

## RIVER OF CALM



A view of the deserted ghats on the bank of river Ganga during a one-day nationwide Janata (civil) curfew, in Varanasi on Sunday.

# Students must help fight Coronavirus

**W**E have 40,000 colleges, over 1000 universities, more than 35 crore students and over 10 lakh teachers in India. I urge all students and teachers to come together and help us keep the entire country safe by spreading awareness about COVID-19.

Our country and the entire world have been stuck in a tough predicament. All over the globe, people are trying their best to protect themselves from Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Amid such a global as well as national health crisis, it is easy to succumb to panic. We have been receiving multiple requests from students, teachers and parents to postpone exams and shut down schools and colleges. Precautionary measures for examination and evaluation centres were circulated. However, the anxiety among examinees and their concerned has only increased. Assessing the stressful situation, the ministry of human resource development (MHRD) has taken a few initiatives for the safety of the students and teachers, to ensure a panic-free state. These decisions have been based on scientific evidence and are motivated from the intent to avoid local risk of infection. Our objective is to delay the growth of the virus and flatten the peak of the pandemic.

### Postponing exams

The MHRD has ordered educational institutions, including the Central Board of Secondary Education, the National Institute of Open Schooling and all universities to postpone examinations and reschedule them after March 31. All evaluation work has also been rescheduled to after that date.

Besides, we have also decided to postpone JEE Mains since the examination requires examinees to travel to different towns. As we have to make sure that JEE Mains does not clash with rescheduled dates of CBSE and other board examinations, we will reassess the situation and the revised date for JEE Mains will be announced on March 31.



by Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank

The UGC, AICTE, NTA and NCTE will also postpone their exams to April. The MHRD has advised the temporary closure of educational institutions across the country. Many academic establishments have suspended classes, deferred or cancelled campus gatherings, including convocations.

The advice has also been followed by premier educational institutions and varsities, including IITs and IITs. So far, five higher educational institutions in Delhi announced postponement of exams and suspension of classes till March 31. These include the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia and Indraprastha University.

### No loss of learning

Meanwhile MHRD has advised all educational institutions and examination boards to maintain regular electronic communication with students and teachers. Now, the question arises: Will studies get impacted during the closure of schools and colleges? No they won't. There are multiple initiatives run by the Ministry that ensure continuity of learning and access to essential services for all students. The focused approach of Prime Minister Modi on 'Digital India' has also supplemented digitalisation of education, which makes it accessible anytime and anywhere.

Our digital schemes such as SWAYAM Prabha, will not let the studies of students get hampered while staying at home. SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), as the name indicates, is a portal that fosters self-study. It offers courses via tutorials and lectures. The Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) can help everybody from students to teachers to parents get learning material in an engaging format. Besides the website, it

is also available as an app and has received over 55 lakh downloads so far, having delivered 11.8 crore content sessions and 26 crore minutes of usage. In fact, CBSE delivers weekly Creativity and Critical Thinking practice tests for In Science, Mathematics, Hindi and English through the portal.

For those parents whose children are glued to the television screens, SWAYAM Prabha is an ideal solution. It is a group of DTH channels that provides quality content for higher education from esteemed colleges. Plus, time-slots of four hours have now been approved for select states to offer school education content every day. For instance, Channel No. 31 (Kishore Manch) telecasts e-content approved by NCERT on a 24/7 basis for classes XI-XII in all subjects.

E-pathshala offers educational material for students and teachers through a portal as well as an app, now also available on the UMANG app of the government. The National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) is a collaborative platform that provides access to educational resources in multiple languages including gamification.

### Employee-friendly

For MHRD employees, we have displayed certain dos and don'ts to be followed across the campus to protect themselves from Coronavirus. All entry points have been equipped with hand sanitizers and infrared thermometers. We are also sanitising the rooms and furniture in Shastri Bhawan every day.

I request all students to stay at home and participate in self-study. I urge everyone to wash hands properly with soap or use alcohol-based hand rub, follow social distancing and maintain a gap of at least 1 metre from a person who is showing symptoms such as coughing and sneezing. Kindly isolate yourself and get help from medical professionals. Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, the government and education department are working 24/7 for your safety and health. Stay protected, stay safe.

Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank is Union Minister for Human Resource Development.  
*The views expressed are personal.*