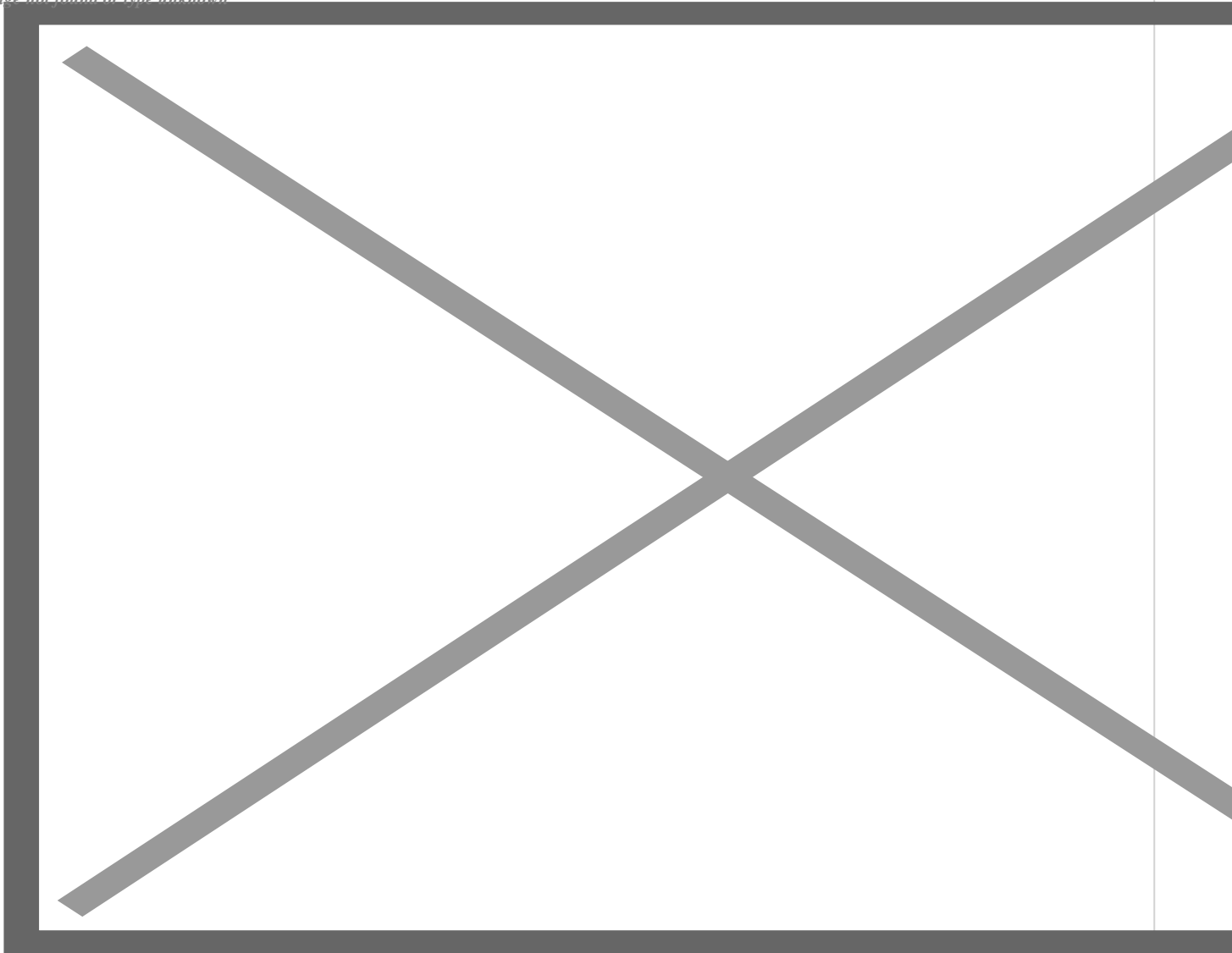


Calls grow for India lockdown amid worsening COVID crisis

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Healthcare workers and relatives carry a woman from an ambulance for treatment at a COVID-19 care facility in Mumbai, India [Niharika Kulkarni/Reuters]?

New Delhi, May 6 (RHC)-- India's government is facing growing pressure to impose a nationwide lockdown to stem the devastating coronavirus surge that has overwhelmed hospitals and morgues.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, widely criticised for allowing religious festivals and political gatherings attended by hundreds of thousands of largely unmasked people, is reluctant to impose a national lockdown for fear of the economic fallout.

With 3.45 million active cases on Tuesday, India recorded 357,229 new infections over the previous 24 hours, while deaths rose by 3,449 to 222,408, health ministry data showed. The cumulative case count in the world's second most populous country has passed 20 million, adding 10 million cases in just over four months, after taking more than 10 months to reach the first 10 million.

With hospitals running out of beds and oxygen, and morgues and crematoria overflowing, experts say the actual numbers could be five to 10 times higher. The leader of the main opposition party on Tuesday urged the government to impose a full national lockdown.

"The only way to stop the spread of corona now is a full lockdown ... GOI's inaction is killing many innocent people," opposition Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Twitter, referring to the government.

Several states have already imposed social curbs in an attempt to contain the virus. The eastern state of Bihar ordered a lockdown until May 15, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said. With more than 100,000 infections, its death toll is nearing 3,000, government figures show.

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