



MARGOT BROUGHT SO MUCH OF HERSELF TO HARLEY QUINN: DIR CATHY YAN
pg 08

The Pressure to Titillate
Television news is getting worryingly dangerous
pg 4

BOLLYWOOD PRODUCER KARIM MORANI'S DAUGHTER TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS
pg 08



Summit **T**IMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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COVID-19 state portal launched to cover all aspects of information and access

GANGTOK, 06 APR [IPR]: Chief Secretary SC Gupta today launched a dedicated State Portal for Covid-19.

The portal can be accessed at www.covid19sikkim.org.

The Covid-19 Centralized Information System has been developed by the Department of Information Technology to function as a single source for credible and authoritative information on services related to Covid-19 mitigation, and to disseminate genuine/credible information about the steps taken by the Government of Sikkim in order to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along with vital interactive features, the portal will also work as a fact-checking platform to deal with any instance of circulation of fake and unverified news and information.

The system has been developed with technical support from local IT firm, NetSpeq Solutions, which has its registered office in Deorali.

The portal is a voluntary contribution of NetSpeq Solutions founder, Karma Lhendup Bhutia, and his team comprising of Sulochan Thapa and Arpan Rai.

The Portal also includes a link to Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund where people can voluntarily contribute through the

online mode (cmdrf.sikkim.gov.in).

A brief presentation on the Online Portal was made by Assistant Director, IT Department, Prem Ashis Pradhan.

The portal displays information pertaining to the latest news and press releases from the Government of Sikkim as well as Notifications, Orders, Circulars and other official information issued by competent authorities on a regular basis; Daily updates on number of people who have been quarantined along with the names of the quarantine centres, as well as number of patients admitted in Isolation facilities; Daily updates of COVID-19 test samples sent for screening, and results thereof. The portal will have the daily medical bulletin issued by the Health Department; All the contact details of important persons will be found in the portal as well as important Helpline numbers; Citizen's Corner, which is an interactive feature, where the citizens can ask questions to the Government officials by registering one time and avail of the following services.

The Citizen Corner provides list of essential stores in different localities and also how to enlist a store; Vendors/ suppliers/ Commercial establishments i.e. milk vendors/ grocery/ departmental stores/ emergency vehicles/ are requested to



register themselves through the portal by clicking the essential button on the portal by visiting sikkimlocalsupply.com.

This data will be helpful to identify vendors for essential goods in the locality.

One can also apply for vehicle passes online. Those who are applying for the Vehicle e-Pass can use the portal to apply for the permit online which gets approved online and on approval a downloadable link will be received on their cell-phone which can be downloaded and showed at checkpoints.

However, the documents mentioned in the application are to be carried in original for verification purpose. It may be informed that the e-passes will be

issued by District Collectors from tomorrow, the 07 Apr, 2020. A nodal officer for each district has been notified for the purpose.

Registered NGO's and voluntary organizations willing to extend their services can apply for permission to operate within a particular district through the portal. A dedicated column has been designed for this purpose.

It may be mentioned that the application for issue of vehicle passes has been developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), Sikkim.

Chief Secretary, SC Gupta expressed his satisfaction at the interactive and user-friendly features of the Portal.

He said that the Portal will be a credible source of information and updates on COVID-19 in the State, as well as a platform for easily accessible online services to the people of Sikkim during the period of lock-down.

He also suggested that the Portal should be a one-stop solution for all IT needs of the people in this time of crisis. Speaking on the challenge of circulation of fake and unverified news and information, the Chief Secretary said that the Penal Provisions laid down by the Government of India under the Disaster Management Act have to be clearly laid down in the Portal to make people understand the legal implications of creating/sharing fake news through any form of media.

He took the opportunity to appeal to the people of Sikkim not to indulge in circulation of fake or unverified news and information on COVID-19.

The meeting had the presence and participation of Secretary, Home (Protocol), Rinzing Chewang Bhutia, Director, IT Department, Rajendra Chettri, Officers from Home and IT Departments, Members of the newly-constituted 'Fact Checking Team' to check fake news, and Founder of M/s NetSpeq Solutions, Karma Lhendup Bhutia.

CM takes stock of distribution of relief materials

GANGTOK, 06 APR [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] chaired a high-level meeting at Samman Bhawan to take stock of the distribution of relief materials by the concerned authorities and also check on the law and order situation in the state.

During the meeting, he gave clear instructions to the concerned departments for delivering the relief materials to the beneficiaries, instructing them to make sure that commodities like rice reach them within the next 48 hours.

He requested the MLA's to make sure that there is a swift transfer of relief materials from the godowns to the fair price shops and ordered for the immediate disbursement of relief materials without fail.

The Secretary of Food and Civil Supplies apprised the house re-



garding the stock of food commodities i.e. rice, daal, and oil available in the state. He also apprised the transport issues which has been a hurdle in the timely receipt and distribution of the relief materials.

The Chief Minister advised the concerned authorities to

distribute the relief materials through the tokens issued by the District Collectors and not directly through trucks to avoid overcrowding as this may defeat the purpose of social distancing.

The Director General of Police assured necessary assistance for the smooth flow of these materials to the state

and informed about the steps taken to seal entry points to the state using wired fences to stop the illegal flow of people in the state from neighboring areas.

The Chief Secretary informed the house about the online portal which will be launched soon where one can apply for permit/vehic-

le passes in case of an emergency. This was done to decrease the gathering of people and provide an efficient way for people to apply for permits.

During the meeting, the Minister of Food and Civil Supplies Arun Upreti informed the house regarding his visits to the godowns to take stock of the situation and ensure the relief materials reach all the beneficiaries.

In conclusion, he requested the concerned authorities to be more vigilant for the coming few weeks and requested everyone to follow guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the State Government to avoid confusion. He urged the concerned authorities to fulfill the commitment made by our Government and distribute the relief material by Friday at all costs.

Agri Minister assures delivery of relief packages within 48 hours, inspects West dist preparedness

RUDRA KAUSHIK GYALSHING, 06 APR:

Agriculture Minister Loknath Sharma today stressed that relief packages should reach beneficiaries in West District immediately and directed the Food & Civil Supplies Department officials to reach the relief materials to all the Block Administrative Centres of the district by 07 April.

The Minister explained that relief assured by the State Government to those in need like migrant workers stranded in Sikkim and underprivileged families was delayed due to problems such as lack of transport facilities and difficulties faced in procuring the commodities during the lockdown.

He added that now that supplies have arrived, the relief should reach the beneficiaries without any discrimination.

He further informed that apart from rice, other foodgrains such as pulses, onion, oil etc will be procured by Friday.

He also took note of the preparedness of the West District administration in dealing with COVID-19 and the ongoing lockdown.

The Minister was speaking at an emergency meeting held today at the Zilla Panchayat Bhawan here.

The meeting was attended by DC [West] Karma R. Bonpo, SP Tenzing Loden Lepcha, ADC Karma Lodey Lepcha, CMO Dr Anusha Lama and officials from F&CS Department.

The Minister, appreciating the dedication of the West District administration, recognized that it was due to the district administration's preparedness that West Sikkim has remained safe so far.

He added that the fight against COVID-19 would continue till the disease was eradicated.

The DC informed that relief mate-

rials will be provided to beneficiaries phase-wise through the BACs and that every panchayat ward would initiate the distribution of ration considering the convenience of the people.

He added that rations available in godowns are being sent to the BACs and the beneficiaries are being identified.

Maintaining that preference will be given to families living Below the Poverty Line, the DC informed that around 21,600 families have been enlisted in the beneficiary list. He informed the house on preparedness of west district administration regarding the fight against COVID-19 and ongoing lockdown.

He added that isolation centres have been set up at the sub-division level and if the situation demands, more will be established.

DC further informed that the transit centres for the drivers who are permitted to ferry essential goods from Siliguri could be established considering the fear of people about the possibility of transmission.

"The lockdown will be maintained in an effective way and the district administration is well prepared to deal with any untoward situation," he said.

The SP in turn briefed the meeting about the law & order situation in the district and assured that adequate police personnel and IRBN have been deployed to enforce the prohibitory orders.

The SP also informed that wire-fencing will be done at different access points of the borders with Nepal.

The CMO stated that adequate medicines have been made available to almost all the PHCs and PHSCs across the district and in case of shortage in the health centres, the Health Department was committed to meet the demand.

COVID-19 death toll rises to 109, number of cases to 4,067: Health Ministry

NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI): The death toll due to novel coronavirus rose to 109 and the number of cases in the country climbed to 4,067 on Monday, according to the Union Health Ministry

While the number of active COVID-19 cases stands at 3,666, as many as 291 people were cured and discharged, and one has migrated, it stated. The total number of cases include 65 foreign nationals

According to the ministry's data updated at 9 am, 21 fresh deaths were reported from Maharashtra, two each from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil

Nadu and one from Punjab Maharashtra has reported the most coronavirus deaths at 45, followed by Gujarat at 11, Madhya Pradesh at nine, Telangana and Delhi at seven each, Tamil Nadu at five and Punjab at six

Karnataka has reported four deaths, while West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh have recorded three fatalities each. Two deaths each have been reported from Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, and Kerala. Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana have reported one fatality each, according to the data

The highest number of confirmed cases is from Maharashtra at 690, followed by Tamil Nadu at 571 and Delhi at 503. The number cases in Telangana has gone up to 321, in Kerala to 314 and in Rajasthan to 253

There are 227 COVID-19 cases in Uttar Pradesh, 226 in Andhra Pradesh, 165 in Madhya Pradesh, 151 in Karnataka and 122 in Gujarat

Jammu and Kashmir has reported 106 cases, Haryana 84, West Bengal 80 and Punjab 68. Thirty people are afflicted with COVID-19 in Bihar, while Assam and Uttarakhand have

reported 26 novel coronavirus cases each

Odisha has 21 positive cases, Chandigarh 18, Ladakh 14 and Himachal Pradesh 13. Ten cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, while Chhattisgarh has nine cases of the infection. Goa has reported seven COVID-19 cases, followed by Puducherry with five cases, Jharkhand three and Manipur two cases. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have reported one infection each

"State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation," the Health Ministry said on its website.

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CRH rep accepted aid from political party in personal capacity, not on behalf of hospital: CRH

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 APR:

Central Referral Hospital today clarified that reports and claims that CRH received a donation of facemasks and hand sanitizers from "a political party" are misleading.

A press communiqué issued by the CRH Management conveys the "categorical denial" of the hospital receiving "any such items."

Opposition Sikkim Democratic Front, it may be recalled, had donated a consignment of face-

masks and hand sanitizers to CRH a few days back.

The CRH Management has now clarified: "The person in the photograph in circulation who supposedly received the items according to the social media page did so in his own personal capacity and not on behalf of CRH."

The press release goes on to claim that the Hospital "is self-sufficient with essential items required to tackle any medical emergency due to the pandemic."

Now, a digital book camp to beat lockdown blues

NEW DELHI, APR 6

(PTI): In a bid to engage children during the lockdown, Penguin India has started a month-long digital summer camp in which its authors will curate talks, masterclasses, read-aloud sessions and do-it-yourself activities.

The #StayHappy initiative is through the channel of GurgaonMoms, a women's community in the NCR.

"With outdoor activities suspended and everyone being advised to stay in, parents are facing a challenge to keep children meaningfully engaged. Amid all this, we initiated the idea of #StayHappy to bring cheer and quality content to our readers," says Preeti Chaturvedi, vice president (marketing and strategic alliances) at Penguin Random House India.

"Over a period of one month, our authors will curate talks, masterclasses, read-aloud sessions and DIY activities through the channel of GurgaonMoms. We have an impressive line-up in place and hope our readers will enjoy this initiative," she adds.

Upasana Luthra, director of GurgaonMoms Book Club, says there could not have been a better way to utilise screen time more fruitfully than this idea of a book camp.

"We are looking forward to many more on a diverse range of topics. Esha Deol among the speakers addressed us and we were so thrilled to see her share her story with us," she says.

Deol in a video shared her journey of motherhood, as documented in her book "Amma Mia" and how one should stay safe.

Says Deol about the initiative, "Parents and kids are dealing with a unique challenge right now and I thought this will be a great opportunity to connect with them and share my own challenges and experiences as a parent, which I also document in my book."

Other names include popular authors Ruskin Bond, Jane DeSouza, fitness expert Deanne Panday and spiritual guide Sri M.

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Relief materials reached to migrant laborers stranded in Namchi and Jorethang



NAMCHI, 06 APR [IPR]:

In view of the needy and stranded labourers affected due to the lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the MEO's of Namchi Municipal Council (NMC) and Nayabazar-Jorethang Municipal Council (NJMC) and all Block Development Of-

ficers (BDO's) under the supervision of South District Administration under South district engaged themselves in distributing various relief materials on 05 and 06 of April respectively.

The officers deployed distributed the said relief materials in various areas and wards under

South District maintaining proper protocol of social distancing and hygiene. Necessary law and order situation was also ensured during the said exercise by the SDMs of the district and sub-divisions under South to avoid mismanagement and unwarranted congregation of

public and authorities alike.

It may also be pertinent to add that Government of Sikkim has been taking all measures to perform public outreach activities as well as offer essential services to aid public and needy people alike during the lockdown period.

What if I get Coronavirus..? anxious calls never stop

BENGALURU, APR 6

(PTI): "What if I get coronavirus, will my kin contract this disease?"

"What if I get the illness but because of the lockdown, I am not able to reach the hospital?"

"When I reach the hospital, will I get ventilator support?, will doctor be available or not to treat me?"

"When I die (from Coronavirus), will anybody come to cremate my body? Will I be stigmatised?"

Hospitals treating COVID-19 cases, doctors attending on patients

and help-lines have been receiving calls of this kind over the past few days from anxious and concerned people worried over the pandemic.

"People go on anticipating worst scenarios, this has to be broken. This is a cycle of concern which will snowball into worst preoccupation", a mental health expert told PTI.

Director of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, B N Gangadhar, who has more than 30 years of extensive experience in the field of mental health

gave up her job in the city's financial heart a decade ago.

The pandemic has prompted more people to rethink what can be produced in Hong Kong, said Mandy Tang, who runs a campaign group that rallies behind the city's farmers by promoting local produce.

Referring to the ongoing lock-down in the

from both clinical and academic perspectives, terms such concerns as normal reactions to unusual situations.

"Majority in this condition get better, almost 95 per cent of them become all right.

Its a good thing, whatever the illness (those anxious), its a short-lived illness, not more than a fortnight to a month, it leaves no scar, unlike HIV, it comes and goes, there is no need for panic, the recipient of the Padmashri award said.

Referring to the ongoing lock-down in the

community Farm in suburban northeast Hong Kong has doubled takings since the outbreak became a major public health issue in February.

"All of a sudden, so many people came to our fair for vegetables that our supply could not meet the demand," said founder Becky Au, who

gave up her job in the city's financial heart a decade ago.

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Governor to donate 30% salary to PM Cares Fund for one year

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 APR:

Governor Ganga Prasad has committed to donate 30 percent of his salary for the next one year to the PM Cares Fund in view of country's collective battle against COVID-19 pandemic.

A press release issued by Raj Bhawan informs

that in a letter addressed to the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, today, the Governor expressed his desire to get 30% of his salary deducted over the next one year and the amount credited to PM-Cares Fund as his personal contribution for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supermoon to be visible on Wednesday

KOLKATA, APR 6 (PTI):

People confined to their homes due to the coronavirus-triggered lockdown will be able to watch Supermoon on Wednesday evening.

Supermoon, which will a little larger than the usual full moon, will be visible from India in the evening of April 8, MP Birla Planetarium Director Debiprasad Duari said.

On Wednesday, the moon will rise from Kolkata horizon at 6:17 pm and will set at 6:19 am the next day, Durai said.

"It will be a spectacular sight to witness as it will be (one of) the brightest and the biggest full moons of 2020,

and is being widely publicised as the Pink Supermoon," the renowned astrophysicist said in a statement.

Traditionally, the full moon in the month of April is named after certain wildflowers, called pink moss, native to eastern North America, and hence the name 'pink' refers to the pink flower that blossoms during this time and not the colour of the moon.

"People should try to see the moon just after its rise with the horizon as the background when a full moon looks spectacularly larger than during the later night hours when it is high above in the sky," he said.

Boeing extends factory shutdown in Washington state

WASHINGTON, APR 6

(AFP): Boeing has said it will indefinitely extend a shutdown at its factories in Washington state because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The aerospace giant had already halted production at its Puget Sound facility near Seattle, where the company builds the long-range 777 jet and other models, after announcing a two-week stoppage last month.

It had also shut its other major state factory at Moses Lake because of the 737 MAX grounding.

Boeing announced Sunday that the shutdown would continue indefinitely in an effort to protect staff from COVID-19, which has already claimed the life of one employee at the company's Everett facility.

"The health and safety of our employees, their families and our communities is our shared priority," Boeing's commercial airplanes division president

Stan Deal said in a statement.

Boeing was already facing significant headwinds prior to the coronavirus pandemic because of the crisis surrounding the 737 MAX, which has been grounded for more than a year following two fatal crashes.

But the pandemic has further hit the company's outlook with most commercial airline travel suspended and major carriers thrust into a life-or-death fight.

The company is seeking more than 60 billion in federal support for the US aerospace industry in the wake of the two crises.

It announced a voluntary worker layoff plan on Thursday and said it expected "several thousand employees" to take a severance package or retire.

Boeing currently employs around 70,000 people in Washington state.

How to survive conronatimes? Internet's the word

TRISHA MUKHERJEE

NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI):

Every move you make, every step you take, it's the internet that is possibly enabling it at least in urban India -- powering the router tucked away in a corner as well as mobile data packages that are the pivots to keep the work and home worlds revolving in lockdown times.

The dictionary defines internet as the large system of connected computers around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other.

Behind the rather prosaic definition is a tool that has woven itself intricately into the fabric of everyday life. And never more so than now when the entire country is under an unprecedented 21-day lockdown.

At a time when staying indoors is the best way to survive the coronavirus pandemic, the internet has emerged as saviour for over 480 million internet users across the country. The lockdown doesn't look quite as unbearable with the internet. Take it away and chances are urban lives will fall apart like dry cake.

It's about work, leisure, shopping, family bonding and myriad other things as people recalibrate their lives. For every closed grocery shop, restaurant, movie hall, gym or even doctor's appointment, the internet has an alternative ready at the click of a button.

When living in the same city can feel more distancing than ever, it is bringing families and friends closer. Many

office systems would have collapsed had the internet not made possible video calls from different parts of the city and sometimes even the country.

Pune-based Shreya Sengupta said the net is helping keep her sane in these stressful times.

Video calling is the closest thing to seeing her brother and boyfriend in London after her trip to the city last month got cancelled because of the coronavirus threat.

Internet is all I have. London has the most number of corona cases in the UK, and WhatsApp video call is the only way I know they are okay. I just literally need to see them everyday just to know they are fine, not coughing etc, the 29-year-old instructional designer told PTI.

Over the last few weeks, social media users have been sharing screenshots of their video chat windows with friends, family and colleagues, evidence of the role the internet is playing in connecting people in these days of social distancing.

Besides the usual Whatsapp, Facetime, or Facebook messenger, new apps like Zoom are making the process seamless.

The increased dependence on the internet has led to data consumption in the country going up by at least 20-30 per cent in data consumption, according to Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) Director General Rajan Mathews.

To help mitigate mobile and broadband network con-

gestion, platforms like Netflix and Facebook are reducing video quality after COAI wrote to the government urging it to initiate measures to ease the burden on network infrastructure.

Mathews said last week that mobile users could do their bit by choosing to time their online activities during off-peak hours.

Gurshabad Grover of the Bengaluru-based Centre for Internet and Society (CIS), however, reassured that the internet system is far from collapsing in the country.

"The internet won't break. It is designed to be resilient, and our internet traffic gets routed around failures. There is an extremely low chance of multiple independent network failures happening simultaneously, in the absence of which any single network congestion or failure may not even be noticeable, Grover told PTI.

He explained that low speeds often experienced by broadband users is a temporary inconvenience.

"One can face low speeds, especially for broadband services, but that will be for a certain point of time as bandwidth is split across several customers.

His words come as comfort for Shruti Menon, who works with Mumbai-based NGO Vitamin Angels, and has been coordinating with colleagues over video conferences since the first week of March.

We try to have one call a day with the core team in the morning. It helps us to check-

in with each other and plan our work for the day. If there is an urgent need to address something, we schedule another call, the 30-year-old said.

While many would argue that office calls can also be conducted over audio calls, Menon said video conferencing was a closer replacement of the face to face meetings.

The internet is also coming in handy for patients to keep in touch with their doctors in these contactless times.

Several hospitals across NCR have started offering consultations online.

Gurgaon's Paras hospital has been extending the service since March 22 through video sessions on their own app Paras Health Mate.

We started our online consultation service soon after people were asked to maintain social distancing. There are video sessions between doctor and patient. We issue e-prescriptions, and payment needs to be done online before the consultation begins, said Dr Sameer Kulkarni, facility director at the hospital.

The internet has also come to the rescue of fitness freaks who, after the closure of gyms and parks, have now turned to online workout videos to keep their bodies in top notch shape.

"The lockdown has not weakened my will to work out. I have been exercising at home since the restrictions were imposed by watching workout videos by Kayla Itsines', Jordon Yeoh', and Real Rubal's. They are power packed, dynamic,

varied and impactful, said Delhi-based fashion photographer Richa Maheshwari.

Over the last one week, several home workout videos have garnered millions of views, and hashtags like #quarantineworkout #covidworkout #coronaworkout #athomeworkouts are trending on platforms like YouTube and Instagram.

With the new reality of social distancing, we're glad creators are connecting with their communities and engaging with them. Especially in the past week, there have been many fitness regimen videos, inspiring people to be fit within the confines of their homes, Manish Chopra, Head of Partnerships, Facebook India, told PTI.

The Internet's role in offering entertainment is not new, and therefore the outpouring of posts seeking and offering recommendations on what to watch on streaming platforms like Netflix, AmazonPrime and Hotstar comes as no surprise.

Online games, particularly Ludo, which one can play with their friends in any part of the country, has been keeping lakhs of people engaged since the lockdown.

The internet is the word also for those who are afraid to step out to go to the market, or who are tired of eating home-cooked food. The fact that daily groceries can be delivered through apps like Dunzo, and Swiggy, and Zomato are being able to break the monotony of 'ghar ka khana' is all thanks to the wonder tool.

SummitTIMES CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30x40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 27 Lakhs (negotiable).

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LAND FOR SALE

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LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501,62970-03235, 98320-48410

ICFAI Univ opts for online classes

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 APR:

ICFAI University-Sikkim has opted for online classes using web-based learning

app ZOOM considering the time lost by the students due to classes being suspended because of the COVID-19 situa-

tion. Vice Chancellor, Dr Jagannath Pattnaik, informs that this step has been taken in the best interest of the

students "since this is a very challenging time for our students and teachers," an ICFAI press release states.

Minister assures extra wages and relief package for Temi Tea workers

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 APR:

The State Government has announced plans to provide relief packages within two days, apart from extending the government decision to provide an extra Rs 300 per day, to workers at Temi Tea Estate.

Minister for Commerce and Industries, Bedu Singh Panth, visited Temi Tea Estate this afternoon and explained that it was exempted from the lockdown.

In view of extraordinary situation, the Govt has decided to provide an extra incentive of Rs 300 along with relief materials to workers engaged at the tea estate.

The Minister was holding a special meeting with SDM Rabongla, BDO Temi Tarku along with line department official here at Temi Ba-



zaar.

While speaking to Summit Times, Pratik Gautam, Assistant Manager of Temi Tea Estate, informed that more than 450 workers are engaged and that all the prescribed procedures of food processing have

been adopted since the beginning and that the factory was following all safety measures prescribed in Government directives.

When contacted, Managing Director, Mrinalini Shrivastava, added that usually the first flush

was 20 percent of the annual crop which comes to about 16 to 18 tonnes.

Despite working with a reduced workforce, the estate has already picked about a tone of the first flush and hopes to reach 4 to 5 tonnes by 14 April.

34 booked for fake news on coronavirus in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, APR 6 (PTI): In a crackdown on those spreading fake news on social media about coronavirus, the Punjab Police has booked 34 people, arresting four of them.

Confirming it, DGP Dinkar Gupta said in a statement here that police have registered 34

cases so far, of which 27 were lodged between March 21 and April 6.

He said the cases lodged in the past a couple of weeks related to the spread of fake information through WhatsApp.

Police are also taking stern action against attempts to use social

media to spread communal strife, he said, adding that a sedition case was registered on Friday against a Ludhiana resident.

The Ludhiana resident had allegedly misled people about the availability of critical medical equipment besides

"spreading hatred" against the state government, he said.

The DGP had earlier this month constituted a special team headed by a ADGP-ranked officer to monitor all social media platforms to check any instance of fake news or information.

Medical personnel attacked in TN



TUTICORIN (TN) APR 6 (PTI): A medical team taking members of a family for COVID-19 tests from a nearby hamlet and accompanying

policemen were injured when they were attacked, allegedly by villagers after an argument broke out over them videographing the relatives.

The paramedical staff were taking the family from Aynarthu village to a hospital on Sunday night for a check up after one of their relatives had

tested positive when locals objected to the team videographing the exercise, police said.

An argument broke out after which the villagers damaged the vehicles and attacked the medical personnel, police said.

Police intervened and chased them away and in the melee some policemen were also injured, they said.

Police personnel later escorted the team safely out of the village with the family members.

The medical team members and police personnel suffered minor injuries and were treated and discharged.

Jaws' actor Lee Fierro dies of coronavirus complications

LOS ANGELES, APR 6 (PTI): Actor Lee Fierro, best known for playing Mrs Kintner in Steven Spielberg's "Jaws", has died of complications due to coronavirus. She was 91.

The actor had moved from her home on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where "Jaws" was filmed, and was living in Ohio at an assisted-living facility.

Kevin Ryan, artistic director and board president for the Island Theatre Workshop, where Fierro worked as a director and mentor for



25 years, confirmed the news to Entertainment Tonight.

"We will miss her terribly. She spent 40 years here on the Vineyard.

I've been working with her for 30 years here (on Martha's Vineyard) and three years since she moved (to Ohio), he said.

In the 1975's Jaws, Fierro played grieving mother to young Alex Kintner (Jeffrey Voorhees), the second victim of the killer great white shark.

She reprised her role as Mrs. Kintner in "Jaws: The Revenge" in 1987.

During her time at the Island Theatre Workshop, Fierro also appeared in many theater company productions and mentored more than 1,000 children.

Fierro is survived by her five children, seven grand-children and seven great-grandchildren.



Relief supplies reached

GANGTOK, 06 APR (IPR): Distribution of relief materials to the needy and stranded labourers carried out at Rabangla this morning.

China's twerking high jumper Zhang Guowei retires at 28

SHANGHAI, APR 6 (AFP): China's world silver-medallist high jumper Zhang Guowei, renowned for his flamboyant twerking celebrations, has stunned fans by announcing his retirement aged 28.

The colourful Zhang won silver at the Beijing 2015 World Championships and also competed at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics.

"I'm sorry, I really can't jump anymore, I've decided to retire," Zhang told his 3.4 million followers on the Twitter-like Weibo on Sunday.

However, his form and fitness tailed off after his 2015 triumph and his season's best performance of 2.28m, set in Italy's Siena in February, was some way short of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics



qualifying standard of 2.33m.

The Tokyo Games were last week moved to the summer of 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Zhang was suspended in March last year for an undisclosed amount of time for breaking Chinese athletics' strict rules on commercial activities.

His return to the national team was blighted by more mediocre form and bursitis, an inflammation of the joints, the People's Daily said.

But Zhang still had many fans in China because of his quirky character; celebrating successful jumps in an exuberant fashion, twerking and striking poses, before sprinting towards

spectators.

His surprise retirement was a trending topic on Weibo on Monday, with many expressing shock and disbelief.

The hashtag "Zhang Guowei retires" was read 260 million times as of Monday afternoon on Weibo.

"Big brother, April's Fool Day has passed," wrote one fan.

In a first, PM Modi chairs Cabinet meet via video link

NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI): In a first, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the Union Cabinet on Monday via video link amid the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Besides Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah were present at the prime minister's official residence along with some senior officials, other members of the Cabinet were connected via a video link from their offices and residences.

In the last Cabinet meeting on March 25, the large oval table at the 7, Lok Kalyan Marg was gone, and Prime Minister Modi and his ministerial colleagues sat in chairs kept at quite a distance from each other as they practised 'social distancing' to prevent a possible spread of the novel coronavirus.

Usually, the Cabinet meetings are held around the oval table.



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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Toll free no. 104 District surveillance Officer EAST : 7029372100 WEST : 9593297809 NORTH : 9641957468 SOUTH : 7407691463 New STNM AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Few take part in lights-out call in Mizoram

AIZAWL, APR 5 (PTI): A few homes in Aizawl and other parts of Mizoram joined Governor PS Sreedharan Pillai in lighting candles at Raj Bhavan.

However, only a few residents joined the prime minister's call in Chris-

tian-dominated Mizoram.

Most families, though, held prayers seeking divine intervention to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Modi had on Friday urged the people to

switch off the lights of their homes and light up lamps, candles or mobile phone torches for nine minutes at 9 pm on April 5 to display the country's "collective resolve" to defeat coronavirus.



BL land for sale. Road site 100ft by 50ft at Lower Syari. Enroute Ranipool to Deorali via Syari. 10 Minutes Drive from Ranipool. Serious Buyer may contact : **83720-77482/ 94341-36989/ 98320-82664**

The Pressure to Titillate Television news is getting worryingly dangerous

When the internet exploded on to personal computers and commentators around the world started sounding the death knell for the printed word and television [we are talking news here], there were a few sane minds which pointed out that this would not happen since the worldwide web did not have a business model to translate eyeballs into revenue.

No media can survive, leave alone wipe out another, without a revenue model. The internet has been flattening the world for a while now and has now even infiltrated our phones (making them smart although the verdict on whether we have become any smarter as a result is still up in the air), but newspapers and television channels continue to thrive. But wait, that is clearly not the case anymore with nCoV driving both, news vendors and newspapers away – social distancing not allowing the newspaper vendor to reach your homes and the virus-surviving-on-surfaces-scary leading too many people to cancel their subscriptions.

Returning to the revenue model discussion, the reason why advertisements, which sustain newspapers and television nowadays, did not migrate to the internet is because even though the net offers free information, it demands constant engagement – you cannot be brewing yourself tea while also browsing [at least not properly], but you could be reading, cooking and washing even as you catch the news on television playing in the background. Because the television does not demand unbroken attention, it attracts advertisements which play on a spool and a few decibels louder than regular programming, until, with their covert assault, they command the top of the mind recall that advertisers so desire. But then, there are so many channels to choose from, so many claiming breaking news all the time, that to retain advertiser portfolios, it becomes necessary to acquire viewership. Because television is chosen as a medium of information sometimes to catch news [a lathicharge or budget announcements] as it breaks, and most of the times because this form of imbibing information makes no demands on attention spans, given the competition in this segment, the need to entertain takes priority over the responsibility to inform. The need for authenticity is sidestepped because television viewers do not get a chance to rationalise – the rapid barrage of soundbytes and visuals, presented by excitable presenters, jumping from one story to another, leaves viewers no time to mull over the information provided or get any perspective or nuance. This is the lack of nuance one finds online as well, at least in the platforms like Facebook popular in Sikkim where information abounds, but perspective and context are often missing.

It's different with newspapers where the reader is engaged in the process, questioning, doubting and analysing the information provided as she reads. Admittedly, not everything that we print demands such attention, but once a habit has been formed, such engagements become instinctive. At least we would wish so.

Meanwhile, to remain in business, an audience is required. At the harmless levels, this pressure to entertain ends up serving viewers half an hour specials on a "saree walle Baba" or a cow that walks in circles or two-hour long debate hours which racket nationalistic jingoism to eardrum-shattering levels, arguing in broadstrokes and explaining nothing. At the more unethical level, the pressure to titillate makes airtime for obviously doctored videos and flagrantly communal posturing which tease out people's insecurities and paint enemies and threats even as facts and sanity are airbrushed away. Television does not allow viewers time to think, and visual images have a way to 'leading' viewers, something not as easily achieved in the print medium. Work the remote on your telles or swipe away on your phone and decide for yourself how many examples of journalistically responsibility towards authenticity are you being provided when it comes to stories that matter. Are the right questions being asked? Are the ignored angles being explored? How many instances have you noticed where this responsibility has been dangerously de-prioritised in the race to garner viewership?

As the bar for journalistic ethics to verify gets lowered, the medium of information with the largest footprint and accessibility becomes that much more susceptible to plants and directed misinformation which provide only momentary euphoria in some camps, anger in others, but serve no purpose save to titillate...

Why pandemics are the perfect environment for conspiracy theories to flourish

NICOLAS GUILHOT
THECONVERSATION.COM

A bioengineered virus, a genetic mutation induced by 5G technology, a big pharma conspiracy, a plot single-handedly masterminded by Bill Gates or Georges Soros. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, conspiracy theories have spread like the virus itself.

The whiff of conspiracy that inevitably seems to trail pandemics is nothing new. When the 1918 flu pandemic hit the Americas, it was blamed on German submarines spreading the virus. During the 1630 plague in Milan, the combination of folk superstitions and widespread anxiety led to the trial, torture and execution of two citizens falsely accused of spreading the pestilence – a case minutely examined by the Italian novelist Alessandro Manzoni.

In his work on witchcraft, Carlo Ginzburg tells of persecutions against lepers and Jews in 14th century France. According to some chronicles, rumour had it that the Jews, acting on behalf of the Muslim prince of Grenada, had bribed the lepers so they would contaminate public fountains and wells in order to kill the Christians. Clearly, contemporary tales of viral bioweapons build upon a very old theme.

Like conspiracy theories, pandemics are about an invisible and powerful enemy hiding among us. Like pandemics, conspiracy theories are contagious or, as we say today, "viral". But beyond these superficial similarities, they are connected by deeper affinities.

APOCALYPSE NOW

Pandemics are surrounded by a sense of impending apocalypse. Throughout history, they have been understood as final tribulations, a sign of the end time. In 1523, during a plague outbreak, while the richest inhabitants of

Florence had scrambled for their countryside villas, those who had remained in the city were barricaded in their homes and trying to make sense of their predicament.

Florentine statesman Niccolò Machiavelli, who witnessed the episode first hand, observed:

"Many are looking for the cause behind this affliction, some say the predictions of the astrologists threaten us, others that the prophets had predicted it; there are those who remember some prodigy ... so that everyone concludes that not only the plague, but an infinite number of other calamities are to befall us."

Today, only religious fundamentalists interpret the coronavirus pandemic as an omen of the final judgement or end times. Yet, apocalyptic thinking does not necessarily have to be religious or to countenance the end of earthly existence.

Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino proposed the idea of "cultural apocalypses" to designate the sense that a specific historical world is ending. For de Martino and his contemporaries in the mid-20th century, this manifested itself in the sense of existential crisis permeating post-war culture and in the actual possibility of atomic annihilation, but he intended the notion to apply to a wide range of historical situations.

We are living through such a cultural apocalypse today, as it becomes increasingly clear that the world as we know it is fast becoming a thing of the past and that whatever lies ahead will be utterly different. We have become the quarantined spectators of an unfolding catastrophe that underscores the frailty of the world we took for granted and of our own presence in it.



WHEN PARANOIA PREVAILS

The impression that the world is dissolving and our impotence to stop this can make us feel a paralysing anxiety, incompatible with any productive form of social and cultural life. For de Martino, ancient mythologies, religions and even progressive secular cultures have contained this risk by emphasising a future around which a community could exist.

Without this, the apocalyptic experience becomes totally alienating. When all the certainties grounding our existence are shaken, it is easy to feel paranoid. Or, as de Martino put it, to sense hostile forces and feel victim of "conspiracies, machinations, curses". Conspiracy theories and paranoid visions are the flipside of a cultural crisis in which the idea of a shared future has collapsed.

In an earlier work, de Martino observed that extreme situations of "suffering and deprivation" could trigger such existential crises. He mentioned wars, but he might as well have added pandemics. Self-isolation and quarantine epitomise the idea of being removed from the world

and any sense of community. In these conditions it is easy to succumb to paranoia, especially if it is stirred up by cynical and reactionary politicians.

Unlike religious ideas of apocalypse, the secular version of conspiracy theories offers no element of redemption. Conspiracy theories perpetuate the paranoid sense of disaffection and powerlessness – the idea that evil forces are at work, which one has little power to stop. They further isolate people and deprive them of feeling that they can shape their own world, let alone make it a better one.

The political culture of the past 50 years has failed to offer the vast majority of people a sense of their own worthiness and to protect them against the existential risk of losing their livelihoods – indeed, their world. The current pandemic pushes us into the terminal phase of this crisis. The only way out consists of turning apocalyptic ideas on their head and ensuring that the end we are witnessing will not be an endless agony but a new beginning.

[the writer is Senior Research Associate, CNRS and Visiting Professor, City College of New York]

How do viruses mutate and jump species? And why are 'spillovers' becoming more common?

STEVE WYLIE
THECONVERSATION.COM

Viruses are little more than parasitic fragments of RNA or DNA. Despite this, they are astonishingly abundant in number and genetic diversity. We don't know how many virus species there are, but there could be trillions.

Past viral epidemics have influenced the evolution of all life. In fact, about 8% of the human genome consists of retrovirus fragments. These genetic "fossils" are leftover from viral epidemics our ancestors survived.

COVID-19 reminds us of the devastating impact viruses can have, not only on humans, but also animals and crops. Now for the first time, the disease has been confirmed in a tiger at New York's Bronx Zoo, believed to have been infected by an employee. Six other tigers and lions were also reported as "showing symptoms".

According to the BBC, conservation experts think COVID-19 could also threaten animals such as wild gorillas, chimps and orangutans.

While virologists are intensely interested in how viruses mutate and transmit between species – and understand this process to an extent – many gaps in knowledge remain.

SKILLED IN THEIR CRAFT

Most viruses are specialists. They establish long associations with preferred host species. In these relationships, the virus may not induce disease symptoms. In fact, the virus and host may benefit each other in symbiosis.

Occasionally, viruses will "emerge" or "spill-over" from their original host to a new host. When this happens, the risk of disease increases. Most infectious diseases that affect humans and our food supply are the result of spillovers from wild organisms.

The new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that emerged from Wuhan in November isn't actually "new". The virus evolved over a long period, probably millions of years, in other species where it still exists. We know the virus has close relatives in Chinese rufous horseshoe bats, intermediate horseshoe bats, and pangolins – which are considered a delicacy in China.

Past coronaviruses, including the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), have jumped from bats to humans via an intermediary mammal. Some experts propose Malay pangolins provided SARS-CoV-2 this link.

Although the original host of the SARS-CoV-2 virus hasn't been identified, we needn't be surprised if the creature appears perfectly healthy. Many other coronaviruses exist naturally in wild mammal and bird populations around the world.

WHERE DO THEY KEEP COMING FROM?

Human activity drives the emergence of new pathogenic (disease-causing) viruses. As we push back the boundaries of the last wild places on Earth – felling the bush for farms and plantations – viruses from wildlife interact with crops, farm animals and people.

Species that evolved separately are now mixing. Global markets allow the free trade of live animals (including their eggs, semen and meat), vegetables, flowers, bulbs and seeds – and viruses come along for the ride.

Humans are also warming the climate. This allows certain species to expand their geographical range into zones that were previously too cold to inhabit. As a result, many viruses are meeting new hosts for the first time.

HOW DO THEY MAKE THE JUMP?

Virus spillover is a complex process and not fully understood. In nature, most viruses are confined to particular hosts because of specific protein "lock and key" interactions. These are needed for successful replication, movement within the host, and transmission between hosts.

For a virus to infect a new host, some or all protein "keys" may need to be modified. These modifications, called "mutations", can occur within the old host, the new one, or both.

For instance, a virus can jump from host A to host B, but it won't replicate well or transmit between individuals unless multiple protein keys mutate either simultaneously, or consecutively. The low probability of this happening makes spillovers uncommon.

To better understand how spillovers occur, imagine a virus is a short story printed on a piece

of paper. The story describes:

1. how to live in a specific cell type, inside a specific host
2. how to move to the cell next door
3. how to transmit to a new individual of the same species.

The short story also has instructions on how to make a virus photocopying machine. This machine, an enzyme called a polymerase, is supposed to churn out endless identical copies of the story. However, the polymerase occasionally makes mistakes.

It may miss a word, or add a new word or phrase to the story, subtly changing it. These changed virus stories are called "mutants". Very occasionally, a mutant story will describe how the virus can live inside a totally new host species. If the mutant and this new host meet, a spillover can happen.

We can't predict virus spillovers to humans, so developing vaccines preemptively isn't an option. There has been ongoing discussions of a "universal flu vaccine" which would provide immunity against all influenza virus mutants. But so far this hasn't been possible.

LET WILDLIFE BE WILDLIFE

Despite how many viruses exist, relatively few threaten us, and the plants and animals we rely on.

Nonetheless, some creatures are especially dangerous on this front. For instance, coronaviruses, Ebola and Marburg viruses, Hendra and Nipah viruses, rabies-like lyssaviruses, and mumps/measles-like paramyxoviruses all originate from bats.

Given the enormous number of viruses that exist, and our willingness to provide them global transport, future spillovers are inevitable. We can reduce the chances of this by practising better virus surveillance in hospitals and on farms.

We should also recognise wildlife, not only for its intrinsic value, but as a potential source of disease-causing viruses. So let's maintain a "social distance" and leave wildlife in the wild.

[the writer is Adjunct Associate Professor, Murdoch University]

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Coronavirus pandemic denting tourism, hospitality sector at astonishing pace: Industry body

Kolkata, Apr 6 (PTI): The cascading effect of the global coronavirus pandemic is crippling the country's tourism and hospitality industry at an "astonishing pace", an industry body said.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) has come down by about 67 per cent annually in the January-March quarter, while for domestic tourists, the

figure is lower by nearly 40 per cent, according to statistics published by the tourism ministry, the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) said.

"Disruption due to coronavirus could result in 18-20 per cent erosion of nationwide occupancy across the hospitality sector; and 12-14 per cent drop in average daily rates (ADRs) for the

entire 2020," ICC Director General Rajeev Singh said.

The travel and tourism sector alone accounted for 9.2 per cent of India's GDP in 2018, and generated 26.7 million jobs in that year, the ICC said in a statement.

"Most of the tourism companies afflicted by the pandemic are

now anxiously looking for interim relief to pay EMIs, taxes and salaries to employees for at least six months," Singh said.

The industry body also recommended a host of initiatives for the central government, including extending the RBI's three-month moratorium on repayment

of term loans to six months and a complete GST holiday for the tourism, travel and hospitality industry for the next 12 months.

"ICC recommends setting up of a 'Travel & Tourism Stabilisation Fund' with direct benefit transfer to each unit to prevent financial loss and consequent job loss," the statement added.

India's exhibition sector has taken Rs 3,570 cr hit, says Industry body

BENGALURU, APR 6 (PTI): India's exhibition sector has lost an estimated Rs 3,570 crore due to the lockdown imposed across the country to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, say industry players.

The Indian Exhibitions Industry Association (IEIA), the apex body of exhibiting and trade show industry in the country, said the sector has been hit hard due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and urged the government to immediately intervene and offer an economic support package for the industry to relieve some of the stress.

"Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the impact on exhibiting and trade show industry has been unprecedented with multiple global and national events being postponed or cancelled in the country," IEIA said in a statement.

"...in last few weeks more than 90 shows have been reported to be either postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19... with a resultant estimated loss of Rs 3,570 crore for the entire sector and this may increase

if COVID-19 crisis lingers on," IEIA President S Balasubramanian said.

According to IEIA, the size of Indian exhibition industry is Rs 23,800 crore with more than 550 events conducted annually in the organised sector.

The exhibition industry sector enables trade/business transaction of over Rs 3,00,000 crore, boosting and supporting the growth of various spectrum of industries while also being a colossal employment provider with nearly 1,20,000 people employed in this industry, it said.

Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) recently cancelled the spring edition of IHGF (Indian Handicrafts and Gift Fair) Delhi fair, considered to be the world's largest congregation of handicrafts and gifts items which was slated to be held from April 15, due to the coronavirus outbreak, the statement said.

It was expecting 7,000 overseas volume buyers and over 3,200 small & medium handicraft manufacturers and exporters as exhibitors

from various parts of the country, it said.

"The fair normally generates export orders worth Rs 6,000 crore and thereby source of livelihood to seven millions of craft persons who are from small and weaker section of society," Rakesh Kumar, Director General, Export Promotion council for Handicrafts, an apex body of handicrafts sponsored by the Union Ministry of Textiles, was quoted as saying in the statement.

IEIA has urged the government to create an "Exhibitions in India" economic stimulus support package and offer a ten per cent incentive to Indian exhibition management companies to organise shows in the country and help recover the losses incurred in these "critical times."

It also appealed for reduction of GST rate for all exhibition services from existing 18 per cent to 12 per cent with immediate effect, deferment of the GST and Income Tax for six to nine months, and subsidising the venue rentals for government-owned venues, among others.

Around 35 now staying in isolation rooms in Kolkata hotels

KOLKATA, APR 6 (PTI): Around 35 people are presently staying at isolation rooms set up at various hotels in Kolkata, which have been earmarked by the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) following the outbreak of COVID-19.

Following a request from the West Bengal government, 31 two-star, three-star and four-star hotels across the state have offered a total of 640 rooms at subsidised rates to people who have

been directed to live in isolation for 14 days.

"The government is asking those who need isolation whether to stay at its quarantine places or hotels. Many are opting for hotels. At present 32 or 35 people are staying at the identified hotels on pay-and-use basis", secretary of HRAEI Sudesh Poddar told PTI.

Besides, two other persons are staying at a hotel in Siliguri.

The two replaced a couple of other persons who had left after the 14-

day isolation period, he said. Those staying in hotel isolation are getting all facilities including meals - breakfast, lunch and dinner at subsidized rates.

Poddar said the names of the hotels offering isolation rooms cannot be revealed.

He said the coronavirus outbreak has closed down hotel and restaurant business.

Bars associated with the hotels are also shut since the lockdown started on April 25.

Virtual classes for Bengal boards' students on TV

KOLKATA, APR 5 (PTI): Virtual classes will be held on a private television channel for students of standards 9-12 of the West Bengal boards for a week beginning April 7, an official said on Sunday.

The classes, which will be broadcast by ABP Ananda, will be held from 3 pm to 4 pm, he said.

"The TV channel's studio will be converted into a classroom. Students will ask questions to the teachers through WhatsApp and phone calls, numbers for which will be given before the classes start," the official

told PTI.

The state government earlier decided to hold the classes on DD Bangla from 4-5 pm but the plan was shelved as a section of students and teachers raised objection on the timing and there were logistical issues on shifting it to another slot on the same channel.

"The government is actively working to enable students to make up for the time lost since the suspension of classes on March 16. There was some uncertainty after the initial decision, but it is final now," the official said.

'Stupid coronavirus!' In uncertain times, we can help children through mindfulness and play

BEN DEERY
THE CONVERSATION.
COM

"Stupid coronavirus!" I heard my six-year-old mumble while talking in her sleep.

Earlier that day her swimming and basketball lessons were cancelled, a birthday party postponed, and she had to race with me between several meetings before the university campus shut down. "Stupid coronavirus indeed!"

Hearing this reminded me these are strange and worrying times for young children. While we need to look after ourselves and others, we also need to consider how all this is affecting our kids, and how we can help them through it.

KIDS AND ANXIETY
Australian research found child anxiety diagnoses almost doubled from 2008 to 2013. It's difficult to say whether this is due to a true increase or we're simply recognising anxiety better in children.

Feeling anxious or worried sometimes is a part of healthy development. But at times, children may feel more anxious or worried than usual.

Climate change, the bushfires, and COVID-19 may have contributed to and continue to fuel increased anxiety. We need research to better understand the effects these crises have had on children's well-being.

We can support children during these times and also keep an eye out for when they might need more help than we can give. If their anxiety is interfering with typical childhood activities or family life, it could be time to see a GP, paediatrician or psychologist.

But there are many things you can do as a parent or caregiver.

MINDFULNESS FOR CHILDREN?

Mindfulness is the regular and repeated act of directing our attention to the present moment. Mostly, our attention follows whatever is most

interesting; mindfulness helps us to focus without judging ourselves when we can't.

It's commonly used to reduce stress, improve well-being, and address mental health, which it does reasonably well. In a broader sense, the goal of mindfulness is to help us to sit with our experiences whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or somewhere in between.

Mindfulness practices have become more popular over recent years. Many people practise mindfulness in their day-to-day lives, often using apps (though we need more research to explore the benefits of these). Mindfulness programs are also run in workplaces and other settings.

Large numbers of parents, teachers, and entire schools are also turning to mindfulness.

But what does the evidence say about mindfulness for children?

THE EVIDENCE IS MIXED

A recent review of over 60 studies of school-based mindfulness programs involving preschool to secondary students suggested gains in social-emotional and cognitive skills.

The researchers didn't observe similar gains in academic achievement or student behaviour. They noted the quality of research, much like that in adults, was not strong enough to make the claims many would like to make about the widespread benefits of mindfulness.

Short-term early childhood mindfulness programs and those delivered using audio-guided tracks have so far provided questionable results at best.

One small but promising study used classroom mindfulness activities (for example, listening to sounds), emotion coping skills (like "where in my body do I feel anger?"), and breathing techniques (such as breathing with a soft toy on the tummy).

At the end of the first year of this program,



pre-schoolers displayed better learning skills. After two years, children displayed higher vocabularies and reading scores.

Our own pilot work teaching pre-schoolers about mindfulness found benefits too. While there was little difference immediately after the intervention, three months later, children who learned mindfulness showed significant benefits to their mental well-being compared with those who didn't.

ADAPTING MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

Obviously, you can't ask a five-year-old to sit still and focus on their breath for 45 minutes. Techniques commonly used in adults just won't work with kids.

Mindfulness for children should be interactive, play-based, and focused on sensory and body awareness. It should use emotional vocabulary and sensory language (for example, talking about sounds, taste, textures and smells), be hands-on where possible, and most importantly, it should be fun.

Given the lack of strong empirical evidence for mindfulness on its own for young children

just yet, we should integrate aspects of mindfulness-based activities with other components.

Think playful learning about emotions, like colouring in where we notice certain feelings in our bodies, or drawing how music makes us feel. These activities take from other well-known psychological approaches called cognitive behaviour therapy and psycho-education.

3 MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

1. Belly breathing with a "buddy"

- find a favourite soft toy (with some weight is good), a plastic bath boat, or similar

- have your child lie down and place the object on their tummy

- get them to pay attention to it by looking and touching

- encourage them to focus on how the object moves up and down as they breathe (you can suggest calm and slow breathing might even put the toy or people in the boat to sleep)

- this activity can be great as part of bath time or getting ready for bed.

2. "Robot" child

- ask your child to pretend they are a robot

lying on the ground

- use a remote control (you can make one from cereal box) and pretend to "shut-down" your child/robot's body

- begin with their feet/legs, move up the body to arms/hands, before getting to the face/brain

- ask "robot" if they can still feel any "electricity" in that body part after it's been shut down

- as your child gets better with this activity, you can get more detailed with robot body parts (for example, toes, fingers, noses, ears)

- a variation is to get your robot-child to tense and relax (and reset) each body part as you control it with your remote.

3. A mindful walk or "sensory countdown"

- go for a walk outside and try to notice or find: five different sounds, four matching colours, three different textures, two different smells

- add different sounds, sights, shapes, and textures to tick off on a bingo-style checklist

- this activity can be adapted for inside play.

[The writer is Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Universi-

Seven Nepalese citizens quarantined in UP's Bahraich

BAHRAICH (UP), APR 6 (PTI): Seven Nepalese citizens, including a child, who reached the Indo-Nepal border at Rupaidiha here from different parts of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat have been quarantined, police said on Monday.

They have been admitted to a quarantine facility in Nanpara, they said.

"On Sunday two Nepalese citizens reached the Indo-Nepal border in Rupaidiha area of the dis-

trict from Varanasi and two came from Surat. On Monday afternoon, three Nepalese citizens, including a child, reached here after getting medical treatment in Lucknow," Superintendent of Police Vipin Mishra said.

"They have been quarantined in Nanpara. They will be sent back to Nepal once they complete the 14-day quarantine period," he said.

They underwent medical examination and all necessary arrange-

ments have been made for them, he added.

"Two days ago, officials of the border districts had decided that people will be quarantined wherever they are," Mishra said.

The number of coronavirus cases in Uttar Pradesh climbed to 294 on Monday as 16 fresh cases were reported, officials said.

It is likely to cross the 300-mark as more reports are expected later in the day.

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SummitTIMES

Big-hitting New Zealand batsman Jock Edwards dead at 64



WELLINGTON, APR 6 (AP): Jock Edwards, a big-hitting wicketkeeper-batsman who played six tests and eight one-day internationals for New Zealand and who would have been a natural at Twenty20 cricket, has died.

He was 64.

His death was confirmed Monday by the Central Districts province, for which he played 67 first class matches between 1974 and 1985. A cause of death was not available.

Edwards was a stocky and powerful batsman whose approach would have been ideally suited

to the modern white-ball game but put him at odds with the more traditional style of his era.

He told his local newspaper, the Nelson Mail, in 2011 that several coaches had tried to rein in his attacking style but he didn't listen.

He agreed his talents would have suited Twenty20 cricket.

It's more like a backyard game, I'd have loved it, he said.

Edwards' best moment in test cricket came when he scored half centuries in each innings of a drawn test against England at Auckland in 1978.

Let people write me off, I am preparing for 2021 Tokyo now: Sushil Kumar

AMANPREET SINGH NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI): "People have this perennial habit of writing me off now and then but it does not affect me," says veteran wrestler Sushil Kumar, who has not only quashed his retirement talks but is rather bullish about his qualification for next year's Tokyo Olympics.

Already on the wrong side of 30s, Sushil was struggling to qualify for the Tokyo Games but the postponement of the quadrennial event has re-ignited his Olympic plans.

The Summer Games, originally scheduled for July-August this year, were expected to be a swansong for many athletes including Sushil and veteran tennis star Leander Paes but the one-year delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has put a question-mark over their retirement plans.

Set to turn 37 next month, Sushil, though, ruled out retirement.



"I am not going anywhere as of now. I have got more time and more time means better preparation," Sushil told PTI in an interview.

Making a comeback at the 2019 World Championship, Sushil showed glimpses of his glorious past with two breathtaking four-point throws before he lost steam and made an early exit.

"Wrestling is such a sport that if you manage to remain injury-free, practice well, set a target and work on that, you can have a shot at that,"

added Sushil, the only Indian to win two Olympic medals.

"I am still practising twice a day. Obviously I am not hitting the mat but I am trying to be in shape and God willing I will be able to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics," Sushil said.

Sushil competes in the 74kg category in which India is yet to lock Olympic quota. But will he be able to defy age-related issues?

"People were saying the similar things in 2011. I know how to han-

dle this. It's my daily job to manage it."

Sushil was referring to doubts people cast in 2011 over his ability to repeat his Beijing's bronze medal-winning show at the 2012 London Games. However, he ended up winning a silver in London.

The delay in Olympics has also brought Sushil's old foe Narsingh Pancharam Yadav in the picture since his four-year doping ban will be over in July and he will be eligible to have a shot at the Olympic qualification.

What can I say now about this.

"All I can say is to congratulate Narsingh that he can restart his career. I wish him the best."

Jitender Kumar is also doing a decent job as he recently won a bronze in 74kg at the Asian Championship.

Sushil, it seems, does not consider any of the compatriots his real rivals.

When asked about the competition he is likely to face from fellow Indians, he said, "If you think small, you will achieve nothing. I am thinking about the international wrestlers, who are my likely rivals. Like there is one Uzbekistan guy, who won Asian Games gold medallist (Bekzod Abdurakhmonov). He is really good, my preparations are keeping in mind these wrestlers."

"I am keeping an eye on everyone. I am analysing everyone. If I think about small target, it won't lead me anywhere," he signed off.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Chahal goes back to old passion, says chess taught him to be patient on cricket field

CHENNAI, APR 6 (PTI): Chess master-turned-cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal went back to his old passion by headlining an online blitz event and said the sport taught him to be patient on the cricket field.

A former national Under-12 chess champion, India cricketer Chahal has the distinction of having represented the country at the World Youth Chess Championships, and is listed on the World Chess Federation (FIDE) website. His Elo rating is 1956.

In a freewheeling interaction with Grandmaster Abhijeet Gupta and International Master Rakesh Kulkarni before the event got underway on Sunday, Chahal said,

"Chess taught me patience. In cricket, you may be bowling well but you may not get wickets.

"Like in a Test match you may have bowled well in a day but not got wickets but you have to come back the next day so you need to be patient. Chess has helped me a lot in that way. I have learnt to be patient and get batsmen out."

Asked about the decision to choose cricket over chess despite doing fairly well in the board game, Chahal, who has played 52 ODIs and 42 T20 Internationals, said he did so because he had more interest in cricket.

"I had to choose between chess and cricket. I spoke to dad who said the

choice was (yours). I had more interest in cricket and opted for it."

Blitz is one of the three formats in chess in which a player gets 10 minutes or less, with or without time increments.

Chahal matched his wits against the likes of prodigy R Praggnanandhaa, India's second youngest Grandmaster ever, GMs B Adhiban, Nihar Sarin and Karthikeyan Murali, among others.

Chahal, who would have been a part of the Virat Kohli-led Royal Challengers Bangalore if the IPL had gone ahead, said he had been spending time with family members.

"I don't get to spend

too much time with my family. After many years I am at home. I am spending a lot of time with my family. It is a good and new experience. I sleep late and wake up late and spend time with my family members in the evening."

Chahal, who said he idolised legendary leg-spinner Shane Warne, said he does follow chess whenever possible and plays online games at times.

He described the wicket of South Africa batsman Faf du Plessis in the 2019 World Cup in England as one of his best.

"It was my first World Cup. I dismissed Faf, it was a big wicket in a big game,"

he added.

Chahal said like in chess, there is a lot of planning a bowler does in cricket, adding he does discuss with the keeper about what he is going to bowl.

"I do plan while bowling and discuss with the keeper. Like I used to tell Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) what I am likely to bowl."

He also appealed to the people to stay indoors and help fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"Please remain at home, this is an opportunity for you to become a hero. We have to remain united to fight coronavirus. You can read, learn dance, cook, learn new things in the time available," Chahal signed off.

Badminton: BWF suspends all its tournaments till July

NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI): The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Monday suspended a host of its flagship international, junior and para tournaments scheduled from May to July in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It comprises many Grade 2 and 3 events including HSBC BWF World Tour, BWF Tour and other BWF-sanctioned tournaments.

According to a BWF release, the decision was taken in "close consultation and consensus" with the Host Member Associations

(HMA) and Continental Confederations (CC).

The most prominent tournament affected during the period is the Indonesia Open 2020 (Super 1000).

"The escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic globally has led all parties to confirm the suspension of these tournaments. The health, safety and wellbeing of all athletes, their entourage, officials and the greater badminton community remains the top priority," the release stated.

Last week, the BWF froze the world rankings and world junior rank-

ings until further notice, with the lists backdated to March 17, 2020.

"BWF will provide more clarity on the unfreezing of rankings once it is deemed safe to resume tournaments.

"The BWF is also reviewing the impacts of the rescheduling of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games upon the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system. This review process is expected to take several weeks upon which BWF will make a further announcement," it further stated.

Coronavirus: Why the Nordics Are Our Best Bet For Comparing Strategies

PAUL W FRANKS THECONVERSATION.COM

Daily updated graphs illustrating the rising COVID-19 death rates in different countries raise hopes that we can understand the impact of the virus and work out how to stop it from spreading further. But when comparing countries as different as South Korea, China, Italy and the UK, we may find the impression of how different interventions work is obscured by many other factors.

These countries differ in many important ways, including demographics, civil disobedience, population density, patterns of social interactions, air quality and genetics. Italy, for example, has regions with older populations than many other countries. And European societies are unlikely to ever accept the draconian interventions used in China and South Korea.

From a scientific perspective, and in the absence of better models, the Nordic countries of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland – which are culturally, economically, politically and geographically similar – may, serendipitously, represent a powerful intervention trial.

Currently, 15 million people here have been assigned to a lockdown, while a further 10 million have been asked to simply act responsibly. While it is too early to have definite answers about what works best, interesting insights can already be gleaned.

The Swedish approach to COVID-19 could not be more different from its neighbours, placing much of the responsibility for delaying the spread of the virus and protecting the vulnerable in the hands of the public. It's now April and, albeit with some restrictions, Swedish bars, restaurants and schools remain open.

Under the blue skies and blazing sun Sweden has enjoyed lately, people have flocked to parks and beaches, bars and cafes. Nevertheless, Sweden has a high number of people living in single households, and citizens are generally respectful of public health advice and guidelines.

This all contrasts the far more assertive physical restrictions imposed in the culturally similar neighbouring countries. Across the borders in Denmark, Norway and Finland, schools closed weeks ago and movement has been severely restricted.



NEW RESEARCH

A report just out from the group leading the UK government's COVID-19 simulations estimates the spread of the virus within 11 European nations. An important metric in this setting is the reproduction number: how many people someone with COVID-19 in turn infects. A number that is larger than one indicates that the epidemic is in its growth phase, whereas a number of one or less indicates the epidemic is fading.

As of March 28, the reproduction numbers for Sweden and Norway are estimated to be 2.47 and 0.97 respectively, with Denmark's around one. Unsurprisingly, the spread of the virus is also estimated to be among the highest in Sweden (3.1% of the population infected) and lowest in Norway (0.41% of the population), likely reflecting the radically different containment strategies. This compares with 9.8% and 2.5% for Italy and the UK, respectively.

Indeed, one Swedish academic has predicted that up to half the Swedish population will be infected by the end of April. Although it is probably too soon to see a clear effect of interventions on mortality rates, by April 1, COVID-19 deaths in Sweden accounted for 24 per million citizens, whereas in Norway it was only eight deaths per million. Finland was lower still with just three per million.

The virus transmission rate is important, as the faster it spreads, the more condensed the burden of mortality will be and the higher the peak burden hospitals will be forced to endure. The core objective of epidemic suppression is to minimise the number of daily hospital admissions in order to maintain a functioning health care system, even if the total deaths is eventually the same.

When the burden substantially exceeds capacity, hospitals collapse, casting staff and patients into the medical dark ages. So staying within capacity is paramount. In preparation, each of the Nordic countries have conducted detailed simulations to estimate the extent to which the hospitals will need to "surge".

Those simulations show that the overall burden is expected to be similar across countries, resulting in about 528 to 544 deaths per million. Importantly though, unlike its peers, Sweden is likely to take the hit sooner and over a shorter period, with the majority of deaths occurring within weeks, rather than months.

That's despite the fact that Sweden has the lowest number of ICU beds per 100,000 people (5.8), with Denmark (6.7), Finland (6.1) and Norway (8.0) all being better prepared. They all, however, lag far behind Germany at more than 29 beds per 100,000 people, being more similar to the UK's 6.6. And concerns are

being expressed in Sweden about inadequate protective equipment for frontline medical staff.

In the event that Sweden has pitched it right, the other Nordic countries will find the strain on hospitals is well within capacity. But, if the opposite is true, health care professionals in Sweden will face the fight of their lives.

THE LONG RUN

This may make it sound like an intensive strategy is crucial. But there are strong counter arguments. As those living through a lockdown will attest, the psychological burden can be considerable – there's a reason the incarcerated are sent to "solitary" for harsher punishment.

Consider too that the effects of intensive restrictions on freedom of movement wanes over time as social disobedience increases. Deploying milder containment strategies, as Sweden has done, which are followed by nearly all, may be more effective than strict interventions that are frequently flouted. Here, it will be interesting to see how Sweden compares to the other Nordic countries, which may have been able to achieve high levels of compliance with voluntary social distancing.

There's also the perpetual danger of epidemic resurgence where herd immunity – whereby enough people have been infected to prevent the virus from spreading further – has not been achieved. Sweden is likely to reach herd immunity faster, so it's not impossible that it will see fewer additional outbreaks of the virus than its neighbours. And there are numerous economic arguments too.

There is no knowing at this stage how the interventions adopted by Sweden and the other Nordic nations will play out. But within weeks, this will start to become clear. From this, we will learn much about the delicate balance between strategic under- and overreaction in the face of an infectious disease pandemic.

And what we learn may serve other nations where COVID-19 is still emerging or where second and third waves hit, as well as future societies facing other global pandemics, which are certain to come.

[the writer is Professor of Genetic Epidemiology, Lund University]

Japan prepares for state of emergency over virus

TOKYO, APR 6 (AFP): Japan's government began preparing Monday for the declaration of a state of emergency over the outbreak of the new coronavirus, as infections spike in the capital Tokyo and elsewhere.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was expected to meet late Monday with a panel of experts advising the government on the global pandemic, with widespread reports that he would announce a state of emergency as soon as Tuesday.

The move comes as infections grow steadily -- though in far smaller numbers than in Europe or the United States.

Tokyo announced a record 148 new cases on Sunday, and pressure has increased on the government to take fresh action.

Tokyo's Governor Yuriko Koike has already urged residents of the capital to avoid non-essential outings on weekends and to work from home during the week.

"We've not received anything formal but we are preparing various things assuming Tokyo will be designated," she told reporters Monday, when asked about a pos-

sible declaration.

Koike is expected to outline how the declaration would affect the capital at a press conference later Monday.

The declaration will reportedly only cover parts of the country where infections are increasing rapidly, and falls far short of the strict lockdown measures seen elsewhere in the world.

It will allow governors of areas affected to ask, but not order, residents to stay home, and call on businesses that attract crowds to shut their doors.

It allows the commandeering of land and buildings for medical purposes.

But there is no legal power to enforce requests for people to stay inside, and no punishments mandated for those who fail to do so.

Public transport will continue to run, though reports Monday said Tokyo might ask train operators to reduce services by up to 50 percent, and supermarkets, banks and hospitals will remain open.

Experts say Japan's legal system restricts the government's ability to limit the movement of

citizens.

"Japan is still haunted by the negative legacy of the war and the oppression of its citizens," said Yoshinobu Yamamoto, an emeritus professor of international politics at the University of Tokyo.

But he said if the relatively relaxed measures proved insufficient to curb the spread of the virus, "calls for a stronger power to control people may grow".

"This case could be a touchstone," he said.

Japan has so far been spared the sort of crisis seen in parts of Europe and the United States, with around 3,650 cases across the country -- compared to around 330,000 in the US and around 130,000 in Italy and Spain.

It recorded its first infection in mid-January, and Abe stunned the country by calling for nationwide school closures in February -- far earlier than in many countries.

In recent days Tokyo's streets have been noticeably quieter as residents heeded the request to stay home. Many businesses have already announced voluntary, temporary closures.

NEW YORK, APR 6 (AP):

Americans braced for what the nation's top doctor warned Sunday would be the hardest and saddest week of their lives while Britain assumed the unwelcome mantle of deadliest coronavirus hot spot in Europe after a record 24-hour jump in deaths that surpassed even hard-hit Italy's.

Britain's own prime minister, Boris Johnson, was hospitalized, 10 days after testing positive for COVID-19 in what his office described as a precautionary step. Amid the dire news, there were also glimmers of hope some hard-hit areas the number of people dying appeared to be slowing in New York City, Spain and Italy.

The news was cautiously welcomed by leaders, who also noted that any gains could easily be reversed if people did not continue to adhere to strict lockdowns.

US Surgeon General Jerome Adams offered a stark warning about the expected wave of virus deaths.

This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment, he told Fox News Sunday. But President Donald Trump later suggested the hard weeks ahead could foretell the turning of a corner. We're starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, Trump said at an evening White House briefing.

In New York City, the U.S. epicenter of the pandemic, daily deaths



dropped slightly, along with intensive care admissions and the number of patients who needed breathing tubes inserted, but New York state Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned it was too early to tell the significance of those numbers.

Italy and Spain also got some encouraging news. Italy registered its lowest day-to-day increase in deaths in more than two weeks 525, said Angelo Borrelli, the head of the national Civil Protection agency. The pace of infection also seemed to be slowing.

Even so, Borrelli warned, This good news shouldn't make us drop our guard."

Confirmed infections fell in Spain, too, and new deaths declined for the third straight day, dropping to 674 the first time

daily deaths have fallen below 800 in the past week.

The outlook, however, was bleak in Britain, which reported more than 600 deaths Sunday, surpassing Italy's increase. Italy still has, by far, the world's highest coronavirus death toll almost 16,000.

In a rare televised address, Queen Elizabeth II appealed to Britons to rise the occasion, while acknowledging enormous disruptions, grief and financial difficulties.

I hope in the years to come, everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge, she said. And those who come after us will say that the Britons of this generation were as strong as any.

Johnson, meanwhile, has been hospitalized,

though his office said it was not an emergency and that the 55-year-old Conservative will undergo tests.

There are concerns that Johnson's government did not take the virus seriously enough at first and that spring weather will tempt Britons and others to break social distancing rules.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the U.K. might even ban outdoor exercise if people still 'flout the rules.' The vast majority of people are following the public health advice, which is absolutely critical, and staying at home," Hancock told Sky TV.

"But there are a small minority of people who are still not doing that it's quite unbelievable, frankly, to see that. As the

numbers of infections rose, Saffron Cordery, the deputy head of Britain's National Health Service Providers, said the agency needed to focus on quickly increasing ventilator capacity and getting more protective equipment for health care workers.

Italians have not been immune to lure of the good weather, either. Top Italian officials took to national television after photos were published showing huge crowds out shopping.

Health Minister Roberto Speranza told RAI state television that all the sacrifices Italians have made since the nationwide lockdown began risked being reversed.

Restrictions on movement vary from country to country, state to state, locality to locality.

Pak's coronavirus cases reach 3,277

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, APR 6 (PTI): The number of the coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Monday reached 3,277 with the infections in the worst-hit Punjab province approaching 1,500 despite government claims that the ongoing lockdown in the country has slowed down the spread of the deadly virus.

Ministry of National Health Services said that 50 patients have so far died of the disease, while 257 people have recovered.

Punjab recorded 1,493 cases, Sindh 881, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 405, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) 210, Balochistan 191, Islamabad 82 and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir 15.

Chief of the National Command and Operation Centre Asad Umar on

Sunday said that the pace of coronavirus spread is slowing down in the country due to effective lockdown measures.

Umar, who is the Minister for Planning, said that the government was developing a mechanism to identify areas with most coronavirus cases to undertake preventive measures.

The government was taking steps to curtail the spread of the virus but without much success. The National Coordination Committee headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan meets every day to evolve the response to the threat.

The government also set up a National Command and Operation Center to implement the decisions made by the committee.

The Pakistan government on Saturday

informed the Supreme Court that the number of coronavirus patients in the country could reach up to 50,000 by the last week of this month.

The number of cases increasing at a rapid pace in Punjab could become a cause of concern for the government as it is also the wealthiest region of the country.

Meanwhile, the government said the process for provide financial support to the poor affected by the lockdown during the coronavirus crisis would commence on April 8.

The government has announced to provide Rs 12,000 (USD 157.7) assistance to 12 million families each, while Punjab and Sindh have decided to contribute funding for the assistance of additional 700,000 and 250,000 people, respectively.

Venezuelans stream home from Colombia due to virus pandemic

BOGOTA, APR 6 (AFP): Hundreds of Venezuelans who fled to neighboring Colombia during their country's economic crisis are now returning home, pushed by the deadly novel coronavirus and Colombia's own pandemic woes.

Colombian migration officials said Sunday that 600 people -- including 35 children and 167 women -- crossed the main border point at the Simon Bolivar International Bridge in the northeastern city of Cucuta, into Venezuela one day earlier.

Another group of 160 departed Bogota on their way back home on Sunday, officials said.

Although the border is officially closed as a measure taken to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus, Colombia has opened a

"humanitarian corridor" to allow Venezuelans to return home.

Colombian agents on Sunday were on hand to make sure that those departing Bogota "were voluntarily returning" to Venezuela, an official at the immigration office told AFP.

In recent years Colombia has welcomed 1.8 million Venezuelans fleeing their country's economic and political collapse.

According to the United Nations, 4.9 million Venezuelans have fled their country, mainly to other South American nations, and many need international aid due to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Before crossing the international bridge into Venezuela, Colombian police took the temperature of the

departing migrants to make sure no one could be infected with the virus, and sprayed those wearing face masks with a disinfectant.

"We're afraid because we don't know if over there we could face the coronavirus. We don't have medicine to fight that, because in reality in Venezuela you can't find anything," a Venezuelan returning home named Alexander Colmenares told AFP.

The head of Colombia's immigration service, Juan Francisco Espinosa, told reporters that Venezuelans who fled to places like Ecuador and Peru often on foot, are now also returning to their home country.

More than 1,400 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Colombia since March 6, including 35 deaths.

Americans brace for 'hardest, saddest' week of their lives

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Isolation blues? Myanmar's ex-political prisoners share survival tips

YANGON, APR 6 (AFP):

From meditation to memory games, former political prisoners in Myanmar are dishing out tips on surviving isolation in a pandemic as the country once severed from the world again closes its borders.

The Southeast Asian

state spent nearly half a century under a paranoid, secretive junta that violently suppressed dissent, jailed its critics and locked the country off as it drove the economy into ruin.

Pro-democracy activist Bo Kyi, 56, was one of thousands jailed, spending eight years behind bars in the 1990s.

His punishment included 12 months in solitary confinement in an 8 x 12 foot (2.5 x 3.5 metre) cell furnished with just a bowl for a toilet and a mat to sleep on.

Last week he posted advice on Facebook

about how to cope with isolation to his compatriots holed up at home, gripped by fears over the coronavirus in a country with a threadbare public health system.

"I wanted to make sure people don't get too down," Bo Kyi told AFP. "Do something! This

is the best medicine when you are (in) isolation," he wrote in the post, signed off "In Solidarity".

During his detention Bo Kyi devoted himself to learning English, helped by a friendly guard who each day smuggled in a page from a dictionary.

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facebook.com/SummitTimesOnline

Phone:
03592-208498
+91-9832556698
+91-9832080753

www.summittimes.com
news@summittimes.com
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Address:
Santa Bhawan Complex, Church Road
Near Diesel Power House (DPH)
Gangtok, East Sikkim, 737101

Margot brought so much of herself to Harley Quinn: dir Cathy Yan

LOS ANGELES, APR 6 (PTI): Director Cathy Yan is all praise for her "Harley Quinn: Birds of Prey" actor Margot Robbie.

The filmmaker said she was impressed by the Oscar-nominated actor's "personal" commitment to the role, which she first played in 2016's "Suicide Squad".

"When she's in character, she's so fully in that character. Harley is a character that's very close to her heart, and this movie is so personal to her as well. It's hard for me, sometimes, to really be able to see the border between Margot and Harley because she brings so much of herself to the character as well," Yan told The Hollywood Reporter.

The director said Robbie, who also served as producer on the film, acts with her entire body, which was really "interesting".

"Margot is such a physical actor... She changes the way that she moves



depending on the character that she's playing, yet she's still able to switch it off and on.

"She could walk off set, immediately ask me a producer question and I'd be like, 'Whoa, what's going on?' She's real-

ly incredible in that way," she added.

"Birds of Prey" also features Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Huntress, Jurnee Smollett-Bell as Black Canary, Ella Jay Basco as Cassandra Cain and Rosie Perez as Renee Montoya.

Stay safe, be well: Chris Hemsworth to Indian fans

NEW DELHI, APR 6 (PTI): Hollywood superstar Chris Hemsworth on Monday said he was looking forward to celebrate "Extraction", a part of which he shot in India, with his fans here but that could not be possible amid the coronavirus spread.

The actor said he had an unforgettable time in the country while shooting for the film with the local talent and would like his fans to enjoy the trailer, which drops Tuesday. Netflix is set to release the film on April 24.

"Namaste India, Chris Hemsworth coming to you all the way from Australia. As you may have heard, I was incredibly excited to come to India, and to cel-

brate this movie where it was filmed. My time in your country during the production was unforgettable and I was so looking forward to returning.

"But due to all that's happening in the world at the moment, I, like you, am staying home. I know things are not easy right now for everyone," the 36-year-old actor said.

Asking fans to keep an eye on the trailer, Hemsworth said the film is an incredible action packed ride, directed by his good friend Sam Hargrave.

"It was an absolute honour to work alongside some of your best local talent to make this movie pos-

sible, and I can't wait for you to see it. Sending you lots of love and good thoughts to everyone around the world, stay home. Stay safe, be well," he added.

The film revolves around Hemsworth's character, Tyler Rake, a fearless black market mercenary, who embarks on the most deadly extraction of his career when he's enlisted to rescue the kidnapped son of an imprisoned international crime lord.

Written by "Avengers: Endgame" co-director Joe Russo, the film was shot in India and Thailand and also Rudraksh Jaisawl, Randeep Hooda, Golshifteh Farahani, Pankaj Tripathi, Priyanshu Painyuli, and David Harbour.

Bollywood producer Karim Morani's daughter tests positive for coronavirus

MUMBAI, APR 6 (PTI): Bollywood producer Karim Morani's daughter Shaza Morani has tested positive for novel coronavirus. To a text message inquiring if Shaza had tested positive for COVID-19, Morani told PTI, Yes it is true.

As per reports, Shaza had returned from Australia before the city announced lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Morani has backed many Bollywood films like "Chennai Express", "Dilwale", "Dum", "Ra.One" and "Happy New Year" among others.

As of Monday morning, the number of coronavirus cases rose to 4067 in India with the pandemic claiming 109 lives.



Three weeks since I saw my father, coronavirus has scared us all: Salman Khan

MUMBAI, APR 6 (PTI): Superstar Salman Khan on Monday said the coronavirus pandemic has terrified him and it has been nearly three weeks since he last met his father, writer Salim Khan.

Salman, who is currently at his Panvel farmhouse, shared a video on Twitter along with his actor-brother Sohail Khan's son, Nirvan, and said they had gone to the farmhouse for a few days, but had to stay there because of the nationwide lockdown.

"Hum toh darr gaye (we got scared). I have not seen my father since three weeks. We are here and he is alone at home (Galaxy Apartments) he said in the video.

Quoting a dialogue from Bollywood classic Sholay, penned by his father Salim and Javed Akhtar, Salman said, 'You remember the dialogue, 'Jo darr gaya samjho woh mar gaya' (the one who gets scared, dies), it does not apply here in this situation. We are scared and bravely admit that. Please don't be brave in this situation."

The 54-year-old actor said the dialogue which suits the current times is, "Jo darr gaya samjho woh bachch gaya (the one who gets scared, saves himself)."

"And also save the lives of others around him. Moral of the story: We are all scared," he added.

As of Monday morning, the number of coronavirus cases rose to 4067 in India with the pandemic claiming 109 lives.



Juicing Up! Bachelor star Hannah Ann Sluss grabbed a green juice to go in Beverly Hills.

Jason Bateman enjoys challenge of directing

LOS ANGELES, APR 6 (PTI): Actor-director Jason Bateman says though he is most comfortable doing acting, he prefers direction as it is a more interesting aspect of filmmaking.

Bateman, who made his directorial debut with the 2013 black comedy "Bad Words", has since directed and starred in "The Family Fang" and recently, the Netflix crime drama series "Ozark".

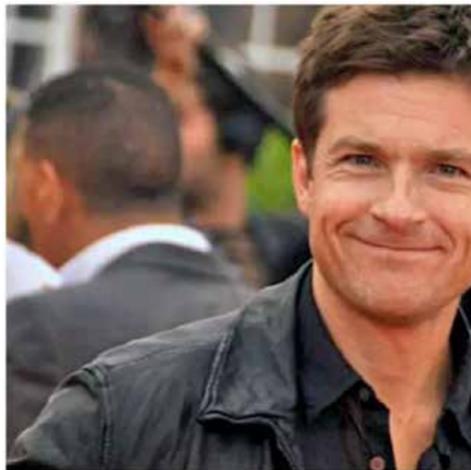
"The acting part is less interesting for me only because that's the part that's obviously most familiar and most comfortable.

"So, it is the camera work that is everything to me. I will do a lot of work on my own to create every image that we end up doing," he told Collider.

The actor-filmmaker said he still takes a "long time to figure out" how he must go about setting up a scene.

"I have everything worked out in my head as far as where the actors will walk, where they sit, where they'll talk, or where the cameras are going to be - all the images. (I do this so I can) discover the best way for the visuals to amplify - or the opposite, offset - what the scene is about.

Bateman was awarded the Primetime Emmy Award for outstanding directing for a drama series in 2019 for "Ozark" and has won a Screen Actors Guild Award for his performance.



Aries:
Do you ever examine your dreams and think maybe they're too big or too unrealistic or simply too much? Maybe you've grown up to believe that it is safer to play it small than allow yourself to claim the spotlight you deserve. Know that this is a limitation, Aries, one that you have the potential to overcome. So, what do you want to achieve this year and how does it fit in with your long-term goals? Tap into the power of intention, which is the very seed of creation. Start by getting crafty with your vision board.

Taurus:
Truth tea, Taurus: the Universe doesn't work according to our timelines. From where you are standing, it may seem your share of blessings are being withheld, but you need to trust that you will be given much more than you can imagine. The manner in which you receive these gifts is, however, not in your hands. You've just got to surrender the 'how' and the 'why' to the mysterious forces above as you keep putting in the work. PS: There are big things taking place behind the scenes for you.

Gemini:
"To love someone fiercely, to believe in something with your whole heart, to celebrate a fleeting moment in time, to fully engage in a life that doesn't come with guarantees—these are risks that involve vulnerability and often pain." But leaning into the discomfort promises magnificent rewards like joy, gratitude and

grace. You're resonating with Brené Brown's words like never before and understanding the importance of bringing vulnerability into your relationships. Let go of the masks, Gemini. Come as you are.

Cancer:
Here's the thing about authenticity, Cancer: it shows. So if you feel like you need to imbibe somebody else's style in order to make a point, know that people will be able to see through your act eventually. So examine your beliefs. Understand what is yours and what is borrowed. This is a good way to start listening to your own voice. You're also being encouraged to bring the gift of originality into the work you create.

Leo:
The world may be on lockdown, but that doesn't mean your dreams have to be. If you have put in the work, get ready to see magnificent results. What the Universe wants you to know: it's showtime in Leo headquarters! Very often, we sabotage our success by believing we are not worthy of the big stuff. You could be confronted by your own demons as you inch closer to the finish line.

Virgo:
You've always had a good sense of how the manifestation game works, but you haven't always had the space to put your knowledge into practice. But there is no time like the now, is there? The cards are urging you to get creative with your vision board (or

journal, if you prefer!). Bring out the watercolours, paintbrushes, glue sticks, and markers. Things are about to get dirty in the Virgo headquarters. Remember, setting your intention is only the first part of the process.

Libra:
Here's the Libra guide to self-care in the time of self-isolation. Step 1: Bring out your favourite gown or suit. Step 2: Direct a show and assume the leading role. Remember, there is only one audience member here, i.e. you, you, you! So adopt a no-holds-barred policy with your creative urges. You will find that your artistic side is also calling for your attention.

Scorpio:
In the words of Maya Angelou, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Words have a cathartic effect on us, Scorpio. Yet again, you're being encouraged to put pen to paper and allow the words to flow uninterrupted. We do not always get closure in the way that we desire. So journaling is a good way to release the hurt and the pain.

Sagittarius:
"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us the most." What Marianne Williamson said, Sagittarius! Today, you're being asked to examine your wildest dreams. Have you convinced yourself that they're too big for your own good? Perhaps you're afraid that if they come to fruition your light will blind those around you. Spirit is urging

you to examine where these wounds are stemming from, the self-negating patterns that are keeping you from stepping up.

Capricorn:
You can think this a period of confinement or a chance to curate your very own artist retreat with unlimited access to Netflix. Sounds like a party, Capricorn! So, how do you plan to spend the rest of your days? Start by doing away with the goal-oriented approach. Rewire your mind to replace productivity with creativity. Remember, the world may be on lockdown, but joy, creativity, art, poetry, and drama don't have to be. Bring beauty into this world in whatever manner you can.

Aquarius:
We're conditioned to believe our hobbies are just that—hobbies. Our source of income is something else entirely. Could this be a limiting belief, one that is getting in the way of living a fulfilling life? The cards are urging you to find a middle ground between what you do for money and what you do for love, and know that the Universe will support you by opening up new avenues of income.

Pisces:
In his book Zen in the Art of Writing, Ray Bradbury wrote, "You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you." Your thoughts exactly, Pisces. You've always found a way to express yourself artistically. But your time away from the matrix is helping you rediscover your love for the written word. So, write essays. Write poetry. Write prose. Write blog posts. Write, not because you have anything to prove to anybody, but for the sheer joy of expressing.