



**NO SHORTAGE IN LPG  
CYLINDER SUPPLY: STCS**  
*pg 03*

**Not everything can be left  
to fate because history  
carries enough lessons**

*pg 4*

**WEST SIKKIM FARMERS  
SUPPLY 150 METRIC  
TONS OF VEGETABLES**  
*pg 02*



# SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 106 | Gangtok | Saturday | 25 April 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | 5

## Rooftop: A breathing space for locked down residents

**KOLKATA, APR 24 (PTI):**

The deadly coronavirus sure has humans in its control, but it has not been able to tame their spirits. Boxed up inside their homes for over a month now, people have found ways to connect with their neighbours and community at large from the good old rooftops.

For children, the rooftop has turned out to be their playground, for parents it is a hangout zone, teenagers a cozy spot for long phone calls, and a new selfie zone for one and all.

The same goes for standalone houses with rooftops, where families had been bonding over a cuppa or taking their pets for a walk, since the imposition of the lockdown.

People, who are otherwise busy round the year, are also seen taking to their terraces to water their plants and take pictures of sunsets.

"A majority of the residents of our building are working from home. After office work, we gather on the roof -- we have quite a spacious roof -- and chat for an hour or so," said Sandip Chowdhury, who lives in an apartment block in north Kolkata's Phoolbagan area.

Chairs, brought from the office room of the flat owners' association to the roof, are arranged maintaining safe distance, said Chowdhury, who is also the secretary of the association.

The chairs are sanitised from time to time and everybody wears masks during chats, he said.

"We have four-five children in our building. They play badminton in the afternoon," Chowdhury added.

## Communication gap hiccup affects vegetable supplies; Confusion resolved, DC assures

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 24 APR:**

Shoppers arriving at Lall Bazaar here and at vegetable markets at several other places in the State found thinly stocked stalls today and this, compounded by some imaginative rumour-mongering, led to some panic buying and frenetic WhatsApp messages warning of shortage. Where the whispers claimed that the State Government was discouraging import of vegetables from Siliguri, the real reason behind the reduced supplies was a mix of communication gap between the administration and the vendors and reservations in the minds of truckers.

When DC East, Raj Yadav, was contacted for clarifications, he said that there was no shortage of vegetable supply from Siliguri and that these were just rumors.

He added that there was some confusion regarding hiring of trucks by Lall Bazaar vegetable sellers for transporting vegetables from Siliguri due to which supplies coming in today could have been affected.

"We had identified 100 trucks with SK license plates for transporting vegetables from Siliguri so that we can track the trucks and drivers because we have set up transit camps where these drivers are being housed for the safety of all. These trucks do not need to get permits every time they ply.

However Lall Bazaar vendors use trucks with WB numbers and were therefore confused about how they could transport their vegetable supplies. We have told them that they can also use trucks with WB numbers but they will have to get permits first and now the confusion has been resolved," said Mr Yadav.

The idea was that the 100 trucks, since they have already been identified and issued e-passes, will not need to keep applying for such passes everytime they travel to Siliguri and these journeys will not pose any risk for Sikkim since the drivers will be housed in quarantine.

Passes will still be issued for trucks from West Bengal though.

The confusion could have affected supplies for a day, however, the DC has

assured that there will be no shortage of vegetable supplies from Siliguri since the matter has been cleared with the vegetable suppliers.

But that is not the only hiccup affecting supplies from Siliguri. Apparently, some truck drivers are not very excited about the prospect of having to stay in quarantine because of their interstate movement.

All Sikkim Truck Drivers Association president, Bhim Bahadur Mukhia, said that to begin with, truck drivers were not comfortable about traveling to Siliguri in these times. This was brought up with the Transport Minister, Sanjit Kharel, he said, who has assured to provide health insurance for truck drivers plying to Siliguri for transporting vegetables and essential commodities.

The association has however appealed to vehicle owners not to force drivers to work if they do not want to, said Mr Mukhia.

He also informed that truck drivers are being asked to stay in quarantine facilities by the authorities and many drivers do not want to do that.

## Agri Minister takes stock of SIMFED's ongoing activities and future plans



**GANGTOK, 24 APR [IPR]:** Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma called a meeting today to review the ongoing activities and further strengthening of SIMFED during this lockdown period.

The meeting, held in the Minister's office at Tashiling Secretariat, was attended by Principal Secretary Agriculture and Horticulture, R Telang, Secretary Agriculture Rinzing C Bhutia, CEO Sikkim Organic Mission Dr S Anbalagan, Managing Director SIMFED Pawan Awasthy and senior officials.

The meeting reviewed activities carried out by SIMFED during the lockdown and discussed strengthening of marketing mechanisms for vegetables and flowers.

SIMFED has been asked to work out its requirements to meet future challenges as well.

The mobile van selling vegetables and ration initiated by SIMFED was appreciated by the Minister who further instructed the organisation to expand its network to other districts as well.

SIMFED was also asked to explore the possibility of operating the feed mill to cater to the requirement of the fodder in the state.

The establishment of a collection centre for vegetables along with a cold storage facility was also discussed.

## 969 units of blood donated in Mizoram during lockdown

**AIZAWL, APR 24 (PTI):** Mizoram now has sufficient stock of blood bags to meet urgent requirements after 969 units of blood were donated during the ongoing lockdown, an official said here on Friday.

There was a bit of crisis during the initial stage of the lockdown but the situation is normal now, the official said.

Following an appeal by the state government, several organisations and church bodies came forward to donate blood and it was collected strictly maintaining the social distancing norms, he said.

Of the 30,499 units of blood collected in the state during 2019-20, the official said, 27,727 units were donated voluntarily.

State Blood Transfusion Council held a meeting on Friday and decided to spread awareness on the need for donating blood.

Meanwhile, Mizoram Sports Minister Robert Romawia Royte on Friday distributed 200 sets of sewing machines to tailors in his Aizawl East-II constituency so that more face masks can be manufactured.

Royte said the demand for face masks increased after the Centre made it mandatory to wear face masks in public and workplaces during the lockdown.

## CM thanks people for helping keep Sikkim COVID-free



**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 24 APR:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] has expressed gratitude towards everyone on the overwhelming support received from all sides during this time of COVID-19

pandemic. He expressed confidence that the support will continue at the same level and help keep Sikkim safe from COVID-19.

In a Facebook post today, the CM expressed that at a time when the entire world has

been terrorized by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important for Sikkim to stay united and supportive of each other.

He further expressed that support and charity made by different social, religious and non-governmental organizations along with individuals and groups was a source of inspiration.

He added that this generosity of the people will be remembered for a long time.

The CM further expressed gratitude towards Governor Ganga Prasad for the direction and support extended by him and further thanked the Ministers, MLAs, Chairperson of MDH, different companies, Sikkim Police personnel and other government employees, panchayats, teachers, individuals and groups for coming forward with support in this difficult time.

He added that the

contributions made by ASHA workers, non-governmental organizations, Rimpoches and monks from different monasteries, religious leaders and small children who have donated from their piggy banks was unprecedented and a source of inspiration for all.

The CM also thanked Chairman of National Peroxide Limited, Mumbai, Ness Wadia for providing 7.60 Metric Tonnes of Hydrogen Peroxide to the State government and further added that this chemical has been used to sanitize different areas of the State.

While thanking Mr Wadia on behalf of the people of Sikkim, he stated that his generosity was very appreciable. He stated that the people of Sikkim have been following directions and

guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry and WHO to prevent this pandemic.

He expressed gratitude towards doctors, nurses, all health workers, police, media persons and other workers for working on the frontline during his lockdown period.

The CM expressed that the decision to close entry of foreign tourists to Sikkim on 04 March was a preventive measure which was very challenging for the State government as, but also one that was necessary.

With the passage of time, this difficult decision has proven to be a positive step to keep Sikkim safe from COVID-19 and now the entire world was appreciating Sikkim's initiative.

The CM has also commended the people for their calmness and sincerity which have helped keep Sikkim safe.

## Anxiety and angst as Indians mark one month of lockdown

**NEW DELHI, APR 24 (PTI):** It has been a month. Of life slowing to a crawl, of going back to the basics, of recalibrating equations with family, friends and colleagues and waking up, as if from a dream, to the vast inequalities and commonalities that underlie Indian society.

On the evening of March 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the entire country would go under lockdown from midnight to stem the spread of coronavirus. In the days since, 1.3 billion Indians, wealthy and poor, in the heartland and in distant corners, have faced up to the fear of a pandemic spreading across the globe.

No one was spared the anxiety of a coronavirus forced lockdown, extended till May 3, that kept most of India behind closed

doors, not corporate biggies in gilded mansions, not the middle class inside their homes and not part-time domestic workers in claustrophobic tenements.

That was the equaliser, but the inequalities also hit home almost immediately. As India went quiet and millions snuck into their homes to wait out the lockdown, migrant workers and daily wagers, stranded miles away from home, stared at an uncertain future without money, food or jobs.

Most middle and upper class families found it challenging to spend so much time with their immediate families, and many isolated without them spiralled into depression.

The journey of getting used to a new way of life without domestic help, without the necessity of dressing up to step out

and just staying cooped up indoors -- has been out of the ordinary, equal parts good, bad and ugly.

According to Preeti Singh, clinical psychologist at Gurgaon's Paras hospital, the lockdown has encouraged people to differentiate between a need and a want and helped them prioritise their requirements.

It has helped people realise that one can survive with a minimalist lifestyle, and the futility of all the materialism that drives the world, Singh told PTI.

From these 30 days -- that will go down as one of life's markers, an always-to-be-remembered month -- emerged innovative ways of social interaction, celebrations and even mourning in keeping with the need for social distancing.

It has been an extraordinary time of looking

inwards to rediscover reserves of strength and sometimes hidden talents, said many people.

Chetna Beniwal, a customs inspector posted in Madurai and now with her parents in Gurgaon, said the lockdown has been an opportunity to discover the joy of simply talking with her family.

Due to my work, I hardly get to visit home so I have actually been enjoying staying with my parents. I have realised that when you spend more time together, you get to know the small issues of the house, the 28-year-old told PTI.

For some, the challenging part was to spend most of the day confined at home with a close relative, even if one hugely loved, be it parent, child or spouse.

I am finding it hard to be around my father 24/7, said

Kolkata-based Indrani Paul.

I have realised that staying within the walls of your own house can be as difficult as staying 10 hours in the office. It is as good as being under house arrest, the 29-year-old said.

Families, however, have come closer too.

Mahender Sahni, a Delhi-based plumber, was in his village in Bihar when the lockdown was announced. He hasn't earned a rupee since March but said he has become closer to his sister, who has been helping him and his wife out with ration and food.

She has been very kind to us, the 56-year-old said.

Jammu-based Kamla Devi, 71, said she is happy her sons can spend time with their children but the future of their restaurant and catering business fills her with anxiety.

All bookings for weddings in the last month had to be cancelled, and our employees need to be paid. We are extremely anxious about the days ahead, she said.

She is also lonely and missing her friends.

What I have missed the most is going to the park for my evening walk and chatting with my friends. I am spending more time on WhatsApp and phone calls these days, she said.

According to Singh, Kamla Devi's loneliness is not uncommon in these trying times and can be seen across all age groups.

Mental health has taken a hit with increasing cases of anxiety, depression, mood swings, obsessive compulsive disorder among others. There are also cases of alcohol abuse, increased anger issues, domestic violence, and marital discord,

the doctor said.

In times like these, lack of emotional support often leads to a sense of hopelessness.

At least 30 people have reportedly committed suicide due to the fear, anxiety and panic of being in isolation.

The extended lockdown has put normal life on hold. Even treatment for illnesses, regular medical check-ups and health problems other than COVID-19.

Ricky Sharma's brother ended up with a gum infection after he was unable to see a dentist.

My brother had intense pain due to his wisdom tooth but no doctor agreed to see him. Eventually, a local chemist prescribed a medicine. But it hasn't been of much help. He is still in pain, Sharma, an IT professional in Gurgaon, said.

**turn Page 2**



## NawaPrabhatSanghprovides relief packages



### SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 24Apr:

NawaPrabhatSangh (NPS) of Tikjek, a non-government organization, provided relief packages to the families of upper and lower Tikjek of West Sikkim under Yanthang constituency today.

The relief package included rice, pulses, oil, onion and other essential items.

A press release informs that 50 families of upper and lower Tikjek were given the food items by NawaPrabhatSangh today.

## 1,400 students from Haryana, Assam leave for home; those from Bihar stage stir

**KOTA, APR 24 (PTI):** Nearly 1,400 students from Haryana and Assam left Kota for their home towns by buses on Friday morning, while over 2,000 from various places in Rajasthan are scheduled to leave in the evening.

Meanwhile, students from Bihar have appealed to Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of their home state, to make arrangements for their return and staged a silent protest here.

Over 50 students from the Union territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Diu had left for home in three buses on Thursday noon and more than 250 students from Rajasthan had left for their respective home districts till Thursday night.

Eighteen buses carrying students from Assam and 31 with students from Haryana were scheduled to leave Kota on Friday, ADM (administration), Kota Narendra Gupta, who is monitoring the task, said.

At least 50 students from Dadra and Nagar Haveli and six from Diu had left Kota in three buses on Thursday noon, while students

from Bundi, Jhalawar and Baran in Rajasthan were dispatched in 10 buses on Thursday night, he added.

Nearly 1,000 students from Haryana left for home on Friday morning and about 400 students from Assam have started the journey towards their home state.

The Assam government had hired buses from private operators to take the students from the state back home, an official of a coaching institute who is associated with the task of sending students home, said.

Over 2,000 students from various cities and towns of Rajasthan were also scheduled to leave Kota in the evening, he added.

"The Haryana government has heard our plight and sent buses to take us back home. We are grateful to the Haryana government," Anjali Singh, an NEET aspirant who hails from Gurugram, said.

Meanwhile, over 12,000 students from Bihar, who are stuck here since the nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus was imposed, appealed

to Kumar to call them back on Thursday.

They held up placards with the appeal written on those from their respective places while maintaining social distancing.

Shahbaz (18), an NEET aspirant, and his roommate in a paying guest accommodation, Aajam Hussain, both from Bihar's Katihar district, said they were desperate to go home as it was getting more and more difficult to spend even a single day here amid a critical problem of food and the panic surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The approval to send back 190 students from Punjab and nearly 500 from Jammu and Kashmir is yet to be received from the respective states governments, a district official said.

At least 13,000 students from Uttar Pradesh, 2,800 from Madhya Pradesh and 350 from Gujarat had already reached their home towns from Kota, which is known for its coaching centres to prepare students for competitive exams, in the last few days, he added.

## DAS distributes essential supplies to drivers

YOGEN THATAL

Singtam, 25 APR:

Driver Association of Singtam [DAS] distributed essential commodities to needy drivers at Singtam Bazaar today. President, Tinku Adhikari along with all the executive members and staff were present during the distribution process.

"The distribution is mainly for drivers of our association and those driving private

vehicles. All the expenses were covered by the association," informed Mr Adhikari. Meanwhile, he also informed that those members who got left behind will also be provided with the items at their respective homes.

The items distributed were 10kgs rice, 3kgs potato, 1kg onion, 1ltr cooking oil, 2kgs pulses and 1kg wheat.

"The number of beneficiaries was more

than 260 but because of the lockdown many were unable to make it to the distribution centre. So the association has decided to reach the items to their house," said Mr Adhikari.

Meanwhile, similar distribution was also conducted at Bihari Dharmasala by Bihari Jagran Yuva Munch Singtam led by vice president, Jainand Prasad and his colleagues today.

## West Sikkim farmers supply 150 metric tons of vegetables



GANGTOK, 24 APR (IPR):

'West Sikkim' is known for the Fiery Cherry Peppers a.k.a 'Dalle' of Neshia (Tashiding), the fresh Carrots of Nassa (Tareybhair, West Sikkim); the potatoes of Ribdi; the large Cardamoms of Hee-Gaon; the green peas, cabbages and cauliflowers of Bariakhop, Okhrey and Sombaria; the juicy fresh kiwis of Naku-Chumbong (Pelling) and the tasty 'Sikkimese Mandarins' of PakkiGaon (Soreng).

During the recent period of Lockdown, the farmers of the Pea growing areas of Upper Rumbuk, Tareybhair, Nessa, Buriakhop, Sombaria, Begha and Dentam earned a good source of income from the green pea cultivation. Most of the markets like Soreng, Jorethang, Rangpo, Singtam and Gangtok has been seen to be flooded with green peas from West Sikkim. Due to large scale production of Green Pea, they have also been able to supply their produce even to Siliguri Regulated Markets with the coordinated effort of Horticulture

Department and District Administration West Sikkim. The pea cultivation has become a boon to the farmers of West Sikkim, as informed by Karma Sherpa, Joint Director, Horticulture Department, West Sikkim.

Till date, 20 Nos. full Utility Vehicles loaded with 3 Metric tons per utility has been supplied to Siliguri Regulated Markets, West Bengal and about 12 Nos. full Utility Vehicles loads has been supplied to different Local Markets and Gangtok. As informed by JD (Horti, W/S) around 54 Metric tons also have been supplied to the local markets of Gyalshing, Soreng, Dentam, Martam, Legship, Reshi and many others within West Sikkim.

It's noteworthy to mention that the total amount of vegetables sold have been about 150 Metric Tons which is a huge number to go with thus exerting the significance of the Farming Community and the success of the FPOs along with the dedication of the Horticulture Department of West

Sikkim.

From what is known, the departmental officials and farmers work in close co-ordination to ensure that the crops are nurtured well and the produce when harvested reaches the markets for the consumers to buy the farm fresh vegetables. The Department conducts regular field inspection of different vegetable clusters by the respective circle in-charge who helps farmers to take proper care of the produce, trainings on good horticultural practices in farms are being done on regular basis.

The Horticulture Department has also been focusing on the marketing of vegetables in collaboration with different Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) in West Sikkim. The Vegetables harvested by the farmers are collected from different locations and sent to the designated markets to ensure a proper supply.

There are about Six FPOs in West Sikkim who are scattered along the major farming belts of West Sikkim. These FPOs have been actively involved in working for their community during the COVID 19 Lockdown period. These 6 FPOs are namely: 1. Sustainable Organic Cooperative Society, Gyalshing; 2. Himali Vikas Sanstha, Bermiok; 3. Sunrise Cooperative Society, Soreng; 4. FPO Khecheopalri; 5. FPO Zoom; and 6. FPO Rinchenpong.

Thus, the collective efforts of the Department officials, the hardworking farmers and the diligent FPOs who have made it possible for the produce of Organic Sikkim to reach the tables of the consumers and joy to the farmers in these hard times.



### Rooftop: A breathing space...

The situation is slightly different at another high-rise in South Kolkata's Dhakuria area.

"No, we do not have any pre-arranged chat sessions on our rooftop. But we meet others during morning or evening walks," said Raka Ghosh who lives in the Dhakuria apartment.

Ghosh said she has met neighbours she didn't know existed. "My husband happens to be an introvert. The lockdown has forced him to venture out to the rooftop. My husband has even found himself a new hobby. He has taken to time-lapse photography from the terrace," she said.

A college student, a resident of Salt Lake in the eastern part of the metropolis, looks for opportunity every day to sneak away to the terrace to call his girlfriend.

"Actually the roof serves two purposes. First, I can talk to her without being disturbed. Secondly, I can get some fresh air," said the youth who did not want to be named.

Families owning individual houses are also seen frequenting rooftops.

"My mother goes to the roof more than once every day to tend to the plants. These days, I accompany her. I think I have discovered my love for gardening," said Ritika Dutta, a Class 9 student in Baguiati, on the eastern fringes of the city.

For pet parents, too, rooftop is a relief.

"My dog insists on going out, but I can't help it. I am lucky that I own a house with a terrace. It is really difficult for those who live in an apartment blocks where flat owners may not be allowed to take their pets out on the rooftop for a stroll," said Abhijit Sengupta, a resident of Lake Town.

### Anxiety and angst...

According to Shweta Sharma, a psychologist at Gurgaon's Columbia Asia Hospital, there are challenges in surviving a lockdown but it is also important to look at the positive aspects and take some of them forward in a post corona life.

This lockdown made people recognise the true value of relationships, and team work while sharing household responsibilities. Pollution free environment, and consumption of homemade food have been the valuable perks of this lockdown.

These are also things that must continue after the pandemic. Perhaps, work from home can be accommodated in our routines to regulate pollution, and save resources, and exercising at home must continue, as should a certain amount of me time', Sharma said.

Actor Rajeev Khandelwal who was in his holiday home in Goa when the lockdown came into effect, said his biggest takeaway has been that one should not be dependent on others for his/her happiness.

"It should not be a borrowed happiness. One should not feel frustrated if they cannot step out of the house, if there is no one around them. One should be able to spend time with oneself. It is important to find things to engage with to find happiness.

Lubdhak Chatterjee, a Kolkata-based filmmaker, said the most difficult thing to come to terms with has been the fragile nature of human life as well as the collective lifestyle of the modern world.

This has been a more challenging reality to accept than just being restricted to my home, and the process is psychologically draining. In fact, this might be just the beginning of a long process and thus it is important to accept and adapt accordingly, he said.

COVID-19 has infected over 2.7 million people across the world and claimed at least 1,91,000 lives. In India, the death toll has risen to 718 and the number of cases to 23,077, according to the Union Health Ministry on Friday.

Mail us at [advertise@summittimes.com](mailto:advertise@summittimes.com)  
or call us at :03592-208698

No. 1/1/2020-E-II (B)  
Government of India  
Ministry of Finance  
Department of Expenditure  
\*\*\*\*\*

North Block, New Delhi  
Dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2020.

### OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject: Freezing of Dearness Allowance to Central Government employees and Dearness Relief to Central Government pensioners at current rates till July 2021.

The undersigned is directed to say that in view of the crisis arising out of COVID-19, it has been decided that the additional installment of Dearness Allowance payable to Central Government employees and Dearness Relief to Central Government pensioners, due from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 shall not be paid. The additional installments of Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief due from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 shall also not be paid. However, Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief at current rates will continue to be paid.

2. As and when the decision to release the future installment of Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief due from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 is taken by the Government, the rates of Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief as effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 will be restored prospectively and will be subsumed in the cumulative revised rate effective from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021. No arrears for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 till 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 shall be paid.

3 These orders shall be applicable to all Central Government employees and Central Government pensioners.

*Annie George Mathew*  
(Annie George Mathew)  
Additional Secretary to the Government of India

## Chardham temples to reopen, no pilgrim to be allowed

DEHRADUN, APR 24 (PTI):

The Chardham yatra is all set for a low-key opening this year with no pilgrims allowed to visit the Himalayan temples of Gangotri, Yamunotri and Kedarnath when their portals reopen in a few days after the six-month winter closure.

The opening ceremony of the four temples in Uttarakhand is an important annual event attended by thousands of pilgrims but the extended lockdown to halt the spread of coronavirus has cast its shadow on the yatra this year. The Chardham yatra begins with the

opening of Gangotri and Yamunotri temples on April 26 this year.

Kedarnath will open on April 29 while the opening of Badrinath has been put off to May 15.

"In compliance with social distancing norms, we cannot allow pilgrims as of now to visit the temples. Only a select group of priests who have to perform the pujas at the opening ceremony and temple committee officials are being allowed," state tourism and culture minister Satpal Maharaj said.

When asked how long it will take the state government to

permit pilgrims to visit the temples, he said it will depend upon the guidelines from the Centre after the extended lockdown is over.

"Our priority at the moment is opening the portals of the temples in accordance with religious beliefs and traditions associated with them. The rest of the decisions will be taken as per the Centre's directives," Satpal told PTI.

With the spread of the virus dealing a blow to the yatra and tourism in general, he said an action plan is being drawn up on how to recover from the setback.

~ 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).

Contact: 9800201335

### LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Road-side just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

### 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



# No shortage in LPG cylinder supply: STCS

ARPAN PRADHAN  
GANGTOK, 24 APR:

“We have been able to distribute LPG cylinders to the people of Sikkim even during the lockdown period and there is no shortage of LPG cylinders as of now,” said Managing Director, State Trading Corporation of Sikkim (STCS), MenlaEthenpa, today.

Managing Director, STCS has informed that like other frontline workers, the employees and workers of the State Trading Corporation of Sikkim have also been working tirelessly to ensure uninterrupted supply ofLPG cylinder to the people of Sikkim during the lockdown period.

MrEthenpa has also informed that the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) in view of the lockdown



period has started surplus production just to ensure that there is no shortage of LPG cylinder.

“STCS is also working in close coordination with the IOC and as of now there are no issues being faced by STCS in terms of LPG cylinder supply,” said MrEthenpa.

He informed that STCS is supplying and distributing LPG cylinders on daily basis

at various locations throughout the state to consumers.

He further informed that STCS has taken various initiatives in regard to the safety of its staff and workers during the distribution and strict social distancing is being maintained during the whole process of distribution of LPG at various distribution points. STCS has also

provided various relief materials to their frontline workers who are working tirelessly in the service of the people of Sikkim.

MrEthenpainformed that the consumers have to maintain the gap period of 15 days to get the next LPG refill.

There are almost 28000 consumers under the State Trading Corporation of Sikkim

(STCS) but there are many other LPG distributors in the state as well which cater to different areas in different districts of the State.

Senior Manager, Sales, NP Bhutia has said that there is no shortage in LPG cylinder supply in Sikkim as of now.

It is informed that a minimum of 16–18 trucks with 270 LPG cylinders in total are being sent to various places of Sikkim for distribution. There are around one lakh twelve thousand LPG consumers in the state as of now.

Mr Bhutia said that the plant is producing and refilling enough LPG cylinders so that the demand of the consumers during this lock down period can be met and the plant has been successful in doing so.

# Special initiatives for the elderly in COVID-19 times

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 24 (PTI):

Kudumbashree, hailed as one of the worlds largest women empowerment and poverty eradication missions, has launched a special initiative for the well-being of the elderly in Kerala during theCOVID-19 lockdownwitha string of confidence-building measures.

The thrust of the outreach has been to take care of the mental health of the elderly and boost their confidence through I E C ( I n f o r m a t i o n , Education and C o m m u n i c a t i o n ) programme.

There are chances of co-morbidity and low immunity among the elderly people. So, it makes them vulnerable to the epidemic. We could successfully convey the message to around 43 lakh people throughthe I E C c a m p a i g n , s a i d S Harikishore, Executive Director, Kudumbashree, which functionsas a community organisation of Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) of women in Kerala.

The programme, which focuses on the message elderly should take extra precaution, is one of the three

campaigns catering to the senior citizens.

A letter and a video message from the Executive Director were distributed to Ayalkootams ( n e i g h b o u r h o o d groups), apart from SMS and posters through WhatsApp, to create a sense of seriousness among the public, he noted.

There are three lakh Ayalkootams in Kerala and around 43 lakh people are part of it. Just before lockdown got under way, Kudumbashree sent a discussion note to all neighbourhood groups, which they discussed in their meetings,” Harikishore said.

“Apart from the message to the elderly, the focus of the note was to effectively implement Break the Chain campaign and social distancing. So, I can confidently say that we have covered around 50 per cent of families, he said.

In the second round, Kudumbashree targeted two groups: quarantined elders at home and people above 60 years from destitute families.

Among the 1,50,000 people, who were

quarantined at home, around 5,000 elderly people were primary contacts. Since they are the most vulnerable, as per the directions of the Health Department, Kudumbashree gave special care to them, the official pointed out.

Kudumbashree has mobilised and trained 786 volunteers with each one of them contacting 10 people. The one-to-one contact campaign with the elderly is effective. It also has a touch of care, he said.

Expressing happiness over Kudumbashree teams making one- to-one contact with such a large number of people in destitute and quarantined families, Harikishore said it boosted their confidence considerably.

The third phase of the campaign targeted elderlypeople in destitute families under Destitute-Free Kerala project of Kudumbashree.

Among 1.54 lakh destitute families, there are 1.14 lakh elderly people. We designated 2,176 resource persons and they contacted them once in five days. So far, we have covered 95 per cent such vulnerable people, he added.

# Chardham temples to reopen, no pilgrim to be allowed

DEHRADUN, APR 24 (PTI):

The Chardham yatra is all set for a low-key opening this year with no pilgrims allowed to visit the Himalayan temples of Gangotri, Yamunotri and Kedarnath when their portals reopen in a few days after the six-month winter closure.

The opening ceremony of the four temples in Uttarakhand is an important annual event attended by thousands of pilgrims but the extended lockdown to halt the spread of coronavirus has cast its shadow on the

yatra this year.

The Chardham yatra begins with the opening of Gangotri and Yamunotri temples on April 26 this year.

Kedarnath will open on April 29 while the opening of Badrinath has been put off to May 15.

“In compliance with social distancing norms, we cannot allow pilgrims as of now to visit the temples. Only a select group of priests who have to perform the pujas at the opening ceremony and temple committee officials are

being allowed,” state tourism and culture minister Satpal Maharaj said.

When asked how long it will take the state government to permit pilgrims to visit the temples, he said it will depend upon the guidelines from the Centre after the extended lockdown is over.

“Our priority at the moment is opening the portals of the temples in accordance with religious beliefs and traditions associated with them. The rest of

the decisions will be taken as per the Centre's directives,” Satpal told PTI.

With the spread of the virus dealing a blow to the yatra and tourism in general, he said an action plan is being drawn up on how to recover from the setback.

“We are mulling a number of steps to offset the economic impact of social distancing on the yatra which will continue even after the lockdown is lifted.

“One such step is shifting focus to

# Sources: Guaido allies take slice of first Venezuela budget

MIAMI, APR 24 (AP):

Opposition lawmakers in Venezuela quietly agreed to pay themselves USD 5,000 a month when they readied special USD 100 bonuses for doctors and nurses battling the coronavirus a large payout for a nation where most workers are scraping by on couple of dollars a month, according to people involved in the process.

Funding for the payout, which has not been previously reported, was contained in legislation passed last week by the National Assembly setting up an USD 80 million Liberation Fund made up of Venezuelan assets seized by the Trump administration as part of its sanctions campaign to remove socialist leader Nicol's Maduro.

The legislation was touted as a hallmark achievement for Juan Guaid , the 36-year-old congressional leader recognized as Venezuela's rightful president by the US and nearly 60 other nations, but who has struggled to exert real power.

For this first time since invoking the constitution to proclaim himself as acting president, he would have access to some of the billions of dollars in Venezuelan assets frozen abroad.

The details have been

shrouded in secrecy, however. The text of the new measure, which implements a general law passed in February creating the fund, hasn't been made published in the official legislative gazette as required although The Associated Press obtained a copy from sources.

And the official announcement makes no mention of salaries or the proposed USD 5,000 payout, saying only that 17% of the USD 80 million in recovered assets will be set aside for the defense and strengthening of the national legislative power and the social protection of its members.

G u a i d o ' s communications team issued a statement late Thursday denying a USD 5,000 salary had been approved.

It said lawmakers, who have gone unpaid since Maduro cut off funding to the legislature after it fell to the opposition in 2015, will determine an appropriate amount and communicate it to the rest of the country in a transparent manner.

It said the USD 14 million in funding earmarked for the National Assembly would pay not not only lawmakers' personal

income but also cover office expenses, staff costs, travel and other related legislative expenses.

Two lawmakers and three Guaid aides earlier confirmed the plan and acknowledged that the optics looked potentially bad coming as many Venezuelans struggle to cope with an economic crisis that has reduced the minimum wage to barely 2 a month.

The five agreed to discuss the matter only if granted anonymity, worrying they might face retribution for airing details of what they described as a fierce, months-long debate that threatened to split the anti-Maduro coalition.

They point out that spread out over the full five-year legislative session, the payments amount to 1,000 a month far less than what lawmakers earn elsewhere in Latin America.

They said some lawmakers will surely refuse to collect the money, even though many struggle to make ends meet while living in exile or traveling to Caracas for parliamentary debates

Since the legislation passed, Guaid has frequently promoted his plan to hand out USD 100 bonuses to an estimated 60,000 doctors

and nurses fighting the coronavirus pandemic in a country where most hospitals lack running water, electricity and basic supplies.

The dictatorship has billions of our dollars sequestered but we, with less than 0.01% of what they have, can do a lot more, Guaid said while announcing his plan.

The USD 14 million in funding for the National Assembly is the second largest item in the Special Law for the Venezuelan Liberation Fund and Attention to Vital Risks, after a 45% outlay on social spending to ease the humanitarian crisis.

That includes the three monthly bonuses of 100 each for health care heroes,” payment of which will be made via digital wallets.

The system will be managed with the Organization of American States at a cost of 9.2 million.

An additional 11% is earmarked for diplomatic envoys in the countries that recognize Guaid as interim president.

There is also money to strengthen the opposition's c o m m u n i c a t i o n s outreach, judicial cooperation and 4.5 million for security and defense of democracy” to be used at Guaido's discretion.

# SC grants 3-week protection to journalist Arnab Goswami

NEW DELHI, APR 24 (PTI):

The Supreme Court Friday granted protection against any coercive steps for three weeks to Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami in connection with some FIRs lodged against him in various states for alleged defamatory statements made during the news shows on recent Palghar mob-lynching of three

persons including two saints in Maharashtra.

A bench comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah, in a hearing conducted through video conferencing, took note of the submissions of senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and said that Goswami shall be protected against any coercive steps for the telecast of

the alleged defamatory news programmes aired on the news channels.

It also said that Goswami can later file anticipatory bail plea in connection with the FIRs after three weeks and he should cooperate with the investigating agency.

The top court allowed Goswami to amend his plea for impleading the

complainants against him as parties in the apex court and also permitted him to seek clubbing of FIRs lodged against him.

The plea, seeking reliefs such as quashing of FIRs and protection from coercive measures, said that several FIRs have been registered against Goswami in different parts of the country.



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM  
TASHILING SECRETGARIAT, GANGTOK(SIKKIM)-737101

## NOTICE

No. 1223/Exam/Edu/2020-21/ 287

dated 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2020

In continuation to Notice issued vide reference No. 42/JD/Exam/2019 dated 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 regarding private schools being run without registration, recognition, renewed registration or without fulfillment of basic teaching qualifications such as STET etc as required under the norms of NCTE, RTE Act of 2009, Sikkim Education Act, 2005 and Sikkim Education Rules of 2008. Schools were given time till 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2020 for fulfillment of above requirements.

However, government has now decided, on the request made by the Sikkim Private School Welfare Association to give further time extension till 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020 to fulfill all the requirements of teachers as stipulated under above mentioned Acts and NCTE regulations and also to get all the private schools registered/recognized etc. Failure to do this will invite penal action including closure of school and fine as per the RTE Act, 2009 and Sikkim Education Act, 2005, since no further extension shall be granted.

Registering Authority,  
Exam Cell,  
Education Department

Dated Gangtok, the 24<sup>rd</sup> April, 2020.

**LAND FOR SALE**  
**(URGENT SALE)**

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**



## Planning Well Means Preparing for the Worst

*Not everything can be left to fate because history carries enough lessons*

A few evenings of ferocious hailstorms left fields in parts of East and West Sikkim battered with lost harvests. If these disruptions are any indicator of what the actual monsoon has plans for a few months down the line, then it is time to pause and start preparing better. The absence of traffic on the roads and the armies of laborers without work at present offer an opportunity to reinforce monsoon preparedness across Sikkim. Let's accept it, when it comes to preparedness, Sikkim is slack. It is, after all, not the rain's fault that roads take such a battering – what is reinforced though is the failure of the State's drainage system (if at all it can be called that). These are technically not even the nor'westers yet and are still erratic westerly disturbances, but even if showers carry such potential for damage, one shudders to think what June and July have in store. It is never too late to start learning, and it is even more apt when the worries of manmade disasters are discussed on the eve of the anniversary of what is probably the worst catastrophe of development. On that note, let us try and learn from the past in a distant land.

On 26 April in 1986, the world's worst nuclear fallout took place at Chernobyl in what was still USSR. It was not a nuclear bomb that released radiation several times higher than the atom bombs detonated over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but a peaceful nuclear power plant. Most people have forgotten Chernobyl and to jog memories a bit it is worth recording that Chernobyl had state of the art [even by present standards] safety mechanisms in place. The whole incident was a horrific accident; an experiment that went wrong with no mala fide intent. An area extending 30 KMs on all sides of the reactor remains heavily poisoned, with officials estimating that it would not be safe for human life again for another 20,000 years. On an aside, tourists though can make quick daytrips to the area which is also seeing some civil works to further contain the ground zero.

The reason remembering Chernobyl makes sense in Sikkim is because the State too is on a heightened development mode, a condition made risky by the short-cut engineering and still dodgy civil works. The lesson to be learnt from Chernobyl is not that things “go wrong,” rather, it is that things “could always go wrong.” We learn from the past, and not always our own, not to abandon ideas, but to avoid the mistakes. Sikkim has identified hydel as one of its thrust sectors for the economy. No one can fault this attention since better lettered experts have zeroed in on this option. What the State needs to ensure is that all worst-case-scenarios are identified and back-up plans worked-in in advance. This process has to be frank and open and every fear, no matter how far-fetched it sounds, addressed and prepared for. It is still not too late to commission a study on post-hydel project situations [studying especially the already commissioned projects]. This study could delve into how the affected people adjusted to new lifestyles, how they managed their compensation kitties, how the projects affected the socio-cultural environment, what kind of unexpected fallout came about etc. And it could also project the potential catastrophes that these manmade interventions can wreck. We get a sense of this aspect being addressed from the several NDRF disaster drills being undertaken at settlements along rivers which have hydel projects upstream. While these drills are welcome, one wonders if there is any science being deployed to the scale of manmade disasters being prepared for.

Here, one would also like to reiterate that if the hydel lobby was so worried with the risks posed by the Mantam lake to projects downstream, how is it that the dams, which hold back much more water, are not flagged for the risks they pose. Again, not necessarily because of faulty design, but because of scenarios they are not adequately prepped for like a mega-quake of a massive landslide into the reservoir itself.

Agreed, our country does not believe in such preparations, but that does not mean that Sikkim should not? The area of study is still very manageable and even a small team of dedicated scholars [it has to be scholars, not bureaucrats or ex-hydel sector employees] can carry out such a study and the findings could end up ensuring that development happens at minimal human cost in Sikkim, and the State continues to show the nation how things should be done.

It is time that Sikkim realized that uninformed decisions and not preparing for the worst leaves everyone vulnerable. Take Gangtok's example, it was allowed to urbanise in a free for all, and now, everything from fighting fires to fleeing earthquakes to avoiding landslides and repairing roads presents a logistical nightmare. Had the planners planned at least with the obvious threats in mind, Gangtokians would not find themselves in a situation where all they can do is build and pray. All developmental works for the future should rely more on planning and not just the grace of guardian deities.

## To book ad-space, contact SummitTIMES at

### GANGTOK:

For circulation details Contact: (Sandeep) 9734152451 & for Advertisement booking at 9933427505 or at office no 03592 208698. Mail us at [advertise@summittimes.com](mailto:advertise@summittimes.com)

### SILIGURI:

Mr. Mani Rai, M/s. Space Ads, B.R. Ambedkar Building, Room No.7, 1st floor. Opp. Ganga Hotel. Hill Cart Road. Siliguri – 03. Ph. 9832318644/ 9800682989/ 9153035100 or mail at [mani\\_siliguri@yahoo.co.in](mailto:mani_siliguri@yahoo.co.in).

### KOLKATA OFFICE:

Irshad Ali/ Imteeyaz. Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezzine – 2, 2nd floor. Kolkata – 700072. Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. 9830547774/ 983108397. E-mail: [contact.synapse@gmail.com](mailto:contact.synapse@gmail.com)/ [irshad\\_ali123@rediffmail.com](mailto:irshad_ali123@rediffmail.com)

# Beating coronavirus requires faith leaders to bridge gap between religion and science

KATHERINE MARSHALL  
THECONVERSATION.COM

While many religious communities have embraced physical distancing measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus, some still encourage gatherings despite strong public health messages that large groups run a significant threat of disease transmission.

Some ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in New York continue to gather for funerals, weeks after physical distancing guidelines went into effect in the city. Four Brooklyn neighborhoods with large Orthodox Jewish populations have especially high rates of coronavirus infection, according to data released in early April.

Other religious leaders are using the pulpit to spread misinformation. The evangelical pastor Kenneth Copeland, for example, claims to have cures for COVID-19. And some Hindu nationalists in India have blamed Muslims for the country's outbreak, leading to a surge in hate crimes.

As these situations demonstrate, millions of people worldwide look more to religious authorities than health officials for guidance on how to behave and what to believe in a crisis. My research on the intersections between public health and religion suggests enlisting religious institutions worldwide will be vital in stopping the spread of coronavirus.

### CONNECTING THEOLOGY AND HEALTH

Social resistance to medical intervention often drives the transmission of infectious diseases, research shows.

Studying the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which killed over 11,000 people between 2014 and 2016, I have identified important lessons – both positive and negative – about how religious actors can help build essential bridges between faith and science to strengthen a pandemic response.

Bridging theology and science was imperative in the Ebola

outbreak, when up to 60% of Ebola cases were linked to funerals. Traditional religious burials in West Africa, both Christian and Muslim, often involve touching and washing the body, yet contact with body fluids spread Ebola.

For the first months of the outbreak, in early 2014, government prescriptions to cremate or swiftly bury the dead sparked fears and suspicion in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea – the most affected countries. Many relief workers, outsiders dressed in spacesuit-like protective outfits sent in to implement these procedures in Ebola-affected communities, were blocked from entering. Others faced violent, even deadly, physical attacks.

In late 2014, public health officials and religious leaders got together with the World Health Organization to produce a protocol for culturally sensitive burials of Ebola victims. Over 2,000 Christian and Muslim leaders were trained to conduct safe, dignified funerals in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The burial protocol may have saved thousands of lives, according to a 2017 study published in the journal of Neglected Tropical Diseases.

### FAITH AND TRUST

Among the assets that religious actors offer is trust – perhaps the most vital key in a crisis for addressing fear and misinformation.

After an initial period of doubt and confusion, when many faith leaders in West Africa understood Ebola as divine punishment for various sins or simply as fate, public health officials made a concerted effort to get religious leaders to the same tables as scientists to educate and engage them on health education.

By late 2014, faith-inspired organizations like World Vision International were organizing workshops that taught public health practices like meticulous hygiene and quarantining of

people exposed to Ebola grounded in theology and scripture.

Like the burial protocol, such programs proved to be a crucial step in halting the spread of Ebola.

An equivalent intervention for COVID-19 might be a simple message focused on physical distancing, for example – framed by religious leaders in terms people can understand and accept.

### BUILDING BRIDGES

Any COVID-19 prevention program aimed at religious communities would have to work with faith-based organizations that know local leaders and have roots in the community.

But it is difficult to build partnerships between faith and health networks not accustomed to working together.

The Ebola outbreak demonstrated that relationships between religious and health institutions in West Africa were at best patchy. Governments, international health agencies and aid groups lacked systematic knowledge about the region's diverse religious landscape, which includes Christianity, Islam and traditional African religions. And little relevant public information was available to help them learn the ropes.

Ultimately, groups of religious leaders from various faith traditions worked through interreligious councils to help coordinate national faith responses. On the regional level, faith-inspired organizations like World Vision, Catholic Relief Services and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation leveraged their relationships with religious actors in West Africa to provide funding, supplies and training for Ebola relief workers.

The global scale of the coronavirus pandemic will make it even more challenging to launch faith-inspired public health programs today.

I am part of one such effort to begin this difficult, delicate

process. On March 11, the World Faiths Development Dialogue and Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, where I teach, joined with the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities to document how faith communities are responding to COVID-19.

My project includes a digital repository to track changes to religious gatherings, beliefs and practices during the pandemic. So far, the database shows that religious communities are responding in very different ways.

Many Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities in the U.S. are providing financial as well as spiritual support for not only the ill but also those who've lost jobs because the outbreak. Global faith-based groups like Religions for Peace are teaming up to provide support for vulnerable children worldwide.

But other religious groups continue to spread false information to explain the disease.

### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

For health officials, figuring out which religious leaders worldwide to work with, who their constituents are and how to transmit health messages that will resonate with these communities will be tricky indeed.

But once on board, faith leaders can do more than convey health guidance: They can bring messages of hope to communities struggling with anxiety, sadness and despair.

On March 27 Pope Francis, speaking alone from the Vatican to a plaza usually filled with followers, urged Catholics to approach the pandemic through faith, not fear.

“Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope,” he said. “That is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear.”

*[the writer is Founding Director, World Faiths Development Dialogue; Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University]*

# Murky Origins: Why China will never welcome a global inquiry into the source of COVID-19

GRAEME SMITH  
THECONVERSATION.COM

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne has led a bipartisan call for a global inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus, noting Australia will insist on an independent review, not one conducted by the World Health Organisation.

Labor's shadow health minister, Chris Bowen, has given his full backing to the idea, saying “we would expect and trust that China would cooperate.”

Payne and Bowen are likely to be disappointed.

In our most recent episode of The Little Red Podcast, former China correspondent Louisa Lim and I sat down with Joseph Nye, the man who coined the phrase “soft power”, Professor Bates Gill from Macquarie University and Natasha Kassam of the Lowy Institute.

Their views of the possibility of China — and the US — displaying moral leadership during this crisis are bleak.

In Nye's blunt assessment, both countries are only interested in tactical leadership on global issues like COVID-19 and climate change. Both China and the US seem focused on wielding power, rather than achieving joint goals by exercising power with other nations.

As he put it, “Both the Chinese leadership and the American leadership are focused almost entirely on competitive power over who came out ahead [after COVID-19] and how well we dealt with it.”

### CHINA HAS SETTLED ON ITS OWN TELLING OF THE STORY

The main barrier to Payne's call for an inquiry is China has already settled on a narrative that the origins of the virus are unclear – Italy and the United States have been named as possible sources – and that if it did arise in China, it was not the result of a laboratory accident.

Researchers in China looking to publish anything related to the origins of the virus also now face an extra level of scrutiny.

As a result, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will have no interest in cooperating with any effort that might challenge that narrative.

Indeed, Payne's call has already met with a sharp reprimand from China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, who accused Australia of “dancing to the tune of a certain country to hype up the situation.”

In disputes such as these, Australia is seen as

a proxy for the United States, and by extension the colonial powers behind China's “century of humiliation”, the term used to describe the period of foreign subjugation from the mid-19th century to the Communist Revolution after the second world war.

Overturning humiliation by foreign powers is the basis for President Xi Jinping's project of national rejuvenation. Allowing a team of foreign investigators into China to ask awkward questions about biosecurity is never going to be on the agenda.

There was a brief period in February when China looked open to entertaining a different narrative around the origin of the virus. But that window quickly closed when the US media began to run stories questioning whether it was accidentally spread from one of two institutions in Wuhan studying bat coronaviruses.

### UNLEASH THE 'WOLF WARRIORS'

Here's the rub: both China and the US are playing to domestic audiences.

In the case of China, that audience is not even the Chinese public, writ large. As Bates Gill argues, “the primary target of what we're seeing in all the so-called soft power is the party itself. It is an attempt to remind party members, reassure them about Xi Jinping's leadership and first and foremost, feel good about themselves.”

While there is mixed evidence to support the lab accident theory, as soon as the story is taken up by outlets such as Fox News, the matter enters the realm of information warfare, which both the US and Chinese governments have turned to in this crisis.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called on China to “come clean” on what it knows, echoing language frequently used by President Donald Trump. A recent Pew Poll found nearly 30% of the US population subscribes to the theory the virus is a Chinese “bioweapon”.

Meanwhile, China has ramped up its own disinformation about the virus originating in the US.

The number of Twitter accounts opened by Chinese embassies, consulates and ambassadors has increased by more than 250% since March 2019. These diplomats are now being described as “wolf warriors” in China for their newly aggressive stance on social media toward western countries.

As Natasha Kassam observes in our podcast,

“Conspiracy theories have been floated and then taken away, just trying to muddy the waters rather than actually change someone's mind. This is reminiscent of Russian disinformation efforts.”

### 'SOFT' POWER IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER'

In some countries, China's “face mask diplomacy” – its recent move to provide protective equipment and respirators to all corners of the globe – will improve trust in the country as a global power.

As Kassam notes, the Chinese government is wise to where it gets a warm reception and where it does not: “You see Chinese companies delivering products to Serbia and Hungary and their leaders are ... calling Xi Jinping a brother and a friend. When those same companies are delivering products to Australia, they get delivered late at night, no fanfare, no embassy reception at the airport.”

China's assistance is in stark contrast to the US ban on exports of personal protective equipment, as is their projection of competence in dealing with the virus.

But polling indicates that, as Nye puts it, “soft power is in the eye of the beholder”. Where China is not trusted, mistrust is likely to grow.

### A RECIPE THAT CAN'T BE ALTERED

Herein lies the dilemma for Australia. Unless a broad coalition of countries from across the ideological spectrum back its call for an independent inquiry into the origins of the pandemic, it's going nowhere.

Thanks to China's all-court disinformation campaign abroad, including an effort to own and influence global media, paired with an ever-more tightly controlled media landscape inside China, the transparency Payne and Bowen call for is simply impossible.

Under Xi's predecessors, there was some room for divergent views, even from civil society. But under Xi, all information that meets Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang's definition of “objective” and “scientific” is prepared in a centralised “kitchen”, as the Chinese media describes it.

The head chef has already decided on the dish. Regardless of how many deaths this virus will cause, alternative recipes from abroad are not welcome.

*[the writer is Research Fellow, Department of Pacific Affairs, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University]*



# Assam govt facilitating return of students from Kota

**GUWAHATI, APR 24 (PTI):** The Assam government is facilitating return of 391 students from Kota and they are expected to reach the state on April 26, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

The students started their journey in 17 buses from Rajasthan on Thursday and the Uttar Pradesh government provided them stay at Kushinagar in the night, the minister said at a press conference here.

The state government will not

bear the cost of their travel and each student has paid Rs 7,000 for the bus journey, he said.

"Initially, we were not keen to bring them back and I held three Zoom meetings with them urging them to stay back but we have to consider the fact that they are all teenagers and felt insecure when Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh governments brought back their students," he said.

The Kota town in Rajasthan is a coaching

hub where medical and engineering aspirants from different parts of the country go every year in large numbers.

The state government air-dropped eight police officials to help the students. It and facilitated their journey back home by requesting Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal governments to allow their movement during the ongoing lockdown, Sarma said.

A team of state government officials is monitoring their movement through GPS

and also coordinating with different state governments, he said.

"The students will have to undergo the mandatory institutional quarantine as they are coming from Rajasthan, which is in 'red zone'. Swab tests will also be conducted on them and even if they test negative, it will be the doctors who will decide on their release," he said.

The students were already in quarantine in Kota but the "possibility of infection during the journey is there", he

said.

The police officials accompanying them will also be quarantined, the minister added.

"We are also receiving messages from other students studying in Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai requesting for arrangements to be made for their return," Sarma said.

"If they can arrange vehicles, we will consider their requests and try to facilitate their journey, depending on our logistics capacity," the minister added.

## BEST converts buses into ambulances



**MUMBAI, APR 24 (PTI):** As the city is grappling with the rising number of coronavirus cases, Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking, the civic transport service, has converted seven of its AC mini-buses into ambulances.

These 'semi-ambulances' will be used to ferry suspected coronavirus patients, or those who have only mild infection, to COVID-19 Care Centres, a senior official said.

Seats were removed and air-tight partition was put in to separate driver cabins from the rest of the vehicle in seven buses at the BEST's workshop in the last three days.

"We have been asked to provide 20 more such buses- turned-into-ambulances," said Surendrakumar Bagde, general manager of BEST.

Its staff was converting three buses

into ambulances every day and 20 make-shift ambulances will be ready in the next week, Bagde said.

Some of the converted buses have been already pressed into service.

"We are also converting some of our buses into proper (full-fledged) ambulances and the first such ambulance is expected to get ready tomorrow," he said.

This will reduce the pressure on dedicated COVID-19 ambulances, he added.

At present, out of 93 ambulances of 108 service in the city, 66 are available for COVID-19 patients, and these are attending average 400-500 patients daily.

BEST, which caters to 35 lakh commuters in Mumbai and neighbouring cities, has a fleet of over 3,500 buses.

Since lockdown began in March, BEST buses are being used for ferrying emergency and

essential services staff. It is operating special services with 1,650 buses, 650 of which are used for transportation of hospital staff, police personnel, and government staff.

"Mumbai is fighting a war against coronavirus and by transporting frontline emergency and essential service staff, BEST is also playing a major role in it," Bagde said.

The undertaking has also provided six buses for transportation of dry ration to different parts of the city.

BEST buses are also being used to transport food parcels, sanitary napkins and diapers and other essential items to slum-dominated areas.

"We are daily ferrying nearly 2.5 lakh food packets in 24 wards from 79 community kitchens using 70 air conditioned mini-buses," Bagde said.

As of April 23, Mumbai had reported over 4,200 coronavirus patients.

## Tharoor slams govt over 'faulty' rapid test kits, calls for indigenous production

**NEW DELHI, APR 24 (PTI):** Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday attacked the government over reports of India getting faulty rapid antibody test kits from China and asserted that the answer to the problem lies in indigenous development of test kits as done by countries like the US, South Korea and Germany.

India's apex medical research body ICMR on Tuesday advised states to stop using the rapid antibody test kits till it examines their quality in the wake of complaints that they are not fully effective.

Last week, India procured five lakh rapid antibody test kits from two Chinese firms and they were distributed to several states reporting rising cases of the coronavirus infection.

Reacting to the reports of faulty test kits, Tharoor said he read comments on social media over the issue stating that what can the Modi government do about it as other countries also had the same experience.

"Yes, that's exactly the point. How smart is a government if it does not learn from the mistakes



of other governments. Isn't it foolishness to make the same mistake at the cost of public health and money?" Tharoor said in a series of tweets.

The EU Medicine Agency's guidelines, on par with the US Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC), require that rapid tests be 80 per cent accurate and the Chinese kits bought by India have shown an average of five per cent accuracy, which is the lowest by their own standards, he said.

Noting that China said that the kits should be procured

from authorised manufacturers, Tharoor highlighted that one of the companies that India ordered from is the same company that the UK government had ordered and then rejected for being flawed.

The British are seeking a USD 20 million refund from the two Chinese companies, Tharoor said.

"Spain, with one of the largest counts of positive cases, returned around 600,000 faulty kits to China. Czech and Filipino authorities also discarded testing kits imported from China, claiming they had only 20 per cent & 40 per cent

accuracy respectively. Slovak PM: 'throw straight into the Danube,'" Tharoor tweeted.

"We have options: The answer lies in indigenous development of test-kits, as USA, South Korea and Germany have done. Indians are no less capable but has the government been smart enough to facilitate it?" he asked.

There are two successful initiatives from Thiruvananthapuram, with which, Tharoor said, he is closely associated. These are the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) and the Rajiv Gandhi

Centre for Biotechnology (RGCB), both Indian government centres of excellence.

"SCTIMST's RT-LAMP test, a conclusive, yet faster and cheaper test which can replace expensive and time-consuming RT-PCR tests, and RGCB's antibody rapid test kits (the kind we have now imported from China and found faulty) are still awaiting ICMR approval. Why is the government dragging its feet?" Tharoor asked.

"In this emergency, ICMR should be taking decisions in hours and days, not weeks and months! We had given Rs 1 crore funding to SCTIMST from MPLADS on March 30. Since then their kits are ready, trials have worked. RGCB too. But ICMR is unable to move at the rapid pace required. Why?" the Congress leader asked.

## WB Minister asks pvt schools yet again to stall fee hike

**KOLKATA, APR 24 (PTI):** West Bengal Education Minister Partha Chatterjee has "for the second time" asked the state's private educational institutes to refrain from hiking fees for the new academic session, amid the COVID-19 crisis.

In a message to the authorities of private institutes on Thursday, Chatterjee cautioned against any move to stop online lessons to students who have defaulted on fee payment due to "economic hardships".

Taking to Facebook, the minister said, "I am informing the private schools for the second time not to go ahead with any fee hike at present. Any decision to debar those, who could not pay existing fee due to economic hardships, from online class facility is also unacceptable.

"Everyone should be given such facility and there should be no discrimination on this issue," the minister said.



The minister hoped that private schools would not exert any pressure on the parents.

"The government has taken a strong view in this matter. We hope the private schools will act accordingly, keeping in mind the government's stand on this issue. We hope they will refrain from exerting mental pressure on the guardians," Chatterjee said in his post.

Earlier, too, the minister had made an appeal to private schools for not effecting a fee hike this year in view of

the crisis triggered by the contagion.

The school education department had on April 10 issued a notification in this regard, asking the institutes to be "sympathetic" towards parents, amid the difficulties faced by them during the lockdown.

The very next day, private schools such as South Point, DPS North Kolkata announced that they have decided to put on hold their decision to hike fees. A few schools also extended deadlines for fee payment.

Several other

institutes in the city, however, were yet to announce any such concession.

The principal of a prominent private school, when asked about concession, said the decision to hike fees was taken sometime last year, and rolling it back at this juncture is near impossible.

"Also, salary of the teaching and non-teaching staff at most private schools come from the fees paid by the students. We have to give our staff members a hike, too," she said.

**to book advertisements in SummitTimes, call 03592-208698 9734152541**

**SummitTIMES**

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Sikkim SCAN | CapitalTIMES | Neighbourhood WATCH | Sports & Specials | ElseWhere | ETCETERA

*It's easy to relax... When you can trust the News.*

**To book ad-space, contact SummitTIMES at**

**BANISTON:**  
For circulation details Contact: +91-9749877695, +91-9647102692 & for Advertisement booking at +91-9933427903 or at office no 03592 208698. Mail us at advertise@summittimes.com

**SILIGUR:**  
Mr. Mani Rai, M/s. Space Ads, B.R. Ambedkar Building, Room No.7, 1st floor, Opp. Ganga Hotel, Hill Cart Road, Siliguri - 03. Ph: +91-9832318644/ 9800482188/ 9153035100 or mail at mani\_rai@yahoo.co.in.

**KOLKATA OFFICE:**  
Irrahad Ali/Imteyaz, Synapse - 6, Madan Street, Marine - 2, 2nd floor, Kolkata - 700072. Ph: 033-22124140/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. +91-9030547774/ +91-903100397. E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/irrahad\_al123@rediffmail.com

**Phone:** 03592-208698 +91-9832556698 +91-9832060753

**www.summittimes.com**  
news@summittimes.com summittimes4@gmail.com advertise@summittimes.com

**Address:**  
Santa Bhawan Complex, Church Road Near Diesel Power House (DPH) Gangtok, East Sikkim, 737101

**VIDEO NEWS SECTION**  
@summittimesvideo @summittimesvideo



# ‘Everything clouds over and goes dark’ - Iniesta on depression at Barcelona

MADRID, APE 24 (AFP): Andres Iniesta has described his struggle with depression while playing for Barcelona, which his mother says was a “bottomless pit” that caused her 25-year-old son to ask to sleep with his parents.

Iniesta recalls his experience with the illness in a Rakuten TV documentary, ‘Andres Iniesta - The Unexpected Hero’, which was released on Thursday and covers his move to Japanese side Vissel Kobe in 2018.

After winning the Champions League under Pep Guardiola in 2009, Iniesta was battling injury and then hit by the death of his friend Dani Jarque, the 26-year-old Espanyol defender who suffered a heart attack.

“The days pass and you realise you’re not improving, you don’t feel good, you’re not yourself. Everything clouds over and goes dark,” Iniesta said.

On Jarque’s death, Iniesta added: “That was like a body blow, something powerful that knocked me down again and I was pretty low, clearly because I wasn’t very well.”

Iniesta’s depression is described by those closest to him, including his mother Maria Lujan and father Jose Antonio.

“I noticed he wasn’t well one night when we were sleeping downstairs and he came down and said, ‘mum can I sleep here with you?’” Maria said.

“Then the world came down on my head.” Jose Antonio said: “Our 25 year-old son coming down at midnight and wanting to sleep with his parents means he can’t be well.

He said, ‘I’m not well dad’. I said, ‘what’s wrong?’ ‘I don’t know, I don’t feel well.” Iniesta’s father admitted he thought his son might have to take a break



from football.

“At one stage I thought he would have to stop because the most important thing was him,” said Jose Antonio.

Iniesta began having sessions with psychologist Inma Puig, who said the Spaniard’s recovery owed much to those around him, including Guardiola.

“Guardiola said this

is the first time I’ve been in this situation as a coach,” said Puig.

“I remember he said, ‘the most important thing now is Andres, the person not the player.’”

“They’re people and this is a very human thing which affects millions of people around the world,” said Guardiola.

“They have to know we are there for them.”

“Guardiola tried

to get him out of that bottomless pit he was in,” said Iniesta’s mother Maria.

Iniesta came through Barcelona’s La Masia academy and went on to win nine La Liga titles and four Champions Leagues with the club.

He also lifted the World Cup with Spain in 2010, after scoring the winning goal against the Netherlands in the final.

Despite receiving a hero’s farewell from Barca, Iniesta hinted his relationship with the board influenced his decision to go to Japan.

“People at the club never imagined I could leave,” Iniesta said. “It’s like everything, in relationships if you don’t discuss things at the right time there comes a time when there’s no way back.

# COVID-19 effect: Legalisation of ball-tampering could be considered, says report

NEW DELHI, APR 24

(PTI): The usage of artificial substances to polish the cricket ball, which effectively means ball tampering, could be considered for legalisation when the game resumes after the COVID-19 pandemic that has made bowlers wary of applying saliva on the red cherry.

‘ESPNCricinfo’ reported that administrators are “open to the option of allowing for the use of an agreed artificial substance to polish the ball under the supervision of the umpires”, which amounts to ball-tampering as per the current rules governing the sport.

However, an ICC CEC member, who PTI spoke with, refused to say whether such a discussion will happen and only revealed that “saliva on the ball is something they will consider but at a later

date when it looks like we will have a return to cricket.”

The matter of saliva being unsafe was raised by the ICC’s medical committee and it would be addressed before cricket resumes. All sports activities have come to a halt after the coronavirus outbreak.

Shining the ball is an integral part of Test cricket as it helps the bowlers swing the ball, both conventional and reverse.

If the move gets the go ahead, it would be quite ironic for the game’s administrators after the 2018 ball-tampering controversy which led to one-year bans on Steve Smith and David Warner for conspiring to use sandpaper to alter the ball.

Following the chief executives meeting of the ICC on Thursday, its medical committee,



headed by Peter Harcourt, had issued an update.

“Our next step is to create a roadmap for the resumption of international cricket which will include a criteria for decision making and a checklist for what needs to happen.

“This will consider everything from player preparation to

government restrictions and advisories and bio-bubbles. The scale and complexity of getting cricket started again cannot be underestimated particularly with respect to a global event,” Harcourt said.

Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood recently said that Test cricket will become harder if the

bowlers did not have enough means to move the ball.

“I think the white ball would be fine, (but) Test cricket would be very hard. Bowlers rely on any sort of sideways movement in the air,” said Hazlewood.

“If you didn’t maintain the ball at all for 80 overs it would be quite easy to bat after that initial shine has

gone. Whether you use saliva or sweat, maybe one person can do it.

Former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad supports the idea of not using saliva on the ball.

“When the action resumes, they should use only sweat for some time as safety of the players is paramount,” former pacer Prasad, who played 33 Tests and 161 ODIs for India, told PTI.

However, he reckons it will be tough for the bowlers to stop all of a sudden.

“When you are in the thick of things, you tend to forget it. You have to get the upper hand over the batsmen as you can’t use anything else besides sweat and saliva.

“The question is what do you do when the batsman is pulping you? You need to swing the ball and what helps swing the ball is the aerodynamics,” the 50-year-old explained.

# China signals World Cup ambitions with new football stadiums

SHANGHAI, APR 24 (AFP): China is in the throes of a multibillion-dollar splurge on new football stadiums, ramping up ambitions to be a superpower in the sport and host a World Cup as early as 2030.

The building spree is taking place despite the coronavirus pandemic which has brought much of the world to a standstill, ravaging economies and putting live sport on hold.

But with the outbreak receding in China, where it emerged in December, Chinese Super League (CSL) champions Guangzhou Evergrande last week began construction on their 12 billion yuan( 1.7 billion) new home.

With a capacity of 100,000, the lotus flower-shaped stadium will for a time trump Barcelona’s Camp Nou -- which is set for expansion -- as the world’s biggest football arena, once it is completed by the end of 2022.

Evergrande Group, a major property developer founded by one of China’s richest men, said it also intends to build two more 80,000-seater stadiums in China.

The country will have at least 12 major new football stadiums two years from now, said the state-run Southern Metropolis Daily, calling it “a new era for Chinese football”.

Most will be used for the newly expanded 2021 Club World Cup and the 2023 AFC Asian Cup, but President Xi Jinping has his eyes on the biggest prize of all.

“I think China’s desire to apply for the World Cup is very clear,” said JiYuyang, a journalist for the Oriental Sports Daily.

Ji said it was a matter of when, not if, China bids.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in June that he would welcome a Chinese bid to stage the 2030 World Cup, the next one up for grabs.

- Fit for a World Cup final -

=====

Guangzhou Evergrande’s new stadium made headlines because of its vast scale and bold design.

But it jarred because most sport in the world is shut down and economies, including China’s -- the second largest -- are reeling from coronavirus.

Moreover, Guangzhou is not holding Asian Cup games and the stadium will not be ready for the Club World Cup, even though the tournament is poised to be put back from the summer of 2021 because of the pandemic.

Critics also queried why a club that averages about 50,000 for home matches needs such a big arena.

“I think Evergrande may have two considerations. First, a 100,000-seat stadium might come in handy if China hosts a World Cup final or opening ceremony,” said Ji.

“Another point is that Evergrande will be able to make a statement by saying that they have the largest professional football stadium in the world, with the largest number of spectators.”

Most stadiums currently used by Chinese football teams were built for multiple sports. They are falling into disrepair and facilities for fans are poor.

Replacing them with gleaming, football-specific arenas fits with Xi’s master plan to transform the sport in the country on and off the pitch.

- ‘Soft power of stadiums’ -

=====

In Shanghai, which has ambitions of holding the Olympics, a 33,000-seat stadium for CSL side Shanghai SIPG is scheduled to be finished next year.

Shanghai Stadium, the biggest arena in the city and SIPG’s former home, is also undergoing major renovation.

# Don’t rush to restart La Liga, Bale warns

MADRID, APR 24 (AFP): Real Madrid star Gareth Bale says there should be no rush to restart La Liga during the coronavirus lockdown as the Spanish football federation plans tests and a return to training.

Testing players is being discussed with a view to completing the Liga season and thereby avoiding financial disaster, a source cose to La Liga told AFP on Thursday.

Bale said he wanted to get back into action but felt it wise to wait and see.

“Everyone wants to play football, but the most important thing is everyone stays safe, we don’t want to come back too early. We need to make sure everything is done safely so we avoid the second wave of this virus,” Bale told British broadcaster BT Sports.

The Bundesliga in Germany, where there have been far fewer coronavirus deaths, said on Thursday they are “ready” to restart on May 9 but needed government approval.

Rafael Ramos of the Spanish Association of Football Team Physicians said La Liga is planning to return to action in a series of stages.

“The idea according to La Liga is to test everyone on April 28 and 29,” Ramos said on Spanish radio on Thursday.

He added that the tests would be repeated every three or four days.

La Liga president Javier Tebas said several alternatives for a return to action were being mullied with May 4 slated for the return to training.

“The scenarios we are looking at could see La Liga restart as early as 28-29 May,

but could also be 6-7 June or even as late as June 28,” Tebas said, calculating that the move could save Spanish clubs a billion euros in revenue if they complete La Liga and the European competitions.

- AWAITING G O V E R N M E N T APPROVAL -

Whatever Tebas wants, Spain is under a severe lockdown quarantine and is reeling after 22,000 deaths from coronavirus in the country so far.

The Spanish players union (AFE) agree with Welsh winger Bale in his call for prudence.

“Ask yourself if this is really a good idea. Is it safe? isn’t our main concern everybody’s safety?,” Diego Lopez the Espanyol goalkeeper said on Wednesday.

Eight Espanyol players are sick with Covid-19.

Barcelona and Spain midfielder Sergio Busquets was also sceptical on the proposed dates.

“I suppose it’s workable, to train without getting too close to the other guys, showering at home, but meetings and travelling to a match would be difficult,” said Busquets.

Others have been more defiant.

“I’m hearing stuff about May 4 or May 11. No way will I be going back to training (then), nor will I play. I’ll tell you that straight right now,” said Rafael Jimenez, a central defender at Liga 2 leaders Cadiz.

Athletic Bilbao player Ander Capa was more open to a return.

“I’m optimistic, I believe we’ll get restarted and I hope we’ll all be playing again,” he told Radio Popular.

# SRH has the best death bowling in IPL: Warner

NEW DELHI, APR 24 (PTI):

SunrisersHyderbad captain David Warner believes his side’s death bowling is “probably the best” in the Indian Premier League.

The 2016 champions boast of a fine combination of pacers and spinners with India’s Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Afghan leg-spinner Rashid Khan being the prominent names.

“We’ve got a very good squad. One of the best things about our squad is we have great depths in our bowling,” Warner said in an Instagram live session with Sunrisers teammate Jonny Bairstow.

“We have got got good upfront swing bowling and our death bowling is probably the best in the competition,” he added.

While Warner has been in the side since 2014, Bairstow joined the Sunrisers last season. They shared some brilliant opening partnerships including a 185 stand against the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Asked about

what they liked most about batting with each other, both said running between the wickets was a major contributing factor in their successful partnership.

“I love running between wickets and I think our energy running between the wickets is outstanding,” Warner said.

“I know how fast your ability and game awareness is. It’s one of my favourite things to do and a strong point for us,” he added.

While Warner scored 692 runs from 12 games, Bairstow notched up 445 runs from 10 matches last season.

“Yes definitely there is an understanding between us. We can both gauge if it’s 2 runs we don’t have to look, it’s just touch and go,” Bairstow said.

“And that started really early on, we were getting twos when we had no right to get them. You put pressure on opposition like that and then it eases off pressure on us,” the wicketkeeper added.



## Coronavirus: Philippine president threatens martial law



**MANILA (PHILIPPINES), APR 24 (AP):** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has angrily threatened to declare martial law after accusing communist rebels of killing two soldiers, who escorted the delivery of cash and food aid to villagers as his government scrambled to deal with a growing number of coronavirus infections.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque on Friday said Duterte also approved during a meeting with Cabinet officials the extension of a lockdown in metropolitan Manila and several provinces and

cities up to May 15.

A lockdown in the main northern Luzon region of more than 50 million people is set to expire on April 30.

"I'm warning everybody and putting the armed forces and the police on notice that I might declare martial law. There will be no turning back," Duterte said in a televised speech beamed nationwide.

"I have two more years. I will try to finish all of you, including you the legal (fronts), you should go and hide."

Duterte renewed his attacks on the New People's Army guerrillas, who he

said has extorted large amounts of money from big companies and stole firearms of slain soldiers in an insurgency that has dragged on for more than a half century.

The rebels have denied his accusations and said they were helping villagers cope with the pandemic.

The Philippines has reported nearly 7,000 cases of COVID-19 disease, including 462 deaths.

It's among the highest in Southeast Asia but many believe the toll is higher given the limited coronavirus tests specially in provincial and rural regions.

## China signals World Cup ambitions with new football stadiums

China is in the throes of a multibillion-dollar splurge on new football stadiums, ramping up ambitions to be a superpower in the sport and host a World Cup as early as 2030.

The building spree is taking place despite the coronavirus pandemic which has brought much of the world to a standstill, ravaging economies and putting live sport on hold.

But with the outbreak receding in China, where it emerged in December, Chinese Super League (CSL) champions Guangzhou Evergrande last week began construction on their 12 billion yuan (\$1.7 billion) new home.

With a capacity of 100,000, the lotus flower-shaped stadium will for a time trump Barcelona's Camp Nou -- which is set for expansion -- as the world's biggest football arena, once it is completed by the end of 2022.

Evergrande Group, a major property developer founded by one of China's richest men, said it also intends to build two more 80,000-seater stadiums in China.

The country will have at least 12 major new football stadiums two years from now, said the state-run Southern Metropolis Daily, calling it "a new era for Chinese football".

Most will be used for the newly expanded 2021 Club World Cup and the 2023 AFC Asian Cup, but President Xi Jinping has his eyes on the biggest prize of all.

"I think China's desire to apply for the World Cup is very clear," said Ji Yuyang, a journalist for the Oriental Sports Daily.

Ji said it was a matter of when, not if, China bids.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in June that he would welcome a

among OPEC and key non-members to support prices, while the Energy Information Administration said American crude production fell slightly last week.

- Key figures around 0810 GMT -

West Texas Intermediate: UP 1.7 percent at \$16.78 per barrel

Brent North Sea crude: UP 1.3 percent at \$21.61 per barrel

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 0.9 percent at 19,262.00 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng: DOWN 0.6 percent at 23,831.33 (close)

Shanghai - Composite: DOWN 1.1 percent at 2,808.53 (close)

London - FTSE 100: DOWN 1.2 percent at 5757.57

Euro/dollar: DOWN at \$1.0737 from \$1.0775 at 2100 GMT

Dollar/yen: UP at 107.71 yen from 107.62 yen

Pound/dollar: DOWN at \$1.2312 from \$1.2344

Euro/pound: DOWN at 87.18 pence from 87.29 pence

New York - Dow: UP 0.2 percent at 23,515.26 (close)



Chinese bid to stage the 2030 World Cup, the next one up for grabs.

- Fit for a World Cup final -

Guangzhou Evergrande's new stadium made headlines because of its vast scale and bold design.

But it jarred because most sport in the world is shut down and economies, including China's -- the second largest -- are reeling from coronavirus.

Moreover, Guangzhou is not holding Asian Cup games and the stadium will not be ready for the Club World Cup, even though the tournament is poised to be put back from the summer of 2021 because of the pandemic.

Critics also queried why a club that averages about 50,000 for home matches needs such a big

arena.

"I think Evergrande may have two considerations. First, a 100,000-seat stadium might come in handy if China hosts a World Cup final or opening ceremony," said Ji.

"Another point is that Evergrande will be able to make a statement by saying that they have the largest professional football stadium in the world, with the largest number of spectators."

Most stadiums currently used by Chinese football teams were built for multiple sports. They are falling into disrepair and facilities for fans are poor.

Replacing them with gleaming, football-specific arenas fits with Xi's master plan to transform the sport in the country on and off

the pitch.

- 'Soft power of stadiums' -

In Shanghai, which has ambitions of holding the Olympics, a 33,000-seat stadium for CSL side Shanghai SIPG is scheduled to be finished next year.

Shanghai Stadium, the biggest arena in the city and SIPG's former home, is also undergoing major renovation.

Ji said that while the Evergrande Group were likely paying for Guangzhou's new stadium, in some other instances it was a combination of the club and local government.

Professor Simon Chadwick said that aside from China's World Cup aspirations, the rush on new stadiums sends a message that "China is developing and

becoming healthier and stronger.

"There's something about the iconography and symbolism of the stadiums, particularly the Guangzhou development," said Chadwick, director of the Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry at Emlyon Business School.

"This is a huge stadium, incredibly striking design, pictures of it have been carried across the world and people are commenting on it across the world.

"It's almost the soft power of stadiums. China is trying to use these hugely distinctive stadium designs as a way of attracting people and attention, of getting people to understand that China wants the same things that other countries want."

## Crude lifted by Iran-US tension but virus impact hits stocks

US oil prices were set to end a historically bad week on a positive note, extending gains Friday owing to rising Iran-US tensions, though equities edged down following a series of crushing economic data.

As the rates of infection and deaths linked to the coronavirus show signs of easing in some countries thanks to draconian lockdowns, a fuller picture of the extent of its economic impact was beginning to emerge.

Purchasing managers indexes -- which gauge activity in countries' factory and service sectors -- came in at either lows not seen in decades or in history, highlighting the huge battle governments face in averting an extensive, painful depression.

The readings came as the US said 4.4 million people applied for unemployment benefits last week, taking the total virus-fuelled job losses in the country to more than 26 million.

There was little major reaction to news that US lawmakers had approved nearly half a billion dollars in new stimulus, on top of the more than \$2.2 trillion already passed.

Adding to the downbeat mood was a Financial Times report that said initial trials of the remdesivir coronavirus drug being developed by Gilead Sciences had flopped.

The news was a blow to investors and while Gilead said it was still awaiting data from multiple studies of the drug, which has shown promise in some analyses, it sparked a sell-off on Wall Street with all three indexes ending virtually flat.

That weakness seeped into Asia, which was on course for a weekly loss, having enjoyed two weeks of healthy gains caused by huge stimulus measures and hopes the disease was

plateauing.

"Beyond extraordinary policy support, the main reason for the strong recovery in risk sentiment is the unambiguous clarity of this recession's driver compared to previous downturns that were more multi-branched and ostensibly more difficult to unwind," said AxiCorp's Stephen Innes.

"The removal of a single recessionary input (the virus) via a vaccine or more effective treatment can pave the way for fast recovery in output. There's a lot of hope riding on a cure, and with optimism around remdesivir as top view on the healthcare section, it's a bit of blow for the market at week's end."

- 'Decisive response' -

Tokyo stocks ended 0.9 percent lower, while Hong Kong shed 0.6 percent and Singapore slipped 0.9 percent.

Shanghai, Seoul and Jakarta fell more than one percent, while Mumbai dropped 0.5 percent. Taipei and Bangkok fell 0.2 percent apiece, and Wellington was off 0.3 percent. Manila sank more than two percent as the Philippines government extended a lockdown in the capital.

In early trade, London, Paris and Frankfurt sank as EU leaders were divided over the size of a financial rescue package to stimulate the bloc's economy and a Bank of England official warned of Britain's worst recession in centuries.

JP Morgan Asset Management strategist Hannah Anderson warned that while news that some countries were moving to ease lockdowns and the virus was growing at a slower rate, there were still dangers ahead.

"It is important to not conflate medical and economic data," she said in a note.

"Obviously a deceleration in infection rates is a positive development for the economy, but progress in combating this awful disease is not the same as returning the economy to the place it was last fall.

"Investors need to understand that the risks associated with lifting public health measures too early could further exacerbate market pain."

While stock markets were struggling, oil was enjoying another day of gains, with WTI up more than seven percent at one point, having surged around 20 percent on Thursday on the back of a new flare-up between Washington and Tehran.

Iran warned the US of a "decisive response" after President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he had ordered the US Navy to destroy Iranian boats that harass American ships in the Gulf.

However, the gains in crude were unlikely to be sustained, observers warned, as storage facilities are near to bursting with demand almost non-existent -- a situation that sent the May contract for WTI to minus \$40 this week.

"There is little in the way of fundamental developments to support the move higher, although given the amount of weakness recently, we were due a relief rally," said Warren Patterson and Wenyu Yao at ING.

"Renewed tensions between the US and Iran will likely be providing some support, but... this will likely be short-lived unless we see a further escalation."

ANZ said there were also signs that producers had started cutting output after this month's agreement

<https://www.facebook.com/SummitTimesSikkim/>

**Watch our Nepali news broadcast every evening on Facebook at the Summit Times Daily Page.**

**Please like, Share, Comment and let us know how we can improve.**

**Thank You**

**DONATE BOOKS FOR NOBLE CAUSE TO BUILD LIBRARY**

*If anyone willing to donate books or support through Finance, than you are most welcome*

**"GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKE A DONATION, ITS ABOUT MAKING DIFFERENCE"**

**For more Details Contact ; 6294745117,8768809862**

**Email ; chitishchetri7@gmail.com**



# Batman Actor Robert Pattinson Drops Out of Movie Due to Scheduling Conflict



Robert Pattinson's filming schedule is starting to get more packed by each passing day and now, the actor has dropped out one upcoming project because of scheduling conflicts. In a new report from IndieWire, The Batman star will no longer appear in the Joana Hogg's highly-anticipated sequel to The Souvenir. The sequel was set to start filming next month, which conflicts with Pattinson's filming schedule on Christopher Nolan's mysterious Tenet film.

"Despite Rob's strong desire to do the film, scheduling proved impossible but he very much looks forward to working with Joanna on something down the line," Pattinson's team told IndieWire.

The Souvenir ended up winning a Grand Jury Prize at this year's Sundance Festival, which allowed Hogg and A24 to quickly rush a sequel in development. Little is known about Tenet, besides the fact it has an expansive ensemble cast including Pattinson, John David Washington, Elizabeth Debicki, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Kenneth Branagh, Cl  mence Po  sy, Dimple Kapadia, and Michael Caine.

Then, after Tenet wraps filming, Pattinson will almost hop straight into production on Matt Reeves' The Batman, which will reportedly enter pre-production later this summer. Reeves previously confirmed that his Batman tale wouldn't be an adaptation of the fan-favorite Year One storyline, though he did mention it will focus on the Caped Crusader's skillset as the world's greatest detective.

"Year One is one of the many comic books that I love. We are definitely not doing Year One," Reeves said. "It's just exciting to be focused very specifically on a tale that is defining for him and very personal to him. Obviously, we're not doing an origin tale or anything like that. We're doing a story that is definitively Batman though, and trying to tell a story that's emotional and yet is really about him being the world's greatest detective and all the things that for me since I was a kid, made me love Batman."

What do you think of the Pattinson casting? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below.

The Batman is due out on June 25, 2021. Other upcoming DC movies include Joker on October 10th, Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn) on February 7, 2020, Wonder Woman 1984 on June 5, 2020, The Suicide Squad on August 6, 2021, and Aquaman 2 on December 16, 2022.

## 'Little Fires Everywhere' showrunner up for season two

LOS ANGELES, APR 24 (PTI): "Little Fires Everywhere" showrunner Liz Tigelaar says she is "open" for another season to the series, which stars Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington.

Based on Celeste Ng's 2017 bestseller of the same name, the Hulu show follows the intertwined fates of the perfect-looking Richardson family and an enigmatic mother and daughter who upend their lives.

Tigelaar, who is also the series creator, said she had the time of her life working on the show.

"I'd be open to it in terms of this is the best job I've ever had. This was such an amazing treat of work experience, adapting something that I love with all my heart, with people who I love with all my heart," the writer told Entertainment Weekly. But when it comes to the story, Tigelaar said she always imagined "Little Fires Everywhere" as a limited series.

"In my heart, I feel like this is what it's always been, which is a limited



series. It's a show with a beginning, middle, and an end. Everything burns down," she said. Although Tigelaar would never say never, she believes

"these eight episodes honour the book. This is a close-ended story to me and we've ended it where it ends."

The series, co-produced

by Witherspoon, Washington and ABC Signature Studios, also stars Joshua Jackson, Jade Pettyjohn, Jordan Elsass, Gavin Lewis, and Megan Stott.



ROLLING OUT! The model, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley steps out on a beach cruiser with her family in Beverly Hills.

# Meghan McCain says her pick for President shouldn't be a surprise

(CNN)-According to Meghan McCain, "it shouldn't take a rocket scientist" to know who she is voting for in the next presidential election.

"There's one man who has made pain in my life a living hell and another man who has literally shepherded me through the grief process," McCain said Wednesday night during "Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen."

Former Vice President Joe Biden is the presumptive Democratic nominee, and McCain has said in the past that she talks to him "all the time."

Biden was a close friend of McCain's late father, Republican Sen. John McCain, and publicly consoled his daughter on her show "The View" back in 2017 when the elder McCain was battling cancer.

In contrast, Meghan McCain and her family have had a contentious relationship with President Donald Trump, who is a Republican like her dad was.

So it made sense that Cohen would ask McCain who she planned to vote for during her appearance on his late night show.

But fellow guest on the show, "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" cast member Erika Jayne, took it even further, suggesting that McCain could become Biden's running mate.

"He said he was going to pick a woman," Jayne said. "It should be you!"

McCain countered that she didn't know who Biden would select, noting that it could be California Sen. Kamala Harris.

"I'm not friends with Kamala," Jayne joked. McCain, who is pregnant, said she loves Biden "dearly," but, "I'm always like, my heart over my head in so many different ways."

"The Trumps, they're always making my mom cry," McCain said. "I just think politics is personal too and character is really important. And [I want] someone who's going to tamp down... fear and anger, instead of making it worse."

**THE DAY AHEAD**  
Aries: The New Earth is not a place of scarcity. It is a place of joy, abundance, love, compassion, and creativity. Where do you want to vibrate at, Aries? What is your chosen frequency? Spirit wants you to work through the fears that keep you stuck in the matrix. What you desire and deserve will be taken care of despite the general state of chaos. Leave the how and the why to the Universe.

Taurus: Hello, and welcome to Taurus season! You are feeling like the most glorious version of yourself, and with good reason. On your to-do list today: tapping into the energy of the new moon in order to set your intentions. Light a candle as you do and record what's coming through in your journal. It's not just about deciding where you want to go, but also defining the course of action. Spirit has got your pack, child of Venus! Know that all the help and support you require will come through in divine time. Gemini: Given the general state of chaos, your business may be taking a hit at the moment. To fear about how and where you next paycheck will come from is but natural, Gemini. What you aren't seeing in this

situation is the fact that even the darkest of clouds possess a silver lining. Help and assistance are on their way to you (though not in the manner you imagine), you just have to open yourself to receiving what the Universe is sending your way. PS: Your prayers are about to be answered. Cancer:

The truth isn't always pretty, but it must be spoken. There is no way out of the given situation. Be mindful about sugarcoating your words, or saying them in a way that makes them palatable. The truth simply is, Cancer. Some of you may feel inspired to pay heed to the stirrings of your heart. Befriend courage. Express your true desires. You are no longer obliged to play by the rules of the matrix. Leo:

Spoiler alert: you can't use the excuse of lack of time anymore. Spirit is asking you to respect what you've been given—an opportunity to develop your gifts and pour your energy into the things that set you feel aligned with. The stirrings of your heart are not random. They're pointing you towards your true north. So, take the first step. Let go of the idea of how things must

turn out and allow yourself to explore. Oh, the things you will discover about yourself on the way!

Virgo: The groundwork has been laid. This is the moment of truth. Spirit is asking you to define how and where you would like to go from here. Remember: all the help and support you require will come through in divine time. There will be moments when you find yourself questioning your chosen path or doubting your dreams, but this is a limitation of your three dimensional mind. Your higher self knows that there is a whole wide Universe waiting to be explored. Look beyond the illusion, Virgo. Libra:

Fear is not the end of the road, it's a grand opening that's leading us towards our ultimate truth. The real question: will you run and hide at the first sign of uncertainty, or look your damn fears in the eye? You didn't get here by playing small, Libra. You have slayed many dragons in the past. On the work and career front, this could be a time of many breakthroughs. Trust that the right people have got their eyes on you, and for the right reasons. Allow yourself to step into what you once perceived as a

distant dream.

Scorpio: Look around you, Scorpio! Your physical reality is proof of all the masterpieces you have created. Take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate your efforts. True satisfaction comes not from rewards and recognition, but from knowing that you have followed your soul's calling and put your best foot forward. Let your own success story inspire you to keep working towards your dream despite what your outer reality is telling you. Sagittarius:

The scars you wear are not a sign of failure, Sagittarius. They tell a story of grit and valour; of all the times you faced your demons despite the danger involved. Spirit is asking you to remember who you are, tap into this inner reservoir of strength, and make the most of the given opportunity. Who's to say you won't break through and emerge victorious this time around? Capricorn:

Burden is a big theme in the Capricorn HQ, but the responsibility you're struggling with hasn't been entrusted upon you by an external force. It is we who determine our reality by the choices we make. Spirit is encouraging you to examine the weight on

your shoulders and understand where it is coming from. Truth of the matter is that you cannot save the world single-handedly. Let go of that which isn't yours as you call in the support of your soul crew and spirit team. PS: Trust that you will emerge from this as a stronger version of yourself. Aquarius:

Given the state of affairs, everybody is dealing with their shadows around survival and security. But lack is a human construct, Aquarius. So is scarcity. The Universe is abundant in every way. Mother Nature provides for our every need. So, examine where your fears are coming from and if they're blocking the flow of goodness into your life. The assistance you desire is on its way to you. Allow yourself to receive with open arms. Pisces:

Life on the other side of your existential crisis looks bright and beautiful, Pisces. You are experiencing a sense of alignment, an inner knowing that you are on the right track. There is no way out of the given situation other than to surrender to the hustle. So put in the work, and with a smile. You are moving closer and closer to the desired destination. PS: Spirit has got your back!