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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Death toll due to COVID-19 touches 166; cases climb to 5,734

NEW DELHI, APR 9 (PTI): The death toll due to the novel coronavirus rose to 166 and the number of cases to 5,734 in the country on Thursday, according to the Union Health Ministry.

While the number of active COVID-19 cases is 5,095, as many as 472 people were cured and discharged and one had migrated, it said.

As many as 17 new deaths have been reported in the last 24 hours across the country, the ministry said.

Eight deaths were reported from Maharashtra, three from Gujarat, two from Jammu and Kashmir and one each from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, it said.

Maharashtra has reported the most coronavirus deaths at 72, followed by Gujarat at 16,

Madhya Pradesh at 13 and Delhi at 9. Punjab and Tamil Nadu have reported eight fatalities each while Telengana has reported seven deaths.

West Bengal and Karnataka have registered five deaths each. Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh have reported four deaths each while Haryana and Rajasthan have recorded three deaths each.

Two deaths have been reported from Kerala. Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Odisha reported one fatality each, according to the health ministry data.

The death toll on Wednesday evening was 149.

However, a PTI tally of figures reported by various states as on Wednesday late evening showed at least 181 deaths.

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 APR:

Different places in East District were covered with white blanket of hailstones on Thursday afternoon. Thunderstorm with lightning, hail and moderate rain was reported in different parts of East District.

The DC East has directed all SDM, RS and ARS to get reports of damages if any from concerned Panchayats so that the administration can provide support to the affected.



SAME HAIL, TWO EXTREMES: Gangtok on Thursday afternoon. [foto: KUNGA TASHI]

Stalls cleaned, Lal Bazaar meat vendors urge authorities to allow sale



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 Apr:

Meat vendors of Lal Bazaar Goskhan have undertaken a cleanliness drive and painting of their meat stalls. Chicken vendors started cleaning their stalls on Wednesday and meat vendors of beef and buff have also started painting their stalls.

It has to be mentioned here that the authorities had shut down Lal Bazaar Goskhan for a week after a joint inspection by Gangtok Municipal Corporation, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department and Food Safety Cell of Health Department on 31 March found the Goskhan in unhygienic condition and not meeting the food safety standards. The authorities extended the shut down for another 15 days after seeing no improvement in the hygiene after another joint inspection on 07 April.

Speaking to media persons today, meat vendors stated that the cleanliness process will be completed within a few days and requested the authority to open the Goskhan before 15 days of time after checking it again. They mentioned that the meat stalls were closed before the lockdown which led to the delay in the cleanliness drive.

Sikkim will decide on lockdown's future on 11 April



SANDEEP PRASAD

GANGTOK, 09 APR:

Sikkim will take its final call on lifting of lockdown only after the meeting of Chief Ministers with Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on 11 April, said Chief Secretary, SC Gupta while speaking to Summit Times today.

Sikkim is safe as of now after prompt action was taken by the government to seal the state's borders, he said. The state government took this decision 10 days before the nation decided to do the same, he added.

Government of Sikkim will take decision on lifting of lockdown after the meeting with the Prime Minister, he informed further adding that the government's first priority is the safety of Sikkimese people.

He said that the state government is providing relief packages to the people of Sikkim and working class, however there are certain anomalies and complaints which will be sorted out in a day or two.

He appealed to the people of Sikkim to abide by the advisories of the government and co-operate with the administration for better coordination despite extraordinary situation on arrangement of food and other commodities from outside the state

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The Time for Sikkim to Make The Next Big Decision Is Now

JIWAN RAI

Nobody envies the positions of leaders worldwide. The precision of decision making has never been more significant. No leadership is infallible. Mistakes are inevitable. The degree of rightness will eventually decide the proportion of success.

With a fairly successful three-week lockdown coming to an end, the government of India is faced with a massive dilemma. On the one hand, the lifting of the lockdown could shatter the hitherto successful battle. On the other hand, extending the lockdown could completely destroy the economy which was, unfortunately, already grappling with a massive slowdown pre-lockdown. The Modi government has reiterated its priority time and time again - which is, human life over the economy. But many have pointed out that in a country like India with huge poverty issues, prioritizing health through a prolonged lockdown may not have the intended effect. Quite possibly, without government intervention, the number of citizens saved through lockdown could be lost through starvation and other accompanying issues of poverty. These are tough times indeed and I am praying for the leadership every single day. India will probably go for a longer lockdown which

will eventually be lifted in a phased manner as the Kerala government is contemplating. Overall, Kerala with two deaths out of 345 cases is a tremendous testimony to their healthcare system in general and commitment in particular.

Sikkim's situation is thankfully different from the rest of the country. We have amazingly remained COVID-19 free until now. A number of things have gone in our favour. Our strangled connectivity with a dysfunctional airport, non-existent railway and one and only crumbling highway connecting us to the rest of the country has been a huge blessing in disguise. Also, the national lockdown came at the best time for Sikkim. While the coronavirus was spreading in bigger cities with international airports and second tier cities, far flung Sikkim was safely tucked away. No one can take away from the state government's prompt decision to seal its border at the right time. Our small and relatively law abiding population has also been a blessing. That's a telescopic view. The microscopic view would be different. There are varied issues. However, looking at our safe journey thus far, we must all be satisfied and grateful and continue to focus on the battle.

Sikkim's better situation also comes with a

different challenge. What kind of lockdown pattern and protocol to design is a huge challenge. Our nuanced situation calls for a tailor made protocol. In a sense, we do not have to necessarily copy paste the national protocol from now on - unless orders are given.

How the state government plans to move on from 21 April will be crucial to our future. It is very likely that there will be a phase-wise lifting of the lockdown in our state too. According to some news doing the rounds, schools and colleges may continue to remain closed for a few more weeks. The government may have already formed a committee to study the situation and might submit a detailed report accordingly. If not, it is high time that a committee is formed. Looking at the situation from a layman's perspective, in about two weeks from now, the time will be ripe to withdraw the lockdown in rural Sikkim that has no borders with West Bengal and Nepal.

As I see it, a few things must be factored in while planning the withdrawal of the lockdown in Sikkim. One - Sikkim could unnecessarily attract people from outside as the most sought after hideout. Two - Kalimpong has been declared a CV hotspot and the situation in North Bengal

is not inspiring at all. Three - apart from Rangpo and Melli, West Sikkim shares an extremely porous borders with West Bengal.

Other factors to be pondered will be the movement of private vehicles within the state, the occupancy of busses, taxis, private and government vehicles. For example, in Kerala, during the first phase, the occupancy of government vehicles will be restricted to two persons per vehicle excluding the driver. Also the movement of senior citizens with specific medical conditions needs to be restricted.

Sikkim must watch out for asymptomatic cases. Coronavirus is arguably the most complicated virus with an uncanny ability to mutate. There are claims that the Covid 19 strain in India is a less virulent mutation than ones found elsewhere in the world.

Finally, when the battle is finally over, we will be faced with a massive economic issue. We will be much poorer on the other side of this dark tunnel. During the lockdown, India has been losing \$8 billion worth of GDP each day. The economists think that the economic package of Rs 1.7 lakh crore announced by the Centre is too meagre. So, get ready for a long and complicated battle ahead. It's time to unite and put up a combined combat.

Lokjanshakti Party condemns police action in South Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 APR:**

Lokjanshakti Party, Sikkim, has condemned the recent incident where a person was humiliated by police personnel for violating lockdown orders in South Sikkim and the video circulated on social media.

In a press release, LJP president, Udai P Sharma has said that this act by the police goes against Article 21 of the Constitution.

“The concerned policeman went on to

declare that his actions were beyond the reach of the courts including the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India thus bringing the entire judicial system into disrepute, offending its dignity and is an affront on the majesty and authority of the Courts in India,” Mr Sharma states.

He has further warned that the Constitution of India, Rule of Law and the Contempt of Courts Act are not under lockdown and necessary action will be taken against the “errant policeman”.

Two-member squads to oversee relief distribution in South

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 APR:**

Two-member squad have been constituted in each sub-division of South District to oversee the distribution process and check quality of relief packages distributed.

The two-member squad consists of the respective SDM and SDPO of the sub-division.

10 students discharged from Tashiding Quarantine Centre



**SUMMIT REPORT
YUKSAM, 09 APR:**

Ten students [three girls and seven boys] who returned to Sikkim from colleges and universities outside the state and were under 14-day quarantine at Tashiding Yatri Niwas since 25 March were discharged today.

The students need to undergo 14-day home quarantine in their respective homes and the students were sensitized on measures to be taken for preventing COVID-19.

The brief programme held at Tashiding Yatri Niwas was attended by SLA Deputy Speaker and Yuksam-Tashiding MLA, Sangay Lepcha, Yuksam SDM, Tshering Thendup Bhutia, Chongrang BDO, Subash Chandra Subba, Tashiding PHC MO/IC, Dr. Bidut Rai amongst others.

The students were sensitized on various health issues and particularly on safety and precaution from COVID-19.

Tashiding PHC MO/IC, Bidut Rai informed that the students who returned from colleges and universities had been put on 14-day quarantine and after thorough test and medical examination

they were sent home today.

Yuksam SDM, Tshering Thendup Bhutia informed about various measures taken in the Subdivision to ensure the safety and well-being of people.

Tashiding PHC has 51 persons and Yuksam PHC has 45 persons under home quarantine currently and quarantined persons are being closely monitored by the respective doctors and health professionals. No health issues have occurred so far, he added. Relief package distribution has started in the Subdivision and those who have been left out will be provided the packages soon, SDM, Tshering Thendup Bhutia informed.

SLA deputy speaker and Yuksam-Tashiding area MLA appealed to people not to panic and assured full support from the state government.

Our state government is distributing essential commodities without any discrimination based on political party affiliation and appealed to the people not to believe in propaganda and rumours, said Yuksam-Tashiding MLA, Sangay Lepcha. [from Pritam Lama Gurung]

SRP demands COVID-testing lab for Sikkim, white paper after situation normalises



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 APR:**

Sikkim Republican Party president, KB Rai, has demanded that the State government initiate immediate action to set up a COVID-19 testing lab in Sikkim. He further called for health insurance for frontline health workers of the State.

Speaking to media persons on Thursday, Mr Rai mentioned

that Sikkim has been sending samples for testing outside the state but since COVID-19 cases have been rising in the country, chances are that testing labs in other states will not give priority to samples sent from Sikkim. This made it imperative for Sikkim to get a testing lab of its own, he stressed.

He added that other states have insured their doctors and health

workers so Sikkim government should also provide health insurance cover for its frontline workers.

Mr Rai also asserted that the police should not use force on the people but try and convince the people instead.

He demanded that the State government invite all political parties to discuss and prepare strategies

to fight COVID-19 and added that the government should also release a white paper on money received and spent after the situation returns to normal.

He contended that the State government has failed to fight COVID-19 effectively and also alleged that the government has failed to distribute relief materials properly to the people of Sikkim.

Roads & Bridges Minister tours Lachen and Lachung, takes stock of COVID-preparedness



MANGAN, 09 APR [IPR]: Minister for Roads and Bridges, Samdup Lepcha, visited Lachen and Lachung today to take stock of the lockdown situation and distribution of relief materials and essential commodities.

At Lachen, the Lachen Kyaser Dzumsa and Lachen Tourism

Development Committee donated Rs 1,00,000 and Rs. 25,000 respectively towards the Chief Minister Relief Fund.

Similarly, N/K Yadap Pradhan of Lachung Ploice Check Post also contributed Rs 5,000 towards Chief Minister Relief Fund. The amounts have been handed over to

the Minister.

Mr Lepcha stopped at various places such as Lachen PHC, Lachen Police Check Post, Lachung PHC and Lachung Police Check Post and distributed hand sanitizers and masks to the police personnel posted there.

While interacting, the Minister extended his gratefulness for their selfless services during this pandemic of COVID-19.

The Minister lauded the essential service delivered by the frontline workers in the area during lockdown period and further insisted that the SDM, Chungthang, SDPO, Chungthang, Pipons and Head Lama continue smooth law and order duly following social distancing.

He also took stock of the medical supplies, capacity and preparedness at PHCs and handed out hand sanitizers and masks to the health workers there.

During his visit, Minister also distributed essential commodities to needy one from his own resource.

Cops thrash two junior doctors in Bhopal; probe ordered

BHOPAL, APR 9 (PTI): Two junior government doctors, including a woman, have alleged they were beaten up by police personnel who accused them of “spreading coronavirus”, leading the authorities to take disciplinary action against a constable and order a probe into the incident on Thursday.

The doctors suffered injuries in the attack, which they said, took place close to AIIMS Bhopal - their workplace - when they were on way to home after duty on Wednesday evening.

Taking a serious note of the incident, Bhopal City (South) Superintendent of Police Sai Krishna Thota on Thursday attached a constable to the line (taking him off field duty) and ordered a probe.

We showed them our IDs and also had our

aprons on, said the lady doctor, identified only as Ritu, accompanied by the other victim, who had his right hand bandaged.

There were some more colleagues. The policemen were abusive and said we were the ones spreading the viral infection.

“They threw away our belongings and kept hitting us with sticks without any rhyme or reason, she alleged as her male colleague nodded in approval.

She claimed policemen also told them “you are disgrace to this country”.

We first conveyed the matter to our professors and lodged a complaint with the mobile police control room through phone,” she said, showing her crape bandage.

The two doctors later received first aid at the AIIMS.

Some of their friends recorded their ordeal

and uploaded it on social media.

AIIMS Bhopal Director Dr Sarman Singh told PTI that they don't have any grudge against the police now as officers immediately contacted the hospital after the incident and took action promptly.

Seeking to downplay the incident, he said it was not proper to focus on “small things” in the midst of a major health crisis.

SP Thota said, Police got a call that some vendors were selling vegetables near AIIMS which they were not supposed to. Two constables rushed to the spot in a four-wheeler to disperse the crowd.

People out there ran helter-skelter on seeing the police. Near the same place they saw these (two) young doctors in civil dress. It was hard to differentiate them from

others in the crowd,” he contended.

“These doctors were not buying vegetable... they were purchasing milk,” the SP added.

An altercation took place, but the doctors did not suffer any major injuries or fractures,” Thota said.

The SP acknowledged the role of doctors in fighting the coronavirus crisis.

“Doctors and police are on the same page in fighting the virus and we want cordial relations between the two pillars who are actually striving hard to manage the situation,” he said.

Meanwhile, former chief minister Kamal Nath termed the incident as shameful.

He tweeted, Policemen beating up two PG doctors, including a lady doctor, has come to light. This is extremely shameful.

Govt. has failed in reaching lockdown relief properly, SDF alleges

**SAGARCHETTI
GANGTOK, 09 Apr:**

Sikkim Democratic Front spokesperson, JB Darnal has alleged that the State government has been failed to distribute the relief materials to the people in a proper manner. On the same, he further alleged that the government has been trying to suppress the voice of the opposition on this issue to hide its weakness. He asserted that the arrest of people on raising the voice on such practice would not prevent corona virus in the State.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, MrDarnal alleged that the arrest of SDF general secretary [social media] AvinashYakha was an attempt to suppress the voice of opposition party by using the administration. He added that the concerned citizens have been highlighting the issue in the social media but instead to take it positively the government has been trying to suppress the voice with arrest.

He informed that the police have booked MrYakha under sections 500, 504 and 505 of IPC on a complaint of a party functionary of Sikkim KrantikariMorcha party. On the same, he questioned that as per the complaint if the posting of such post was defamation of the government then why a party functionary has filed the complaint and

not the government. He further stated that MrYakha should booked under the IT Act for his post in the social media and not IPC sections. He added that prisons in other States have been releasing prisoners on payroll due to COVID-19 pandemic but the State has been working opposite.

MrDarnal questioned that why the law was different for the ruling party and opposition party. He stated that the posting of fake post in the social media on SDF functionaries but no action has been taken by the administration. He added that the arrest of MrYakha was made to hide the weakness of the government in the distribution of relief materials to the people. “Being a responsible party SDF has been fully supporting the direction and efforts of the State government in the state in such situation by keeping opposition and people in the jail would not prevent COVID-19 in the State,” he said.

MrDarnal demanded that the State government should provide relief materials to all needy people as per the guidelines of the Centre. He mentioned that SDF was the first party to demand to set up the testing lab for COVID-19 in the State. On the same, he thanked the Governor for taken the issue to set up the testing lab in the State in a high-level meeting on Wednesday.

Lockdown: Biker drags cop for 50 metre to evade checking

MUMBAI, APR 9 (PTI): A 40-year-old policeman was injured when he was dragged for around 50 metre by a motorcyclist, who tried to evade checking at Wadibunder in south Mumbai on Thursday amid the COVID-19 lockdown, an official said.

The incident took place at P D Mello Road, where motorcyclist Khajabi Shaikh Naim (42) dragged assistant

police inspector Vijendra Dhurat, who tried to intercept the two-wheeler, the official said.

A team of policemen where screening vehicles at the entrance of Eastern Freeway, when Dhurat found something suspicious about the motorcyclist and tried to stop him, he said.

The injured was rushed to a hospital and is presently out of danger, he said.

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Governor's Good Friday greetings

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 APR:

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad has extended greetings and goodwill to the people of Sikkim on the solemn occasion of Good Friday and Easter weekend, a Raj Bhavan communiqué informs.

In his message the Governor has said, "I join the prayers on

the occasion of Good Friday, also called Easter Friday, with my fellow Christian brethren in Sikkim and worldwide and pay homage and respect to the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ to salvage the humankind and its virtues from evil forces. Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus

Christ, his death at Calvary and resurrection. Jesus Christ, through his life and teachings of Holy Bible, has always spread the message of truth, love, righteousness, non-violence compassion and spirit of service among mankind.

At this hour of unprecedented global challenge to mankind posed by dreaded COVID

19, the humanity need virtues of compassion, service and unity like never before. May the teachings of Jesus Christ show us the way forward at these critical time. May this day once again reaffirm our commitment to work in unison for the common good of mankind and enable us to come out victorious."

CM's greetings on Good Friday

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 APR:

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang has extended his warm greetings to the Christian brethren and the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Good Friday.

In his message the Chief Minister has said, "Good Friday is a holy day which symbolizes the

supreme sacrifice made by Lord Jesus Christ for the humankind. The crucifixion of Jesus and resurrection on Easter Sunday are manifestations of the triumph of good over evil.

In the present times, there is no greater lesson to learn than that of forgiveness and brotherhood amongst all

irrespective of religion, caste or creed."

Referring to the current scenario due to COVID-19, the Chief Minister has informed that the Government is taking all necessary steps and is well prepared to face any challenge and threat posed by the global pandemic. He has urged the people to practice

social distancing, quarantine or isolation measures in an effort to slow down the spread of the disease.

"On this holy and pious occasion, let us all uphold the noble ideals of peace, harmony and brotherhood. May this solemn occasion of Good Friday bring good health and happiness to the people

US death toll crosses 10K as country enters most difficult phase during COVID19 pandemic

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APR 7 (PTI):

The death toll in the US from the coronavirus crossed the 10,000-mark on Monday as the country entered the most difficult phase during this pandemic with officials stating that there are encouraging signs in the fight against the dreaded disease mainly due to the aggressive implementation of the mitigation measures.

By Monday, more than 10,800 Americans died due to the deadly coronavirus and over 366,000 tested positive, to which top American scientists are racing against time to develop either a vaccine or a successful treatment.

Globally it has infected more than 13 lakhs people and resulted in the death of more than 74,000.

In New York, the epicenter of COVID-19 in the US, the fatalities on Monday increased to 4,758 and confirmed cases to 130,000, with officials saying that new cases and deaths have now slowed down in the Big Apple.

Members of the White House Task Force on coronavirus said that the new models based on fresh data projects less than 100,000 death against the previous projections between 100,000 and 200,000. This has been mainly due to the aggressive implementation of the mitigation strategy.

"We are increasingly hopeful that the aggressive mitigation

strategy we put into place will ultimately allow our hospitals system to successfully manage that major influx of cases that we have right now," Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference.

The goal is that all Americans have been sacrificing to achieve these last few weeks things that a lot of people thought were not possible to achieve, he said.

"I think we've more than achieved, but we have to go through. Again, we're going to have a rough week, were going to have maybe a rough little more than a week but there's tremendous light at the end of that tunnel, he said.

According to the president, there are so many things happening with therapeutics, and with vaccines.

"Those therapeutics, the vaccines are going to be always a little bit later because of that testing period, but the therapeutics, getting the kind of things that I heard about today talking to these brilliant companies and brilliant people on the phone was fantastic," he said.

Currently there are 10 different therapeutic agents in active trials and some are looking incredibly successful, he said, adding that another 15 are in plans for clinical trials. A second company announced that the US Food and Drug Administration has authorised its vaccine candidate to begin critical trials, he said.

Dr Deborah Brix, member of the White House Task Force on coronavirus, told Fox News on Monday that the drop in new cases in New York and other places shows American people are following the presidential guidelines: social distancing, not gathering in groups any groups, over time trying to keep going out to an absolute minimum. getting drive through, getting carry out, getting delivery services, and really protecting all Americans,

We know this is a very transmittable virus and having all Americans pulled together in this moment of great need as a nation. It is really inspirational, she said.

We are really beginning to see the impact of the sacrifice that Americans have made for each other. And we're in a call to action for this next 26 days or 25 days to really ensure that we're doing everything we can to stop the spread of this virus we can do it as a nation," she said.

Meanwhile, on Monday, Texas reported 464 more cases of the new coronavirus, an increase of about 7 per cent over the previous day, bringing the total number of known cases to 7,319.

In a press conference on Monday, Texas Governor Greg Abbot said there have been 85,357 Texans who have been tested for the COVID-19 and 7,319 have tested positive.

Governor Abbott

provided an update on personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution throughout the state of Texas.

"It is vital that our health care workers and first responders on the front lines have the personal protective equipment they need to stay safe as they respond to COVID-19, said Abbott said.

He also said that Texas received 2.5 million masks in the past 24 hours, and will receive an additional 3 million masks by April 11.

"The only states that have administered more tests than Texas are those with more dire consequences with regard to people in their states," he said.

"All of the states that have tested more than Texas have more deaths. We have more than enough testing data in order to form the models that we need to make the assessments and determinations based upon science and data to understand the correct strategy for Texas."

In an executive order last month, Abbott closed all public schools through May 4. Some districts have told students and parents their campuses will be closed "until further notice."

Abbott also issued a warning to those not taking the self-quarantine orders seriously. The more patient Texans are and the longer they stay at home, the safer everyone will be.

You are safer in jail than out on bail: HC to applicant

MUMBAI, APR 9 (PTI):

The Bombay High Court on Thursday refused to grant temporary bail to an accused, saying it can not allow him to be released and put him at the risk of contracting coronavirus.

The situation in jail was much better than that in the city of Mumbai, Justice G S Patel observed while hearing a bail plea filed by Jitendra Mishra, a murder accused who is lodged in Taloja prison in Navi Mumbai for the last 18 months.

Mishra, a resident of suburban Ghatkopar, had sought temporary bail citing the pandemic.

Justice Patel, who heard the plea through video conference, told Mishra's lawyer Shailendra Singh that the applicant was "better off in jail".

"You (applicant) have no idea what is happening in the city. The jail authorities are better equipped than the municipal authorities outside, especially in Worli Naka (central Mumbai).

"Worli Naka is in a mess," the judge said.

Worli Koliwada in central Mumbai has emerged as one of the COVID-19 hotspots in the city.

The high court further said that it was aware of the direction given by the Supreme Court that wherever possible prisoners should be released, but it also needed to consider the situation in the city.

"The situation in the city does not warrant the release of the applicant. Several areas in the city are under severe lockdown. Hence, I cannot let a man leave Taloja jail and go to Ghatkopar and risk getting infected with coronavirus and also endanger others," Justice Patel said.

Refusing to grant bail to Mishra, the court said the application be listed for hearing before a regular court which will resume after lockdown is over.

As of Wednesday, Mumbai had reported over 700 coronavirus cases.

Kerala oppn moots staggered lifting of lockdown

NEW DELHI, APR 9 (PTI):

Kerala opposition coalition United Democratic Front on Thursday submitted a roadmap to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for staggered lifting of ongoing lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The coalition led by leader of opposition Ramesh Chennithala has given a set of recommendations to Modi in this regard, which include those made by an expert committee headed by deputy leader of opposition M K Muneer.

The committee was set up to suggest measures to be taken by the government for

smooth transition from lockdown to normalcy.

It listed an eight-point exit strategy for removing lockdown in a staggered approach at a district level, with emphasis on hotspots to avoid further spread of virus and ensure smooth restart of economy.

This approach is tuned to the unique needs of each district and all the districts should also be categorised as per their risk levels, the report said.

The report has also been submitted to chief ministers of all states, former prime minister Manmohan Singh, Congress president

Sonia Gandhi, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi among others.

The committee recommended that COVID-19 rapid testing must be enhanced across the country and the testing target be widened to 500 tests per one lakh population.

"A step-by-step approach is necessary for each sector along with conditions that need to be considered for each sector," the report said.

"There is a need for a comprehensive economic stimulus package in addition to the ones already announced after considering all the industries," it added.

Enjoyed last two years in FC Goa: Pena

PANAJI, APR 9 (PTI):

Carlos Pena, who on Thursday announced retirement from professional football, said he enjoyed the last two years with Indian Super League (ISL) franchise FC Goa and being in India.

The Spaniard played his last two seasons with FC Goa, helping the Gaurs to their first ever piece of silverware -lifting the Super Cup in the 2018/19.

"It has been a real pleasure to enjoy my last two years in FC Goa and India. I feel incredibly

blessed to have felt the love and passion of the people of Goa everyday," Pena was quoted as saying in a release issued by FC Goa.

"We have together achieved a lot and lived some memorable moments. Me and my family were lucky to have spent two years in India

and I would like to say that we will forever be Gaurs," the 36-year-old added.

Last season, with him in the backline, the Gaurs went on to top the table in the league stage of the ISL and the feat helped the club become the first ever club from India to secure a place in the AFC Champions League group stage. Over the past two seasons, Pena appeared in FC Goa colours 43 times.

Indian Newspaper Society slams Sonia's suggestion of ad ban

NEW DELHI, APR 8 (PTI):

The Indian Newspaper Society on Wednesday condemned Congress president Sonia Gandhi's suggestion of imposing a ban on media advertisements by the government and PSUs for two years, saying such a proposal tantamounts to "financial censorship".

The Indian Newspapers Society (INS) asked the Congress chief to withdraw the suggestion in the interest of a "vibrant and free press".

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi made various suggestions for fighting COVID-19, including imposing a "complete ban on media advertisements - television, print and

online by the government and Public Sectors Undertakings (PSUs) for a period of two years".

In a statement, the INS said its president Shailesh Gupta, on behalf of the entire community of INS members, expressed disbelief and condemned the Congress chief's suggestion.

"Such a proposal tantamounts to financial censorship. It is a very small amount as far as government spending is concerned, but it is a huge amount for the newspaper industry, which is essential for any vibrant democracy, and is struggling to survive," the statement said.

"Print is the only industry, which has a wage

board and the government decides how much the employees should be paid. This being the only industry where market forces don't decide salaries, the government has a responsibility towards the industry."

The advertisement and circulation revenue had already declined due to recession and the digital onslaught, it noted.

"Further to add to the problem, we now face severe financial crisis due to the complete lockdown of industries and business," the statement said.

At a time like this when media personnel are risking their lives and bringing news on the pandemic situation, the suggestion

of the Congress president is deeply disturbing and demotivating for the entire media industry, it said.

The statement comes a day after the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) also "strongly deplored" Sonia Gandhi's suggestion of imposing a ban on media advertisements by the government and public sector undertakings for two years, saying the Congress chief's call was "highly demoralising" for media personnel.

The NBA also called upon the Congress president to withdraw her suggestion made to the prime minister about the "complete ban" on media advertisements for two years in the interest of a "healthy and free media".



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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fever Difficulty in breathing Dry Cough Severe acute respiratory syndrome Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash your hands often with soap. Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer Observe good personal hygiene. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. No vaccinations available as of now. Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	
  	
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Small, Marginal and Ignored *The real farmers of Sikkim need some real engagements*

So, as per the Agriculture Census of 2010-11, there were 74,928 farmers in Sikkim. It is anybody's guess whether this number has grown or fallen in the nine years since because at least as far as officials in departments which work with farmers, such matters as data, planning or preparation do not command much priority. The number of farmers, it appears, has been worked out from the number of land-holdings in the State and that offers some interesting insights. While the overall number of farmers in the State appears robust, when one break it down to how much land individual farmers have access to for cultivation, the bubble bursts. 40,476 of the farmers, 54% of the total lot, till barely 14% of the landholdings, managing with less than a hectare of farmland. This, in official records, makes them "small farmers". Next, 23% of the farmers have landholdings between one to two hectares making them "marginal farmers" in official records. Small and marginal farmers, accounting for 76% of the landholdings, possess only 33% of the agricultural land. The top-level, those with farming tracts of more than 4 hectares, count barely 780 (1.04% of the total number of farmers) but occupy 11.53% of the total arable land. The biggest portion of land available for agriculture in Sikkim, 55.46% of the landholding area, sits in the hands of big landholders owning between 2 to 4 hectares; there are 16,731 of them, roughly 22% of the farmers in Sikkim.

Of course, not everyone who "owns" farming land is a farmer, and very few, if any, of the two hectares and above owning "farmers" are actually hands-on agriculturists. What is clear is that agriculture and horticulture production in the State relies on the 76% small and marginal farmers of Sikkim who possess an average of 0.61 hectares. As their classification as "small and marginal" suggests, they are also ones most at risk of exploitation and short-changing by middlemen since they are also more at risk of suffering due to the vagaries of weather patterns. Any price support mechanism or addition of value to their produce would hence go a long way towards alleviating their condition. In this regard, the Organic Mission was best suited for them because it offered them an opportunity to earn more their small fields. That would have required more than awareness camps on organic farming, they already know how to do that rather well except perhaps the bureaucratic procedures of getting organic certification. What they required with convincing that that organic route would fetch them higher returns, and for that they needed more focused marketing assistance instead of being talked down upon by service providers how good organic farming was for people's health and Sikkim's environment. That marketing support has been sorely lacking. Is still lacking despite the monopoly extended to them by the ban on non-organic farm produce in Sikkim.

What should also have arrived alongside the Organic push was credit support for them revitalize their farms and invest in their handkerchief size landholdings (because accept it, 0.61 hectares is not much farmland to work with). It would have been desired that credit support formed an integral part of the Organic Mission and increased alongside the mission engagement to make Sikkim organic. Unfortunately, that did not happen either. The State Focus Paper 2018-19 for Sikkim prepared by NABARD as a bank credit projection for the State reveals that credit flow to the agriculture sector has been low and erratic over the past three years. Banks achieved only 22.36% of the projected target for credit to agriculture in 2014-15, improved it dramatically to 40.87% of the target in 2015-16 and then collapsed to 15.37% in 2016-17. To get a perspective, here are some numbers- against Rs 16,725 lakh projected by NABARD for credit to agriculture in Sikkim, the banks released only Rs 3,739 lakh in 2014-15. Undeterred by this shortfall, NABARD projected a target of Rs 19,901 lakh for agriculture in 2016-17. The banks responded by releasing even less than the credit they had provided in 2014-15 and released only Rs 3,058 lakh by way of loans in 2016-17. Even factoring in the over-ambitious ideal-situation enthusiasm of such projections, concerned officials still expect at least 40% achievement of targets. Instead, banks in Sikkim gave agriculture 22%, 41% and 15% achievement over the past three years. Apart from disinterest among the banks, there were clearly no efforts at coordination by the State's agencies either. In contrast, industries received 241% of the projected credit potential in 2014-15 and even in 2016-17 received a handsome 60% of the projected credit flow for the sector. Housing and transport sector were also favoured by banks and maintained a high 70's percentage till 2016 which dipped to 51% in 2016-17, a drop perhaps forced by the demonetization experiment.

The point being made here is that Sikkim's small and marginal farmers need special attention, not romanticizing but some real engagements which address their issues and not just the requirements of everyone else who claims to be working for them.

The Psychology of Lockdown Suggests Sticking to Rules Gets Harder the Longer it Continues



DOUGAL SUTHERLAND
THECONVERSATION.COM

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced millions of people to live under strict lockdown conditions, but the psychology of human behaviour predicts they will find it harder to stick to the rules the longer the situation continues.

New Zealand has now reached a midway point of a comprehensive four-week lockdown and there have already been some rule breakers. Most prominent among them was the country's health minister, David Clark, who almost lost his job this week for flouting lockdown rules by going mountain biking and driving his family 20km to a beach.

He won't be the last to break the rules. During a pandemic, fear is one of the central emotional responses and up to this point, most people have complied with lockdown conditions out of fear of becoming infected. But as time passes, people's resolution may begin to fray.

PSYCHOLOGY OF A PANDEMIC

A group of more than 40 psychologists are currently reviewing research relevant to people's behaviour during a pandemic to advance the fight against COVID-19.

The psychological factors that motivate us to stay in our bubble are a mix of individual, group and societal considerations.

At a very basic level, human behaviour is governed by reward

principles.

If what we do is followed by a perceived reward, we're more likely to keep doing it. Not getting sick is a reward, but it may not be perceived as such for much longer as most of us weren't sick in the first place.

This lack of reward reinforcement could be intensified by an optimism bias - "It won't happen to me" - which may become stronger than our anxiety as time passes and the perceived threat reduces.

Outside of our individual psychology, broader social factors come into play. In times of uncertainty we look to others to guide our own behaviour as they set our social norms.

Often, there is a degree of confusion about guidelines on what people are allowed to do, for example when exercising during lockdown. Seeing others out surfing, mountain biking and picnicking in a park can lead to a mindset of "if they're doing it, why can't I?"

To counter this, the government should continue to appeal to our sense of shared identity and highlight examples of punishment for rule breakers. But an over-emphasis on punishment risks people sticking to rules merely for social approval, which means they may conform in public but not in private. Being punished can also build resentment and may lead people to seeking out loopholes in

the rules.

GROUP BEHAVIOUR

In order to last the distance at the highest level of lockdown, people need to cooperate as a group. If everyone complies, we'll all be OK.

The reverse was evident in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic with the panic-induced buying of toilet paper, face masks and other "essentials". Here we saw decision making based on emotion and the government attempting to counter it with fact-based information.

There is evidence that in times of major crises groups may prioritise their local interests, such as keeping your family, neighbourhood or wider community safe. An example of such local activity in New Zealand is the initiative of some iwi (tribal groups) to set up road blocks around their communities to control access by people who are not local residents.

But this has the potential to spill over into vigilantism if local protection interests combine with fear. It can prioritise the interests of a few over the greater good.

CULTURAL FACTORS

Cultural and political psychology also has an impact on our behaviour during lockdown. Broadly speaking, different cultures can be categorised as "tight" or "loose".

Tight cultures (China, Singapore) tend to be more rule bound and less open but are also associated with more order and self-regulation.

In contrast, looser cultures (UK, USA) place more emphasis on individual freedoms and rights, and are correspondingly slow to self-regulate in the face of government requirements.

Australia appears to fall towards the looser end of the spectrum while New Zealanders sits somewhere in the middle. The challenge will be how we respond as our society continues to "tighten" with strict rules while boredom and annoyance sets in.

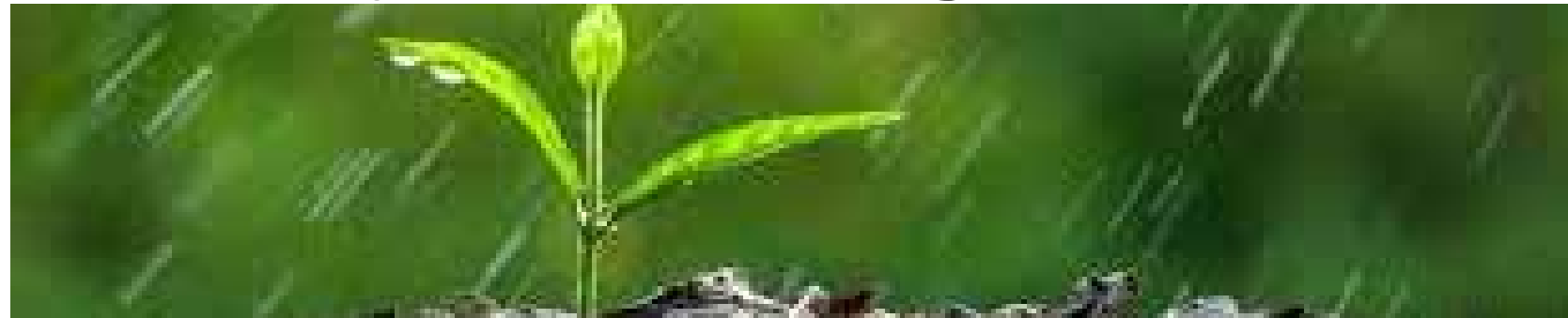
Political polarisation, which has increased markedly in recent years, may be exacerbated by being physically distant from others. There is a danger that as we stay in our bubbles, both physical and virtual, we fall into "echo chambers" wherein we only hear similar voices and opinions to our own.

If this chamber becomes filled with resentment at ongoing restraints on our freedom, it can break down our motivation to stay home. But polarisation can be overcome by helping people identify with a bigger cause - and this was often invoked during times of war.

New Zealanders will eventually emerge from the level 4 lockdown, but it may be into a brave new world. It's hard to know what to expect as alerts are relaxed. People will need clear guidelines at each stage and help to adjust to a new normal.

[the writer is Clinical Psychologist, Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington]

Here's why soil smells so good after it rains



KLAS FLÄRDH & PAUL BECHER
THECONVERSATION.COM

Did you ever wonder what causes that earthy smell that rises after a light summer rain? That mysterious scent has been called "petrichor", and a main component of it is an organic compound called geosmin, which lingers around moist soil.

Geosmin comes from the ancient Greek "geo", meaning earth, and "osme", meaning smell. We use this scent as an ingredient in perfumes and it is what gives beetroot its earthy flavour. Geosmin can also be perceived as an "off" flavour in water and wine.

Animals can detect geosmin. Fruit flies, for example, dislike geosmin and they avoid anything that smells of it, possibly to avoid contaminated and potentially toxic food. But why is geosmin made in the soil? As part of a team of scientists from Sweden, the UK and Hungary, we discovered the fascinating biology behind this enigmatic compound.

SMELLS LIKE (MICROBIAL) TEAM SPIRIT

Scientists have known since the 1960s that geosmin is made by microorganisms in the soil, primarily by bacteria with the scientific name Streptomyces. These bacteria are abundant in soil and are among nature's best chemists, as they make a wide range of molecules (called specialised metabolites) from which many antibiotics derive. Streptomycetes and their close relatives make thousands of different specialised metabolites - a true treasure trove for the potential discovery of new antibiotics.

It turns out that all streptomycetes have the gene for making geosmin, suggesting that it has an important function. But what do

these bacteria gain from producing geosmin? This has been a longstanding mystery.

In our recent study, we found that geosmin is part of the chemical language in a mutually beneficial relationship between Streptomyces bacteria and springtails, insect-like organisms that are abundant in the ground.

We discovered this by asking if there could be soil organisms out there that would be attracted to the smell of Streptomyces. We baited traps with colonies of Streptomyces coelicolor and placed them in a field. Our traps captured several types of soil organisms, including spiders and mites. But strikingly, it was springtails that showed a particular preference for the traps baited with geosmin-producing Streptomyces.

Using a particular species of springtail, Folsomia candida, we tested how these creatures sense and react to geosmin. We placed electrodes on their tiny antennae (the average body size of springtail is about 2mm) and detected which smells stimulated them.

Geosmin and the related earthy odorant 2-methylisoborneol were sensed by the antennae, which is essentially the creature's nose. By studying springtails walking in Y-shaped glass tubes, we saw they had a strong preference for the arm that smelled of these earthy compounds.

The benefit for the animals seems to be that the odours lead them to a source of food. While geosmin-emitting microbes are often toxic to other organisms which avoid them, we found that it did no harm to the springtails we tested.

But how does producing these compounds benefit the bacteria? Streptomycetes normally grow as mycelium - a network of long, branching

cells that entwine with the soil they grow in. When they run out of nutrients or conditions in the soil deteriorate, the bacteria escape and spread to new places by making spores that can be spread by wind or water.

Our new finding is that spore production also includes the release of those earthy odors that are attractive to springtails - and that helps spread the spores by another route.

As the springtails grazed on a Streptomyces colony, we saw spores sticking to their cuticle (the outer surface of the animal). Springtails have a special anti-adhesive and water-repellent surface that bacteria typically don't stick to, but Streptomyces spores can adhere, probably because they have their own water-repellent surface layer. Spores eaten by the springtails can also survive and be excreted in faecal pellets.

So, springtails help spread Streptomyces spores as they travel through the soil, in much the same way pollinating bees are lured to visit flowers and take with them the pollen grains that adhere to their bodies and fertilise the other plants they visit. Birds eat attractive berries or fruits and help the plant to spread its seeds with their droppings.

Next time you encounter that earthy smell, let it be a reminder of the fascinating and extremely valuable bacteria that thrive in the ground beneath your feet. You might be listening in on an ancient type of communication between bacteria and the creatures that live with them in the soil.

[Klas Flärdh is Professor of Molecular Cell Biology, Lund University; Paul Becher is Associate professor in Chemical Ecology, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences]

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Bihari diaspora reaching out to stranded migrants

PATNA, APR 9 (PTI): The Bihar Foundation, a forum for the state's diaspora which has Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as its patron and his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi as its chairman, has been reaching out in a big way to people stranded elsewhere on account of the nationwide lockdown.

The Foundation has set up relief camps in cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Surat, Ahmedabad and far-off states like Goa and Sikkim, extending help

to as many as 3.17 lakh people since March 28, according to the Chief Minister's office (CMO).

Members of the Bihari diaspora are providing these stranded people with food and medicine.

All the arrangements are being made by the Foundation, while the entire expenditure, which also includes direct cash transfer of Rs 1,000 into the bank accounts of the migrants, is being borne by the Chief Ministers Relief Fund.

On Tuesday, more than 30,000 people

got "ration packets" containing five kilograms of rice, three kilograms of wheat flour and 1.5 kg pulses in addition to edible oil, vegetables, spices and a cake of soap which is expected to help a person sustain for 15 days, the CMO said in a statement.

Out of these 30,144 recipients of ration packets, more than half 18,349 were in Delhi, from where a large number of migrant labourers had made a scramble back home late last month triggering anxieties about the spread of coronavirus

infection en route.

The Bihar Foundation is also running seven shelter homes six in Maharashtra and one in Tamil Nadu which can accommodate more than 6,500 people. Around 3,000 migrant workers have already taken shelter in those homes.

The CMO statement said more such shelter homes would be set up as and where the requirement arose.

The Bihar Bhawan in Delhi - the office of the resident commissioner - has been maintaining

coordination between the state government and those stranded people.

A communication received from the Bihar Bhawan said it is getting positive feedbacks from various parts of the country - Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Delhi-National Capital Region, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The Bihar Bhawan has also been involved in helping those having suffered a bereavement in their family to reach their homes by making arrangements for their travel.

Frontline nurse lives life in isolation

JAIPUR, APR 9 (PTI): When his mother died, nurse Ram Murti Meena was at work at SMS Hospital's coronavirus isolation ward. He saw the last rites being performed on a video call on his mobile phone.

Certainly, it was a painful thing for me to skip the funeral of my mother, who died at the age of 93 in our village in Karaul district, he says.

I was on duty as the nursing in-charge of the isolation ward on March 30 when she passed away. I saw my mother's face for the last time on video call, Meena remembers.

My father and three elder brothers performed the last rites and I attended through video call. At this time of pandemic, attending to patients is the most important thing, he says.

He remained busy with his work till April 3, when he was sent into quarantine. The government hospital in Jaipur switches isolation ward staff,

placing those who have put in some time there into quarantine as a

precautionary measure.

Meena says being in isolation is not easy and the staff has to take care of the patients' emotional well-being as well.

The patients have to be reassured that nothing will happen to them, that they will be cured. And we give the examples of those who have turned coronavirus negative from positive, he says.

They also have to make their own families believe this.

My wife, son and daughter keep on calling me on the mobile regularly to inquire if I am fine. I have to take care of their emotions as well. When that part is done, I have to battle with my own emotions, he says.

My wife insists that I come home. She asks why just you, is there no other staff, he says. Meena tells her what if everyone quits fearing exposure to the virus.

Before it became the isolation ward for suspected coronavirus patients, it was set apart for those brought in for swine flu. He has worked

there then as well.

Meena has been on coronavirus duty since January 26.

I was at home when the first suspected case was reported. I was called to the hospital. The patient fortunately tested negative. Since then I am engaged with coronavirus cases. Many have tested negative but some tested positive. At present, there are 13 positive patients in the ward, he says.

It is not just the patients who are cut off from the rest of the world.

We too are exposed to infection and therefore we also live life in isolation. It is a challenging time for doctors, nursing staff and all others, Meena says.

He says his chest swells with pride when he and other hospital staff members are praised for fighting coronavirus.

This is certainly a tough time. It is also a time to prove our mettle and dedication. I feel that it is not just a job but also a big responsibility towards society.

Caught in curfew, Himachal nomads start journey home

HAMIRPUR (HP), APRIL 9 (PTI): The Gaddis (nomads) of Himachal's Chamba areas have started returning to their native places after getting special permission from authorities amid curfew restrictions in the state to contain spread of coronavirus.

The nomads were preparing to go to their homes when they received the new of lockdown and subsequent curfew on radio.

Curfew has been

imposed in Himachal Pradesh since March 24 to contain the spread of coronavirus

The nomads said it was a horrible time but locals helped them with food, water and other items and when the state government lifted ban on their movement, they started their journey.

Speaking to a group of reporters in Hamirpur, they said they had spent the last seven months in the hills of Dhaulgiri and

other high hill areas of Shivalik mountain ranges of Hamirpur and Una districts.

Accompanied by their livestock, they did not seem to be bothered about the threat of COVID-19 pandemic.

Motu, one of the nomads, said that they were returning with a herd of about four hundred as against three hundreds that they had taken along with them at time of their journey to plains.

The nomads have

purchased land and built houses at Bada and Chhota Bhangal areas in Kangra's Baijnath subdivision and started cultivation to earn their livelihood.

Motu said about 50 per cent of gaddis don't own livestock and work in fields

About 3,000 nomads go to plains with their flock as during the winter their areas face acute shortage of pastures.

The gaddis said, We have grazing rights in almost all parts of

Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh on the basis of old traditions.

No one stops us from grazing the flock in their fields. At many places, people themselves offer them their fields and also provide them with food as a goodwill gesture, they added.

There is general belief among people that with the arrival of gaddis in their fields, their productions will increase and that they will not face any threat from evil forces, he added.

Sealing woes of residents of areas sealed in Delhi-NCR

NOIDA/NEW DELHI, APR 9 (PTI): Milk man not coming, no running water supply, not able to take pets for a walk -- these were among a myriad of issues faced by many residents on Thursday in those coronavirus hotspots in Delhi-NCR which have been sealed completely to stop the spread of the infection.

There was panic and then chaos following Wednesday's sealing announcement before people could really come to terms with the fact that they are not supposed to venture out of their homes under any circumstances.

The residents of these areas say they were looking forward to a relaxation of the lockdown next week but were taken by surprise when they came to know that their localities have been completely sealed.

Noida's sector 41 is among one of the 22 hotspots of Gautam Buddh Nagar.

The area which is home to at least 10,000 people, has around 1,500 houses across various blocks.

In Gautam Buddh Nagar, Wednesday's announcement led to panic buying as people rushed to grocery shops to stock up essentials.

A woman who bought 10 litres of milk justified her action, saying in these "uncertain times, one needs to ensure that essentials are stocked at home".

Noida's sector 41 is also home to many bachelors who are living as paying guests. For many of them, Maggi has become a staple.

"That was first thing we bought as soon when the lockdown was announced but now our stock is running out," said Sameer.

Many people having pets could not even take them out for walks.

Rajesh, who has a labrador, said his pet has been restless since morning.

"At most, I can allow him to go till the balcony but that is not enough for him," he said.

The sealing is proving to be particularly difficult for the nearby village Aghapur which is home to many housemaids, gardeners and other help who work in the posh houses of sector 41.

Mamata, a housemaid, is scared about how will she spend her whole day inside her 150 square foot room.

"I have food for now. Let us see what happens in the coming days. I do not have a home as big as that of my employers so spending my whole day locked in here would be difficult. I hope things get better in the coming days," she said.

"I do not have running water supply at my home. I get water from a handpump nearby. During lockdown I could go there but now I am scared to venture out," she said.

In the Palm Olympia housing society, Gaur City 2 of Noida, which has also been sealed, people faced some difficulties on the first day of the restrictions.

"On Thursday morning, our milkman called at 5 am to say that he was not being allowed entry and asked us to meet him 500 metres away from the society to take the milk. It wasn't possible to do so at that hour," said Pranav Mishra, a resident of the society.

Another resident said earlier on Thursday they queued up for buying milk but soon mayhem ensued.

"People queued



up outside the store inside the society to buy milk. initially, while standing in the queue, they maintained a safe distance but later it all went for a toss. Seeing the situation, it was later announced that the essential products will be delivered to each and every tower," Rashmi Dixit, another resident, said.

Dixit also has to leave for Nagpur on April 15 to bring back her seven-year-old son who is at his grandmother's place but she is scared now as she is apprehensive whether she will be able to go or not.

"I am worried that the lockdown might be extended and I will not be able to bring my son back soon," she said.

Pooja Singh, a resident of Noida sector 79, who has three hotspots nearby, said there was total mayhem after the announcement due to panic buying but now there is absolute silence in the locality.

"Now there is complete silence in the locality. It feels like no one is living here," said Singh.

"No children playing, no elders going for morning walks. People who during lockdown used to step out for buying

essentials are not there," she said.

The three hotspots near her locality are Hide Park sector 78, Supertech Capetown sector 74 and Palm Olympia.

In Delhi also, panic gripped residents of apartment buildings in Mayur Vihar extension where Vardhman apartment was sealed.

A resident of Parwana apartments, a few blocks away from Vardhman apartments, said there is a sense of apprehension among people of the area.

"My 12-year-old son is fed up of watching TV. I try to engage him in the kitchen and we are experimenting with different dishes. He is slowly developing interest and has started helping me regularly," she said.

A resident of Samachar Apartments which is very close to Vardhman Apartments said a tent has been erected outside the building and there is heavy deployment of police personnel in the area.

People in some localities started panicking over rumours of sealing being extended to their areas where suspected cases of coronavirus were reported.

After a few suspected cases of coronavirus were reported near H Block of Lajpat Nagar-1, all the shops near Krishna Market were asked to shut and the entire area was disinfected.

"We were asked to shut down the shops by the authorities. The entire area was disinfected. We may open shops later to deliver essential supplies," a shopkeeper said.

"We are not going to step outside the house. We have stocked essentials already. It's wise to stay indoors and protect our families and neighbours," said Jyoti, a resident of Lajpat Nagar 1.

But police confirmed that Lajpat Nagar has not been sealed.

As many as 34 residential localities across Noida and Greater Noida were sealed off till April 15 in order to contain coronavirus from spreading further, the Gautam Buddh Nagar administration said on Wednesday.

The Delhi government has also sealed 20 Covid-19 hotspots in the national capital to combat the spread of the novel virus.

Over 600 positive cases have been reported in Delhi and Gautam Buddh Nagar so far.

US Soccer gender discrimination lawsuit delayed

LOS ANGELES, APR 9

(AFP): The trial date for the gender discrimination lawsuit brought by US women players against the US Soccer Federation has been pushed from May 5 to June 16.

US District Judge Gary Klausner issued the order postponing the trial on Wednesday after both parties sought guidance on preparing in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

California governor Gavin Newsom has issued a statewide stay-at-home order in a bid to slow the

spread of the virus.

Klausner also pushed back a pretrial conference scheduled for April 20 to June 1.

Players for the US women's national team sued the federation last year alleging gender discrimination, demanding 66 million in back pay under the Equal Pay and the Civil Rights Act.


They claim they have not been paid fairly compared to players on the men's national team -- a claim the federation has

denied.

US Soccer sparked outrage in March with language in a legal filing in the case that the job of playing on the men's team required "greater skill based on speed and strength" than the women displayed, and that playing on the men's team carried greater responsibility.

After an outcry from US women stars and sponsors the federation apologised, and

Carlos Cordeiro resigned as US Soccer president.



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NBA legend Michael Jordan wins long-running China trademark dispute

BEIJING, APR 9 (AFP): China's Supreme Court has ruled in favour of basketball legend Michael Jordan in a long-running trademark dispute, ending an eight-year legal battle with a Chinese sportswear firm that illegally used his name.

U p h o l d i n g intellectual property rights is one of the core disputes of the US-China trade war, and a phase one deal signed in January saw Beijing pledge to improve protections of intellectual property.

The landmark ruling, made late last month, prohibits the Fujian-based Qiaodan Sports from using the Chinese translation of Jordan's name, Qiao Dan.

The retired Chicago Bulls player and six-time NBA championship winner has a huge following in China, a country that has legions of avid basketball fans.

The Supreme Court decision overturns two previous verdicts in favour of the Chinese firm.

However, it still allows the firm to continue using its logo of a silhouetted basketball player -- which has similarities with the "Jumpman" logo used by Nike to promote its "Air Jordan" line of sports shoes.

However the Supreme Court preferred the case over

the use of the logo for retrial by the State Intellectual Property Office.

In 2016, Jordan won the right to his name in Chinese characters, but the Supreme Court upheld the firm's right to use its trademark "Qiaodan" in Romanised English.

Qiaodan Sports said in a Weibo statement Tuesday that the ruling "would not impact the normal use of [its] existing trademarks, nor would it affect normal business operations."

Founded in 2000, the sportswear franchise operates more than 5,700 stores nationwide.

It has also applied for nearly 200 similarly named trademarks including different Chinese spellings of "Qiaodan", "Flying Power" and "Qiaodan King", according to the verdict.

In 2017, the sportswear brand New Balance was awarded 1.5 million in copyright damages by a Chinese court over its famous "N" logo, which was illegally copied by a local sports shoe firm.

The verdict -- a rare victory for a Western brand in a Chinese intellectual property infringement case -- was announced shortly after US President Donald Trump launched a sweeping investigation into China's record on intellectual property.

Real Madrid players take voluntary pay cut to protect non-footballing staff

SID LOWE

MADRID, 09 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Real Madrid have become the latest Spanish club to apply pay cuts to alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis.

The players and coaching staff of the football and basketball teams have joined executives in other departments in lowering their salaries by up to 20% in order to ensure that non-sporting employees are not affected and to help the club. The cuts were "voluntary", a statement said -- in contrast to those at Barcelona, Alavés and Atlético, which used the government's ERTE scheme to unilaterally impose temporary reductions.

An agreement was announced on Wednesday evening, following discussions with the players. The cuts will range between 10% and 20% for the year, with a statement saying the aim was to avoid more radical measures that "would affect other employees" as well seeking to palliate the effects of the stoppage. La Liga played its last game on 8 March while Spain has been under a state of alarm for three weeks and will continue to be in lockdown until 26 April at the earliest.

On Tuesday the league president, Javier

Tebas, outlined three working plans for return of domestic competition, all dependent on the health authorities. The earliest, most optimistic plan proposes the sport returning at the end of May. Tebas also said that in total Spanish football could stand to lose €1bn (£880m) if the league season is not completed and €300m (£265m) in the event they complete the season behind closed doors.

M a d r i d ' s announcement came the day after the Germany international Toni Kroos had suggested pay cuts were not the most effective measure. "Waiving salary is like an empty donation or to the club," he told the German radio station SWR. "It should be something for everyone to consider [and] I think it's better to get the full salary and then do the right thing with it. I don't think it's necessary here; what I do with the money I get is a different issue. We must all help where help is needed, and there are many places where it is needed now.

"It also depends how long everything is stopped. If, for example, the game returns in May, I'm sure solutions will be found. If we need to stop until the winter, some may not be able to. That would change football as we know it."

‘Baptism of fire’: meet two female footballers working in hospitals

SUZANNE WRACK

LONDON, 09 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: "It's been an absolute baptism of fire," says the nurse and Portsmouth left-back Rosie McDonnell. "I was told it was going to be hard but I didn't quite think we'd be in a pandemic."

When McDonnell qualified as a nurse in September and began work at Portsmouth's Queen Alexandra hospital, juggling that with football, it was "difficult", and that was before coronavirus ruptured societal norms.

"There's a bit of a strange atmosphere at the hospital," she says. "People are visiting less and there's lots of change going on. People are adapting with every day that goes by; more plans come into place, different equipment, different strategies to try and manage the workload. It's not horrendous at the moment where I am -- I know that ICU [intensive care units] and high-care areas are struggling a lot more -- but there is a bit of a sense that we're getting ready to deal with a bigger influx of patients, which is a little daunting. But credit to everyone I work with, no one has shied away from work."

Portsmouth's season has gone, with the National League South voided as a result of the crisis, and McDonnell misses the escape the sport provides. "It is nice when you've had a stressful week you can



go to football training and just forget about it for a couple of hours," she says.

But there is a modicum of relief too for McDonnell, who doesn't have to choose between her two passions. "It has helped in that sense. I do love playing football but there's more important things in life. I look forward to getting back into it but for now it needs to be on the back burner."

The Championship defender Hayley West, who plays for London Bees, is a sports therapist in her final year on a preregistration physiotherapy masters, a two-year accelerated programme, and epitomises the drive that healthcare professionals feel during crisis.

Having just completed her fifth of six placements at Whitechapel's Royal London hospital, she is waiting for the outcome of talks between the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the

professional council about graduating students early so she can throw herself back into the breach. In the meantime, she is picking up shifts as a rehab support worker with a community physiotherapy team.

West saw big changes at the Royal London, where she finished late last month. "There was training all over the place. You've got the intranet which is updated with Covid protocols every single day. There is an office which is open in the morning for staff members, in the afternoon for students only, and you can go there and ask them anything about Covid."

The physiotherapy team is being brought together and split into two to cope with the changes. "You just don't know how many patients are going to end up having it or how many wards are going to be changed from, like, a

trauma ward to a high-dependency unit. There's no point in having the one physio on a trauma ward and all of a sudden they've got to deal with high-dependency patients."

For some, sport and coronavirus have been very separate, for others, like McDonnell and West, they are entwined. Although the worlds are very different, there are similarities between the ethos in a football team and the one on a ward. "There's not that strong a link between healthcare and football but they are very similar environments," McDonnell says. "You have challenges in football, you rise to the big games, you have to do things you wouldn't normally do to get the team through and it's the same in healthcare."

West agrees: "One hundred per cent. Everyone works with everyone, every discipline. At work

they are absolutely brilliant. At lunchtime, in the team I've just finished with, there was a rule that you don't talk about Covid over lunch. You've got 10 minutes before lunch where you can raise concerns but actually during lunch there's music played, we all sat two metres apart, which is quite amusing, but you're there and just chatting and having a nice time."

Both have felt humbled by the support for health workers and the shift in consciousness on who holds value in society. "I finished my shift, and there was the applause at 8pm and it just made everything feel so much more valued," says McDonnell. "None of the work has changed, the effort has always been going in, but it's really lovely to see that appreciated."

West says: "It's been a wake-up call. Last week when we stood outside and

clapped I actually got really emotional. Because there's stuff that's going on behind closed doors that most of the country won't see but they are recognising and clapping for it. I was clapping for it but I'm a tiny part of a bigger thing.

"I've had my eyes opened too about shop workers, lorry drivers and stuff. There's a lot of: 'Oh they only work in a shop. Oh they only stack shelves in Tesco.' When you're 16 and want a job it is: 'Go and work in Tesco, that will be all right.' Actually, it's those people right now that's are keeping the country going.

"They are risking themselves just so we can have food. [Then there are] the people that are volunteering; every family member helping out. It's insane and great. I don't know if you can really put the NHS on top of everyone else. The NHS might be saving lives but the shopworkers are too."

Premier League stars launch fund to ‘help’ health service virus fight

LONDON, APR 9 (AFP): Premier League players announced they had launched an initiative to generate funds for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) to help against the coronavirus pandemic.

The idea -- named #PlayersTogether -- has been set up on Wednesday to "help those fighting for us on the NHS frontline" during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"It is about we, as players, collaborating together to create a voluntary initiative, separate to any other league and club conversation," a statement from the group said.

"To try and help, along with so many others in the country, to make a real difference," it added.

Individuals such as league leaders Liverpool's captain Jordan Henderson, Tottenham's Harry Kane

and Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang were among those to post on social media about the move.

Earlier this week, the Premier League proposed wage cuts of 30 percent but talks have hit a stumbling block, with the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) warning the NHS could suffer from the loss of tax receipts.

The league's chief executive Richard Masters admitted the virus fall-out could cost the top-flight "at least 1 billion pound" (USD 1.23 billion, 1.13 billion euros).

PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor said the players had "agreed to play their part" as pressure mounts to find a collective pay deal.

"TAKE OUR TIME" England's top-flight stars had come under

heavy fire over their lack of action, which contrasts sharply with significant pay cuts taken by players at other leading European clubs such as Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

Manchester United attacker Marcus Rashford defended his fellow players.

"I think there has been plenty of occasions, for me personally, where we've tried to help but we've not helped in the best way possible," Rashford told BT Sport.

"You can get some backlash from that. We wanted to take our time with the decision," he added.

British Health Secretary Matt Hancock was originally among senior politicians calling for players to take a cut and "play their part".

"Warmly welcome this big-hearted decision from so many Premier League footballers to create #PlayersTogether

My Life in Cricket'.

The fallout of the Newlands Test was huge.

Then captain Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner were slapped with a one-year international ban while Bancroft was suspended for nine months by Cricket Australia for their role in the scandal. It also prompted a cultural review into Australian cricket.

"... I didn't realise



to support NHS Charities. You are playing your part," he tweeted after the Wednesday's announcement.

On Tuesday, English Football Association chief Greg Clarke called on players and fans to "share the pain to keep the game alive".

Appearing at an FA Council meeting, Clarke warned football faces economic challenges

"beyond the wildest imagination of those who run it" as a result of the health emergency.

Spurs have come under pressure from fans to follow Jurgen Klopp's side in reversing their decision to use public money to pay employees.

The Reds, the European champions and the world's seventh richest club, ditched their controversial plan

you're going - oh dear, how do I talk through this?" Ball-tampering was classed as a level two offence under the ICC Code of Conduct, but it has since been elevated to a level three category, which carries a ban of up to six Tests or 12 ODIs.

Gould admitted he couldn't quite believe what he was seeing on TV, but said what came out of it was good for the game, especially

to furlough some of their non-playing staff during the virus on Monday after coming under intense pressure from ex-players and fans.

More than 60,000 people, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson who is being treated at an intensive care unit, have tested positive for COVID-19 in Britain, and more than 7,000 have died from the virus.

Australian cricket.

"When the director said, 'He's put something down the front of his trousers,' I started giggling, because that didn't sound quite right. Obviously, what's come from it is for the betterment of Australian cricket - and cricket generally," he observed.

Gould said that he still has the balls that were used in the Newlands Test.

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Global leaders wish UK PM Boris Johnson speedy recovery

LONDON, APR 7 (PTI): Several international leaders including US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have wished British Prime Minister Boris Johnson a quick recovery after he was admitted to an intensive care unit of a London hospital as his coronavirus symptoms worsened.

Johnson, 55, was tested positive for coronavirus more than 10 days ago and was admitted to the hospital a day earlier, which Downing Street said was done as part of a precautionary measure.

The Conservative party leader spent Monday night in the intensive care unit (ICU) at St. Thomas' hospital, in a move his office said was a "precaution" should the British Prime Minister require ventilation to aid his recovery from COVID-19.

Prime Minister Modi hoped that his British counterpart finds himself in perfect health soon.

"Hang in there, Prime Minister @BorisJohnson! Hope to see you out of hospital and in perfect health very soon," the prime minister wrote on Twitter.

President Trump has asked leading US companies working on COVID-19 drugs to "contact immediately" UK Prime Minister Johnson's doctors and offer "help" to his "good friend".

"We are very saddened to hear that he (Johnson) was taken into intensive care this afternoon a little while ago, and Americans are all praying for his

recovery," Trump told reporters during his daily press conference at the White House on Monday.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen wished Johnson "a speedy and full recovery".

"My thoughts are with Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his family this evening," she said in a tweet.

Michel Barnier, the European Union's Brexit negotiator who is recovering in quarantine after testing positive for coronavirus, wished Johnson a speedy recovery.

"Wishing Boris Johnson all the best and a speedy recovery. My thoughts are with you and your family," Barnier tweeted.

French President Emmanuel Macron also took to Twitter to extend his support to Johnson saying: "I hope he will rapidly overcome this ordeal".

"I send all my support to Boris Johnson, to his family and to the British people at this difficult moment. I wish him a speedy recovery at this testing time," he said in a tweet.

Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus sent his and WHO's heartfelt good wishes to the British Prime Minister.

"I am thinking of my friend @BorisJohnson tonight, and sending my and @WHO's heartfelt good wishes as he battles the #coronavirus. I know the @NHSuk

and its dedicated #healthworkers will be looking after you," he said.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a tweet, "My solidarity and wishes for a speedy recovery for Prime Minister Boris Johnson. These are difficult days for our countries, but it is through strength and unity that we can win this battle".

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said: "on behalf of the Dutch cabinet, I wish Boris Johnson, his family and the British people lots of strength during this difficult time."

Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio said that "the Italian people is with the UK in these difficult times. We are one for each other. Get well soon Boris Johnson!"

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the President of Sri Lanka, said on Twitter: "My best wishes to PM Boris Johnson for a speedy recovery. Our prayers are with you and the people of the UK during these trying times".

On Monday night, the British Prime Minister asked his First Secretary of State, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, to step in for him and the minister will be chairing his second daily COVID-19 meeting in place of him on Tuesday.

His hospitalisation comes as the number of coronavirus hospital deaths in the UK reached 5,373 and the UK's Department of Health said there were now 51,608 confirmed coronavirus cases.

would be focussed on taking Johnson's plans to defeat the pandemic forward.

The minister said: The government's business will continue. The Prime Minister is in safe hands with that brilliant team at St Thomas' hospital, and the focus of the government will continue to be on making sure that the Prime Minister's direction, all the plans for making sure that we can defeat coronavirus and can pull the country through this challenge, will be taken forward".

"There's an incredibly strong team spirit behind the Prime Minister, and making sure that we get all of the plans the Prime Minister's instructed us to deliver, to get them implemented as soon as possible. And that's the way it will bring the whole country through the coronavirus challenge that we face right now, the minister said.

Downing Street said Johnson remains conscious and is receiving excellent care, for which he thanks all National Health Service (NHS) staff for their hard work and dedication.

Queen Elizabeth II

has been kept informed about Johnson's health by No 10, according to Buckingham Palace.

According to the BBC, Johnson was given oxygen late on Monday afternoon, before being taken to intensive care. However, he has not been put on a ventilator.

Earlier in the day on Monday, Johnson had messaged from his hospital bed to say that he was in good spirits and staying in contact with his ministers to oversee the UK's coronavirus fightback despite his hospitalisation on Sunday night due to persistent COVID-19 symptoms.

He was last seen in public applauding the NHS and other key workers just outside his flat in Downing Street last Thursday and posted his last Twitter video message on Friday in which he said he was still displaying minor symptoms.

"I still have a temperature. So in accordance with government advice I must continue my self-isolation until that symptom itself goes. But we're working clearly the whole time on our programme to beat the virus," he said.

British PM fights virus in intensive care as global deaths soar

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson battled the coronavirus in intensive care on Tuesday as death tolls in the United States and Europe reached new heights from the pandemic sweeping the world.

Johnson, 55, moved into intensive care when his condition worsened 10 days after his diagnosis. A senior cabinet minister said Johnson had been given oxygen but had not been put on a ventilator.

His case has highlighted the global reach of COVID-19, which has put more than half of the planet on some form of lockdown, upended societies and wrecked economies worldwide.

The disease's relentless march across the planet has now claimed more than 75,000 lives out of more than 1.3 million confirmed cases, with warnings that much worse is yet to come.

The number of daily deaths in Spain rose to 743 on Tuesday, after France on Monday recorded a new surge of 833 fatalities and Italy saw its death toll shoot up after days of dropping.

And the United States -- which has by far the most number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the world -- recorded 1,150 deaths over 24 hours, Johns Hopkins University said.

- 'Fighting a ferocious enemy' -

There were however glimmers of hope in the daily diet of deadly statistics.

In China, where the virus originated late last year, there were no



new deaths reported for the first time, just a day before it plans to lift travel curbs from the contagion's epicentre of Wuhan.

In New York state, the US epicentre of the crisis, the rate of growth in the death toll appeared to be slowing, although state Governor Andrew Cuomo warned that "now is not the time to be lax".

"New York City is fighting back. We have an invisible enemy. We have a ferocious enemy. But this city is fighting back with everything we've got," said mayor Bill de Blasio.

- 'Like 9/11' -

But amid fears of a second wave in Asia, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared a month-long state of emergency in Tokyo and six other parts of the country.

Singapore's usually bustling business district fell silent as most workplaces closed to stem the

spread amid a new surge of cases in the city-state.

The virus is stretching medical facilities to the limit and the World Health Organization warned there was a global shortage of six million nurses.

People around the world have been forced to improvise as supplies run short, with bodies packed in cardboard coffins in Ecuador and a mosque converted into a makeshift mask factory in Iran.

Undertakers in New York are so overworked that a city official raised the possibility of carrying out temporary burials in a public park.

"Trenches will be dug for 10 caskets in a line. It will be done in a dignified, orderly and temporary manner. But it will be tough for NYers to take," tweeted Mark Levine.

New York City funeral home director Pat Marmo said he

was dealing with three times more bodies than normal.

"It's almost like 9/11, going on for days and days and days," he said.

As hospitals overflow, the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in Manhattan is being converted to handle at least 200 patients beneath its stained-glass windows.

"In earlier centuries, cathedrals were always used this way, like during the plague. So this is not outside the experience of being a cathedral, it is just new to us," cathedral dean Clifton Daniel told the New York Times.

- 'Coronabonds' -

Governments around the world are scrambling to put together rescue packages to stem the economic damage from effectively shutting down global commerce, as fears loom of a devastating recession.

Japan has promised a \$1-trillion stimulus package, nearly twice as large as measures taken during the 2008 financial crisis and a staggering 20 percent of GDP in the world's third-top economy.

With the ink barely dry on a \$2-trillion economic rescue package passed by Congress, US President Donald Trump said he favoured another massive spending programme, again roughly \$2 trillion, but this time targeting infrastructure projects.

"We built the greatest economy in the world. I'll do it a second time," he said.

EU finance ministers are expected to clinch a deal to use the eurozone's

410-billion-euro bailout fund to fight the virus but the bloc remains divided on pooling debt to issue "coronabonds".

But France warned it was heading for its worst recession since World War II and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the European Union was facing its "biggest test" since its founding in 1957.

Analysts at Oxford Economics said the pandemic "may trigger annual GDP declines among the worst seen in the last 100 years" with millions of jobs being shed around the world.

Stock markets have chosen to see the glass as half-full so far this week, with the Dow Jones index soaring 1,600 points on Monday as traders saw hope the pandemic was reaching its apex.

Markets were up in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Shanghai and the London market rallied three percent in opening deals.

But away from the multi-billion packages and Wall Street swings, the coronavirus is affecting millions of ordinary people trying to make ends meet.

On a usually bustling wharf in Senegal's capital Dakar, 23-year-old fishmonger Galaye Sarr said his produce normally gets exported to Italy but trade has dried up.

"The boats have been docked for a long time, all because of the coronavirus. And even if they go and catch fish, we can't sell it," he told AFP.

"We're still trying to keep going, hoping that one day God will rid us of the curse."

Japan PM Abe declares state of emergency over virus

TOKYO, APR 7 (AFP): Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday declared a month-long state of emergency

in Tokyo and six other parts of the country over a spike in coronavirus cases. "As I decided that

a situation feared to gravely affect people's lives and the economy has occurred... I am declaring a state of

emergency," Abe said.

The measure falls short of the strict lockdowns seen in other parts of the

world but empowers local governors to urge people to stay inside and to call for businesses to close.

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Bachchan teams up with Rajinikanth, Ranbir, Alia for short film on social distancing



MUMBAI, APR 7 (PTI): Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has unveiled a short film, "Family", which talks about the importance of staying at home, maintaining hygiene and social distancing in the times of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Family", which has been conceptualised and virtually directed by Prasoon Pandey, also features Rajinikanth, Ranbir Kapoor, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Alia Bhatt, Diljit Dosanjh, Chiranjeevi, Mohanlal, Mammooty, Sonali Kulkarni, Shiv Raj Kumar and Prosenjit Chatterjee.

Bachchan posted the film on his official Twitter handle, saying, When you see that the cause is greater than the idea you dreamt of, there is just immense joy and gratitude for all my colleagues and friends in the making of this historic effort. We are one and we shall overcome. Jai Hind!

The made-at-home film, which aired across Sony Networks on Monday night, chronicles a family's effort to find a misplaced pair of sunglasses belonging to Bachchan's character.

At the end of the short, the 77-year-old actor said artistes from several industries came together to make the film, but no

one stepped out of their house.

"Every artiste shot their own section in their own house. You too, please stay indoors. That's the only way to keep yourself safe from the dangerous coronavirus. Stay indoors, stay safe."

On Sunday, it was announced that Bachchan has pledged monthly ration to support 1,00,000 households of daily wage workers belonging to the All India Film Employees Confederation who were severely affected by the 21-day lockdown to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The actor called Indian film industry as a united family but said there is another "huge family" which supports and works with them -- workers and daily wage earners.

"They are facing great difficulty due to the lockdown. We all have come together and teamed up, with the help of sponsors and TV channel, to raise a fund. This fund will be distributed to our workers and daily wage earners to provide them with some relief in these tough times," Bachchan said.

The initiative is supported by Sony Pictures Networks India and Kalyan Jewellers.

Disney releasing new Frozen' short series made at home

LOS ANGELES, APR 7 (PTI): Disney is releasing a series of new shorts titled At Home With Olaf, featuring Josh Gad's ever-cheerful Frozen snowman.

The shorts were entirely made at home by Disney animator Hyrum Osmond, with Gad voicing the Olaf from his home.

Starting this week, enjoy an all-new original Disney Animation digital series with everyone's favorite snowman, Olaf. #AtHomeWithOlaf created at home by Hyrum Osmond. Voiced from home by Josh Gad. #DisneyMagicMoments, Disney Animation posted on its official Twitter handle along with the link of the short.

Gad, who has voiced the character in Frozen and Frozen II, also took to the microblogging site to share the details about the project.

"My friends Jennifer Lee (writer-



director Frozen' films) & Osmond called me up one day & asked me if I would be able to record some dialogue and sounds as Olaf from home. These little shorts done from home by Hyrum & the @DisneyAnimation team are so charming & hopefully provide a smile

during these scary times, he tweeted.

The first short, titled "Fun With Snow", is already available on the Disney Animation website.

The studio has not revealed when or how regularly future episodes will arrive.

Ezra Miller allegedly chokes a woman in video from Iceland bar

LOS ANGELES, APR 7 (PTI): Actor Ezra Miller has landed

in a controversy after a video went viral on social media, allegedly showing him choking a female fan in an Iceland bar.

The eight-second-long video, which has angered many fans of the actor, shows Miller saying to the woman, Oh, you wanna

fight? That's what you wanna do?

The woman seemed to be jokingly preparing for a fight but is taken aback as Miller, 27, reaches for her neck and pushes her against a truck.

The actor then slams her on the ground as the person recording the video, says, Whoa, bro. Bro.

According to Variety, the incident happened on April 1 at a bar in Reykjavik, Iceland.

Sources from the bar, Prikio Kaffihus, confirmed that Miller got involved in a serious altercation" and was later escorted out.

Another source at the bar said the altercation took place after Miller was

confronted by a group of eager fans, who were quite pushy.

Things then escalated, with Miller losing his temper at one woman in particular.

Miller is best known for starring in movies such as Justice League and Fantastic Beasts series.

The actor is yet to comment on the video.



SAFETY FIRST! Cody Simpson & Miley Cyrus wear face masks and gloves as a precaution while picking up groceries at a store in Calabasas, Calif.

Challenging to write a biopic: Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari on 'Murthy'

MUMBAI, APR 7 (PTI): Director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, who is making a biopic on real-life couple - Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy and author Sudha Murthy, says it is a challenging task to work on a real life story.

The film, tentatively Murthy will be co-written by Shreyas Jain, Piyush Gupta and Ashwiny's husband, filmmaker Nitesh Tiwari.

Ashwiny said she was enamoured by the strong yet simple personality of the couple.

It is not only Sudha Murthy's film. There are two strong personalities Sudha and Narayan in the film. The working title is Murthy', the meaning of which is making a difference, Ashwiny told

PTI.

The director feels happy to have been chosen to bring on screen an inspiring tale.

They are very simple people. They have done so much for society and country. I felt their story needs to be told. It so happened that I was chosen to tell the story. They met me and said, I am right to tell the story, my track record is good and that don't show any kissing scenes, she said.

The director, who has made films such as Nil Battey Sannata, Bareilly Ki Barfi and Panga, said working on a biopic isn't easy.

We are still writing it. We want to focus on getting it correct on writing level. A biopic cannot be just written

like a biopic, there has to be a good graph, there has to be a character sketch. If I do exactly like it is then it will be like a documentary. It is challenging. I will have to meet a lot of people and take their point of view in terms of their lives.

The Panga director said nothing has been finalised yet about the cast and crew for the film.

Besides this film, Ashwiny also has been signed by producer Ekta Kapoor for a film.

"I am co-producing it with her. We are almost done with writing then we will go to actors. It is a slice-of-life rom-com and will have my signature touch," she said.

to overcome whatever you have been struggling with, whether it is mental or emotional. Lean onto your soul crew, Gemini. Find new ways to bring joy and madness back into your life.

Tip: Welcome to the realm of rainbows!

CANCER:

So what if you can't go outdoors, Cancer? Spend time on your balcony or head over to the terrace. Find new and creative ways to soak in the sun. Ditto for your workout. Just because you can't hit the gym doesn't mean you can't sweat it out at home. How about perfecting your Suryanamaskar or putting on some music and allowing your body to flow? 'Adapt and adjust' is pretty much the quarantine mantra!

Tip: Find new ways to soak in the sun.

LEO:

You know what's a superpower, Leo? The ability to be your most authentic self in a world of replicas. Be warned: you will be tempted to give into the pressure. But following the herd mentality isn't going to serve you. If anything, it will dull your sparkle and keep you from following your soul purpose. On the upside, this full moon is going to bring the news of completion and fruition, putting you on the map for what you are best at. But stepping into the limelight is not something you've ever been afraid of!

Tip: Make authenticity your superpowers.

VIRGO:

Like the Taurean crew, you're revisiting your list of resolutions. Life happens, Virgo! It's okay if you weren't able to see this through. But there's no reason you can't hit the refresh button. So whether you're thinking about meditating every day for 30 minutes straight or learning the guitar, the time to recommit to your goals is now. Know that the Universe is supporting your every venture. Quarantined couples are coming to the realisation that spending *this* much time together is not such a bad

thing after all! Who knew cooking up a storm could be this much fun?

Tip: Revisit your list of resolutions.

LIBRA:

The full moon in Libra will bring with itself unexpected surprises. What you need to keep in mind though, is that the world is on hold right now. So it could take a few days for your cosmic Fed-ex to make its way to you. Be patient. Librans who are in the mood to get hitched could receive a grand proposal through somebody in the family. The suitor at hand could be somebody from overseas (but they don't have to be). Keep your open mind open, explore, and see how things go. You never know what may transpire under these magical skies!

Tip: A grand proposal could be on its way to you.

SCORPIO:

You've had it with the rumour mill, Scorpio. But do you really want to let somebody else's version of your reality get to you? That's a choice you're going to have to make. Instead of stooping down to their level and dimming your light, shine brighter than you ever have before. This is the best way to throw them off their game. As such, the full moon tonight is likely to illuminate a host of secrets. Things that have been hidden from you will be brought to light. A mantra that will keep you sane: respond, don't react.

Tip: Many secrets are coming to the fore.

SAGITTARIUS:

What ignites your inner fire, Sagittarius? What are the things you feel passionate about? This week is about finding your True North, realigning with your path, and serving the world in a manner that feels authentic to you. Yes, you have what it takes to leap forward. So, commit to your long-term goals with a newfound fervour. Show your obstacles who's in charge. Remember, having the right team by your side will prove to be the biggest game

changer. Hire and train the right people who will assist you in this journey.

Tip: You have that big goal energy about you.

CAPRICORN:

Some days you wake up feeling like a Quarantined Queen. On other days, you legitimately want to set the neighbourhood on fire and find the nearest escape route. It's all a part of the process, the anger and the frustration too. While option #2 may not be the sanest way forward, you can always step out for a grocery run and get some fresh air (with adequate safety measures). Some of you may be particularly nostalgic for the good ol' days and the times you spent with your friends who live in other parts of the world. Thankfully, technology is not on lockdown. So set up a Skype date and catch up with your loved ones. Tip: Set up a Skype date.

AQUARIUS:

This is an especially tricky time in the Aquarius headquarters. Beware of foes masquerading as friends. Trust the voice of wisdom that tells you that a given person has a hidden agenda. If you don't already know what their game plan is, you will know soon. A woman in your life, who has your best interests in her heart, could be instrumental in revealing valuable information to you. Tip: Always trust your gut.

PISCES:

That this is an especially challenging time for all of us in the collective is not brand new information, Pisces. But what is your role here? How are you doing your bit to alleviate pain, assist healing, and raise the vibrations? Let your inner empathy take over from here. Practice kindness and compassion. Hold space for your fellow warriors in the best way you can. Connecting with the women in your life is also going to be a big theme for you today. When was the last time you concalled with your mum and your favourite aunt? Now is the time to pick up the phone!