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Summit **TIMES**

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SATURDAY, 09 MAY

EVEN NUMBER TAXIS, PRIVATE VEHICLES, TWO-WHEELERS ALLOWED TO PLY TODAY

COVID-19 death toll rises to 1,886; cases climb to 56,342

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 1,886 and the number of cases climbed to 56,342 in the country on Friday, registering an increase of 103 fatalities and 3,390 infections in the last 24 hours, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The number of active COVID-19 cases stood at 37,916. While 16,539 people have recovered, one patient has migrated, it said.

"Thus, around 29.35 per cent patients have recovered so far," a senior health ministry official said. The total cases include 111 foreign nationals.

The total of 103 deaths reported since Thursday morning include 43 in Maharashtra; 29 in Gujarat; eight in Madhya Pradesh; seven in West Bengal; five in Rajasthan; two each in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh; and one each in Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Of the 1,886 fatalities, Maharashtra tops the tally with 694 fatalities, Gujarat comes second with 425 deaths, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 193, West Bengal at 151, Rajasthan at 97, Delhi at 66, Uttar Pradesh at 62 and Andhra Pradesh at 38.

The death toll reached 37 in Tamil Nadu, 30 in Karnataka while Telangana has reported 29 fatalities due to the respiratory disease. Punjab has registered 28 COVID-19 deaths, Jammu and Kashmir nine, Haryana seven, Bihar five and Kerala four.

Jharkhand has recorded three COVID-19 fatalities. Odisha and Himachal Pradesh have reported two deaths each. Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Assam and Uttarakhand have reported one fatality each, according to the ministry data.

According to the health ministry data updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country is from Maharashtra at 17,974 followed by Gujarat at 7,012, Delhi at 5,980, Tamil Nadu at 5,409, Rajasthan at 3,427, Madhya Pradesh at 3,252 and Uttar Pradesh at 3,071.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 1,847 in Andhra Pradesh and 1,644 in Punjab.

The tally has risen to 1,548 in West Bengal, 1,123 in Telangana, 793 in Jammu and Kashmir, 705 in Karnataka, 625 in Haryana and 550 in Bihar.

turn to pg 02

Indra Hang blames Chamling's rush to inaugurate incomplete hospital for Sikkim's lack of proper testing lab

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGETOK, 08 MAY:

Sikkim Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba today said that Sikkim Krantikari Morcha government had to start work on a COVID-19 testing lab from scratch due to the lack of vision of the former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and his rush to inaugurate the new STNM Hospital

even though facilities in it were far from ready.

He informed that the civil works of the lab were now on the verge of completion and all required equipment is in place and the lab will be ready within this month.

That said, he lashed out against the former Chief Minister for failing to establish a mo-

lecular lab during his 25 years in government in the state.

Had the previous government and its CM had the foresight or a deeper sense of responsibility, they would have finished such a lab instead of rushing the inauguration just to take credit before the elections, he said.

Addressing a press

conference, Mr Subba strongly refuted allegations leveled by Mr Chamling that there was partiality in the distribution of relief materials.

Mr Subba said SKM was the first government in Sikkim to hold consultations with opposition leaders in order to fight COVID-19. He said that BJP MLAs and SDF zilla adhyaksha and

upadhyaksha were called in a high-level meeting of the government to make plans and strategies to fight against COVID-19. He mentioned that the government has even taken some suggestions placed by them.

"It is unfortunate that a CM who was in power for 25 years has made irresponsible statements without a proper study

on the matter. If he was not well informed then he should talk to his panchayats and party workers working actively on the ground to know how the present government is working in a democratic manner," he said.

Mr Subba stated that SKM government has been following every protocol to bring stranded students and people

of Sikkim from different parts of the country.

"If Mr Chamling is not satisfied then he should see the screening and other processes being an MLA. He should visit the check-posts and quarantine centers," he said. He added that the government has been working seriously to bring every Sikkimese back home safely.

Maha: 16 migrant workers crushed to death by goods train

AURANGABAD, MAY 8 (PTI): Sixteen migrant workers sleeping on rail tracks while returning to Madhya Pradesh were crushed to death by a goods train in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra on Friday, police said.

The Railways announced a comprehensive probe into the accident which took place at 5.15 am near Karmad, around 30 km from Aurangabad.

Those killed and the four other migrant workers who survived were all male, officials said.

A viral video clip from the scene of the tragedy shows the bodies of migrant workers lying on the tracks and nearby with their meagre personal belongings scattered around.

Aurangabad SP Mokshada Patil told PTI that three of the four survivors had tried in vain to wake up their colleagues who had slept on the track after an overnight walk from Jalna, around 40 km from the accident spot.

The workers were walking to Bhusawal from Jalna along rail tracks, while returning to their home state Madhya Pradesh, an official at the Karmad police station said.

They were sleeping on rail tracks due to exhaustion when they were run over by the goods train coming from Jalna, he said.

"The labourers, working in a steel factory in Jalna, left for their

turn to pg 02

Risky rescue succeeds at 15,500 ft

SOLDIERS STRANDED AT SPOT WHERE CHOPPER MADE EMERGENCY LANDING RESCUED

GANGETOK, 08 MAY [PIB]: Today, a combination of Indian Army and IAF helicopters and Indian Army troops were pressed into service to undertake a daring evacuation of the crew of IAF helicopters and Air Dispatch crew stranded in the icy heights of North Sikkim after IAF helicopters made an emergency landing in a remote and inaccessible area yesterday.

Evacuation of the four IAF crew and Air Dispatch personnel from a super high altitude



emergency landing site, braving snow blizzards and undulating ground, which required synergy between the helicopters and ground based rescue parties, stands testimony to the spirit of the Armed Forces of India.

The rescue operation demanded pushing to lim-

its, both man and machine, for the successful extrication of the stranded crew. The stranded military personnel braved inclement weather conditions for several hours before being evacuated.

Immediately on receipt of information,



on 07 May, Indian Army rescue columns including personnel from ITBP, moved on foot to the helicopter landing site traversing dangerous terrain in bad weather to evacuate the individuals and provide medical aid. An ITBP doctor was part

of the team.

Later, a combination of Army and Air Force helicopters were launched at the stroke of dawn on 08 May and executed a daring landing on an unprepared ground at an altitude of 15,500 ft and rescued the stranded personnel.

CABINET RETURNS TO BUSINESS

Stranded Sikkimese to be brought back on special trains and buses

AUSTERITY MEASURES STIPULATED

GANGETOK, 08 MAY [IPR]: A Cabinet Meeting was held today at Samman Bhawan.

Following are the decisions taken during the meeting:

HOME DEPARTMENT

1. Approval and sanction of Rs 21,43,845 for procurement of Firearms for Sikkim Armed Police from SIG SAUER, USA.

FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
2. Approval and sanction of Rs 1,043.51 lakhs as Annual Plan of Operation 2019-20 for implementation of additional CAMPA Activities during the financial year 2020-21.

3. Approval and sanction of Rs 2,99,40,000 as grant-in-aid for implementation of Him-Nature Learning Centre(Him-NLC) entitled "Nature Interpretation and Learning Centre, Sikkim, Gangtok"

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT
4. Approval to take over the Special School for Children with Intellectual Disabilities run by the Spastic Society of Sikkim, a Non-Governmental Organization along with its assets/properties through Social Justice and Welfare Department.

5. Post facto approval and sanction for transfer of Rs 30 lakhs to State Fund for Persons with Disabilities, operated by Social Justice and Welfare Department following provisions of State Fund for persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

6. Approval for enhancement in the existing rate of pension at the rate of Rs 500 p.m per beneficiary for the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) and Indira Gandhi National Disability

Pension Schemes (IGNDPS) with the additional requirement of funds and to lower the minimum age limit for availing the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension from 40 years to 21 years and above.

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL

7. Approval and sanction to make certain modification in the administrative practices in the matter of appointments and promotions of Government employees in the past and align them to the extant rules to ensure orderly administration and smooth running of the State Government.

8. Creation of three posts of Principal in Academic Level-13 A in the Pay Matrix under the revised pay structure of the University Grants Commission (UGC) norms for the Under-graduate Colleges at Dentam, Mangshilla and Chakung under Education Department.

ENERGY AND POWER DEPARTMENT

9. Approval and sanction of Rs 9,338.99 lakh for the work "Survey, Design, Supply, Engineering, Installation, Testing, Commissioning and Documentation of Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) sub-stations in Gangtok under Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)".

RURAL MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

10. Approval and sanction of Rs 320.82 lakh and financial sanction of Rs 50 lakh for Rural Water Supply Scheme from Jaubari to Lower Kamrang under Poklok Kamrang Constituency.

11. Approval and sanction of Rs 20 crore for payment of Land Compensation for construction of PMGSY roads during 2019-20.

HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT

12. Approval and sanction of Rs 40.33 crore towards the implementation of National Health Mission during the financial year 2019-20.

ROADS AND BRIDGES DEPARTMENT

13. Approval and sanction of Rs 226.397

lakhs for construction of link road from Soreng Kaluk road to Lower Singling.

RURAL MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

14. Approval and sanction of Rs 1,014.25 lakh and financial sanction of Rs 50 lakhs already incurred in 2019-20 for Rural Water Supply Scheme for Malbaise Block under Soreng Chakung Constituency in West Sikkim. Financial sanction of Rs.300.00 lakhs is also solicited under the relevant budget head for the financial year 2020-21.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT

15. Approval and sanction of Rs 110 lakhs as Grants-in-aid to Tribal Research Institute, Sikkim for the year 2019-20 for under Central Sector Schemes.

16. Approval and sanction of Rs 544 lakhs and transfers the same to Poshan Abhiyan account under Umbrella ICDS for implementation of the scheme in the State of Sikkim.

17. Approval and sanction of Rs 195.60 lakhs for implementation of various components/activities under Child Protection Schemes (CPS) in the year 2019-20.

ROADS AND BRIDGES DEPARTMENT

18. Approval and sanction of Rs 518.70 lakhs for "Providing, Fitting and fixing of 20 Watt (all in one) Solar LED Street Light with motion sensor along following two roads in the Capital:-

a. The road from Syari Cooperative to Rani-pool in East Sikkim.
b. Bye Pass road from Adampool to Ranka-Sichey road near Ban Jhankri falls.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

19. Approval and sanction of Rs 2,330.43 lakhs as grants-in-aid to Zilla Panchayat, Gram Panchayat, SIRD and SRDA for the financial year 2020-21.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

20. Approval and sanction of Renaming of Government Senior Secondary School Rateypani as Tilak Pradhan Memorial Senior Secondary School.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES DEPARTMENT

21. Approval and sanction of Rs 7 crores only as additional payment for the purchase of private land at Panchgharey, Melli Block, South Sikkim for setting up of Hazardous Waste Treatment Facility.

PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

22. Approval and sanction of Rs 1,64,76,578 and financial sanction of Rs 1,06,45,000 for payment of land compensation for " Providing Drinking Water Supply for Sikkim University at Yangang from Borfung Khola and other two sources in South Sikkim", already released in the financial year 2019-2020.

23. Approval and sanction of Rs 26,35,027 for payment of Land Compensation for "Augmentation of Water Supply Scheme Phase-I and Phase-II at Dentam in West Sikkim", already released in the FY-2019-20.

24. Approval and sanction of Rs 16,78,00,000 and financial sanction of Rs 10 crores for payment of land compensation for construction of New Approach Road for laying of Sewerage pipes to Lower Syari leading to the site of Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) for ZONE-II-Pollution Abatement Scheme of Rani chu-through Roro-chu, Gangtok, East Sikkim, already released in FY 2019-20.

TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION DEPARTMENT

25. Approval and sanction of Rs 6,383 lakhs for the construction of Pilgrimage Centre with 54 feet high statue of Nishani Kali Devi at Central Pendam, East Sikkim.

turn to pg 02

Odisha plans revival of tourism post lockdown

Bhubaneswar, May 8 (PTI): Keen to revive the severely-hit tourism sector in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the Odisha government is planning to come out with a package for promotion of various destinations in the state to woo domestic travellers in the post lockdown scenario, an official said.

Chief Secretary A K Tripathy held a meeting with the officials concerned on Thursday, and directed them to prepare an incentive scheme to attract private investment in the hospitality and tourism industry which is considered to be a labour-intensive service sector.

"Domestic tourism is the core focus in the post lockdown phase as this segment is expected to revive faster than the



others," Tripathy said.

The government has decided to prioritise the development projects in tourist destinations like Rambha and Satpada clusters in Chilika, Bhitarkanika national park, Chandrabhaga and Tal-

sari beaches, he said.

Tripathy also suggested the department to explore possibilities of developing "Eco-Retreat 2020" hubs in the locations like Daringbadi, Debrigarh, Satkosia, Konark and Mahanadi Riverbed

between Naraj and Dhabaleswar. He also directed the department to make a detailed operational plan involving various government agencies and key stakeholders.

"The comprehensive development of

Buddhist circuit and Shamuka project near Puri were also discussed in the meeting," tourism department secretary Vishal Dev said.

He said the department has made a holistic assessment of Covid-19 impact on the tourism sector.

"There were cancellations of bookings due to the lockdown. All the stakeholders will need support from the financial institutions," Dev said.

He said the government will organise road shows in metros and tier-II cities across the country to attract domestic tourists.

"A special campaign will be taken up to promote the tourism sector with organising Odia food festivals across six cities," Dev added.

West admn discusses SPCB guidelines for Covid-19 and Bio-Medical Waste segregation and disposal

GYALSHING, 08 MAY [IPR]: The State Pollution Control Board held an emergency meeting regarding guidelines for COVID-19 and Bio-Medical Waste segregation and disposal at the Zilla Panchayat Bhawan conference hall here today.

The meeting was attended by ADC Karma L. Lepcha, JD [SPCB] Kusum Gurung, MEO [W] Bhumi Pradhan, AD-Sanitation Sabitri Gurung, BDO-Gyalshing Mukesh

Dahal and other officials. The SPCB guidelines and responsibilities of person in-charge of quarantine centers regarding waste management was handed over to the quarantine in-charge.

The ADC, along with the SPCB team, visited Kyongsa Government Senior Secondary School and Girls Hostel which is designated as a Quarantine Center for Gyalshing and its surroundings.

47 Sikkimese return to South district

NAMCHI, 08 MAY (IPR): The Screening and Quarantine report from South District's Melli Screening Centre are as follows:

Total number 66 people were screened today, with 47 from South District and 19

from West District.

One person opted for Paid Quarantine while the remaining 47 were sent to ICHAE Chemchey. Those from West Sikkim were handed over to the West administration.

COVID-19 ...

Kerala has reported 503 coronavirus cases so far, while Odisha has 219. A total of 135 people have been infected with the virus in Chandigarh and 132 in Jharkhand.

Tripura has reported 65 cases, Uttarakhand has 61, Chhattisgarh has 59, Assam has 54, Himachal Pradesh has 46 and Ladakh has 42.

Thirty-three COVID-19 cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Meghalaya has registered 12 cases, Puducherry has nine, while Goa has seven.

Manipur has two cases. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Dadar and Nagar Haveli have reported one case each.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research)," the ministry said on its website.

State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation, it said.

Maha: 16 ...

home state on foot last night. They came till Karmad and slept off on the tracks as they were tired," another police official said.

Three of the four survivors were sleeping some distance away from the rail tracks, police said.

The migrant workers, rendered jobless due to the coronavirus-enforced lockdown and desperate to go to their native places, were walking along the rail tracks apparently to escape police attention.

The survivors had frantically raised alarm to alert their group members sleeping on tracks about the approaching freight train, police said.

Chilling details emerged about the tragedy as survivors recounted the events.

"A group of 20 stranded labourers started walking from Jalna. They decided to take rest and most of them lied on rail tracks. Three of them were taking rest in a nearby plain area.

After some time, these three saw a goods train coming and immediately raised the alarm but it went unheard," Patil said.

"I had a word with the survivors. They started walking from Jalna and tried to reach Bhusaval on earlier night which is around 30-40 km away from the place of the accident (near Karmad near Aurangabad)," the IPS officer said.

Canteen sealed for violating lockdown rules

SUMMIT REPORT GYALSHING, 08 MAY:

A canteen located at 7th Mile, Gyalshing, was sealed by West Sikkim police today for flouting lockdown rules which has not allowed eateries to open yet.

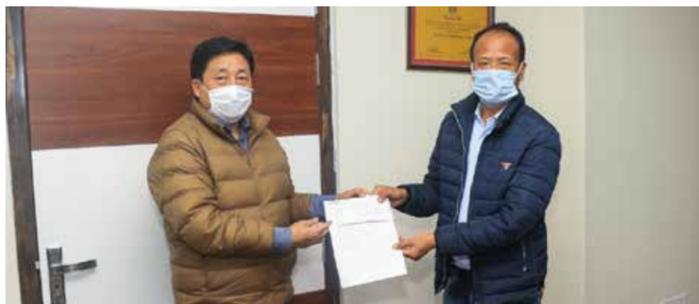
It is also reported that a driver assigned by the Transport Department to bring back stranded Sikkimese had stopped at the canteen for refreshments on the evening of 07 May in contravention of protocols prescribed for containment of COVID-19.

The west district administration ordered the complete sealing of



canteen and has directed the canteen owner and her son to be kept under strict home quarantine.

Horticulture staff contribute towards CM's Relief Fund



MANGAN, 08 MAY (IPR): Regular officers and staff of the office of the Joint Director Horticulture Department, North Sikkim, Mangan contributed their one day salary to Chief Minister's Relief Fund to support government's effort to combat

COVID-19 epidemic.

A cheque of Rs 43,111 was formally handed over to the Minister for Roads & Bridges, Samdup Lepcha at the chamber of District Collector, North, Tenzing T Kaleon on Wednesday by Deputy

Director-cum-Incharge Horticulture Department, North District, Rinzing W Bhutia.

Minister, Samdup Lepcha thanked all officers and staff on behalf of the government for their kind gesture and generous contribution.

Distribution of homeopathic medicine at Namchi



NAMCHI, 08 MAY (IPR): The South District Administration along with Namchi District Hospital distributed free homeopathic medicines of AYUSH at quarantine Centre IHCAE today. Present during this occasion were DC (South), Ragul K, SSP (South), Prawin Gurung, CMO (South), Dr DC Sharma, SHO (Namchi), Sameer Pradhan and Ayush Doctors; Kavita Thapa and Neelima Thatal from Namchi Hospital. This homeopathic

tablet Arsenicum Album 30 is an immunity booster medicine and has been given free of cost to all the frontline staff at this Centre. During the course of the distribution homeopathy doctors briefed the staff on how to take the medicine in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India.

They also added that the frontline staff can take this free of cost medicine voluntarily

which can strengthen the immunity. The doctors also spoke about the guidelines of COVID-19 and urged to maintain strict hand and respiratory hygiene.

DC informed that these homeopathy medicines will be given to the entire frontline staff located at various quarantine centers, Melli Check Post, Melli Screening Centre, Police Stations and in many more places where the frontline staff are placed.

TAXIS

•Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday - Reg No ending with EVEN digit - 0,2,4,6,8
•Monday, Wednesday, Friday - Reg No ending with ODD digit - 1,3,5,7,9
•Not allowed to ply on Sunday.

PRIVATE VEHICLES

•Private vehicles are allowed only on Saturday and Sunday
•Saturday - vehicles with registration number ending with EVEN digit - 0,2,4,6,8
•Sunday - vehicles with registration number ending with ODD digit - 1,3,5,7,9

TWO-WHEELERS

•Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday - Reg No ending with EVEN digit - 0,2,4,6,8
•Monday, Wednesday, Friday - Reg No ending with ODD digit - 1,3,5,7,9
•Not allowed to ply on Sunday.

Stranded Sikkimese...

LAND REVENUE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

26. Issuing the notification of "The Sikkim Public Health and Safety (COVID-19) Regulations, 2020", as a regulatory measure for containment of COVID-19 in the State of Sikkim.

LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

27. Make a recommendation to the Governor for the prorogation of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly Session.

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL

26. To promote Followers who have completed 8 years of continuous service to the post of Constable under the Sikkim Police as a one-time measure.

OTHER BUSINESS:

The Cabinet deliberated on various austerity measures to be taken by the State Government in order to mitigate the adverse effect of economic downturn affected by the situation created by the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and following decisions were taken:

1. 35% cut in monthly salaries of Chief Minister and Ministers, Government of Sikkim for one year.

2. Utilization of the Discretionary Fund of Ministers to be put on hold.

3. Ban on appointment under regular/work-charged/muster roll/adhoc/consolidated pay/ temporary basis etc for six months.

4. Restrictions on repairs, maintenance and payment of liabilities.

5. Ban on replacement and purchase of new vehicles, computers and peripherals etc.

6. Curtailment of allocation under revenue expenditure in all Departments by 10%.

7. Restrictions on drawal of PoL by Government officers outside the State and a complete ban on foreign tours.

8. Restrictions on a tour of officers and staff.

9. Restrictions on advertisement/

publication of Notice Inviting Tender except mandatory ones.

10. Restrictions on conveyance allowance.

11. Grant of Housing building advance to be deferred till further notice

12. Ban on official receptions in Hotel/resorts etc.

13. Deferment of transfer of funds to Rural and Urban Local Bodies other than salaries and honorariums till further order.

14. Devolution of funds under the 5th State Finance Commission to be reduced by 10% except grants recommended by the 15th Finance Commission.

15. Non-utilization of all contingency provision in the ongoing works till further notice.

16. No new scheme/works including land acquisition to be initiated till further order.

17. No restriction on implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes where funds are made available by the Government of India.

18. No liabilities to be created without budget provision.

19. Allocation for the ongoing capital works except for State share to be reduced by 15%.

Further, the Government has announced the following:-

1. The Taxi drivers will be provided relief.

2. The stranded students, workers and other Sikkimese citizens will be brought to Sikkim by Special Trains on Government expenditure from Delhi and Bangalore. The stranded people from North-East, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal will be brought to Sikkim by bus on Government expenditure.

3. The people who are stranded in the adjoining states/areas of Delhi and Bangalore will have to travel to Delhi and Bangalore on finalization of date by Indian Railways.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION



Air India unions challenge pay cut in HC

MUMBAI, MAY 8 (PTI): Air India employee unions have moved the Bombay High Court against the airline's decision to slash allowances, which form a major part of salary, by ten per cent because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Air India Aircraft Engineers Association, All India Service Engineers Association and Indian Pilots Guild filed a writ petition in the high court earlier this week against the national carrier and its subsidiary Air India Engineering Services Ltd.

The petition, filed through advocates Jane Cox and Karishma Rao, said that on March 20, Air India announced 10 per cent deduction for three months from the allowance package of all employees except the cabin crew on account of the impact of coronavirus outbreak.

The plea pointed out that on the same day the Union government issued an advisory asking all private and public firms not to reduce salaries or sack employees due to the pandemic.



"On March 29, the home secretary issued an advisory under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, directing that all employers pay wages to their employees without making any deductions for the period their establishments remain closed on account of the lockdown," said advocate Jane Cox.

The deduction announced by Air India was therefore not only illegal

under industrial laws but it also violated the Union government's order, the petition said, demanding that the pay cut be declared as illegal.

It also urged the court to direct Air India not to make any further deductions, and reimburse the amount deducted for March pending final disposal of the case.

The petitioners had also written to the Ministry of Civil Aviation pro-

testing against the deduction but they were to receive any response, the plea said. "The management has called a skeletal staff on duty on some days each week and has directed all employees to stay at home and remain available on phone in case of any emergency.

We are all willing to resume work but are unable to do so because of the pandemic," the petition further said. The

deduction of wages for March was "especially unjust" as most employees worked from March 1 to March 24, which was prior to national lockdown coming into effect, it said.

Allowances form 50 to 70 per cent of salaries of petitioners while remaining amount includes basic pay and other components, the petition said. The court is likely to hear the matter next week.

We need to be more compassionate now more than ever

BHUPEN CHETTRI

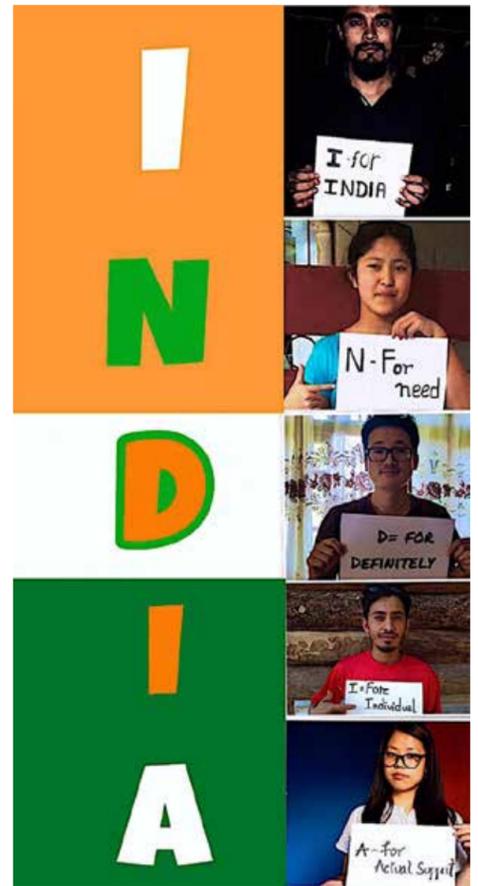
I have made a photo-series including my friends to highlight the current situation.

Let's all come together to fight this war against COVID-19. Individual support and understanding is the demand of the current situation.

Pandemic knows no boundaries, race, gender, caste or political affiliation. All it does is killing the weak first, then the stronger and finally the strongest. We need to contain it before it contains us. The ongoing pandemic is taking lives heartlessly all around the globe. We have often seen countries fight for borders, territory, etc. but no one thought that a day will come when the entire world will suffer because of a tiny creature- a virus called Novel Coronavirus for this long. There is no country left untouched and COVID-19 cases are rising every day.

COVID-19 has brought us unprecedented challenges which need innovative ways to tackle. Technology and science are on the backfoot, at least for now, but with human creativity and intelligence we will definitely contain the pandemic.

We need to act both intelligently and con-



sciously. We need to go through various data available to keep ourselves updated. Simultaneously, we need to be more empathetic and compassionate, more humane than ever before. However, it also teaches us how peace can be maintained, unity can be brought among nations,

epidemic can be contained and defeated and human civilization saved. Thus, during this time of crisis, we need to stay calm, conscious and proactive and do whatever is needed to ease the lives of those less privileged. It is not just social work but a social responsibility. Stay safe, stay home.

10 Bangladeshis arrested in Tripura

AGARTALA, MAY 8 (PTI): Ten Bangladeshi nationals were arrested from Rajnagar village near the Indo-Bangla border on Friday for entering the country without any valid documents, police said. Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided a house in the village and arrested the 10 Bangladeshis on Friday morning.

Director General of Police Rajiv Singh said that the arrested persons revealed during interrogation that they had entered the Indian territory

in search of job about six-seven months back.

One of the arrested Bangladeshis, who was identified as Md Masud Rana told reporters that "After the lockdown was announced, we could not manage any job here, so we were trying to return to our country".

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Border Security Force (BSF) Tripura Frontier on Friday claimed that border smuggling and infiltration had come down drastically during the lockdown period.

Tadong College conducts survey on efficacy of digital classes

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong conducted an online survey among students of the college to learn about the satisfaction and efficacy of the digital mode of education in this moment of crisis.

Subsequently, a report on the Rapid Assessment for Efficacy, Outreach and Satisfaction of Digital Classes during COVID19 closure of College (Apr- May, 2020) was taken out which is an outcome of the survey where almost 60% of our students have taken part, a press release informs.

Associate Professor

and HoD Chemistry, Dr Satyadeep S Chhetri designed the online survey and did the analysis of student perception.

As per the report, the overall satisfaction level is high yet, the figure slightly changes when we see the satisfaction levels at individual course wise and semester wise levels. When we see the course wise break up the satisfaction levels are more for humanities than sciences (where more explanations and board work are required) (BA-59.7% , BSc- 48.7 % , BCom- 49.4 % , BVoc- 58.4%).

Digital penetration was almost 97.3% with

almost 64% saying that internet flow was continuous or with some problems. 2.7% of the places did not have connectivity.

Whatsapp was the most preferred medium for Notes, Audio/Video exchange, followed by Facebook live classes. Zoom and Webex had low preference. However Google Class was also used for some of the semester and courses.

Efficacy of the Digital run classes is only about 30.6 % (BA-35.7%, BSc- 21.1% BCom- 29.7%, BVoc- 35.8%). But this would substantially grow soon as we move towards finishing the course, the release mentions.

By looks of it, T20 World Cup will not go ahead: Warner

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Australian opener David Warner says it is unlikely that the T20 World Cup will be staged in his country in October-November because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All cricketing activity has come to a halt due to the health crisis and there are serious doubts over the future of T20 World Cup.

"The ICC World Cup will not go ahead here by the looks of it. It will be difficult to get everyone (16 teams) together," said Warner in an Instagram live session with India's batting star Rohit Sharma.

However, the International Cricket Council is yet to take the final call on the T20 showpiece event. During the tour, Rohit said India's chat of Australia, which is scheduled after the T20 World Cup, will be a "great way" to restart international calendar.

"I love playing against Australia. When we won last time (in 2019), it was great for us. You guys (Warner and Steve Smith) were missing (due to ball-tampering bans)." "What our bowlers

and batters did there was amazing. I am looking forward to the upcoming tour already. Hope both boards manage to get the series underway. Will be a great way to kick off cricket in the world," said India's limited overs vice-captain.

India won their first Test series in Australia, and Warner said he was feeling helpless watching his team lose.

"Watching that series was hard as you can't do anything from the outside. But I want to say that India has the best pace attack against left-handers. They zero in one spot and keep bowling there. "Mentally, it was great for Indian cricket but it was hard to watch. I felt helpless. Hope it does happen and looking forward to the battle," said Warner.

The Australian said playing India in India is one of the toughest challenges in world cricket.

"I love playing India in India. Everyone is against you. Hard conditions. Same for you (Rohit) when you come here," he said.

Warner is also not enthused by the idea of

playing in front of empty stands, like Australia did against New Zealand in Sydney in March before the ODI series was called off.

"It was a bizarre experience. You could only hear echo of cricket ball. It was bizarre. We are used to calling 'yes and no' while running between wickets but we did not need to do that.

"It was literally like playing a warm up game. It was surreal. I don't know for how long you can sustain that. You gain your momentum from home crowd."

Rohit, meanwhile, joked about his opener partner Shikhar Dhanwan's reluctance to take strike on the first ball.

"He doesn't like to face the first ball. I remember the 2013 Champions Trophy game against South Africa. I had just started opening and he was a regular opener. And you had to face the likes of Dale Steyn and Morne Morkel. I had to face the first ball.

"Shikhar can be annoying but it is great to bat with him. He is such a delight to watch, got so many shots," said Rohit.

K'taka permits bars, restaurants to clear liquor stock

BENGALURU, MAY 8 (PTI): The Karnataka government on Friday allowed clubs, bars and restaurants to sell liquor as takeaway at the maximum retail price till May 17 to clear their existing stock.

Similar permissions have been given to Metro Cash and Carry to sell liquor till May 17.

Also, wine boutiques can sell their stock, but there is no last date set for them.

According to an order from the state Excise department, the permission is applicable to standalone CL-4 (clubs), CL-7 (hotels and lodges) and CL-9 (bar) licence-holders, only till their stocks last; also takeaway of food has been permitted.

Conditions that have been laid down by the government include only sale of sealed bottles, maintaining social distancing during the sale and wearing of masks. Transporting liquor stocks to CL-2 (MRP) outlets is allowed, the order said adding that permission is not applicable to outlets in containment zones.

The order also clarifies that procurement of fresh liquor stocks from the Karnataka State Bev-

erage Corporation Ltd (KSBCL) depots by clubs, bars and restaurants during the period is not allowed.

The permission for the sale between 9 am and 7 pm was given following petitions by certain associations of bars and hotels raising concerns that their stock would have to be destroyed if drinks such as beer which has a shelf life of six months are not sold. In a separate order, the department allowed Metro Cash and Carry to sell liquor till May 17, with similar conditions of timing, social distancing, wearing of masks among others.

They too can't operate in containment zones announced by the government.

A similar order has been issued permitting standalone wine boutiques to sell wines, with similar conditions, but no last date has been set.

The government had earlier allowed CL-2 (retail shops) and CL-11C (state-run retail shops such as MSIL) to sell liquor between 9 am and 7 pm only in areas that are outside COVID-19 containment zones from May 4.

35 students in Assam begin journey back home to Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh

BARPETA/HAILAKANDI, MAY 8 (PTI): The Assam government has facilitated the return of 35 students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) in Barpeta and Hailakandi districts to their home states, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, officials said.

The students were stuck in the two districts due to the nationwide lockdown imposed by the Centre to contain the

spread of COVID-19.

Twenty-three students of JNV Barpeta were sent to Madhya Pradesh by a special air-conditioned sleeper bus, Deputy Commissioner Munindra Sarma said on Thursday.

They had come to study in Class 9 as part of an exchange programme, officials said.

The students were provided masks, sanitisers and mementos of

Assam, they said. Along with the students, the principal, three teachers, a medical team and security personnel also travelled to Madhya Pradesh.

Likewise, as many students from the central government school in Barpeta had gone to Madhya Pradesh as part of the programme.

Sarma said the students from Assam in that state have also started their journey back home.

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104 District surveillance Officer EAST : 7029372100 WEST : 9593297808 NORTH : 9641957468 SOUTH : 7407691463 New STNH AMS : 9434711402</p>

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

Wrong Messaging

Unprecedented in no excuse for dangerously mixed signals

The caller tune on every service reminds people against stigmatizing not only health-workers and other claimants of “frontline-warrior” status but even COVID-19 patients. This is an important message to drill home given that too many appear to be inflicted with lockdown-induced hyper-paranoia which sees them raise the most offensive questions and insist on the most inhuman penalties for people they see as being not as scared of Novel Coronavirus as them. The pandemic, even as it has exposed the disconnectedness of our policy-makers, babus and the people in khaki has also revealed an ugly side of the people at large which is suspicious, poorly informed and intolerant. For this reason, the caller-tune is a necessary and sensible advice especially since the official agencies are tying themselves up in confusing and contradictory messaging.

A people having little faith in the reliability of government health infrastructure and official agencies decided early that the only way they could remain safe was by othering everyone else. They were among the strongest supporters of the lockdown and were the people who kept watch from their windows and cheered when a poorly briefed police force beat up lockdown-violators. The very same people evicted health-workers from their rented accommodations, fearful that because they were attending to COVID-19 patients, they would bring the virus to them. And yes, the very same people were among the strongest bangers of thalis and the most lavish with candle-lighting. It is to counter the dangerous stigmatizing that these folk carry that the caller-tune mentioned earlier is important. Hopefully, these are also people who are on their phones often, pedaling the latest fake news or misinformation which supports their suspicions and repeated listening to the caller-tune message will brainwash them for the better.

Yes, hopefully, this messaging will work because there is too much confusion elsewhere.

Take for instance the recent announcement by the State Government that people caught “infiltrating” into Sikkim [which is in an inter-state lockdown] will be booked under attempt to murder charges. Seriously? What does such an announcement suggest? That every person who enters Sikkim unauthorized is a virus carrier hell-bent on infecting Sikkimese? Yes, illegal entries need to be checked and controlled, but how can an appeal be made against stigmatizing anyone in the same breath as a warning is sent out that “infiltrators” will be charged with attempt to murder? Attaching stigma cannot be a state policy under any excuse, especially not when fear is already running high. The word infiltrator carries a dangerous undertone, one which encourages scaremongering which leads to lynching. The use of the word “infiltration” is also offensive since it connotes an intentional intent to harm, something that terrorists harbor, not immigrants or refugees or people forced to impose themselves even when they know they are unwelcome guests.

And then there is also the ill-advised tone in which the government is trying to convince people not to be fearful of stranded Sikkimese returning home. This appeal is even being broadcast on the public address system at MG Marg in Gangtok as it must be playing in public spaces elsewhere in the state. Yes, there is no justification for people to protest or be suspicious of stranded Sikkimese returning home even if they are returning from the heart of a red zone. The government’s appeal reassures people that the returning Sikkimese are being screened properly at the border and that none of them is symptomatic or sick. The problem here is that this clarification is being offered to convince people that the returning Sikkimese are “safe.” That the people need such a reassurance is disturbing because what the people should actually be insisting for is that the screening is detailed and proper so that the returning Sikkimese receive the attention and medical support they deserve and were perhaps not receiving in places they have fled from. Basing the reassurance to the lay public on the asymptomatic condition of the returning Sikkimese is also problematic because it suggests that bringing Novel Coronavirus positive Sikkimese or even COVID-19 Sikkimese patients was somehow a no-no. Is one to believe that if the situation allows travel, Sikkim’s government and its people will turn away fellow Sikkimese who have tested positive for the virus outside? The current messaging is too short-sighted and insensitive and indirectly promotes stigma [of COVID patients] and should be corrected.

The only explanation offered should be that these are fellow Sikkimese who wished to return home and when conditions were created for them to be able to do so, they have every right to return and no one has the right to challenge or question their entry. In fact, if Sikkim is confident of its healthcare infrastructure and if there are Sikkimese undergoing treatment for COVID-19 outside the State and want to return home, the people should be demanding that the State Government begin exploring the possibility of even their return to the state. While this might not be possible, such an instinct will reflect much better on the Sikkimese than the current bout of scaremongering.

The Novel Coronavirus poses an unprecedented challenge, but it is important that we do not allow our more primal survival instincts to drive out all that makes us human and humane. Here, the State Government and its armies of task forces and nodal officers need to take the lead and nuance the messaging much better.

Coronavirus hasn’t killed globalisation – it proves why we need it

SUNIL VENAİK
theconversation.com

In just a few months, COVID-19 travelled from China to more than 200 other countries, and has now killed more than 200,000 people. Some claim the pandemic sounds the death knell for globalisation - but in fact, it reveals the disasters that can arise when nations try to go it alone.

Examining where the world went right or wrong in its COVID-19 response may help mitigate another global crisis, climate change.

In the face of coronavirus’ global sweep, most national governments acted independently from each other, rather than in unison. Just as in global action on climate change, the responses of nations to the health crisis has largely been ad hoc, piecemeal and, in many cases, lethally ineffective.

My recent research as an international business scholar has focused on finding the common threads of national cultures. My research shows that people around the world have many needs and aspirations in common, such as good health, education and employment. These are best fulfilled when world leaders work jointly with a global, rather than a national, mindset.

So let’s look at the lessons COVID-19 has taught the world, and how this might help the global effort to curb climate change.

DISUNITY IS DEATH

Following the COVID-19 outbreak in China, many countries imposed unilateral travel bans on Chinese arrivals, against advice from the World Health Organization.

The bans mirror the response of many nations during the west African Ebola epidemic which began in 2013. Research has shown that those travel and trade restrictions acted as a disincentive for nations to report outbreaks.

There are undoubtedly legitimate questions over China’s reporting on the coronavirus out-

break. However, travel bans may have made China more defensive and less willing to share vital information with the rest of the world.

A shortage of vital supplies also exposed fractures in international cooperation. For example, France and Germany banned the export of medical equipment such as face masks, and the United States was accused of intercepting a shipment of medical supplies en route to Germany.

But where the world has cooperated to stop the spread of COVID-19, the benefits have been obvious. Collaboration between global health scientists has helped identify the virus’ genome sequence, and grow the virus in the lab.

Similarly on climate change, international unity is required if the world is to keep temperatures below 2°C warming this century. But international climate meetings frequently end in disunity and despair. Meanwhile, global emissions creep ever higher.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

One person practising social distancing during the pandemic might think their effect is negligible. But coronavirus is highly infectious: on one estimate, a single person with coronavirus could eventually infect 59,000 others.

Similarly, many countries seek to avoid responsibility for taking climate action by claiming their contribution to the global problem is small. The Australian government, for example, repeatedly points out it contributes just 1.3% to the world’s emissions total.

But on a per capita basis, Australia is one of the world’s highest emitters. And as a rich, developed nation, we must be seen to be taking action on cutting emissions if poorer nations are expected to follow suit. So actions Australia takes will have major global consequences.

ACT QUICKLY

In the two months it took the virus to spread from China and become a global pandemic, other nations could have readied themselves by amass-

ing test kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment. But many nations did not adequately prepare.

For example the US was slow to implement a widespread testing regime, and Japan did not declare a nationwide state of emergency until mid-April.

Of course the world has had a far longer time to adapt to and mitigate climate change. The time lag between emissions and their consequences is years, even centuries. There has been ample opportunity to take progressive and thoughtful corrective action against climate change. Instead, the crisis has been met with complacency.

As the COVID-19 experience has shown, the longer we delay action on climate mitigation, the more global, costly, and lethal the consequences.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

As others have noted, a major supplier of swabs used for coronavirus testing is based in Italy, and a German company is a primary supplier of chemicals needed for the tests. Many countries rely on foreign suppliers for ventilators, and an Indian firm – the world’s largest vaccine manufacturer – says once a COVID-19 vaccine is ready for mass production, it will supply large volumes to the world, at low cost.

It’s clear that international cooperation is critical for effective mass testing and treatment for the virus. Nations must work together to improve production and distribution, and resources must be shared.

So too is cooperation needed to deal with the worldwide economic downturn. The global recovery will be long and slow if nations adopt sovereign mindsets, putting up barriers to protect their own economies.

With the coronavirus as with climate change, working together is best way to secure humanity’s safety, health and well-being.

[the writer is Associate Professor of International Business, The University of Queensland]



Rodrigo Duterte’s dictatorship sinks to new depths with closure of main broadcaster

TOM SMITH
theconversation.com

After just four years in power, Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, has turned his country into a deadly dictatorship one again. Now the closure of the country’s major mainstream news platform ABS-CBN on May 5 in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic has struck deep historical chords in a country that has heard this sorry song before.

The broadcaster was ordered off air by the country’s media regulator, which said its licence had expired and needed to be renewed by Congress. But Duterte has had an ongoing battle with the independent ABS-CBN and the move was seen as a clear attack on media freedom.

The regime of former Filipino dictator Ferdinand Marcos also closed the broadcaster down in 1972 when it imposed martial law. Marcos’s regime murdered, disappeared and tortured its own people with impunity. Assassinations plagued public life at every level – and there were 3,257 officially documented killings.

Now Duterte’s death squads put the Marcos years into a chilling context. Some estimate at least 29,000 people have been killed in Duterte’s so-called drug war.

The current extent of the alleged genocide is hard to know and will be even harder without ABS-CBN. In-

vestigative journalism and accurate reporting are practically impossible. Journalists are regularly assassinated along with lawyers and human rights workers. Families and society are bereft of justice and accountability. The Philippines has become increasingly perilous for many citizens and an understandable fear of retribution silences many in 2020 despite all the communication tools available.

The timing of the ABS-CBN shutdown could not be worse. Filipinos desperately need their largest broadcaster – the oldest in south-east Asia – for reliable information about COVID-19. Anti-vaxxer conspiracies around dengue fever and measles vaccinations have caused recent tragic outbreaks of both diseases in the Philippines. And yet Duterte’s brand of “medical populism” has spread misinformation, claiming people can rely on fictional “Filipino antibodies” to fight COVID-19.

FEW CHECKS ON POWER REMAIN

The velocity of Duterte’s reign of death and abuse has caught weak institutions and opponents unprepared. His populist electoral victory can in no way excuse the atrocities and yet Duterte’s chauvinistic style and cavalier actions still remain politically popular.

His hashtag friendly campaign title Du30 has become a powerful brand – if not now a violent and well-connected clan. Du30-ism is un-

deniably a cultural and political juggernaut that shows very few signs of abating, or being met by an emerging counter-force. Duterte now controls every aspect of public administration and there are no checks and balances to his power. The fourth estate is now severely – if not mortally – disabled and Du30’s power absolute, for now.

Duterte’s power over the security forces is based on an old and un-subtle system of patronage normally employed by local clans, mayors and alike. Now that the provincial “big boss” is resident in the presidential palace in Manila, he has a vast network of people in every institution in the country in his debt. The military has been overtly politicised and, conversely, politics and culture have become increasingly militarised.

Duterte enables both masked assassins on the back of motorbikes, and killers in uniform. Just as with Marcos, it will take decades to repair public trust and legitimacy in the security services.

‘BIG BOSSISM’ REIGNS

Politicisation of supposedly independent judicial and legislative branches of government is all but confirmed with the shutdown of ABS-CBN. Duterte’s appointees dominate 11 of the 15 judges on the High Court, which protects him and his cronies from justice. The regime has now begun to target the education sector, robbing the next generations of a more progressive future.

Mandatory military training is being pushed in high schools to further militarise society. University students are being falsely targeted in the drug war and in the fight against communist insurgents using crude divide-and-conquer tactics.

Without a free media, new forms of cultural and political dissent will be needed. So far, social media has been no salvation – it was the horse Du30 rode in on and still dominates. His DDS – Duterte Diehard Supporters or Davao Death Squads, referring to the city where Duterte was a former mayor – patrol online and offline.

At times, it feels little has changed across much of south-east Asia since 1971 when Bruce Lee busted out of Hong Kong to global appeal in his film *The Big Boss*. The cultural trope of Big Bossism is entrenched through computer games, film and TV across south-east Asia – only now the battle is fought with bots and keyboards, not Kung Fu.

Shutting down ABS-CBN is not merely an echo of the Marcos dictatorship – it is a continuation of the enduring weaknesses in the Filipino state. Duterte is the most recent incarnation of the Marcos-era Big Boss, wielding the same power in a more potent and deadly fashion. And just as with Duterte, it’s possible other strongmen or authoritarian could follow.

[the writer is Principal Lecturer in International Relations, University of Portsmouth]

26 test positive for COVID-19 in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 8 (PTI): As many as 26 people, who had recently returned from Surat, tested positive for COVID-19 in Odisha on Friday, taking the total number of cases in the state to 245, a health department official said.

Of the fresh cases, 19 are from Ganjam, five from Kendrapara and two from Bhadrak districts.

"These people had come from Surat and were in quarantine centres. They were symptomatic," the official said.

With these new patients, the number of cases in Ganjam has gone up to 47 since May 2, when the district had reported its first case, he said.

The tally for Bhadrak now stands at 23, while Kendrapara has a total 8 cases, the official said.

Migrant workers from Odisha, who were stranded in Gujarat's Surat city due to the lockdown, have been returning to the eastern state in droves by buses and trains after the Centre allowed their movement.

Nearly three lakh Odia workers mostly from Ganjam district are engaged in diamond cutting, textiles and other works in Surat.

The state health department had on Thursday conducted 2,460 tests for coronavirus, he said.

Odisha has so far tested 52,974 samples.

With these new patients, the number of active cases now stands at 181, while 62 patients have so far recovered from the disease. Two persons from Bhubaneswar have died of the infection.

Jajpur district has reported the maximum number of cases at 55, followed by Bhubaneswar in Khurda district 50, Ganjam 47, Balasore 27, Bhadrak 23, Sundergarh 12, Kendrapara 8, Jagatsinghpur 5 and Mayurbhanj 4.

Two cases each have been detected in Cuttack, Jharsuguda, Bolangir, Keonjhar and Kalahandi, and one each in Puri, Dhenkanal, Deogarh and Koraput districts.

The state had on Thursday reported 34 new cases.

Over 100 cases have been reported in the last eight days, the official said.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Rohingyas in TN tackle lockdown blues, pine for better living conditions

V GANGADHARAN CHENNAI, MAY 8 (PTI): Tucked away in a calm suburb of Kelambakkam, the air in the Rohingya Muslim refugees camp was abuzz with preparations by several men for making a delicious porridge to break the daily Ramzan fast.

Sporting an infectious smile, Mohammed Ayub welcomes a neighbour even as he breaks up vermicelli noodles from packs strewn around and drops them in a huge vessel with boiling water as another man places firewood in the makeshift earthen stove.

A 'cutting master' (butcher) in a nearby chicken-cum-mutton outlet, 22-year-old Ayub says he thanks God to pray and fast peacefully in the holy month of Ramadan after a 'bitter' phase in his native land of Myanmar.

"Tamil Nadu bahuth pasandh hai," (I like Tamil Nadu very much) he says as his curious children look on.

Ayub is one among those who came to Tamil Nadu in 2016 following a stay in Jammu and Kashmir for some time.

They had reached the hill territory following a perilous journey from Myanmar.

"I am happy and thank God for having a job even during the days of the lockdown. The stall I work is open till afternoon from 9 AM and I earn about Rs 10,000 and try to make ends meet," he says with a laugh when asked if his earnings have been affected due to curbs.

A cyclone shelter building at Kelambakkam, which was re-



cently given a fresh coat of paint, is the current home of nearly 100 Rohingyas who belong to 18 families.

The neighbourhood is on the way to Mamallapuram, about 25 km from Tiruvanmiyur in south Chennai.

While some Rohingyas men work as butchers, some are helpers in restaurants and others do odd jobs like delivering goods on their fish carts.

The refugees, who hail from regions, including Maungdan in Myanmar, have registered with the Foreigners Registration Office (Police Superintendent), in Kancheepuram and have a Residential Permit issued by the authorities.

Yearning for relief from the sweltering heat, while several men have bath in an open enclosure in front of the building, Yusuf, a delivery man in the local market, moves his tri-cycle cart

to a nearby lane to carry out repairs.

"There was no work for more than a month," Yusuf says.

Asked how he manages, he says "it is difficult, we somehow tackle."

Trying to fix glitches in the engine, he hopes that with the easing of curbs, he will now find work.

The 28-year-old man, a father of a boy and girl, says they were however spoilt for choice when it came to essential commodities like cooking oil, pulses, rice and wheat through the lockdown period since March 24 evening.

"Koi farak nahi karta," (no one differentiates) he says and recalls the support they got from the government authorities and the local people, "be it Muslims or Hindus," to keep them going without hassles.

"We got rice supplies from the (Shirdi

Sai) Baba temple (in the vicinity) as well. We are happy everyone lends us a helping hand," says Yusuf. Not surprisingly, the bonding between the locals and the refugees is too striking to miss as Yusuf's wife combs the hair of an 'akka' (elder sister and she is a neighbour) Kalaichelvi, beneath the shade of a tree in a friendly chat.

Kalaichelvi praises them for their hard work and says some well-to-do Muslims even gifted motors (engines) to the Rohingyas men after seeing them slog.

"They now have motorised tri-cycles which makes their work easy," she says.

Rohingyas say the government run Primary Health Centre bang opposite the camp is a boon for them since consultation, diagnosis and medicine is free of cost and the seven pregnant women are periodically

taken care of.

Recently, when some of them arrived here after visiting their relatives in other States, there was a "concern about the probability of them having contracted coronavirus."

Assuaging concerns, authorities got them admitted to the Chengelpet government medical college hospital quickly and they tested negative for the contagion.

"We were relieved," recall the inmates.

Meanwhile, as trucks meander on the road, men taking bath in open with towels around their waists discreetly ask Yusuf if there are anyone 'nearby' and the catch lies therein.

Barely covered with odd material like frayed clothes and strings, the open place for bath about 10 to 12 feet away from the busy main road is a pointer to their living conditions.

Though there are two restrooms in the 'pucca' building, given the number of occupants, it is far from adequate.

The building used by the refugees is located on a road that serves as a link between the GST Road on the one side and the Old Mahabalipuram Road on the other, which are two key arterial roads that provides connect to the core city.

For nearly 100 people, including about 40 children, the ground plus one building is cramped, where curtains and bedspreads serve as walls between families.

Such a situation has prompted some families like that of Yusuf to move away and put up shacks on the open ground abutting the building.

Also, they use the open ground for cooking in view of lack of space.

During the rainy season, the ground is filled with water.

Rohingyas say they will be even more grateful to the government if the authorities could consider an alternative site for them or improve amenities here.

When asked, local officials told PTI, "from day one of their arrival here, the government has ensured that they have a proper place (to stay) and don't go hungry.

Refugees are given all essential commodities and now they have supplies that will last for two months...also, periodically the premises is inspected to redress grievances."

On their living conditions, they concurred that it needed improvement, adding steps were being taken to address concerns.

"Improvement is needed in some other localities as well and not only there (Rohingyas camp)... the government is committed to everyone's welfare," they said.

The pretty children, bubbling with enthusiasm, are, however, not worried about anything and go around playing at the tree lined roadside near their place of dwelling. They go to the local government run school and are fluent in Tamil.

Those like Rafiq Alam, a helper in a restaurant and who has some family members in Bangladesh and Myanmar, are more worried about the chances to meet and live with them again than the lockdown difficulties.

As Alam got ready to leave to break the fast and offer prayers, a gentle evening breeze wafted the pleasant smell of the hot porridge waiting to be served.

8 new COVID-19 cases in Assam; total 53

GUWAHATI, MAY 7 (PTI): Eight people, four each in Guwahati and Silchar, tested positive for COVID-19 in Assam on Thursday, taking the number of cases in the state to 53, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

There are 18 active cases of the novel coronavirus pandemic in the state, while 34 people have recovered so far, Sarma said.

"Four persons in Guwahati test #COVID19+ One of them had come from outside Assam, and is in home quarantine, while 3 are from Guwahati," he tweeted.

"Four persons, who took the same bus from Rajasthan in

which the Cachar dist #COVID19+ person travelled, have tested positive too," Sarma added.

The person who tested positive in Silchar on Wednesday night has cases pending against him in Sonitpur district. Police are investigating how he managed to reach Ajmer in Rajasthan and return to Silchar in a bus, Sarma told reporters.

A bus carrying 42 passengers had arrived in Silchar from Ajmer. Samples of one of the passengers tested positive for COVID-19, following which certain areas were declared as containment zones, he said.

Subsequently, samples of four other persons were tested, results of which returned positive, Sarma said.

It has been decided that all persons coming from "red-zone states" to Assam will be placed under institutional quarantine till the results of their first tests are received, the minister said.

Sarma said the entry of stranded persons to the state was being monitored by a committee, with Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) G P Singh as its nodal officer.

"The permission for travel of stranded persons to Assam

is being given by this committee," Sarma said. "But in this particular case, the bus was arranged in Ajmer and the permission was given by deputy commissioner of the Rajasthan district."

The Assam government is ensuring that returnees maintain social distancing in the buses and the vehicles ply with only 50 per cent of their capacity but "in this case, 42 people were travelling in the bus", Sarma said.

The health and home departments will coordinate to regulate the entry of people to Assam and screening of the passengers will be increased, he added.

Book chronicles varied episodes in lives of mothers

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Author Pooja Pande explores the spectrum of experiences mothers have as women, as humans - from ecstasy to depression, jealousy possessiveness to indifference, exhaustion to sensual desire - in her new book in which she reveals the personal, social and emotional roller-coaster motherhood can be.

Pande says she wrote "Momspeak: The Funny, Bittersweet Story of Motherhood in India" in response to the half-joking conundrum posed by Anne Enright: "Can mothers not hold a pen?" - while attempting to channel the spirit of Karl Marx's Thesis Eleven - "Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however,

is to change it."

The book, published by Penguin Random House India, talks about pivotal moments in the journey of motherhood.

"There is an impetus each answers to, and also a logic. There is an interrogation of everything we presume and assume about mothers and motherhood - instinct, impulse, rationale," Pande says.

"There is an aching back to buried memories and emotions, mine and that of others - forages into the uncharted dark oceans where motherhood often leaves us, to sink, or swim, or rise; journeys into the sunnier spaces that are as close to blessings as we can get," she writes.

The digital launch of the book will be done by Penguin, Crossword and Shoppers Stop on Saturday.

Writer-director Tahira Kashyap Khurana, who has praised "Momspeak" for being "funny, witty and lively", will be launching the ebook at the digital launch. She will also be reading from the book and will be in conversation with the author.

Pande, through vignettes of her personal journey, and hilarious and poignant episodes in the lives of different mothers - married, divorced, single, queer, adoptive - celebrates and shines new light on this transformative, life-affirming experience of motherhood.

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THE BIRDS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey course-d by hybrid projects in Sikkim and the regions, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM

EDITED BY TSHERING EDEN AND PEMA WANGCHUK

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South African first-class cricketer Nqweni tests positive for coronavirus

JOHANNESBURG, MAY 8 (PTI): Solo Nqweni, a South African first-class cricketer who has been battling multiple health issues, has tested positive for coronavirus.

The 25-year-old all-rounder is also being treated for Guillain-Barre Syndrome -- a condition in which the immune system attacks the nerves. He is currently in Aberdeen, Scotland and shared the news of him contracting COVID-19 on Twitter.

Nqweni is the third cricketer known to have contracted the disease after Pakistan's Zafar Sarfraz and Scotland's Majid Haq.

"So last year I got GBS, and have been battling this disease for the past 10 months and I'm only half way through my recovery. I got TB, my liver failed and my kidney failed. Now today I tested positive for coronavirus. I don't understand why all of this is happening to me," Nqweni tweeted.

This diagnosis is the latest in a long line of health issues for Nqweni, who spent four weeks in an induced coma last year.

Nqweni played for South Africa Under-19s in 2012 and has been contracted to Eastern Province and has also played for franchise cricket for the Warriors.

The former Grey High star, who is playing as a professional at Aberdeenshire Cricket Club, is in the intensive care unit of Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, according to Herald Live.

Kicking off: Texans at Chiefs to open season Sept. 10

AUSTIN, MAY 8 (AP): The Kansas City Chiefs will open defense of their Super Bowl championship by hosting Houston on Sept. 10 in the NFL's annual kickoff game pending developments in the coronavirus pandemic, of course. The Texans won a regular-season game at Arrowhead Stadium in 2019, then blew a 24-0 lead in the divisional round of the playoffs.

Another highlight of the opening weekend will have Tom Brady's regular-season debut with Tampa Bay against Drew Brees at New Orleans on Sept. 13 the first matchup of 40-plus quarterbacks in NFL history.

The opening of SoFi Stadium in the Los Angeles area that Sunday night has the Rams hosting the Cowboys.

Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas will debut on the Monday night, Sept. 21, with the Raiders facing Brees and the Saints.

All of the 32 teams released their schedules early Thursday evening, with the full 2020 list scheduled to be revealed by the league a bit later. The Chiefs, who won their first Super Bowl



in a half-century last February, need baseball's Royals to move their game for Sept. 10, which now is part of a double-header two days earlier.

The teams' stadiums share parking lots. The NFL schedule, not to mention offseason activities and the preseason, has to be considered tentative given the current prohibition on large gatherings.

But Commissioner Roger Goodell has said the league is planning for a normal season,

albeit while making contingency plans.

"The league and the clubs have been in contact with the relevant local, state and federal government authorities and will continue to do so," NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

The traditional Monday night doubleheader on opening weekend will have Pittsburgh at the New York Giants, which has a rookie head coach in Joe Judge, and Tennessee

at Denver. "The number one positive is we're getting ready to play football, so that's the biggest thing," Judge said.

"Once you get the schedule, it starts moving a little bit faster in your mind in terms of preparing for what's in front of you."

Top overall draft pick Joe Burrow and the Bengals start off against the sixth overall selection in April's draft, Justin Herbert and the Chargers at Cincinnati. The Bengals also

will face the other highly rated rookie quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and the Dolphins in Week 13. New England, without Brady at QB for an opener for only the second time since 2001 he was suspended for the first four games of 2016 hosts Miami on the opening Sunday.

Thanksgiving games will have Houston at Detroit, Washington at Dallas, then one of the league's fiercest rivalries with Baltimore at

Pittsburgh in the night game.

Late-season Saturday games will be scheduled but with undetermined matchups for flexibility, something the NFL has done previously.

Certain to draw heavy early season interest will be the past two league MVPs, Patrick Mahomes and Lamar Jackson, facing off in Week 3 on Monday night at Kansas City.

The Chiefs and Ravens each have five prime-time games, as do New England, Dallas, Green Bay, Tampa Bay, defending NFC champ San Francisco, and the Rams.

Detroit and Washington have no prime-time outings.

There's one Friday night contest, on Christmas, when Minnesota visits New Orleans.

Every team has two home and two away games in the first month of the schedule. Whether that's a quirk or by design is unknown.

The season ends Jan. 3 with all divisional matchups, as in recent years. Then follow the playoffs, with the Super Bowl slated for Feb. 7 in Tampa, Florida.

Pending developments with the coronavirus, of course.

Football Returns: Jeonbuk Motors snatch late win to kickstart K-League

SEOUL, 08 MAY [THE GUARDIAN]: Lee Dong-gook - the one-time Middlesbrough striker, and legend of Korean football for Jeonbuk and earlier in his career; Pohang - is adjudged man of the match. Not a bad cameo, from the veteran, then.

Jose Morais' side start their title defence with all three points, although Green Army fans might have liked to have seen a more emphatic scoreline, from a side that dominated both possession and territory.

Sixteen shots to five for the home side, eight

on target to Suwon's solitary effort. 59% possession - you'd have to say, that was reasonably emphatic in the end.

Suwon for their part started well with Terry Antonis lively in the heart of the Bluewings' midfield. His senseless straight red card for a rash challenge 75 minutes in ultimately helped cost his side a share of the spoils. In truth though, they never properly came to grips with the slick passing game of Jose Morais' chargers, did the visitors.

Thanks for your com-

pany and emails tonight - apologies for those I couldn't include. We don't get to cover Korean football every week, but in a football-starved global context it's great to get a close look at some of the leagues around the world. It's been a factory line for producing young talent across the decades for the big clubs of England and Germany, but in its own right, the K-League is a very decent league.

Jeonbuk Motors clinch it late, their title defence starts with a clean sheet and all three points.

Vishy Anand ambushes Russia's world No 4 to win in five minutes

LEONARD BARDEN

LONDON, 08 MAY [THE GUARDIAN]: India's former world champion Vishy Anand stole the show at this week's online Nations Cup as the 50-year-old veteran caught the world No 4, Ian Nepomniachtchi, with home prep and won in 17 moves as checkmate was imminent. The unsuspecting Russian blitzed out his replies until it was too late, and the entire fifth-round game was over in only five minutes.

China, meanwhile, remain the squad to beat in international team chess. Beijing's elite players won both the open and women's gold medals at the 190-nation Olympiad in 2018 and they have taken a clear lead in the online Nations Cup with grandmaster and computer move-by-move commentaries.

The competition format, four-player teams including a women's board plus two alternates, strongly favours China, whose male players are the world title candidates Ding Liren and Wang Hao, the rising star Wei Yi, and the World Cup semi-finalist Yu Yangyi. Their women's board is shared by the world No 1, Hou Yi-



fan, back in action after her academic year at Oxford, and the reigning world champion, Ju Wenjun.

After six of the 10 rounds, which qualify two teams for Sunday's final, China led with 11/12 ahead of Europe 9/12, United States 7/12, Russia 5/12, India and Rest of the World 2/12.

Europe's team is led by France's world No 5, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, with Magnus Carlsen conspicuously absent. The tournament is being played on chess.com, the major rival to chess24.com which hosted last week's Carlsen Invitational. Now chess24 is carrying the Nations Cup games, and providing an entertaining commentary by the world cham-

pion himself.

Why did he decline to play? "I think for me it would have felt more important to play if I had been, let's say, American or Chinese or even Russian. Representing your country in such a tournament is huge, but representing Europe. I don't feel so strongly about Europe."

Chess.com has a different explanation, that Carlsen wanted a higher fee than other participants, but was turned down by Fide's organisers.

Anand's miniature, one of the fastest wins ever between elite players in major competition, will make the Nations Cup remembered. His trainer had found the idea recently, and a previous trainer had also done

so many years earlier. It caught out the Stockfish computer on the chess24 website, which flashed an equal position right up to 15 f5!! when it suddenly changed to +6.

Black's moves are natural, but after 13... Be6? (d4 or Nc6) Nepomniachtchi thought he was already lost. Near the end Black cannot escape by 16...Qb6 17 f6 Nd7 18 Qh6 Nxf6 19 Ng5 or by 16...Qd5 17 f6 Qe4 18 Rae1.

Players at all levels from club matches upwards now spend serious time preparing for the favourite lines of their opponents and hoping that one day they will hit the jackpot and bring off a homeworked victory, but few ever get the chance to do so in such spectacular style as Anand.

There was a bizarre sequel. For most of the match it seemed that Anand's win would secure the match against Russia, until right at the end India's No 2, Pentala Harikrishna, made a mouse slip in a drawn position and lost a piece and the game to Vladislav Artemiev.

The closing rounds of the Nations Cup can be viewed online on Friday and Saturday (2pm start) with the final at 3pm on Sunday.

Misbah wants resumption of cricket soon, even if behind closed doors

KARACHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Pakistan head coach and chief selector Misbah-ul-Haq said being confined to home due to the coronavirus-forced lockdown can become depressing and wants some cricket activities to resume soon even if the matches have to take place behind closed doors with proper safety barriers.

There are reports that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) was contemplating rescheduling and organising the three Test matches against Pakistan in August behind closed doors at Manchester Old Trafford and Southampton.

Misbah said he would love to see some cricket activities resume at the international level and has no problems in playing in empty stadiums. "It is not an ideal situation for anyone because of this coronavirus pandemic and obviously the health and well being of everyone should be our top priority. But if matches can be held even in empty stadiums with the right safety barriers... I would have no problems," he said.

The former skipper said that the players have had nothing much to do except stay indoors for the last two months since the Pakistan Super League (PSL) was called



off due to the global health crisis in March.

"Everyone is confined and I just think that if even if it can be made possible to bring some live cricket action to people sitting at home it would do them a lot of good," Misbah said.

"It becomes depressing when you have nothing to do and hear about mostly COVID-19 news all the time. In this situation if sports can be resumed and if cricket can be started at least it will allow the people to watch cricket at home."

Misbah, who took charge last year in September, said if the right safety barriers and precautions are put in place for players, match officials and other stakeholders, cricket boards can move forward.

He, however, reminded that boards will have to follow their government instructions on the

coronavirus. German football league Bundesliga is set to resume on May 16 and Misbah said it was a positive news.

"But even they first got clearance from their government. Cricket boards also will have to do that," he said.

The 45-year-old said the players were responsible for maintaining fitness standards during these testing times and he expects them to be in top condition whenever cricket resumes.

"I told them as cricket professionals it is their individual responsibility to take care of themselves and their fitness. Because they can be called on duty anytime," he said.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says Manchester United will not force players to return

JAMIE JACKSON

MANCHESTER, 08 MAY [THE GUARDIAN]: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says he would not force any Manchester United footballer to play if they did not feel "mentally ready" due to concerns about coronavirus.

The Premier League hopes to get the go-ahead for a mid-June return and Solskjaer has all his squad back in the country for a potential resumption of training. Yet the manager is conscious some may have reservations about doing so.

"You wouldn't hold anything against them - if a player is not mentally ready to play I don't think we could force anyone," Solskjaer told Sky Sports News. "They've not raised too many concerns, but

of course we trust the experts, the health officers."

A resumption with games played at neutral venues is proposed. "Football has always been about the fans, the environment we play in and the atmosphere," he added. "But these are strange times. Whatever they decide it's going to be a boost for everyone to get football back on. I'm just hoping we get a safe solution soon."

Adjustments will be required. "You're used to the connection with the boys, shaking hands, giving them a hug. Now with all this, that's gone, so that's my main concern, how we get back and how we're going to build that environment again." Paul Pogba is fit to play for the first

time with Bruno Fernandes, who has made an impact in his nine appearances, and Marcus Rashford should be available following a back injury. "With Marcus back, Bruno and Paul back, you'd expect us to be more exciting," Solskjaer said.

United sit fifth, three points behind Chelsea, have reached the FA Cup quarter-finals and are set to make the same stage of the Europa League, with a 5-0 first-leg lead over Lask. "We've always got this pressure at Man United of trophies, winning the next game," Solskjaer said. "We've been through a difficult season, a rebuild. I think everyone knows that and has seen that. And I think we're starting to see something exciting."

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China supports WHO-led review of global pandemic response

China said Friday it supports a World Health Organization-led review into the global response to the coronavirus outbreak, but only "after the pandemic is over".

The comments from foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying came as China faces increasing global pressure to allow an international investigation into the origins of the pandemic.

The review should be conducted in an "open, transparent and inclusive manner" under the leadership of WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Hua said at a press briefing.

She added that it should be at an "appropriate time after the pandemic is over".

But Hua did not say the review should probe the origins of the virus, despite growing calls led by the US and Australia for an international inquiry into the issue, which has become a key flashpoint in deteriorating tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Instead, the review



should "summarise the experience and deficiencies of the international response to the pandemic, strengthen the WHO's work, enhance the construction of countries' core public health capabilities, and provide suggestions to improve global preparedness against major infectious diseases," said Hua.

She said China would cooperate with WHO efforts to trace the origin, but rejected US calls for an investigation, accus-

ing it of "politicising the issue".

Hua stressed that any inquiry should be based on the International Health Regulations, and be authorised by the World Health Assembly or Executive Committee -- the WHO's dual governing bodies.

WHO epidemiologist Dr Maria van Kerkhove said Wednesday the agency is in talks with China to send a mission to investigate the animal source of the virus. Both

US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have heavily criticised China's alleged lack of transparency, and have repeatedly pushed the theory that the virus emerged from a Wuhan maximum-security virology lab.

The claim has become a key point of contention between China and the US, with Beijing accusing US Republican politicians of shifting the blame as an electioneering strategy. Most scientists believe the

virus originated in animals before it was passed on to humans.

Numerous countries including France, Germany and Britain have also urged greater transparency from China over its handling of the virus.

China has strenuously denied accusations it concealed information relating to the initial outbreak, insisting it has always shared information with the WHO and other countries in a timely manner.

Hong Kong gyms, bars and cinemas reopen as virus measures ease



Hong Kong began to ease major social distancing measures on Friday with bars, gyms, beauty parlours and cinemas reopening their doors after the financial hub largely halted local transmissions of the deadly coronavirus.

Queues formed outside gyms in the semi-autonomous Chinese city on Friday morning for employees to check temperatures as people celebrated the return of some normalcy to the city.

Doris, a 39-year-old yoga teacher, said her first classes were already filled after weeks of teaching online.

"I'm excited to share again... and see my students," she told AFP.

"I was quite impatient to get back to the gym," added Alexandre, a 26-year-old finance worker after completing a workout in the city's commercial district.

"It shows that life is starting to get back to normal even though we haven't been locked up like in Europe," he added.

Will Sutton, an American resident, tweeted pictures of his local gym with partitions placed between running ma-

chines. "After three weeks without a workout, whatever... let's just get back to sweating!" he wrote.

The less health-conscious flocked to watering holes, some of which opened their doors as soon as the clock struck midnight.

"Last month we lost a lot of money," bar manager Nikita told AFP as he received the first punters in four weeks. "But still, we are just super happy to be back open."

Most of Hong Kong's entertainment venues were shuttered in early April when the city suffered a second wave of infections -- primarily residents returning from Europe and North America as the pandemic spread rapidly there.

But health officials have made impressive headway against the disease thanks to efficient testing, tracing and treatment programmes with just over 1,000 infections and four deaths.

New COVID-19 cases have been in the single digits for the last 18 days -- with eleven days showing a zero tally. All new infections are residents returning from overseas who are quickly quarantined.

- No dancing, no live music -

In a city mired in recession the reopening of many businesses will be welcome. But the threat of the virus means certain restrictions remain in place.

Bars are permitted to operate at half-capacity and must ensure a distance of 1.5 metres between tables, while live music performances and dancing remain banned.

Gyms, cinemas and beauty parlours must also ensure social distancing -- such as adequate space between yoga mats -- as well as temperature checks and hand sanitiser.

Pure, one of the biggest yoga chains, said it would limit classes to a maximum of eight people while bowling alleys are only opening every other lane. Authorities have also lifted the limit on how many people can gather in public from four to eight.

Restaurants will also now be allowed to take bookings from groups of up to eight people.

Nightclubs and karaoke businesses will remain closed for now because health officials regard them as "high risk".

UN chief says pandemic is unleashing a 'tsunami of hate'

UNITED NATIONS, MAY 8 (AP): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday the coronavirus pandemic keeps unleashing a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering.

The UN chief said anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread, and COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred.

Guterres said migrants and refugees have been vilified as a source of the virus -- and then denied access to medical treatment.

With older persons among the most vulnerable, contemptible memes have emerged suggesting they are also the most expendable, he said. And journalists, whistleblowers, health professionals, aid workers and human rights defenders are being targeted simply for doing their jobs.

Guterres appealed for an all-out effort to end hate speech globally. The secretary-general called on political leaders to show solidarity with all people, on educational institutions to focus on digital literacy at a time when extremists are seeking to prey on captive and potentially despairing audiences.

He called on the media, especially social media, to remove racist, misogynist and other harmful content, on civil society to strengthen their outreach to vulnerable people, and on religious figures to serve as models of mutual respect.

And I ask everyone, everywhere, to stand up against hate, treat each other with dignity and take every opportunity to spread kindness, Guterres said.

Israel president tasks Netanyahu with forming govt



BY HARINDER MISHRA JERUSALEM, MAY 8 (PTI): Israeli president has tasked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with forming a new unity government after Parliament passed legislations approving details of a power-sharing deal between the his Likud and centrist rival Benny Gantz's Blue and White parties, ending more than a year of political impasse.

Netanyahu, the longest serving Prime Minister in Israel's history, will continue at the helm of Israeli politics for at least another 18 months while he fights charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three separate cases.

"I hope Israel will soon have a government that will deal successfully with the complex challenges that stand before us," President Reuven Rivlin said on Thursday, noting the dual crises of the political stalemate and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Rivlin granted Netanyahu a two-week mandate on Thursday night to form the government, which would keep the 70-year-old leader in power until November 13, 2021.

Earlier on Thursday, Israel's Parliament approved amendments to the two basic laws by a hefty majority, paving

the way for Netanyahu to form a fully functioning unity government for the first time since December 2018.

The Knesset or Parliament voted by 71 votes to 37 to back the power-sharing deal between Netanyahu's Likud and his main rival former military chief Gantz's Blue and White parties.

The next government is likely to be sworn in next week with Netanyahu succeeding to forge a power sharing agreement with rival turned ally Gantz, a former Chief of Staff and leader of the Blue and White parties, who split his faction to enter into a rotational deal with the Prime Minister.

Netanyahu would hand over the baton to him after leading the government for the first 18 months.

The bills were supported by the lawmakers in Netanyahu's Center-Right bloc, except for the lawmakers of Yamina, who absented themselves, because it is still unknown whether it will enter the coalition. Blue and White and Labor lawmakers voted in favour, except for Labor lawmaker Merav Michaeli, who opposes the government, The Jerusalem Post reported.

The bills were necessary for Blue and White to be able to recommend

Prime Minister Netanyahu to form a government by Thursday night's deadline to prevent a fourth election, the paper said.

Later, representatives of Likud and Blue and White submitted 72 signatures of lawmakers recommending that Netanyahu form the next government to President Reuven Rivlin, it added.

Once approved by Rivlin, Netanyahu will have two weeks to form the next government.

The development came a day after Israeli High Court ruled on Wednesday that Netanyahu may form a new government while under indictment for corruption charges.

In their ruling, the 11 justices said there was no legal cause to intervene in the coalition agreement between the two parties.

The petitions against Netanyahu were filed by advocacy groups that have asked the court to ban any indicted politician, including Netanyahu, from being allowed to form a new government. Netanyahu was indicted earlier this year on charges of accepting bribes, fraud and breach of trust.

He has denied any wrongdoing. His trial was postponed due to restrictions his hand-picked interim justice minister placed on the courts after the coronavi-

rus crisis erupted and is scheduled to commence later this month.

Netanyahu had signed the agreement with Gantz to form a national government last month after an unprecedented third round of polls which again did not give anybody a clear verdict to form the government.

The deal allows Netanyahu to serve the first 18 months as Prime Minister after which Gantz would assume power for the next 18 months.

Netanyahu has held onto power as a caretaker leader for more than a year as political stalemate prevented the creation of a government and triggered successive elections.

His ruling Likud party emerged as the single largest party with 36 seats in the 120-member Knesset after the third round of polls but the right-wing bloc led by him could garner only 58 seats, falling short of the simple majority of 61.

Gantz won the backing of 61 Knesset members and was mandated by President Rivlin to form the next government but he chose to cut a deal with Netanyahu, even at the cost of splitting his Blue and White party given the difficulties of putting together a government in a highly divided Israeli polity.

Solemn Europe to mark WWII anniversary despite virus damage

Continent devastated by the coronavirus will mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe on Friday, as the economic destruction of the current global crisis was laid bare.

Large-scale parades that had been envisaged to commemorate victory over the Nazis have been downsized as the world grapples with a fearsome new enemy that has killed 277,000 people and sickened more than 3.7 million. While parts of Europe appeared to be over the hump of new infections, the United States' death toll showed no signs of slowing, and Brazil warned of chaos with the pandemic running out of control.

"Within about 30 days, there may start to be shortages on shelves and production may become disorganised, leading to a system of economic collapse, of social disorder," Economy Minister Paulo Guedes said.

Brazil is Latin America's worst-affected nation, with more than 135,000 infections and 9,100 confirmed deaths, although experts say the true figures are far higher.

But far-right President Jair Bolsonaro opposes stay-at-home measures to slow the spread, saying they are unnecessarily damaging the economy.

US President Donald Trump is also pushing for lockdowns to be lifted, as he tries to steady the economy ahead of November polls.

"This country can't stay closed and locked down for years," he said Thursday, as the US death toll topped 75,500.

Another 3.2 million people filed unemployment claims in the United States last week, bringing the total who have lost their jobs in the lockdown to 33.5 million.

Germany and France on Thursday reported major slumps in industrial production and Britain said its econom-

ic output would plummet by 14 percent this year.

Across Europe, many countries are now easing restrictions, with some shops and schools re-opening, Italy allowing Catholics to soon attend mass, and Norway to open up pubs on June 1.

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to offer a roadmap out of lockdown on Sunday.

The easing has already begun in Germany, while France is due on Monday to start emerging from its situation, though Paris will remain restricted.

- Wreaths -

Despite limitations, some ceremonies were to go ahead Friday in commemoration of the end of hostilities in World War II.

The anniversary of Nazi Germany's 1945 unconditional surrender after a war that cost 50 million lives is a holiday in Berlin this year.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier are due to lay wreaths at the country's main memorial.

Ceremonies across France have been drastically scaled down, although President Emmanuel Macron will still be attending an event on the Champs-Élysées.

In Britain, street parades by veterans have been cancelled.

Russia had originally planned a huge military display on its May 9 Victory Day, but now only a flypast will take place over Red Square.

President Vladimir Putin will lay flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier memorial, before making a TV address that will not only touch on the war, but is also expected to chart out the country's next steps in battling the virus. Most of Europe has seen significant drops in new infections, but cases are on the rise in Russia, with another 11,000 reported Thursday.

Kartik Aaryan Shares A Reality Check: "You See The Camera"

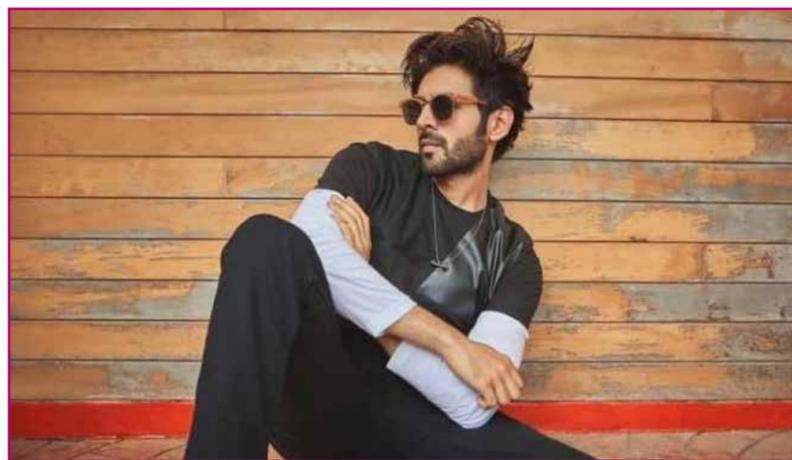
Acting in films is far more different and difficult than practicing acting in front of a mirror, take it from Kartik Aaryan, who spent his initial years in the film industry trying "not to look nervous." Kartik, who made his debut in Bollywood with the 2011 film *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNA*, revealed in his latest post how "unnerved" he was when he faced the camera that was "bigger than the suitcase" he brought with himself when he came to Mumbai to make a career in acting. "When you first dream of being in films, you act in front of the mirror and nail it every time, and the world of movies seems magical. Then you get a movie. You see the camera and are unnerved. It's bigger than the suitcase you brought to Mumbai," wrote Kartik.

"The bright lights seem to be scolding you for not landing on a one-inch tape mark and wasting everyone's time. The first few years become about trying not to look nervous," he added.

Kartik, in his post, added how his career changed after he signed a film with Imtiaz Ali. The actor, who has worked with Imtiaz in his last film *Love Aaj Kal*, was all praise for the director for all good reasons - from his unique style of filmmaking to providing a comfortable environment to his actors. He wrote in his post: "Then you get an Imtiaz Ali movie. The moment he narrates the story, you are pulled into a dream. I don't even remember seeing the camera on

his set, he'd always be standing wherever I looked after cut. He was never at the monitor, he was by my side. The lights

"smoothly". "How ironic that the making of this film felt most effortless! It would scare me to think of doing two characters in one



MORNING PICK-ME-UP! Supermodel, Alessandra Ambrosio grabbed a Starbucks drink wearing a leopard print mask and teal outfit during the coronavirus pandemic in West Hollywood.

Bob Dylan previews new double album with moody 'False Prophet' song

Bob Dylan will release his first album of original songs in eight years, "Rough and Rowdy Ways," on June 19th. Early Friday morning, Dylan dropped a third song from the album, the swaggering, guitar-heavy "False Prophet," which follows "Murder Most Foul" and "I Contain Multitudes." "I ain't no false prophet," Dylan growls over a slinky striptease-blues groove, powered by a downright filthy fuzz-guitar riff. "I just know what I know."

The song's lyrics veer between existential weariness, Willie Dixon-worthy boasts, unabashed come-ons (at one point addressing two women - "Mary Lou" and "Miss Pearl" - at once) and more spiritual allusions. He nods to a Zen koan with a line about "climbing a mountain of swords with my bare feet," quotes Martin Luther's phrase "enemy of strife," tells a "poor devil" to look up at a "city of God," and ends the song by casually singing "I can't remember when I was born/ and I forgot when I died," followed by a fusillade of lead guitar.

Dylan, who won the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature, has long rejected the title of prophet, false or not. "You feel like an impostor

when someone thinks you're something and you're not," he told "60 Minutes" Ed Bradley in 2004. "I never wanted to be a prophet or savior. Elvis, maybe. I could easily see myself becoming him. But prophet? No."

In a widely reported passage from a 2007 memoir, former Pope Benedict wrote that he was unhappy with Dylan's appearance at a Vatican youth event: "There was reason to be skeptical - I was, and in some ways I still am - over whether it was really right to allow this type of 'prophet' to appear."

Dylan's last album of new songs was 2012's "Tempest," which he followed with three collections of standards: "Shadows in the Night," "Fallen Angels," and "Triplicate."

"Rough and Rowdy Ways," which is almost certainly named after the 1929 Jimmie Rodgers classic "My Rough and Rowdy Ways," will be his 39th studio album, landing 57 years after his debut LP. The new album has ten tracks; on the CD version, the 17-minute-long "Murder Most Foul" gets its own disc.



Ari Aster to produce English version of Korean cult classic 'Save the Green Planet'

LOS ANGELES, MAY 8 (PTI): "Midsummer" director Ari Aster is set to produce the English-language remake of South Korean classic "Save the Green Planet".

The project hails from Seoul-based studio CJ Entertainment, which most recently backed filmmaker Bong Joon-Ho's multiple Oscar-winning film "Parasite".

The 2003 black comedy, directed by Jang Joon-hwan, is about a disillusioned young man who captures and tortures a businessman who he believes to be part of an

alien invasion. The film had toured extensively on the international festival circuit with stops at Cannes, Toronto, Hong Kong and Jeonju, among others.

Jang will return to direct the remake from an English-language adapted script by Will Tracy, reported Variety.

Aster will produce the project in collaboration with Lars Knudsen through their banner Square Peg. Francis Chung will also serve as a producer.

Miky Lee, Young-ki Cho and Jerry Ko will be executive producers.

David Ayer to direct thriller 'Six Years' for Netflix

LOS ANGELES, MAY 8 (PTI): Filmmaker David Ayer has set up his next directorial project at Netflix.

According to Deadline, Ayer will write and direct thriller "Six Years" based on 2013 novel of the same name by best-selling author Harlan Coben.

The filmmaker previously tackled "Bright", starring Will Smith, Joel Edgerton and Noomi Rapace in the lead, for the streamer.

"Six Years" is about a man who, six years after a breakup with the love of his

life, attends the funeral of the man his former love went on to marry.

He's surprised to see that the woman at the funeral is not the person he once was involved with, a revelation that sets him on a path to unravel the mystery of her identity and of his own memory.

Ayer will also produce the project along with Chris Long through their Cedar Park banner.

The filmmaker's next release is crime thriller "The Tax Collector", featuring Shia LaBeouf.

Florence Pugh was scared about getting Russian accent right in 'Black Widow'



LONDON, MAY 8 (PTI): Actor Florence Pugh says the most terrifying aspect of starring in the upcoming superhero film "Black Widow" was doing the Russian accent.

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe's stand-alone film, the Oscar-nominated actor plays Yelena Belova, a sister-figure to Scarlett Johansson's Natasha Romanoff/ the titular Black Widow who was trained in the Red Room.

"I was scared because my Russian accent was going to be out there and I didn't know what it sounded like.

"I'm also playing a character who no-one's seen before but they've read about her. I didn't know whether

people were going to hate me!" Pugh told ELLE UK for its June issue.

The 24-year-old actor also said the idea of joining the MCU itself was quite "daunting".

"When you think of Marvel, it's big and daunting. Especially being a relatively small actor to look at it and go, 'Oh! I'm going to be a part of this', that's a big decision," she said.

"Black Widow", which was scheduled to hit the theatres on May 1, will now release on November 6 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Directed by Cate Shortland, the film also stars David Harbour and Rachel Weisz.

Aries: You can either whine about the lemons life throws at you or make a delicious lemon tart out of it. Aries, you're doing a wonderful job at transmuting the panic and anxiety into creativity. Art is and has always been your secret weapon in this crusade. On the down side, you could find out that somebody close to your heart has been throwing shade at you in private. Not all friendships are meant to last forever. Detach. Disengage. Protect your space but do not stoop down to their level.

Tip: Art is your secret weapon.

Taurus: You didn't think you'd be able to survive the lockdown, but look at you now! You're winning the award of QuarantQueen and embracing the slow life. When you don't have the latest gadget to purchase and hottest restaurant to visit, all you have is your rich interior life. So journey back to yourself, Taurus. Reconnect with you true origins. The truth is, things in your outer reality will never be perfect. But you possess within you the power to transcend.

Tip: You're changing the way you approach life.

Gemini: Understand the law of cause and effect. Every action we take has a reaction. When we plant a seed of goodness, we open the door to love and abundance. When we plant the seeds of misery, that's what we attract into our experience. So be mindful of where you are vibrating at. A karmic cleanse is in order, Gemini. The Universe is also asking you to honour the lessons you are being faced with as an opportunity to evolve. Trust that as long as you act conscientiously, you will be taken care of.

Tip: Know that everything is unfolding for your greatest good.

Cancer: Your love affair with the written word continues, but you're in the mood to challenge yourself a little more. What's on your agenda, Cancer? Is there a skill or subject you've been meaning to learn? Just because you cannot go to the classroom that doesn't mean the classroom cannot come home to you. Some of you may also feel inspired to use poetry and prose as a form of expression. Feel comfortable sharing your gift with the world? Social media is a wonderful tool at your disposal.

Tip: Books over people.

Leo: Not everybody in the room is going to jam at your frequency, and that's just the order of life. If somebody is spreading a vicious rumour about you, throw your head back and laugh. They don't know everything about you. They never will. They're merely acting from a space of their own limitations. Your lower self could get vengeful at this point. But you're so much better than this. Rise above, Leo. Remember who you are and your higher purpose.

Tip: Rise above the drama.

Virgo: This is a big moment in the Virgo HQ. Things are coming around full circle, bringing you the reward and recognition you deserve. All eyes on you. Look out for power-players who are in the mood to sync forces. Use your discretion when it comes to saying yes, though. You want to align yourself with opportunities that are for your highest good. Remember to work through the abundance blocks as you do. Allowing yourself to receive will be the real game changer here.

Tip: You've got that big goal energy about you.

Libra: Ah, the gift of the gab! It's both a boon and a bane,

Libra: Be aware of how you are using your words today, lest you end up hurting somebody you love. You don't want to jeopardise your relationships just because you woke up on the wrong side of the bed. On the upside, you are learning to up your social media game and use the available tools to your advantage. Use this time to curate your timeline consciously. Think motivational speakers and fitness gurus who inspire you to raise your vibrations.

Tip: Act conscientiously.

Scorpio: Look at you healing old wounds and transmuting the pain into joy, creativity, and love. You're glowing like never before, Scorpio. You're also developing a sense of trust and surrender, an innate understanding that everything transpires for your highest good. Honour and acknowledge the learnings, magical one. Spirituality is also taking centre stage for you. Instead of thinking of meditation as something you "do", think of it as something you are. Raising your vibrations will help you approach everything—the mundane tasks included—with the tranquility of a Zen Master.

Tip: Turn your wounds into wisdom.

Sagittarius: It's true that you've had to let go of certain plans due to the lockdown, but you've also found a way to adapt and adjust. Let reinvention become your magic word. Know that you were born to kiss the stars. What's wonderful about this phase of your life is that it is providing you with a sense of stability despite the uncertainty. You're more sure now than ever before about the chosen path. The cards are also speaking of fame and recognition. Trust that you will find yourself in the spotlight soon.

Tip: The cards speak of reward and recognition.

Capricorn: Like every couple, you've gone through your share of ups and downs, but you've also discovered a way to power through. Remember why you got together in the first place, Capricorn. Love is and will always be your secret weapon. Move past the differences and focus on the similarities. Let the love you speak of take centre stage. For single Saturnians, this is a time of nurturing soul ties. You're becoming aware of who your real people are.

Tip: Love really does make the world go around.

Aquarius: Oh hello, QuarantQueen! You're winning at the things that once intimidated you and that says something. Your professional life is also on fire. Since you're not one to rest on laurels, you're thinking of new ways to up the game. Research is your power word. You will find that there are many people who are vying for your attention right now. But you're not obliged to say yes to everything or settle for less than what you deserve. Call your power back, Aquarius. Most importantly, read the offer document carefully before putting your name on the dotted line.

Tip: You're not obliged to say yes to everything that comes your way, or settle for less.

Pisces: At a time like this, it is your mental prison that you need to be the most careful of, the voice in your head that thrives on self-sabotage, the voice that disempowers you and says, "You cannot". No force in the world can come in your way once you realise your potential, Pisces. This is also a time of endings in your world. Karmic cycles are being completed as you read this. Send out a prayer of gratitude for the lessons learned.

Tip: Move beyond the limitations created by your mind.