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*Seek information,
not entertainment or
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Id-ul-Fitr greetings from CM

GANGTOK, 24 MAY [IPR]: Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] has extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim, particularly the Muslim community, on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr.

In his message, the Chief Minister expresses hope that this auspicious occasion will be the harbinger of peace, progress, prosperity, and happiness and strengthen the bonds of communal harmony, brotherhood, and amity, which are the hallmarks of Sikkim's traditions.

He further reminds the people of the essence of the festival and highlights that the day demands us to remember the poor; the needy and share happiness with them.

He has prayed and urged the people to safeguard the health and well-being of oneself and others, even during the festivities, and observe health protocols for COVID-19.

Landslide claims one at Lingchom

SUMMIT REPORT MANGAN, 24 MAY:

Incessant rain over the past few days has taken its toll in North Sikkim, especially some parts of Kabi-Lungtsog constituency, where a lady was killed in a landslide triggered above her village, Lingchom, at around 12:30 pmon Sunday.

57-year-old Phu Phu Lhamu Sherpa along with her family had taken shelter in a neighbour's house after the first landslide tore very close to her home and washed away the toilet this morning.

Unfortunately, the second landslide struck the house they were sheltering in and claimed her life. The house, belonging to Passang Sherpa, also suffered substantial damage and also injured the deceased person's daughter-in-law, Lakpa Doma Sherpa, and Bhaichung Sherpa of the same village who had rushed to the landslide hit house to rescue the occupants.

The villagers along with the ward panchayat recovered the dead body from the spot.

DC North, TT Kaleon, area MLA Karma Loday Bhutia, SDM Kabi along with BDO and SHO Phodong Police Station visited the spot to take the stock of damages.

Meanwhile, the two injured persons have been rushed to STNM Hospital, Gangtok, for treatment.

The landslide has also blocked the Gangtok-Mangan road at Phensong and at another spot near Kabi.

The approach road leading to Upper Lingchom, about 4 kms from the Mangan-Gangtok highway, has been rendered inaccessible due to the landslide at several spots.

Returnee completes journey to quarantine centre in share cab, exposes administrative lapses

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

The personnel on duty at Sadar Thana were in for a shock when a taxi driver walked in on 20 May and reported that a person sent to a government quarantine facility in Gangtok had completed his journey in his share cab!

This was clearly not how things should have been since it defeats the entire idea of quarantining. The goof-up was so glaring that the taxi driver in question was not only convinced that this was not advisable but also convinced

that this had to be reported to the police.

It transpired that this returning Sikkimese was sent from Rangpo in a private car along with some other people headed to a paid quarantine facility in Gangtok. The person himself was headed to a government quarantine centre.

Upon reaching Gangtok, instead of dropping him off at his final destination, the group asked to give him a "lift" told him to alight at a spot from where he had to take two share cabs to reach the quarantine centre he was headed for.

The driver of the second taxi figured out what was happening, confirmed it with the passenger himself and then informed the cops.

The police did well to send this alert driver to a posh facility quarantine, began contact tracing and informed the district authorities about the incident.

Senior police officials, while confirming the incident, added that a case of negligence has been registered against the people who did not bother to drop the person off to the quarantine centre.

The case against them will be processed as soon as they end their quarantine, it is informed.

The alert taxi driver has been tested and is thankfully reported to be negative.

There are too many things which rankle in this episode, but there are a few positives as well.

The positives first – the alertness of the taxi driver is well established, but what cannot be lost sight of is the earnestness of his passenger as well. After all, having been dropped off in the heart of town, he could easily not

have reported at the quarantine facility at all. He did not and opted to be responsible instead.

While the police have booked a case of negligence against those who did not follow through on the transportation responsibility, shouldn't officials in Rangpo who organized this entire casual transportation arrangement be shouldered with some blame as well?

If the situation did not allow for any other option, shouldn't some safeguards have been worked into the arrangement?

Truck drivers lodged in Sisney transit camp fear as they a fellow driver had travel history with Sikkim's first COVID-19 case ALSO COMPLAIN OF INADEQUATE FACILITIES



RUDRA KAUSHIK GEYZING, 24 MAY:

A group of truck drivers housed at a transit camp set up near Sisney Petrol Pump, West Sikkim have voiced fears for their health after learning that a driver staying at the camp with them has a travel-history which put him in contact with Sikkim's first COVID-19 case.

They inform that the driver who had ferried the person in his Savari taxi was also in the transit camp with them and add that while he was taken for medical assessment today, the rest of the inmates have not been screened yet.

They have requested a thorough medical assessment of all drivers staying at the transit camp.

"We have been worried ever since we were informed about a driver in our group who had ferried people with travel history with Sikkim's first Corona patient. If that person's test returns positive, other drivers staying the transit camp should

also be tested immediately," GM Chettri, one of the drivers at the transit camp said.

Mr Chettri adds that all inmates are under tremendous psychological stress.

DC [West], Karma R Bonpo, when contacted, assured that the next step would be taken once the medical report of the said driver was received.

Truck drivers staying at the Sisney transit camp have been assigned to ferry essential goods from Siliguri on turn-wise basis by the west district administration.

The truck drivers have also complained of inadequate facilities at the transit camp where they have to make their own arrangements for meals.

ADC (West), Karma Lodey Lepcha, when contacted, informed that arrangement for meals for the truck drivers kept at the transit camp should be looked after by the truck-owners. The district administration takes care of their lodging, he said.

DC-South assures all safety protocols being followed.

BIKASHCHETTRI NAMCHI, 24 MAY:

DC, South, Ragul K, in a video message circulated through the IPR Deptt, has assured the people that proper safety measures have been initiated since a returnee tested positive for COVID-19 at a quarantine facility in the district yesterday.

A senior officer has been deputed to the quarantine facility in question, he adds. This, obviously in response to the mass desertion there by the staff who abandoned their work after one of the inmates tested positive.

The DC has appealed to the people not to panic or spread rumours since these

were hampering the work of those charged with the responsibility to attend to those housed in quarantine facilities and keep Sikkim safe.

The DC has also appealed to the people not to spread fake news or any information without proper verification from authorised sources and concerned officials.

Further, informing about the action initiated by the disaster management team in the district, he said that samples of all the people residing in the two buildings of JNV-Rabongla campus have been sent for testing.

Meanwhile, a

senior officer has been posted for proper management at the quarantine facility.

The DC South also clarified that the bedding and other items used by the youth [who tested positive] at the quarantine centre were sanitised and kept unused for 48 hours before being issued afresh.

The DC further requested the people not to panic as this will create problems for frontline workers and raise unnecessary issues. The JNV campus at Rabongla is a containment area for now and based on further developments and results of samples sent for testing, necessary action will be taken, he said.

Don't panic, come together, SKM appeals, in wake of nCoV arriving in Sikkim



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha has appealed to the people of Sikkim not to get wrapped up in fear or panic, but stay united and disciplined to be able handle the situation of COVID-19 having arrived in the State sensibly. He reassured that the state government was adequately prepared and its priority has always been the well-being of the people.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday afternoon, the SKM spokesperson, political secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling,

stated that the state government was able to keep Sikkim free from COVID-19 for a long time thanks to the hard work of the State frontline workers and support of the people of Sikkim.

Now that the State's first COVID-19 case has been confirmed, it was time to stay even more united and disciplined, he stressed.

"The state government is well prepared for any situation and has established all required facilities, manpower and medicines," he said, while adding that people can be assured of the best healthcare facilities

and care.

He added that the patient was stable and improving.

Mr Khaling added that the department has already begun elaborate contact-tracing and testing and confident of containing the virus, something it has been preparing for a while now.

He also took note of the incident in Rabongla where the support staff of the quarantine facility where the COVID-19 patient was staying deserting their posts. The situation has been resolved, he said and added that after receiving counselling, the

support staff which had been volunteering at the centre have returned.

He mentioned that district administration officials and medical teams were also present in Rabongla.

Responding to media queries on whether the government will review the lockdown relaxations in light of the latest development, he informed that a high-level meeting has been called for Tuesday to discuss the issue between the State Task Force and stakeholders.

On the demand of student's organization to the government not to reopen schools and colleges, he informed that the government will also review on the matter to take the right decision for the betterment of the education sector in the state and also for safety of students.

About the situation in Maharashtra where some Sikkimese are still stranded, he informed that the State Government has not been provided a train to bring them back yet and that the evacuation will be undertaken the moment a train is made available.

Trekking group missing in West Sikkim found

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

Some good news for a change! Six persons who had gone trekking to Dafey Bhir in West Sikkim on 15 May and had since been reported missing have been found.

The group had apparently lost their way and were stuck in a forest

near Yuksam.

The group members were crying out for help and were heard by some villagers who were out gathering fodder. The villagers, who had heard about the missing group through social media, then informed the police who sent a team to rescue the group at around 4:30

pm on Sunday.

The rescue team comprised of police, forest department personnel and the search team which had been looking for the boys.

The missing group had not eaten for six days and were not in good shape, it is informed.

The six people were taken to a hospital for treatment.

The good news comes tempered with some worries though. Information arriving here late Sunday evening suggests that two members of the search team have not yet reported back.

Arunachal, declared COVID-19 free, reports fresh case

ITANAGAR, MAY 24 (PTI):

Arunachal Pradesh, which was declared COVID-19 free over a month ago, reported a fresh case on Sunday as a 30-year-old student who recently returned from Delhi tested positive, a senior health official said.

The student, who used to live in West Patel Nagar area of Delhi,

returned to the state on a bus on May 18, Health Secretary P Parthiban said.

He was in Delhi to prepare for UPSC civil services examination.

He boarded the bus at Gole Market area and it travelled through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam.

There were 33 others in the bus with the

student, the officer said.

On reaching Arunachal Pradesh, he was put in institutional quarantine, Parthiban said, adding that his swab sample was taken on May 22 and the report has come in as positive.

"The patient is totally asymptomatic and is being taken care of by our health team," he said. The state and district-

level contact-tracing team has started the process to track down all those people who came in the bus along with the student, and also those interacted with him, the official said.

Arunachal was declared COVID-19 free after the state's lone patient recovered and was discharged from hospital on April 17.

Opposition double standards hurting Sikkim’s battle against COVID-19: Khaling

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party spokesperson, Jacob Khaling, the political secretary to the CM, today lashed out against Sikkim Democratic Front, accusing it of double-standards in the COVID-19 situation and contending that this attitude of the Opposition was hurting Sikkim’s resilience against the virus by seeding doubts, fears and panic at a time when confidence, faith and collaborations were required.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Khaling alleged that SDF party functionaries and some fake IDs with obvious links to the SDF have been claiming that the State Government was mishandling the COVID-19 situation, finding faults in everything and exposing their own inconsistencies and also creating confusion among the people.

He mentioned that when Sikkimese were stranded, Opposition parties insisted that they be brought back, and now that one of the returnees has tested positive, the same groups

were accusing the SKM Government of bring the virus to Sikkim. Sikkim’s first COVID-19 case was confirmed on Saturday, it may be recalled.

“The state government has equal responsibility towards its people whether they are living in Sikkim or stranded outside. We delivered on our responsibility sincerely and started to bring stranded Sikkimese back when the rules allowed,” Mr Khaling said.

While the government’s delivery was not affected by Opposition comments, such political

opportunism by the SDF was hurting people’s confidence, Mr Khaling added.

He also explained that the state government was consciously organizing the evacuation in a staggered and slower manner with the safety of all people in mind but constant pressure was being mounted by SDF and its supporters to rush the evacuation which would be ill-advised.

He advised the SDF to rise above such political opportunism and prioritise the interest of the people.

He also strongly

condemned statements of BJP MLA, DT Lepcha, who blamed the State government for the first COVID-19 positive case in the State.

“We did not expect such an irresponsible statement from such senior a politician. We expected positive and constructive suggestions from him in such a situation but have been disappointed,” he said.

Sikkim should come together to support those stranded outside and take care of those who might have contracted the virus and require medical and emotional support, he said.

Student organisations want govt to rollback decision to reopen educational institutions

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

Student organizations representing different colleges and universities of the State have requested the State government to rollback its decision to reopen educational institutions in the State.

A letter jointly signed by representatives of Sikkim University Students Association [SUSA], Students Representative Council of different government colleges, students of Sikkim State University and postgraduate

students from Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College and private colleges of Sikkim has requested the Education Minister to roll back the decision till the COVID-19 situation normalizes.

Referring to the first positive case of COVID-19 in the state, the letter states, “We anticipate that this lone incident will further escalate if we promote social gathering of any kind, schools and colleges being prominent among others. We are also

worried about other forms of social gathering, which we are hoping will be stopped by the authorities. In the light of aforementioned factors and with intension to ensure zero infection of COVID-19 again, we ardently request your good office to kindly roll back the decision to make any educational institute operational, till the situation normalize.”

The letter further extends support and cooperation of student organizations to the State government’s fight against the pandemic.

Cyclone-hit people get help from various organisations

KOLKATA, MAY 24 (PTI): Organisations of different types philanthropic and industrial reached out to thousands of people affected by Cyclone Amphan in West Bengal.

The Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Ramakrishna Mission and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) have started providing cooked and dry foods to the people who have lost everything because of the cyclone that ravaged the state after making landfall in the evening of May 20 and claimed at least 86 lives.

Bharat Seva Sangha Principal Secretary

Swami Biswatmananda said they have activated community kitchen in several affected locations through their ashrams and schools they run to support over 30,000 people with cooked food.

“People had taken shelter in our ashrams and schools in Gangasagar, Namkhana and other locations. I have issued an instruction that none should be turned down. Full-fledged kitchens in North and South 24 Parganas districts have started,” he said.

The CII they will distribute three tonne of dry food

such as biscuits, baby food, milk, instant noodles and other articles.

“CII has formed a task force. It has mobilized relief work and has got in touch with the district administrations.

CII has got in touch with Disaster Management. Government is in the process of preparing requirement list and will send to the CII,” according to a statement of the industrial body.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission also said it will lend a helping hand to the victims of the Cyclone Amphan.

With around 380 domestic flights, Delhi airport to resume operations from Monday

NEW DELHI, MAY 24 (PTI): As India is set to resume its domestic civil aviation operations from May 25, the Delhi airport will be handling around 380 flights on Monday, a senior official said.

As per the directions of the Civil Aviation Ministry, domestic flight operations will resume after remaining suspended for about two months following the

nationwide lockdown imposed to constrain the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Delhi airport will be handling around 380 domestic flights on Monday. There will be 190 departures and around 190 arrivals,” a senior government official said.

On Saturday, the Delhi airport’s operator DIAL said it has taken several measures including

installation of automatic hand sanitisers at various places, putting floor markers, allocation of entry gates and check-in islands for departing passengers.

These steps have been taken to enforce social distancing norms and minimize human contact at the airport, the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) said.

MHA issues SOP for stranded Indians who wish to return

NEW DELHI, MAY 24 (PTI): The government on Sunday issued a Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) for the return of Indians stranded abroad due to the coronavirus lockdown, saying it will be a paid service and preference will be given to those who are in

distress, who have lost their jobs or to pregnant women.

A similar SOP was also issued by the government for those who are stranded in India and desire to travel abroad.

As per the latest SOP, issued by the Union Home Ministry, those

who wish to return to India will have to register themselves with the Indian missions in that country, along with necessary details as prescribed by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Priority will be given to compelling cases in distress, including

migrant workers, labourers who have been laid off, short-term visa-holders facing expiry of visas, persons with medical emergency, pregnant women, elderly, those required to return to India due to death of family member, and students, the SOP said.

The cost of travel, as specified by the carrier, will be borne by such travellers, it said.

All those who will arrive from abroad will have to follow the guidelines for quarantine arrangements issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), the SOP said.

32 new COVID-19 cases in Assam, tally rises to 378

GUWAHATI, MAY 24 (PTI): Thirty-two new coronavirus cases were reported in Assam on Sunday, taking the COVID-19 tally to 378 in the state, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Eight COVID-19 cases were reported from the Sarusajai Quarantine Facility in the evening, while two each from Tezpur Quarantine Centre and Jorhat were reported in the morning.

The other coronavirus cases were reported from Nalbari (six), Kamrup (five), Hojai (four), Kamrup Metro (2), Nagaon (2) and Morigaon (one).

“There has been a dramatic increase in the number of positive cases in the state during

the last few days, but almost 90 per cent of the positive cases are from the quarantine centres, the minister said at a press conference here.

“If we had not followed the ruthless policy of quarantine, the infection would have spread to the community, he added.

Of the total 378 COVID-19 cases, 314 are active cases, 57 have recovered, four died and three have migrated.

Hojai district has the highest number of coronavirus cases followed by Kamrup (Metro), while Dhemaji is the only district in the state with no cases so far, he said.

Of the total cases, 271 people recently returned to Assam and 39 are

related to the Tablighi Jamaat.

Among those from outside the state, the highest number of 108 positive cases are from Maharashtra followed by 34 from Delhi, 33 from West Bengal and 40 from Tamil Nadu.

“It has to be, however, noted that so far 60,384 people have entered the state by roads and trains, and they have been quarantined. Out of these, 271 persons have tested positive, the health minister said.

The Assam government’s ongoing surveillance has covered 25,000 villages and found only 23,000 people which is “very less and 6,000 of them were found to be suffering from severe acute respiratory

infection (SARI) and influenza-like illness (ILI),” he said.

“Samples of 4,000 people were taken and tested for coronavirus. Not a single one tested positive. With this, we can claim that so far we have been able to save the community due to our quarantine policy, Sarma said.

The minister said though the number of cases are increasing, “there is no need to panic as we are prepared with facilities to serve five thousand people”.

“We have been planning meticulously for the last two months and the Assam government is adequately prepared to deal with five thousand patients, he said.

Record 6,767 new COVID-19 cases in India in last 24 hours; death toll climbs to 3,867

New Delhi, May 24 (PTI): COVID-19 cases in India saw the biggest spike for the third consecutive day on Sunday with 6,767 new infections reported in the last 24 hours, taking the nationwide tally to 1,31,868, while the death toll due to the disease rose to 3,867 after 147 more fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The active cases of the coronavirus disease rose to 73,560. While 54,440 people have recovered, one patient has migrated to another country, according to the ministry bulletin.

“Thus, around 41.28 per cent patients have recovered so far,” a Health Ministry official said.

The total number of confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus pandemic includes foreigners.

Of the 147 deaths reported since Saturday morning, 60 were in Maharashtra, 27 in Gujarat, 23 in Delhi, nine in Madhya Pradesh, seven in Rajasthan, five in Tamil Nadu, four each in West Bengal and Telangana, three in Uttar Pradesh, and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand

Of the total death toll of 3,867, Maharashtra tops the tally with 1,577 deaths, followed by Gujarat at 829, Madhya Pradesh at 281, West Bengal at 269 and Delhi

at 231.

The number of deaths due to the contagion in Rajasthan is 160, while 155 people died in Uttar Pradesh, 103 in Tamil Nadu and 56 in Andhra Pradesh.

The COVID-19 death toll reached 49 in Telangana, 42 in Karnataka and 39 in Punjab. There are 21 fatalities in Jammu and Kashmir, 16 in Haryana and 11 in Bihar.

Seven people have succumbed to the disease in Odisha, and four each in Kerala, Jharkhand and Assam so far.

Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh have recorded three deaths each, while Uttarakhand has recorded two deaths due to the virus.

One fatality has been recorded in Meghalaya, the ministry said.

More than 70 per cent of the deaths are due to comorbidities, according to the ministry’s website.

The highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 47,190 followed by Tamil Nadu at 15,512, Gujarat at 13,664 and Delhi at 12,910.

There are 6,742 coronavirus cases in Rajasthan, 6,371 in Madhya Pradesh and 6,017 in Uttar Pradesh. The number of infections has gone up to 3,459 in West Bengal, 2,757 in Andhra Pradesh and 2,380 in Bihar.

As many as 2,045

people have been infected with the virus in Punjab, 1,959 in Karnataka, 1,813 in Telangana, 1,569 in Jammu and Kashmir and 1,269 in Odisha.

In Haryana, 1,132 people are afflicted with the deadly disease, while Kerala has 795 cases, followed by Jharkhand with 350 and 329 in Assam. As many as 244 cases have been reported in Uttarakhand, Chandigarh has reported 225 cases, while 214 people have tested positive for the virus in Chhattisgarh.

A total of 189 people have tested positive in Tripura, while there are 185 cases of the pathogen in Himachal

Pradesh, and 55 in Goa. Ladakh has reported 49 COVID-19 cases, while Andaman and Nicobar Islands has registered 33 infections.

Manipur has registered 29 cases and Puducherry has recorded 26 cases. Meghalaya has 14 cases. Dadar and Nagar Haveli has reported two cases, while Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have recorded one case each

As many as “2,338 cases are being reassigned to states,” the ministry said on its website, adding that, “Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR”.

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

Three more test positive for COVID-19 in Manipur

IMPHAL, MAY 24 (PTI): Three persons have tested positive for COVID-19 in Manipur, taking the total number of active cases in the state to 28, officials said on Sunday.

Of the three new cases, one is an 18-year-

old male hailing from Churachandpur district, another is 32-year-old man from Jiribam district and 25-year-old female from Thoubal district, the officials said.

Of the 28 actives cases, 17 have returned from Chennai, they added.

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Enthusiasts confident Dzongu can become butterfly sighting destination

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

One of the rarest butterflies found in Sikkim, 'Euthalia Anosia Saitaphernes: Sikkim Grey Baron [Family Nymphalidae]' was sighted and clicked in Dzongu, North Sikkim, photographed by butterfly enthusiast, Sonam Wangchuk Lepcha, on 29 October 2019 at the altitude of 745 mts at Sangkalang in Upper Dzongu, a feat that was recently identified as a new record for Sikkim.

Mr Lepcha informs that the butterfly was seen playing on the roadside on dry leaves.

"As per experts, this species is rarely seen and I am very glad that



this is the first record of subspecies Euthalia Anosia Saitaphernes in Sikkim," he expressed.

He expressed gratitude towards butterfly expert Monsoon Jyoti Gogoi for valuable information and other experts from Sikkim, Usha Lachungpa, Saniyog Rai and Sonam Pintso Sherpa for helping

identify that this species was a new record for Sikkim.

Two new butterflies - 'Neptis Manasa Manasa: Himalayan Pale Hockeystick Sailer' and 'Neurosigma Siva Siva: Syhet Panther' - have been recorded for the first time in Sikkim.

Both species belong to the family Nymphalidae



and are very rare.

Mr Lepcha photographed Neptis Manasa Manasa: Himalayan Pale Hockeystick Sailer at an altitude 870 mts on 10 May 2020 at Namprikdang, Upper Dzongu, while Neurosigma Siva Siva: Syhet Panther butterfly is found at an altitude 1030

mts on 08 May 2020 at Lingza, Upper Dzongu.

"I have been a butterfly enthusiast since 2016 and I also came up with the guide book 'The book on Dzongu Butterflies' on 2016. In future, Dzongu can be one of the best butterfly sighting destinations in Sikkim," he believes.

Soaring infections dampen Eid festivities in Southeast Asia

JAKARTA, MAY 24 (AP):

Millions of Muslims in Indonesia are marking a muted and gloomy holiday of Eid al-Fitr, the end of the fasting month of Ramzan a usually joyous three-day celebration that has been significantly toned down as coronavirus cases soar.

The world's largest Muslim-majority nation, with more than 240 million people, has reported nearly 22,000 infections and 1,350 fatalities, the most in Southeast Asia. It means no congregational prayers at mosques and open fields, no family reunions, no relatives bearing gifts for children.

This outbreak is not just dampening spirits of Eid, but also has made the tradition entirely different, said Andieka Rabbani, a university student in Jakarta.

This year, like other Indonesians, he can only greet his cousins and friends through video calls.

In deeply conservative Aceh, Indonesia's only province enforcing Islamic sharia law, public Eid prayers can still be performed at mosques and fields, but without shaking hands and with limited sermons.

The iconic public parade of decorated vehicles with loudspeakers invoking God's name was scrapped this year.

It's too sad ... the whole week used to be one long festival, but not this time, said Muchtar

Yusuf, a resident of Aceh's Lhokseumawe city.

The province has reported zero coronavirus cases in the past weeks and has had only one death and 19 confirmed infections.

Unlike Aceh, mosques and fields in Jakarta, which are usually always crowded with Eid worshippers, stood empty after authorities extended the restrictions to June 4, suspended communal gatherings and banned private cars from leaving the capital.

Jakarta has become the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia with 6,515 confirmed cases with 501 deaths as of Saturday.

Eid celebrations also were low-key in neighboring Muslim-majority Malaysia.

Businesses have mostly reopened after weeks of virus shutdown, but mass gatherings are still banned and ethnic Malay Muslims are not allowed to travel back to their villages.

Police have turned away more than 5,000 cars trying to head back to their hometowns in the last few days and have warned of strict penalties against those who sneaked back.

The pandemic has also canceled the open house tradition, where Muslims invite family and friends to their homes for a feast.

The prime minister and government officials usually host

open house events that attract thousands of people. This year, the government allowed family members living nearby to visit each other on Sunday only, but the gatherings must not exceed 20 people in the same house.

Mosques have reopened but are limited to small congregations of up to 30 people.

Rohaizam Zainuddin said he was blessed he could celebrate Eid with his elderly parents living nearby but his sister in another state couldn't return home.

Usually, the house will be teeming with visiting relatives and well-wishers on the first day of Eid, but Rohaizam said he expects most of them to stay away this year.

We feel sad and being human, we are frustrated that celebration this year is not the same," he said. "But there is no point getting angry. We just have to accept it, life goes on.

Everyone in the family has put on new clothes and traditional dishes, and cookies are ready for any visitors, along with a thermometer and hand sanitizer to comply with health measures, he added.

Malaysia has reported 7,185 infections and 115 deaths, but officials fear the Eid festivities could spark a new wave if people ignore social distancing and health measures.

In his Eid message broadcast late Saturday, Prime Minister

Muhyiddin Yassin, who is under a two-week quarantine after being in contact with a government official diagnosed with the virus, reminded Muslims to be responsible and follow strict health guidelines.

He urged them to ensure their homes are cleaned up immediately after hosting guests, and also to refrain from visiting graves, a norm during Eid.

To preserve life, we have to sacrifice some of our traditions or norms so as to prevent infection, he said.

For the first time, Pakistan is celebrating Eid countrywide on the same day, ending an annual controversy over the moon sighting, with rival committees disagreeing over the holiday's start date.

In previous years, Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province, which borders Afghanistan, celebrated Eid a day before the rest of the country, but on the same day as much of the rest of the Muslim world. The rest of Pakistan followed the next day.

Pakistan has been in a lockdown to control the spread of the coronavirus since mid-March but Prime Minister Imran Khan refused to close mosques during Ramzan, despite pleas from doctors and a rising number of COVID-19 infections.

Pakistan has more than 52,000 cases and more than 1,100 deaths.

Hong Kong police fire volleys of tear gas at protesters

HONG KONG, MAY 24 (AP):

Hong Kong police fired volleys of tear gas in a popular shopping district as hundreds took to the streets Sunday to march against China's proposed tough national security legislation for the city.

Pro-democracy supporters in Hong Kong have sharply criticized China's proposal to enact a national security law that would ban secessionist and subversive activity, as well as foreign interference and

terrorism in the semi-autonomous territory.

Critics say it goes against the one country, two systems framework that promises the city freedoms not found on the mainland.

On Sunday afternoon, crowds of protesters dressed in black gathered in Causeway Bay, a popular shopping district, to protest the proposed legislation.

Protesters chanted slogans Stand with Hong Kong," Liberate Hong Kong and Revolution of our times.

Prominent activist Tam Tak-chi was arrested during the protests for what police said was an unauthorised assembly. Tam said he was giving a health talk and was exempt from social-distancing measures that prohibit gatherings of more than eight people.

The protests come two days after the proposed bill was submitted on Friday, the opening day of China's national legislative session.

Sunday's rallies

are a continuation of a monthslong pro-democracy movement that began last year and has at times descended into violence between police and protesters.

The new law, expected to be passed on May 28, would bypass the city's legislature and allow the Hong Kong government to set up mainland agencies in the city, sparking fears that this would allow Chinese agents to arbitrarily arrest people for activities deemed to be pro-democracy.

Id-ul-Fitr greetings from Governor

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAY:

Governor Ganga Prasad has extended warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr.

In his message, the Governor remarks, "The auspicious occasion of Id-ul-Fitr, marking the end of 'Ramadan' the Islamic holy month brings with it the hope, comfort and courage in our quest to establish eternal harmony and peace among the mankind. May

this festival mark the end of conflict and ideological differences in the contemporary world. Let the festival promote universal brotherhood, as propagated by Quran and strengthen the collective battle of mankind against the Global pandemic COVID-19 which has threatened our existence like never before.

On this happy occasion let us rededicate ourselves towards bringing the world closer through compassion, harmony and brotherhood and strive for better tomorrow."

Gujarat COVID-19 cases cross 14,000-mark; death toll 858

AHMEDABAD, MAY 24 (PTI):

Gujarat on Sunday reported 394 new coronavirus cases and 29 deaths, including 28 from the worst-hit Ahmedabad, taking the overall case count to 14,063 and fatalities to 858, a Health official said.

A total of 21 of the 29 deceased- 28 from Ahmedabad and one from Surat- were suffering from comorbidities, the official said.

The number of the people recovered from COVID-19 rose to 6,412 with 243 patients discharged from hospitals in the day.

Gujarat now has 6,793 active cases, of which 67 are on ventilators, the official added.

Ahmedabad now accounts for 10,280 COVID-19 cases and 697 deaths of the total 14,063 cases in Gujarat, the official said.

The number of the COVID-19 cases in

Surat and Vadodara stands at 1,320 and 836, respectively.

Gujarat has so far tested 1,82,869 samples, the official said, adding that a total of 4,65,312 people are placed under quarantine in the state.

Gujarat COVID-19 figures are as follows: Positive cases 14,063, new cases 394, deaths 858, number of discharged people 6,412, active cases 6,793 and people tested so far 1,82,869.

Wuhan lab head calls virus leak claims 'pure fabrication'

NEW YORK, MAY 24 (AP):

Claims promoted by the Trump administration that the global coronavirus pandemic originated at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the central Chinese city are a pure fabrication," the institute's director said.

Wang Yanyi was quoted by state media on Sunday as saying the institute did not have any knowledge before that nor had we ever met, researched or kept the

virus..We didn't even know about the existence of the virus, so how could it be leaked from our lab when we didn't have it?

President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have repeatedly said they suspect the virus that was first detected in Wuhan was somehow released from the laboratory.

Most scientists say the pathogen that has infected 5.3 million and killed more than

342,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, was passed from bats to humans via an intermediary species likely sold at a wet market in Wuhan late last year.

The virus' toll continued to ebb in Asia and other parts of the world, with China on Sunday reporting three new confirmed cases and just 79 people remaining in treatment for COVID-19.

The New York Times devoted Sunday's entire front page to a long list of names of people who have died in the pandemic.

The names and brief descriptions culled from obituaries from around the country fill six columns under the headline U.S. Deaths Near 100,000, an Incalculable Loss." They Were Not Simply Names on a List. They Were Us, read the subheadline.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

<h4>Symptoms of nCoV</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<h4>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</h4> <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.
<h4>Treatment</h4> <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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Understanding News

Seek information, not entertainment or rabble-rousing

Never has the debate over what constitutes proper journalism been as frenetic as it is nowadays with the multitude of 24-hour news channels from diverse backgrounds addressing diverse audiences with their own spin on reportage. Be it Opinion Polls or stilted opinions being foisted as news, there is much that repulses in what television presents as news nowadays. Someone should probably tell our telle-journos that national news channel does not mean “nationalistic” propaganda mediums, because that is what they are increasingly becoming. Journalistic ethics are not flexible – the same rules apply whether we are reporting on soldiers or Kashmiris or India or Pakistan. Wolf whistles (read TRP ratings) are no proof of good journalism.

‘National’ news channels discussing issues, reporting ‘incidents’ or raising issues and the coverage of public meetings in local newspapers or scandalous claims by inconsequential fringe elements lend to feverish discussion over who provided balanced reports and who has been too sensational or which news report subverted journalistic ethics. The debates will never resolve because journalistic ethics are not codified enough to throw absolute answers on what is right and what wrong. In fact, journalism is essentially concerned with reportage and not with the greater disputes of rights and wrongs. These are concerns which require application of serious thought and a reporter, by virtue of her/ his job-description is not expected to be the expert with all the solutions.

That does not go to say that reporters cannot help in resolving issues. In fact, this is what a good journalist should be committed to. They do not, however, resolve conflicts by suggesting remedies. They do so by providing information since conflict exists in the absence of information. Once all sides have access to information, they are also equipped to work out solutions. This is where journalists differ from politicians. Politicians, given the paranoia that comes with the post, hold their cards very close to their chests. They also thrive on misinformation and a committed journalist is expected to play a crucial and constructive role here - by disbursing information.

To disburse information, however, a journalist is required to procure it first and on this path are the most pitfalls. Since information has to be sourced, there is always the danger of a “plant”. People with personal vendettas on their agenda are known to dish out selective information causing many journalists to stumble. While the general argument goes to say that information is information irrespective of where it came from, a journalist is expected to glean through it carefully. If at all someone needs to let off a shot, why should it be from the shoulders of a newspaper. Whenever journalists speak of “self-censorship,” this is what they mean. Information, at the end of the day should serve the needs of the public and not individuals. The self-censorship mentioned here deals only with deciding on what needs to be delivered in the public domain and not whether it is palatable or not. Any news, good or bad, which needs to be broken, should be, and the news bearer should not be blamed for it. As for the audience, they should understand that news is about information first and not all information can be sensational.

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China’s new coronavirus recovery strategy explained

JANE DUCKETT, HOLLY SNAPE,
HUA WANG & YINGRU LI
THECONVERSATION.COM

When Chinese Premier Li Keqiang delivered his annual report to China’s national legislature on May 22, his focus was firmly on COVID-19. His 55-minute speech to the gathering of China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) put the prevention and control of COVID-19 at the heart of the government’s strategy for the year ahead. The focus will be on protecting employment, livelihoods, businesses and supply chains from collapse.

While media coverage of the NPC was dominated by China’s plan to enact new security powers in Hong Kong, the meeting also reveals how cautious China is about its coronavirus recovery.

Western European countries are pursuing a return to normal, but Li signalled that in the coming year, the plan for China is a “normalisation of prevention and control”. Although Li did not set out in detail what control would mean, it currently involves measures that go beyond just track and tracing to widespread temperature controls and social distancing measures. In his opening passage, he warned: “The pandemic is not over.”

The speech, known as the government work report (政府工作报告, zhengfu gongzuo baogao), stressed that continued vigilance against the coronavirus will be a core thread determining everything from macro-level strategy down to micro-level policy for the foreseeable future in China. This may reflect the fact that China has recently experienced new localised outbreaks of the virus – most notably in its north-eastern provinces.

MESSAGE FOR MILLIONS

The government work report is delivered every year on behalf of the executive branch of government to parliament. Its deliberation by the NPC is mainly a formality.

Delayed for over two months due to the pandemic, anticipation of 2020’s report was high, with audiences waiting to hear how the Chinese government would move forward. Li made clear that all efforts toward socioeconomic development must be planned



in coordination with pandemic prevention and control. In other words, preventing and controlling coronavirus will go hand in hand with planning, decision-making and implementation of government policy over the coming year.

Although some international media had predicted Li would claim victory over the virus, he was in fact only cautiously positive. He stressed the challenges ahead and noted that successes so far had come “at great cost”. His speech was unembellished, his tone solemn and matter-of-fact.

Our research shows that in fact this was to be expected: the government work report is aimed at multiple audiences, but its key role is to signal to government departments and officials what their work should focus on in the coming year. It must therefore adopt a measured tone.

Li’s speech was also shorter and very different in structure from his reports in previous years. In Chinese government reports, format and structure are used to signal priorities and principles. This time the speech was almost halved in length – 20 pages compared to 35 in 2019 – and structured differently to the standard format of the last decade.

The atypical length reflected

the need to prioritise efficiency, both in the context of the continued presence of the virus – where all interactions, even the meeting he was speaking at, still pose a risk – and in the tough job of getting the economy going. The structure of the speech reflected the government’s new development strategy. Dropping concrete targets for GDP for the first time since 1990, Li left room for flexibility in the face of continued COVID-19 uncertainty. The speech also allowed local governments space to pursue policies to mitigate the social effects of the pandemic rather than focus purely on economic recovery.

SIX PROTECTIONS POLICY

Li’s strategy for mitigating the damaging effects of the epidemic for society and the economy was summed up in the short slogan, the “Six Protections”. These six protections are: job security, people’s livelihoods, businesses, food and energy security, stable industrial and supply chains, and the functioning of the lower levels of the Chinese government’s five-level hierarchy.

This slogan forms the core of the Chinese government strategy, and is integrated into the national leadership’s recent goals of ensuring stability in

employment, finance, foreign trade, investment, and market expectations.

Implementing the strategy will involve the national government both introducing new policies and strengthening existing ones. This includes allowing a ¥1 trillion (£115 billion) rise in the fiscal deficit and earmarking ¥1 trillion of special governments bonds for the as yet defined purpose of “COVID-19 control”. All this will to be transferred to local governments so that they can support employment, basic needs, and businesses.

Overall, the key message from the Chinese government in its annual work report is that rather than returning the economy and society to normal, or relaxing restrictions (as many European countries are trying to do), for the foreseeable future it is putting prevention and control of the epidemic front and centre.

[Jane Duckett is Professor and Edward Caird Chair of Politics, University of Glasgow; Holly Snape is British Academy Fellow, University of Glasgow; Hua Wang is Affiliate Tutor, School of Social & Political Sciences, University of Glasgow; Yingru Li is Lecturer in Financial Accounting, Tax and Audit, University of Glasgow]

Dead Sea Scrolls: how we accidentally discovered missing text – in Manchester

JOAN TAYLOR

THECONVERSATION.COM

We really didn’t mean to find any missing texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The 2,000-year-old scrolls were found in the Qumran caves next to the Dead Sea in the 1940s. They weren’t the only discoveries, though. Archaeological artefacts like pottery and linen were also taken from the caves, and some are now in collections around the world.

My research collaborators Dennis Mizzi, Marcello Fidanzio and I put together a research project to find and study these artefacts, and to use techniques like radiocarbon dating to understand them better.

Dennis had written his Oxford thesis on Qumran archaeology and was preparing it for a book. Marcello was co-editing the final official publications of the cave findings. I had been working on Qumran materials in private and little-known collections.

We were all interested in non-scroll materials from the caves, which had been gifted and sold by the excavators to collectors, and early photographic dossiers that recorded these discoveries. In our project, scrolls were to be considered as archaeological artefacts among the other items found in the caves.

Blank scroll fragments – or not?

In the list of the many archives and collections we planned to visit, we noted: “Further materials exist in the Reed archive of the John Rylands Library, Manchester.” We knew that this collection contained some blank fragments of scroll – the archive had belonged to Ronald Reed, former leather expert at the University of Leeds, who had been gifted blank scroll fragments after the official excavations of the Qumran caves.

The fragments had been discussed and analysed by previous researchers, and we thought they might be ideal for radiocarbon dating. In our research budget, we had £10,500



for radiocarbon and other scientific analyses for all our designated objects of interest, and £3,000 for digital photography and permissions for publications. We had nothing in the pot for multispectral imaging to reveal texts. This just goes to show how hard it is to design a budget for truly investigative research.

I visited the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester with our researcher Sandra Jacobs. Curator Elizabeth Gow brought us the boxes of the Reed collection. We went through them to identify interesting items. When we got to Box 6, it appeared to contain a lot of random leather samples. But as she took them out one by one, Elizabeth held up a small envelope labelled “4Q22”. I said, “Hang on, this is one of the scroll fragments.” Strictly speaking it should have been in Box 1, where most of the other fragments were found. The label indicated it came from Cave 4Q from Qumran.

A discovery

Elizabeth carefully tipped it out. I looked at it through an illuminating magnifying glass. Unexpectedly, I thought I saw a faint, small lamed, the Hebrew letter ‘L’. But was that an illusion, some tricky stain? After all, these pieces were gifted to Reed for study, including destructive types of testing, precisely because they were blank.

After getting to sit with Box 1 in the library reading room, I decided I should closely inspect

every single fragment for any possible faded letters. There seemed some definite indications. But what to do? Since finding text was not our primary focus and we had a lot of other important work, it seemed we should just park this for the future.

We knew there were some very good results now possible through multispectral imaging. But we had no budget for it, and it was expensive. We had to use the budget as planned. It wasn’t until the end of the grant period, with other studies done, that we had enough left over to commission multispectral imaging.

We agreed to use the remaining project funds for this, and institutionally it was permitted. We wondered about taking the fragments to Israel for the study, given the Israel Antiquities Authority’s proven expertise, but Elizabeth informed us that the John Rylands Library had the capability in house.

Enter Gwen Riley Jones, the University of Manchester imaging manager. Everything listed as Dead Sea Scrolls over 1cm was subjected to multispectral study. In the end, six pieces were selected for full analysis. Of these, four turned out to have readable text, including “4Q22”. We could finally see that lamed plainly, and more besides. On one of the fragments, the word Shabbat (Sabbath) is clearly visible.

We are working with text experts to identify the fragments, and have made progress. But our work does not stop here. We are now planning further study of the Reed materials, which also include textiles, string, pottery and papyrus, to see what else these little bits and pieces can tell us, and more of these will be subjected to scientific tests and multispectral imaging. When we draw up our next budget, whatever we think we probably don’t need will be top of the list.

[the writer is Professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism, King’s College London]

Army, NDRF teams start restoration work in cyclone-hit Bengal

KOLKATA, MAY 24 (PTI): Army and NDRF teams on Sunday helped forest department and civic agencies to get cyclone-ravaged West Bengal back on its feet.

The teams reached areas like Salt Lake, Behala and Golpark in the morning to clear the arterial and other link roads blocked by uprooted trees.

Army personnel equipped with road and tree clearance equipment started working at Roy Bahadur Road and Parnashree in Behala, Ballygunge in south Kolkata and Salt Lake area, a Defence official said.

The Army was deployed in Kolkata and neighbouring districts on Saturday, hours after the West Bengal government sought its help and other support for immediate restoration of essential

infrastructure and services in the state ravaged by Cyclone Amphan.

Five columns of the Army were deployed in different parts of the city and North and South 24 Parganas districts, a Defence official said.

These three parts of the state reported the maximum damage due to the cyclone which claimed 86 lives, flattened homes and damaged crops.

The Forest department and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation have also engaged their staffers in the road clearance work.

Electricity and water supply remained affected in many parts of the city.

Agitated residents blocked roads in several areas in south Kolkata on Saturday, demanding restoration of electricity and water supply which are not available since



Wednesday afternoon.

In places like Mudiali in south Kolkata, locals stepped in with saws to clear roads blocked by uprooted trees.

Mobile and internet services were restored in some areas of the city even as many places in South 24 Parganas, North

24 Parganas and East Midnapore remained cut off.

On Friday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee described the situation as "more than a national calamity" and put the estimated loss at more than Rs 1 lakh crore. She had

stated that more than six crore people have been affected by the cyclone.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with Banerjee had conducted an aerial survey of the affected areas in South and North 24 Parganas districts on Friday.

No congregational Eid prayers in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, MAY 24 (PTI): There will be no congregational Eid-ul-Fitr prayers in public grounds of Meghalaya in view of COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown, a community leader said on Sunday.

The festival will be a low key affair in the

state on Monday with the faithfuls to offer namaz at home, he said.

"We will not celebrate Eid at Eidgahs or other public places in view of the instructions by the government to avoid social gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19," Muslim

Union general secretary Sayeedullah Nongrum told PTI.

Instead, the government order about the necessity of maintaining health hygiene and social distancing norms has been given a priority in view of the pandemic, he said.

Bihar reports 12th COVID-19 death, total cases 2,477

PATNA, MAY 24 (PTI): A 48-year-old man has died of COVID-19 in Bihar, taking the coronavirus death toll in the state to 12, the state health department said on Sunday.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the state increased to 2,477 with 87 people testing positive, it said.

The deceased belonged to Marhaura in Saran district and was admitted to Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH) on May 22 with fever and cough. He died on Saturday afternoon, PMCH

Superintendent Bimal Kumar Karak told PTI.

Though the deceased's sample was collected the day he was admitted but his test report confirmed that he was COVID-19 positive on Saturday after his death, Karak said.

Asked whether the patient had a travel or contact history, Karak said that he had come to Saran from Tamil Nadu during lockdown period.

So far, the contagion has claimed 12 lives that includes two deaths each from Patna, Vaishali and Khagaria while one death each has been

reported from Rohtas, Munger, East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Begusarai and Saran.

Of the total 2,477 COVID-19 cases in the state, 12 people have died, 677 have recovered and 1,789 cases are active, the health department bulletin said.

Patna district topped the list of COVID-19 cases with 196 patients while Rohtas stood at second with 151 cases.

The other badly affected districts are Munger (145), Begusarai (141), Madhubani (136), Katihar (121), Khagaria (118), Buxar (110), Jehanabad (109).

Eid celebrations to be low-key affair in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 24 (PTI): Eid celebrations will be a low-key affair in Odisha on Monday with Muslims preparing to offer prayers at their homes as the usual festive spirit remained subdued amid COVID-19 lockdown.

As mosques across the state are closed for congregational prayers in view of the lockdown, the people have been asked by the maulanas to offer prayers at home instead of moving out to celebrate.

"We will offer thanksgiving prayers at home on the occasion of Eid marking the culmination of the fasting month of Ramzan. We have been asked by our elders to maintain social distance by staying at home and refrain from visiting mosques," said Mohd Sakil Ahmed, a devout Muslim in the state capital.

Most people also



avoided going for festival eve shopping and buying new clothes for the festival as a mark of solidarity towards those who have been hit hard by the lockdown which has snatched away their livelihood sources, he said.

Usual celebration during Ramzan is missing everywhere this time due to the pandemic. Instead of offering prayers at mosques, prayers and the feast will be performed

in homes this time, said Abdul Bari, a maulana based in Jaipur.

The decision has been taken to safeguard the interests of the society amid Coronavirus menace and people will abide by it, he said.

Moreover, many people have lost their jobs and have no income because of the lockdown and they are celebrating in a very limited way, he said.

"People are now very

much aware of the risk involved.

They don't want to congregate anywhere. They will remain at home and celebrate the festival," said Mohd Sabbid, a businessman.

However, traditional delicacies will be on the menu to be shared with the needy, near and dear ones and friends on the occasion, he said.

The state government has also asked the people to abide by the lockdown

restrictions and offer prayers at home due to the pandemic.

Mizoram to hike petrol, diesel prices from June 1

AIZAWL, MAY 23 (PTI): The Mizoram government will hike diesel and petrol prices by 2.5 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, from June 1 to fight the economic slowdown caused by the outbreak of novel coronavirus, Taxation Minister Lalchamlana said on Saturday.

Lalchamlana said the meeting of council of ministers chaired by Chief Minister Zoramthanga also decided to increase the value added tax (VAT) of diesel from 12 per cent to 14.5 and that of petrol from 20 per cent to 25



per cent.

"Diesel price will increase from Rs 60.49 to Rs 62 per litre and petrol from Rs 66.54 to Rs 69.87, which will come into effect from June 1,"

he said.

The minister said the state Goods and Services Tax collection has considerably reduced from Rs 48 crore in March to Rs 14 crore in

April in the wake of the pandemic.

"Mizoram will face a massive financial crisis unless drastic economic measures are taken," he added.

Train carrying 1,600 migrants from Bihar leaves Dimapur

DIMAPUR, MAY 24 (PTI): A special train carrying 1,600 migrant workers from Bihar has left for Motihari in East Champaran district from here, an official said on Sunday.

The train, the first one for migrant workers stranded in Nagaland, departed from the Dimapur railway station at 9 pm on Saturday, he said.

Most of those on the train are auto-

rickshaw drivers, the official added.

The Nagaland government paid for their tickets, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Dimapur Lovitoly Sema said.

Officials said 15 buses from Kohima district ferried 339 migrant workers to the Dimapur District Sports Complex, while five buses from Mokokchung district

reached there with 158 workers.

The district medical team conducted thermal screening of the migrant workers there, they said.

Officials of the district administration verified their documents after which they were issued train tickets, officials said.

The migrants were also provided food packets and water bottles, they added.

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Covid-19 has rocked women's sport but its future remains bright

SEAN INGLE

LONDON, 24 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: The images come from a different time and place: before the sporting world became submerged in sepia and nostalgia, before the great stasis began. Dina Asher-Smith running a bend so geometrically perfect it could have been drawn by a compass before rocketing to the first global sprint title won by a British woman. The MCG swollen with a record 86,174 crowd watching Australia's cricketers win the Women's T20 World Cup. England's Lionesses attracting so many converts and casuals to their cause that unheard of numbers – 11.8m people, in fact – tune in for their World Cup semi-final against the USA.

In truth the most striking sporting photograph of the past 12 months – that of Megan Rapinoe with her arms wide and chin regally tilted in celebration – felt like a metaphor for women's sport itself: standing tall, oozing attitude, ready to take the fight to all-comers. No wonder that throughout 2019 and early 2020 there was a sense of tectonic plates being shifted, and prejudices being shattered. But then came the Covid-19 pandemic. And with it a clawing fear that what had been made could be rapidly unmade.

"The whole industry has been totally rocked by this virus," Women's Sport Trust co-founder Tammy Parlour tells the Guardian. "We have to acknowledge there is a very real threat to women's sport, especially as under pressure people often revert to the old ways of doing things."

Such evidence isn't hard to find. When McKinsey produced a report on coronavirus's impact on the sports industry it grouped women's football alongside youth and futsal in football's food chain. Meanwhile the incessant chatter about sport's return largely focuses on men's sport – with little concern about the lengthier lockdown of women's sport.

In fact, with the FA's Women's Super League about to be

cancelled, the athletics and tennis seasons in limbo, and the prospects for women's cricket this summer uncertain, it is entirely possible that professional sport could be female-free zone stretching into the autumn – aside, perhaps, from an occasional sighting of a female jockey.

Contrast that with Germany, where the Frauen Bundesliga will start up again next week. "We can't just rush to get men's sport back and not think about women's sport," says Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, one of Britain's greatest athletes and now an influential voice. "There has to be a balance and diversity, otherwise some of the strides women have made could be lost. But, as with a lot of the things I have sat on over the years, the default is always men."

Out of sight, out of mind, out of pocket? The sports marketing agency Two Circles projects that global sports sponsorship rights fees will fall from 37.3bn in 2019 to 23.4bn this year because of the pandemic. That is a colossal drop. Would Barclays, who last year became the first title sponsor of the WSL in a three-year deal worth £15m, make the same investment today given it recently announced a 38% fall in profits? The fear is that women's sport, which has risen so fast, is also more fragile – especially with the worst economic recession since 1709 forecast and no gate receipts coming into the accounts.

Some sports will be hit much harder than others. Olympic athletes are financially supported by UK Sport – but many of those in football, rugby and cricket face far more uncertainty. As Zarah Al-Kudcy, Formula 1's head of commercial partnerships development, puts it: "The irony here is that the sports that have tried to become commercially independent, and more reliant on media rights, are the ones that face more business challenges because they are not getting funding from the government."

It's not just at the elite level where progress has been abruptly reversed. Sport England, which



tracks the nation's weekly activity levels, reports that the gender gap has widened since the lockdown. "It had been coming down, thanks in part to campaigns such as This Girl Can," explains Sport England's executive director Ali Donnelly, "But we are seeing a retreat in the numbers of women being active in the pandemic."

Yet for all the myriad challenges, it is notable how much optimism there is. No one fears a steep retreat to the margins, or a return to the bad old days. Indeed, many involved in women's sport expect it to quickly get a second wind; and to not only to survive but to further thrive. "The pandemic will definitely impact on the momentum that we were building," says Donnelly, who is also a prominent figure in women's rugby. "But at the same time, there's expectation from young girls in particular that they will see sportswomen on TV."

It undoubtedly helps that a key priority for most governing bodies is to grow their numbers of participants – and the easiest way to do that is through supporting the women's game. "Strategically it makes sense for them to keep investing in the growth area of a sport," adds Donnelly. "I also don't get the sense that a massive sponsorship hit is coming either because many women's sports are only on the start of that ladder."

Indeed some sponsors could possibly cut back on their big-

ticket items in men's sport in favour of women's sport which is often seen as more authentic. A 2018 Nielsen survey, for instance, found that women's sport was regarded as more progressive and inspiring than men's sport – with 46% of respondents also wanting more of it shown on free-to-air TV.

Another crucial factor is that there is far greater public expectation and pressure on sports to invest in their women's programmes nowadays. When Tom Harrison, the England and Wales Cricket Board's chief executive, appeared before parliament earlier this month he was criticised when he admitted that women's cricket could not be completely ringfenced if the lack of play this summer cost the ECB £380m. Would that have happened five years ago?

But Beth Barrett-Wild, who is in charge of the Women's Hundred, insists the ECB's support for the women's game remains undimmed. "All the statistics and data that we have just shows this upward trajectory that we're on," she says. "We know women's cricket is our single biggest area of growth opportunity – it's indisputable. And I think as a business, and not just as a sport with a social responsibility, women's cricket is just so fundamentally important to what we do."

The Hundred has divided opinion, but Barrett-Wild promises it will herald a huge shift forward for the women's game. "Being able to

properly position men's and women's cricket on the same platform, with the same marketing investment, for the first time is really important," she adds. "Prior to lockdown, I had a couple of really good meetings with BBC and Sky, where we talked about what we are going to do to make the Hundred a real game-changing moment."

Elsewhere the next generation of women's leaders are quietly being developed. The Women's Sport Trust has used the downtime to set up an "Unlocked" programme for 41 top athletes, providing them with mentors to help them develop what they call "a side hustle" beyond their sport, whether it is in media, marketing, or helping the young athletes come through.

One of those involved, Stacey Copeland, professional fighter, stresses that the recent difficulties should be placed into wider context. "When I started boxing it wasn't even legal for women to compete," she says. "And yet I've been able to compete for my country and win a title as a professional. We're used to coming up with creative ways to get around barriers. I don't see why this pandemic should be any different."

Another participant, Alice Dearing, who is hoping to become the first black woman to compete for Britain at swimming in the Olympics, is just as bullish. "This enforced break has been like driving hunger for us: it has only made us more determined to succeed. Yes, women's

sport has taken a knock. But it will come back bigger and better than before."

One aim of the scheme says Al-Kudcy, who is a WST trustee and mentor, is to get more diversity across the whole ecosystem. "If sports have that across every level of decision-making, they are going to make better decisions," she says. "And, what we have seen where there is a lack of diversity, there is often a lack of lateral thinking."

That view is reinforced by Grey-Thompson. "The Davis review of business made it really clear that women on business boards are vital. Sport is in this really weird place, where it likes to think it is different but it is not. Governing bodies to be thinking more about women. The pandemic could be a moment where there is a massive step forward for women's sport. But that will take greater commitment and not just words."

For the time being those in women's sport will continue to do what they have always done, even in the darkest and flintiest days when they faced a lack of interest, visibility, sponsorship and lack of money: roll up their sleeves and push on with one eye on a brighter future.

"There are little girls who are relying on us to succeed, to make sure they've got the role models and a pathway to be successful," says Copeland. "We are committed to that. We're passionate about it. And, trust me, we are definitely not going anywhere."

Former and current Mariners sympathise with Amphan-hit Kolkata



NEW DELHI, MAY 24 (PTI): Former Mohun Bagan forward Sony Norde and I-League-winning coach Kibu Vicuna have sympathised with the people affected by cyclone Amphan, which wreaked havoc in Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal on May 20.

The former and current players who plied their trade in the iconic club took to their personal social media handles to show their love and affection for the city.

At least 80 people, including 19 in Kolkata, died in West Bengal which was the epicentre of the cyclone's landfall.

"Really feeling heart broken seeing all these pictures... I am with you all... my prayers are with you... God will surely help us to overcome this situation... hope everything will be fine very soon..." Haitian international Norde, one of the icons of Mohun Bagan, wrote on his Facebook page.

Norde propelled the Mariners to their maiden I-League title in 2014-15, followed by their 14th Federation Cup title next season. He is currently playing for Melaka United in Malaysia. He left Mohun

Bagan in the middle of 2018-19 season, owing to a prolonged injury.

Vicuna, who has taken up the job of head coach of Indian Super League side Kerala Blasters after guiding Mohun Bagan to I-League title tweeted: "So worried. All my thoughts is with my Indian family and all the people from the areas devastated after Super Cyclone Amphan."

"The biggest disaster in the history of West Bengal. I hope the joy will get back to you as soon as possible!"

Joseba Beitia, the key man to Mariners' success this season, also took to Instagram to share pictures of Amphan-hit Kolkata and a message of anguish.

"Very sad to see how the cyclone is sweeping Kolkata! a lot of strength to all my friends and family from Kolkata. stayathome #besafe #kolkata #cyclone #friends #love"

A poster of Fran Morante, a silent worker in the heart of the Mohun Bagan defence, was found drenched in Kolkata on May 20 night when the cyclone ransacked the city. The picture went viral amongst the Mariners and the Spaniard took no time to retweet it.

Have to clear fitness test before I can resume training: Rohit

MUMBAI, MAY 24 (PTI): India's limited-overs vice captain Rohit Sharma says he has fully recovered from the calf injury that forced him to leave the tour of New Zealand midway earlier this year but the fitness test has been continuously delayed because of the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Mumbaikar had to return home after sustaining the injury during the T20 series against the Black Caps on February 2. He missed the three-match home ODI series against South Africa, which was abandoned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as he was undergoing rehabilitation at that time.

"Before the lockdown happened, I was almost ready to play. That whole week was going to be my fitness test but that's when the lockdown happened and I had to push back everything now," Rohit told LaLiga's Facebook live session on Saturday night.

"Once everything opens up, I have to first go to the centre (NCA) and give my fitness test and once I pass the fitness test, I will be allowed to go and resume my duties with the team."

Pacer Shardul Thakur on Saturday became the first India

cricketer to resume outdoor training after a two-month coronavirus-forced break.

The Maharashtra government has allowed opening of stadiums for individual training in green and orange zones without spectators.

This was after the home ministry offered relaxation in restrictions for the fourth phase of the lockdown till May 31.

Rohit said he is missing hanging out with his team-mates and is looking forward to training with them when things get back to normal.

"Yes, I miss my teammates, hanging around with them and having a banter with them. Although as friends we are trying to stay in touch through the video calls to see what's one been up to, things like that and we manage that pretty well," he said.

"When you are playing together, almost from 365 days, we are together for 300 days, we are playing, travelling together, so it's like a family. So the first thing I want to do is to catch up with all these guys and try hit some balls as soon as I can."

Mumbai is one of the worst affected by the contagious disease and Rohit said it might take more time for him to resume training.

La Liga given green light and plans restart with Seville derby on 12 June

SID LOWE

MADRID, 24 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, has given the green light for football to return in the week beginning 8 June, allowing La Liga to go ahead with plans to restart the first division with the Seville derby on 12 June. A formal announcement on the date of the return to competition will be made by the league's president, Javier Tebas, in the next couple of days.

Sánchez made the announcement on Saturday when he said that the "worst has passed" and that Spain

was now at "the end of the tunnel", allowing for a further relaxing of the state of alarm, which was first declared on 14 March.

"The time has come to recover some of the activities that were suspended," he said. "I want to inform you that, in agreement with the CSD [the sports council] and the ministry of health, the government has given the Spanish professional league the green light to return to playing."

"Spanish football has a massive following both within and beyond our borders,

but it will not be the only activity we will get back. Museums, theatres, cinemas and other sporting activity will also slowly return."

That decision was made according to the government's protocol for the de-escalation of measures to combat coronavirus. With the R rate at 0.2 and the number of recoveries greater than the number of new cases, Sánchez is optimistic he majority of the country will have reached phase three of the de-escalation protocol by 8 June – a condition necessary for La Liga to meet its target of returning on 12 June.

Saliva ban can enhance skills of bowlers: Root

LONDON, MAY 24 (PTI): England captain Joe Root feels the ban on using saliva to shine the ball to combat the COVID-19 threat might improve the skills of the bowlers, who will have to work harder to get something out of the pitch.

The Anil Kumble-led ICC cricket committee has recommended banning the use of saliva to shine the ball when play resumes. The ICC has also barred the practice in its guidelines for resumption of cricket.

However, Root said it could "work in our favour and up skill levels."

"Not having the



assistance that you might normally have means your accuracy has to improve," he was quoted as saying by metro.co.uk.

"Guys will have to find another way to get something out of the surface, whether that's a bit more effort, changing angles on the crease, using the wobble seam they might not have in their locker.

China says virus pushing US ties to brink of 'Cold War'

China said Sunday that relations with the United States were "on the brink of a new Cold War", fuelled in part by tensions over the coronavirus pandemic, as Muslims around the world celebrated a muted end to the holy month of Ramadan.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Washington had been infected by a "political virus" compelling figures there to continually attack China, but offered an olive branch by saying the country would be open to an international effort to find the coronavirus source.

"It has come to our attention that some political forces in the US are taking China-US relations hostage and pushing our two countries to the brink of a new Cold War," he told reporters during a press conference at China's week-long annual parliament session.

He spoke as more nations eased lockdown restrictions in a bid to salvage economies and lifestyles that have been savaged by the pandemic.

Hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world were celebrating a muted Eid al-Fitr, with Islam's two most important mosques closed to worshippers in Mecca and Medina.

Still, churches were reopening in France, Spain's football league announced it would kick off again on June 8, and thousands flocked to beaches in the US, where lockdowns and social distancing have become rights issues that have split communities.

- Highly politicised - Globally about 342,000 people have

been killed, and more than 5.3 million people infected by the virus, which most scientists believe jumped from animals to humans -- possibly at a market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

The issue has become highly politicised, with US President Donald Trump accusing Beijing of a lack of transparency, and pushing the theory that the virus leaked from a Chinese maximum-security laboratory.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday blasted what he called efforts by US politicians to "fabricate rumours" about the virus origin and "stigmatise China".

"China is open to working with the international scientific community to look into the source of the virus," he said.

"At the same time, we believe that this should be professional, fair and constructive."

With infection numbers stabilising in the West, many governments are trying to move towards lighter social distancing measures that they hope will revive moribund business and tourism sectors.

French churches were preparing to hold their first Sunday masses in more than two months after the government bowed to a ruling that they should be reopened -- provided proper precautions were taken.

"My cell phone is crackling with messages!" Father Pierre Amar, a priest in Versailles, told AFP.

- 'Robbed of joy' France's mosques, however, called on Muslims to stay at home for the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. They said they would gradually resume services from June 3.

In Pakistan, thousands gathered in mosques, but celebrations were muted by the crash Friday of a passenger plane into a residential neighbourhood in Karachi, killing 97 on board.

The country's leading English daily, Dawn, said the crash and coronavirus epidemic -- that has killed over 1,000 people in Pakistan -- had robbed the "country of whatever little joy had been left at the prospect of Eid".

In Saudi Arabia, Eid prayers will be held at the two holy mosques in the cities of Mecca and Medina "without worshippers", authorities said as the kingdom began a five-day curfew after infections quadrupled since the start of Ramadan.

For Christians in Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre will reopen on Sunday -- but with tight restrictions.

In Spain, which has enforced one of the world's strictest lockdowns since mid-March, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez sought to reassure potential visitors, saying that from July 1, "entry for foreign tourists into Spain will resume in secure conditions".

Italy is also due to reopen its borders to foreign tourists from June 3.

- US beaches reopening -

But the disease continued its surge in large parts of South America, with the death toll in Brazil passing 22,000 and infections topping 347,000, the world's second-highest caseload.

Neighbouring Peru is also struggling. The country of 32 million has registered more than 3,100 deaths.

In the US, where the death toll is nearing 100,000, Trump has aggressively pushed to reopen the economy, defying the advice of health experts.

He sent a signal of his intentions by playing golf Saturday -- his first round since March 8.

The US economy has shed almost 40 million jobs this year and many companies, most recently car rental giant Hertz, have gone to the wall. But most states have begun easing their lockdowns and many on Saturday reopened public beaches.

"We just get tired of being stuck in the house. There's not much else to do. So I came to the beach," stay-at-home mother Kayla Lambert said, as her two children played in the surf in Galveston, Texas.

In Britain, a scandal erupted over a disclosure that a top government adviser had even flouted the rules.

Dominic Cummings was seen visiting his parents 250 miles (400 kilometres) away from his London home during the country's lockdown, despite suffering from virus symptoms.

He denies any wrongdoing but faces calls to quit.

Lanka seeks USD 1.1 bn currency swap facility from India amidst depleting forex reserves

COLOMBO, MAY 24 (PTI): Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has requested India to provide a special USD 1.1 billion currency swap facility to boost the country's draining foreign exchange reserves in view of the economic slowdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Rajapaksa's office said that the new request is in addition to the USD 400 million amount Sri Lanka has sought from the Indian government under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework.

The Sri Lankan President made the request during his telephonic conversation

with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday, it said.

Modi discussed the situation arising out of the COVID-19 crisis with Rajapaksa and said that India will continue to support our close maritime neighbour in dealing with the pandemic and its economic impact.

The two leaders agreed to accelerate Indian-assisted development projects in the country and also strengthen investment links.

Rajapaksa's office said: If the government of India could provide USD 1.1 billion special SWAP facility to top up USD 400 million under the SAARC facility, it

would enormously help Sri Lanka in dealing with our foreign exchange issues.

Sri Lanka had previously asked India for a 400 million dollar foreign exchange swap under the SAARC arrangements.

Rajapaksa also asked the prime minister to expedite investments in Colombo port's east terminal.

According to the Sri Lankan president's office, Rajapaksa asked Modi to "direct those responsible from India's side to expedite construction of the east terminal of the Colombo port as soon as possible".

Facing issues in its foreign exchange during the coronavirus

pandemic, Sri Lanka has taken drastic measures to keep its foreign reserves and currency stability.

Import restrictions announced are meant to stop the flow of foreign reserves.

The Opposition has accused the government of printing money to create liquidity in markets.

The deadly coronavirus has claimed nine lives and infected 1,068 people in the country.

India has sent four consignments of essential life-saving medicines and medical supplies weighing over 25 tonnes to Sri Lanka in the last few weeks as a goodwill gesture.

NKorea's Kim holds meeting to discuss bolstering nuke forces

SEOUL, MAY 24 (AP): North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un convened a key military meeting to discuss bolstering its nuclear arsenal and putting the country's strategic armed forces on a high alert, state media reported on Sunday, in his first known public appearance in about 20 days.

In early May, Kim quelled intense rumours about his health by attending a ceremony marking the completion of a fertiliser factory in his first public activities in 20 days.

But he hadn't again made any follow-up public appearance in

about another 20 days until the state news agency on Sunday said that he led a meeting of the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party.

"Set forth at the meeting were new policies for further increasing the nuclear war deterrence of the country and putting the strategic armed forces on a high alert operation," the Korean Central News Agency said, without saying exactly when the meeting was held.

The meeting also discussed increasing the capabilities for deterring "the threatening foreign forces", it said.

It was held amid a prolonged deadlock in negotiations with the United States over the North's nuclear programme. The two countries' diplomacy faltered when a second summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in February 2019 ended without any agreement due to disputes over US-led sanctions on North Korea.

Frustrated over the lack of progress, Kim later said he would unveil "a new strategic weapon" and would no longer be bound by a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests.

Kim hasn't still followed through with those threats though he conducted a slew of short-range missile tests.

On Sunday, the North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper released photos showing Kim clad in his trademark dark Mao suit and delivering a speech, writing down on a document and pointing his stick at a board on the podium.

Elderly military generals wearing olive green uniforms were seen taking notes when Kim, 36, spoke something that's typical in North Korean state media-distributed photos.

Taliban, Ghani declare three-day ceasefire for Eid holiday

ISLAMABAD, MAY 24 (AP): The Taliban and Afghanistan's president announced late Saturday a three-day ceasefire ahead of a major Islamic holiday that begins Sunday to mark the end of the Islamic fasting month of Ramzan.

The Taliban order, which was soon followed by an announcement via Twitter from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announcing the government "extends the offer of peace", comes just days after US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was in Kabul and Doha.

Khalilzad on his trip urged both the Taliban and the Afghan government to reduce violence and move ahead with intra-Afghan negotiations, a key pillar of a US peace deal with the Taliban signed in February to allow American troops to leave Afghanistan.

The deal was also touted at the time as Afghanistan's best chance for peace after nearly four decades of war.

The Taliban's ceasefire announcement follows an Eid al-Fitr message from the Taliban

leader which said the insurgent group was committed to the peace deal, was not seeking to monopolize power and promised to guarantee the rights of women and men under an Islamic system.

The directive ordered Taliban fighters not to fight but also not to fraternize with Afghan national security forces. The instructions seemed intended to avoid images that circulated during the last cease-fire in 2018, also during Eid celebrations, including Taliban fighters sharing ice cream and laughing with Afghan national security force soldiers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the announcement and urged all parties "to seize the opportunity and embrace an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process". UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Guterres, who called for a cease-fire in all global conflicts on March 23 to tackle the coronavirus pandemic stressed that "only a peace settlement can bring an end to the

suffering in Afghanistan" and said that "the United Nations is committed to supporting the people and government of Afghanistan in this important endeavour", the spokesman said.

In instructions issued Saturday, Taliban fighters were told "not to attack the enemy in any place but if there is attack from enemy in any place then a befitting defensive response shall be given". The order also warned Taliban fighters against entering "enemy" territory.

Since signing the peace deal with the United States, the Taliban have not attacked US and NATO troops but have staged numerous attacks against Afghan National Security forces.

The peace deal calls for the full withdrawal of US and NATO troops by the end of next year but only if the Taliban honour their commitment to fight against terrorist groups and guarantee that Afghanistan cannot be used as a staging ground of attacks against the United States and its

allies.

The agreement also calls for talks between Taliban and the often-bickering political leadership in Kabul to decide the future of a post-war Afghanistan. It also calls for the release of prisoners by both the government and Taliban as a good will gesture ahead of the talks.

An increase in attacks claimed by the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, including a horrific attack on a maternity hospital in the Afghan capital last week, blamed on the IS affiliate, has given an urgency to finding a settlement between the government and Taliban.

US Department of Defense officials speaking on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the media, said the Taliban is seen as an asset in the fight against IS in Afghanistan.

The US military in Afghanistan welcomed the cease-fire announcement saying "we reiterate our call for the militaries of all sides to reduce violence to allow the peace process to take hold.

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LISA LOVE! Actress, Lisa Rinna was spotted wearing a mask and gloves amid the coronavirus pandemic while stepping out in Beverly Hills.

Jon Stewart’s ‘Irresistible’ heading straight to video on-demand



LOS ANGELES, MAY 24 (PTI): Jon Stewart’s political comedy “Irresistible” is the latest film to head straight to video on-demand amid the coronavirus pandemic. The Focus Features film, which was scheduled for a May 29 theatrical release, will now be play in homes on June 26, reported Deadline. Starring Steve Carrell and Rose Byrne, the movie will be available for the 48-hour rental price of USD 19.99 on platforms such as Amazon, Apple, Comcast, DirecTV, Fandango, Google/YouTube, Microsoft, Sony, among others. “Irresistible” will still play theatrically

starting the weekend of June 26, in the cinemas that are open. It also stars Chris Cooper, Topher Grace, and Mackenzie Davis. The film follows a Democratic political consultant (Carell) who helps a retired Marine colonel (Cooper) run for mayor in a small Wisconsin town. Stewart, who previously directed incarceration drama “Rosewater”, has also penned the script. The project, also backed by Brad Pitt’s Plan B Entertainment, also has Stewart as producer.

The one musician who still leaves Paul McCartney starstruck

We can’t imagine there are many people who wouldn’t get a little bit tongue-tied when meeting one of the most famous men on the planet in Paul McCartney. The former Beatle has been a famous face for nearly 60 years and so has come to learn how to handle fans. However, in a recent interview, the musician revealed that there was one artist that still left him starstruck and it’s someone who he has met many times before. Speaking to The Penguin Podcast in 2019, McCartney revealed that in reality he’s an affable guy when it comes to fame. Having dealt with the rollercoaster of fame for six decades the Liverpudlian has come to expect a certain amount of silly and embarrassing behaviour. The ‘Hey Jude’ singer conversely revealed that he too would be in the same situation if he was asked to interview a famous actor or musician himself. “If I had to interview someone famous tomorrow, I’d be like thinking about it all night and all morning, ‘oh my god what am I gonna do?’ “And I imagine that’s what they’re going through and normally you can see this bit of fear in the eyes or there’s shaking.” The question arose after Macca was asked whether he prefers to be called Sir Paul McCartney, as is his title.” He added: “So I like to put people at ease and say, ‘Look, it doesn’t matter [about calling me Sir Paul], I’m just some guy.” McCartney was then asked who would make him quiver with fear, he responded: “Yes, there’s one or two people who I would be nervous of.” Detailing further, the former Beatle continued: “Bob Dylan would actually make me a little bit



like, ‘oh my god what am I going to say...is it going to be okay, is it going to be good.” It’s a hilarious concept considering he and Dylan have known each other almost as long as they’ve been famous. It would appear that the feeling was mutual, “They were fantastic singers. Lennon, to this day, it’s hard to find a better singer than Lennon was, or than McCartney was and still is,” said Dylan of The Beatles. “I mean I’m in awe of McCartney. He’s about the only one that I am in awe of. But I’m in awe of him. He can do it all and he’s never let up, you know. He’s got the gift for melody, he’s got the rhythm. He can play any instrument. He can scream and shout as good as anybody and he can sing the ballad as good as anybody, you know so... And his melodies are, you know, effortless. That’s what you have to be in awe... I’m

in awe of him maybe just because he’s just so damn effortless. I mean I just wish he’d quit, you know. [laughs] Just everything and anything that comes out of his mouth is just framed in a melody, you know ...” Back to McCartney and the Beatle reflects on a more recent meeting between him and the freewheelin’ Dylan, “But I did see him. He did a Coachella, but it was like Old-chella, because it’s like Stones, us, Neil Young... it was older acts. “But I got to talk to Bob there and he was really very nice, so I don’t know why I would have been nervous, but you get that with some people. It is a funny thing actually when you think about it. What do you have to do, to get secure in yourself?” There you have it. Not only is Sir Paul McCartney one-quarter of the biggest band in pop music but he also lacks self-confidence. Who knew?

Covid-19 patients also show the hallmarks of one mental disorder, says psychiatrist

Cough, fever, loss of sense of smell ... these are the symptoms of Covid-19 that we all know about. But did you know that confusion affects 20 percent or more of patients in hospital with Covid-19? Or that previous coronavirus outbreaks have been linked to high rates of mental illness in the aftermath? As psychiatrists working in a general hospital, we are used to seeing patients with depression, desire to self-harm, dementia, and psychosis. What we noticed when Covid-19 started was that we were being referred to a lot of patients who were disorientated, confused, and sometimes hallucinating. Taken together, these are hallmarks of a condition known as delirium. Delirium is a short-term confused state resulting from illnesses such as Covid-19. Patients can change within as little as a few hours and not know where they are or what is happening to them. Add to this the paranoia and visual hallucinations that many encounters and you can see why it can be a pretty frightening experience. LEARNING FROM THE PAST — There have been two previous outbreaks of severe coronavirus infections: severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) starting in 2002, and Middle East respiratory syndrome (Mers) in 2012. When patients were unwell with these infections, more than 25 percent experienced symptoms such as poor concentration, confusion, and rapid fluctuations in the mood – all of which suggest a delirium. From the early data we have, it looks as though the figures are similar for patients in the hospital with COVID-19. If delirium is a short-term state, why does it matter? Patients who have delirium are at least twice as likely to die in hospital. Patients who develop delirium while in hospital remain in the hospital for about a week longer than other patients. This means that there could be real problems in freeing up beds for new patients. Obviously, we don’t have long-term data for COVID-19, but looking at past epidemics can give us some idea of what to look

out for in the next few months and years. When patients with Sars and Mers were assessed a few months later, 15 percent had depression and 15 percent had an anxiety disorder. Mental illness is common, though, so it’s hard to know how many of these people had longstanding problems or were struggling for other reasons. What was really striking, though, was that rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were more than 30 percent. This is huge and hard to attribute to anything except the experience of the infection and its treatment. Fatigue also seemed to be a big problem: 19% of patients were still reporting this even months after “recovering”. We have to be careful in applying these findings to the current pandemic because all these results are from patients in the hospital and we know that most patients with Covid-19 can be safely treated at home. You also can’t add up the numbers for each disorder as many patients may have presented with more than one. Interestingly, there seemed to be a few groups that were at higher risk of developing mental illness after infection. It is not surprising that those who had a more severe physical illness and those who had lost a loved one tended to have a poorer psychological outcome. What we did not expect to find was that three studies identified healthcare workers as being at higher risk of subsequent mental illness. THE HEALTH SERVICE NEEDS TO BE PREPARED — Whatever the cause, we need to be prepared. But interventions need to be evidence-based and – crucially – should avoid making things worse. Psychological debriefing, where a therapist encourages you to talk through a traumatic event in detail, sounds sensible, but there is convincing evidence that it might actually make things worse, increasing the risk of subsequent mental illness. There are many possible reasons why people develop these problems and your guess may be as good as ours. It might be that the virus affects the brain directly or that the body’s immune system goes into overdrive. Equally likely is that psychiatric consequences are the result of being socially isolated or the psychological trauma of having a severe illness.

ARIES: If managing your finances has become tricky, you’re in luck. A friend has some good advice that you should listen to. You might not like the sound of it at first, but once they tell you the impact that it has made on their money situation, you’ll be a true believer! If you want things to change, you have to be willing to put in more effort. Self-discipline isn’t always fun, but it is always effective. Take notes and get ready for some changes. **TAURUS:** Don’t fret about any small complication or drama today. It won’t mess up your day as much as you fear it will. Unexpected stuff happens, so just roll with it. There will be too many fun things going on to worry much anyway. You’re feeling the need for a bit of self-indulgence right now, and buying one or two small treats wouldn’t be a bad idea. **GEMINI:** You need to be honest and understand what your true limitations are, especially in terms of your job. If you aren’t confident about your abilities in a certain area, then it would not be a good idea to say that

you’re a master of it. That kind of bravado might seem impressive, but it will only get you into some deep and very hot water. Be honest and be humble. **CANCER:** You should bolster your networking skills. Start using them in many more areas of your life than you currently do. Whether you want a recommendation for a car mechanic, a great hotel in Paris, or even just the right shoes, ask around! It’s up to you to make the connections you need, so reach out and don’t be shy. People are going to be very receptive to your questions. Asking around will help you get more out of life. **LEO:** Avoid doing anything big or ostentatious today. This isn’t the right time to make expensive travel plans or major purchases or commit to anything in formal legal terms. Even though everything looks pretty good right now, there could be some darker shadows lurking that you aren’t able to see yet. Wait a little while longer, until everything has been clarified and put into writing.

VIRGO: Other people have a stake in what you’re working on, and you need to let them be a part of your thought process. Share what you’ve been thinking, ask them for input, and really listen hard when they give you their honest feedback. Your life is a solo journey to some extent, but it’s so much richer and more rewarding if you let other people play a significant part. Getting too deep in your own head will limit your options and slow you down. **LIBRA:** You’re eager for your future to begin, but when will that come? There’s no telling, but a glimpse may come today if you step back and give yourself space to see it. Move away from the people who are demanding so much of your time right now. They’re distracting you from putting yourself first and seeing what you need to do next. **SCORPIO:** You could be dealing with a lot of different requests today, which could be confusing or even overwhelming. Just take your time and think about your priorities. Once you

do, it will be obvious what you should do first and what you shouldn’t do at all. If you get frustrated, turn to a good friend for some guidance. They know what’s best for you, and you should trust them completely. There’s no point in taking everything on. **SAGITTARIUS:** If you’re trying not to overeat, you can make the task a lot easier by distracting yourself, or even better, distracting yourself by getting active! When your blood is pumping endorphins all around your body, the last thing on your mind will be cookies, french fries, or ice cream. Staying healthy is all about balance and staying positive about your ability to reach your health goals. **CAPRICORN:** Try to avoid misunderstandings in your conversations today, because they could grow into dangerous assumptions. Aim for clarity. Make sure all your actions and comments are honest, and that people understand what you mean. Double-check and confirm just to make sure. Get things

in writing! If you only assume that they got it right the first time, you could live to regret that assumption. **AQUARIUS:** Someone you usually find fascinating could leave you feeling bored today, but don’t worry. That doesn’t mean you’re no longer into this person. It probably just means you need to take a break. It’s a wise idea to embark on a new solo project right now. Whether you choose to go off by yourself or just take the afternoon to contemplate your next move doesn’t matter much. Just focus on you for a while. **PISCES:** Try to communicate your emotions clearly to someone you’re worried about now. Being brutally honest is tough sometimes, but it’s much more valuable than softening the truth with little white lies. You might think that you’re protecting their feelings, but you’re only keeping them from knowing what they need to know to move forward. And keep in mind that while you’re speaking honestly with them, they’ll be encouraged to speak honestly to you.