the government should have given them a few days notice to reach their home towns before declaring a lockdown. “If they extend the lockdown by another day after April 14, we all will leave, even if they are to shoot us down. If we have to die, it’s better to do so at our homes,” Mr. Hakim states.

Source:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/coronavirus-forced-to-stay-back-these-workers-now-battle-hunger/article31222590.ece>

Annexure 4**The Caravan****A Lockdown and a Hard Place**

SHAHID TANTRAY AND AHAN PENKAR | The Caravan | 31 March 2020

On 29 March, the Anand Vihar bus station in Delhi was overflowing with people—migrant workers in the thousands, all hoping to find a bus back to their homes in neighbouring states. Hunger, evictions and unemployment created by the lockdown were forcing them to flee the capital. Amid the tumult, the migrant workers told us stories of brutal police violence and attempt to feed their families in a virtually deserted city. “So what am I supposed to do?” Mehul Pandey, a 37-year-old labourer, asked. “No one is helping us. The cops have thrashed us around, and we are going to die of hunger. *Koi ration bhi nahi hai, toh ham kya karein?*”—There are no rations for us, what else can we do? “The government isn’t listening, I haven’t gotten any help from anyone,” she said. She told us she had been beaten with a lathi earlier when she was trying to run away from the police. “I’m also scared of the virus. But how am I going to feed myself?”

Many migrants were stranded on the road to Anand Vihar, some having walked from satellite-cities as far away as Gurgaon, Faridabad

and Manesar. Many migrants we spoke to mentioned that they had not been paid for over two months, and many daily-wage labourers mentioned that they had not received wages for over a month, diminishing their already meagre savings. This meant that many were travelling hoping to find food somewhere along their journey. Many mentioned they had not eaten for more than two days. Along with hunger, they also had to contend with the brutality of the Delhi police, who migrants said were unreasonably violent to anyone out on the streets.

“I’ve been walking around here since six in the morning, and have not been able to rest for more than 20 minutes,” Mohammad Aslam, a scrap-dealer from Manesar, said. Aslam was resting by a bench near an Indraprastha Compressed Natural Gas station in Vikas Marg, around five kilometers away from the Anand Vihar bus station. A security guard working at the gas station was harassing him, was asking him to go elsewhere. “I don’t know what to do. I am so scared and worried,” he said, mentioning that he had faced constant harassment by the police. “We keep getting chased from one corner to another. They stopped us near Nizamuddin railway station, and told us not to enter there, and then here, they’re not letting us go anywhere near Anand Vihar.”

On the way to the bus terminal from Vikas Marg, we saw that the police had barricaded every road and were trying to forcefully stop the movement of people. Often, three or four baton-wielding policemen charged at a group of migrants and tried to drive them away. The lack of coordination between different policemen at different road crossings meant that groups of people were constantly being shuttled from one place to another. The police's only goal seemed to be to ensure that the migrants did not reach Anand Vihar. It even carried out lathi charges in some places. "This feels like a warzone," another journalist we met told us. "The roads are empty and people have nowhere to go."

"We are making arrangements for food twice a day as well as a place for them to stay. Many have insisted that they want to go home. Many are not sure what the future holds," said Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's chief minister, had said in a statement on 27 March. While there were a few eateries and government bodies distributing food and water around Anand Vihar, the vast majority of labourers made the journey on an empty stomach, and had no confidence in the government being able to provide them with food and rent. Many said they had called local authorities as well as government helplines about a lack of supplies but got no answers. "We can stay at home and bear with this for 21 days, but where will get the food from? Who is going to convince our

stomachs to not feel hungry?” Kamal Kumar, a daily-wage labourer from Gurgaon, told us.

“I was extremely worried about my situation and didn’t know what I could do if I stayed there,” Vinod Chauhan, a visually challenged man who was sitting with his son, told us. “I have no money for gas or food, I bought the twenty-rupee packet of bread before I left.” Chauhan used to sell mops and dusters in Lakshmi Nagar and said he was lucky he had his son to take him through this. “People will die of hunger before this virus kills us,” he added. Chauhan said he had never received any monetary support from the government, for his disability. “I have never received any money from the government till today. Why will they pay my rent? I filled in my papers in 2018, they keep making me run around in circles, this government.”

Another reason for this mass exodus was that, with a sudden lockdown on work, many daily-earners, who were now without income, could not afford to pay their rent. Despite an order from the Ministry of Home affairs on 28 March, which asked landlords not to charge rent during the period of the lockdown, several people we spoke to had been evicted, rendering them effectively homeless. At the time we met them, a bus to their ancestral villages was their only hope for shelter. Mohammed Isha and Aashma, a young couple who had only recently

moved to Delhi. “We were kicked out of our room,” Aashma said, through her tears. “The landlord said we should either pay or get out.” The couple were heading to Rae Bareilly, in Uttar Pradesh, where they were hoping to get shelter at their family home. Aashma told us that the pain of walking so much had been too excruciating for her to bear, and that she had started developing calluses in her feet. “I have never walked so much in my life. I haven’t gotten any food, I have no money and we both lost our jobs a month ago. How will I eat?” Isha had lost his job as a housekeeping staff at a restaurant a month ago, and the lockdown had depleted their savings.

It was evident that the uncertainty of the future was already taking a toll on the thousands waiting restlessly at the Anand Vihar terminus. Other than hearing rumours about state transport buses that could potentially take them home, nobody, including the press, had any idea when the next set of buses were going to arrive. “Look, our work is law and order, don’t ask us all these questions,” Jasmeet Singh, a deputy commissioner of police, told us. In the meantime, many of the attendants began taunting reporters, “What’s the point of having media people if you know nothing?” Right outside the terminus, many people were selling masks and handkerchiefs. Policemen and journalists appeared well protected, with an ABP reporter using a wooden stick to

elongate her mike in the hopes of keeping her distance from the people she was interviewing.

After three hours of organising passengers into a neat and orderly queue, the police announced that the buses would be coming to pick people up on the opposite side of the road. This caused massive panic and pandemonium, with people running to jump across the fence. “If you people had not come with your cameras, we would have definitely gotten thrashed,” someone told us in passing, as they jumped across the fence. Many women, children, and differently-abled migrants struggled to climb the fence and get to the bus on the other side.

Dileep Kumar was one of those trying to jump on to a packed bus, but his prosthetic leg gave in, and he tripped and fell. We spoke to him and his friends, who jumped down after they saw that he could not make it. Speaking about the mixed messages they had got from state government representatives and police, he said, “I have a plastic leg, and the government promised to send me home, but after a night of moving around between here and there, now they’re telling us to go to Lal Kuan.” Lal Kuan is an important highway junction in Ghaziabad, just across the border, in Uttar Pradesh. His friend Nand Kishore said that they were construction workers and had not received any money, despite the announcement by the Delhi government promising to

provide aid. Many who boarded these buses had heard that they were going to go to Lal Kuan, where they would be picked and dropped by Uttar Pradesh state transport buses. We overheard Jasmeet Singh, the DCP of Delhi's East District, tell another reporter, "Attribute it to sources, but say that they are being dropped off a little bit further away."

Many of the buses that had left Anand Vihar stopped at a flyover in Vaishali, on the border between Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. Here, the migrants were removed from the bus and the police came to disperse the crowd. "Go back to where you came from and maintain social distancing," a constable announced on a loudspeaker. Later, he raised his lathi at a volunteer who was distributing food, and said "They're crowding around here because of you." It later became clear that the police had stopped the buses because of a sudden announcement by the central government banning all interstate movement of people.

"This is just absurd," Naveen Singh Bedi, a labourer who used to work in Gurgaon, said. "We've walked all the way from Gurgaon and now they want us to find our way. Don't they understand that I have nowhere to go and no way to feed my family?" he continued. "They've killed us. I wouldn't have left had I known this was going to happen."

Meanwhile in Lal Kuan, there were nearly a thousand people looking to catch a bus. The Uttar Pradesh police was making announcements about social distancing, while people struggled to find space in the overflowing buses. The roofs of the buses were also crammed, each with over forty passengers. Those who could not fit into buses that day said they were hoping that they would find room the next day.

By 6.30 pm, East Delhi was dotted with migrants who were stranded. They were walking the roads and wondering how they would arrange food for the night. “I think we might have to spend the night on the road. What else can we do?” Altaf Qureshi, a 21-year-old butcher from Sadar Bazar, told us. “This is probably the first night I’m sleeping on the streets. I don’t know if my landlord has locked the room or not. I’ll have to ask around, but I’ve been walking since the morning. I don’t think I can go anywhere else.”

Bhuri Ansar, a 26-year-old woman, was sitting on her haunches alongside her family. She told us she suffered from stomach cancer. Her husband, Ansar Ahmed said, “We went to Bulandshahr for treatment ... and I couldn’t figure out what to do.” Bhuri was carrying prescription and still had her IV device attached to her hand. Barely fifty meters away, the police were shouting from a loudspeaker, asking the family to run and return home. MD Meherban, a journalist who

was nearby and had spoken to the station house officer, told us, “We tried asking them if they could spare any other van, but they said it was for law and order.” The SHO, who was sitting in his car, replied, “What can I do? I just have this car, and the remaining cars are for law and order, go and call the ambulance.” We tried calling for an ambulance but received no help from the 102 helpline, or any other government helpline. Our other attempts to connect the family to a medical institute were also in vain. Eventually, Harinder, an inspector, agreed to drop them home. The family got into the car, after sanitising their hands. Ahmed later confirmed that they had reached safely.

Around seven pm, close to the Delhi-Noida-Direct highway, we saw the police chasing a group of migrants who had not managed to find transportation. A woman, who was holding a heavy sack over her head, snapped at the police, “*Maaro, jitna maarna hai maardo, poora din seh chuke hai ham*”—Go on then, hit us all you want, we have taken it the whole day.

Source:

<https://caravanmagazine.in/labour/in-photos-migrant-workers-face-police-violence-and-hunger-escaping-delhi-during-lockdown>

Annexure 5**The Reuters****'Some of us will die': India's homeless stranded by coronavirus lockdown****Zeba Siddiqui and Sunil Kataria | The Reuters | April 1, 2020**

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - In a densely packed neighborhood of Delhi, hundreds of homeless people queued up this week as volunteers doled out rice and peas from a vat in the back of a van.

Only a handful of the people in the crowd wore masks. There were no hand sanitizers or wash basins in sight and no social distancing.

"I need the food," said a man in the queue, Shiv Kumar

"If I stand apart, someone else might come in between."

Volunteers say such scenes are playing out daily across India, as laborers and waste pickers - most of them homeless or too poor to afford a meal - are among the hardest hit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-week nationwide lockdown to stem the spread of coronavirus.

Most of the estimated 4 million plus homeless people in India have had no way of earning a living since the lockdown began on March 25. With streets deserted, even begging is not an option.

Many wander aimlessly, some find refuge at homeless shelters where ranks of people sleep beside each other.

While the plight of India's migrant workers has garnered headlines, with thousands forced to walk miles to reach home since the lockdown began, many aid workers say the millions of homeless in India face a bigger risk.

Officials say the shutdown is necessary to stem the spread of the coronavirus. India has reported more than 1,500 cases and 38 deaths from the outbreak.

But rights groups have criticized the government over what they say has been inadequate planning ahead of the lockdown.

"You cannot impose such drastic measures on a population the size of India all of a sudden," said Shivani Chaudhry, executive director of Housing and Land Rights Network, a non-profit group that works with the homeless.

"In shelters, we face serious challenges such as the lack of adequate space and sanitation," she said. "If one person in a shelter gets infected, it's going to be very hard to control its spread."

'URGENT REQUIREMENT'

While some cities like Delhi and Chennai have several homeless shelters, in other parts of the country, like Mumbai, many are stranded on the streets, rights groups say.

Some states are now scrambling to put the homeless in tents in parks, or at schools and other vacant spaces.

In the eastern city of Kolkata, a municipal councillor said government-run homeless shelters were all packed and there was no way of keeping people apart as a coronavirus precaution.

The Delhi government said in an order last week that social distancing must be "strictly followed" at the 200 odd night shelters across the city. But at least four shelters Reuters visited this week said they were struggling to follow the orders given the numbers of people seeking help.

"How do we do social distancing? If we separate them we will have to let many of them go," said a manager at one shelter with a capacity of 500 people.

The federal Ministry of Urban Affairs only issued an order on March 28 – four days after the lockdown began – telling state governments there was "an urgent requirement" to support the homeless, according to a copy seen by Reuters.

While the government has outlined a \$22.6 billion stimulus plan that provides for direct cash transfers and food security measures for the poor, many activists say it is unclear how many homeless, many of whom lack documentation, would get any aid.

MOST VULNERABLE

Doctors and health experts say the homeless are among the most at risk from the virus as many already suffer from illnesses such as tuberculosis, and their morbidity rates are higher than for the general population.

"How does one quarantine someone who has no home, or someone who lives cheek to jowl with 10 others in a small room?" said Dr Zarir Udwadia, an infectious diseases specialist in Mumbai, who has been treating coronavirus patients.

"Poverty and overcrowding like ours are likely catalysts for the COVID-19 explosion we anticipate with trepidation," he said.

The spread of coronavirus among such a population would be terrifying, warned Indu Prakash Singh, a member of the Supreme Court's urban poverty monitoring committee.

"In any pandemic these are first people to be hit," he said calling efforts to tackle the issue "slipshod".

Many of those on the streets view the coronavirus with a grim fatalism

"Some of us will die, some of us will live to suffer," said Zakir Hussain, a 45-year-old laborer, standing near a homeless shelter in Delhi.

"We are poor. We've been left here to die. Our lives are of no value to anyone."

Source:

https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN21J56D?__twitter_impression=true