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# SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 109 | Gangtok | Tuesday | 28 April 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

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## CM attends video conference with Prime Minister

**GANGTOK, 27 APR (IPR):** Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) attended the video conference called on by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi regarding COVID-19 with Chief Ministers of all States and Union Territories today.

The Prime Minister applauded the efforts of the State government in containing the virus duly maintaining transparency and encouraged the State to continue with its efforts. The Prime Minister said that the inputs provided by the state were useful to the central government in tackling the disease in certain areas of the country.



He urged the states to continue with agriculture and production activities. The Chief Minister

requested every individual to download the Aarogya Setu app and appealed to the teach-

ers and students to help others understand the usefulness of the app. He further appealed to

the Sikkimese people to continue following the guidelines and keep themselves safe.

## Assam allows inter-district travel till May 2

**GUWAHATI, APR 27 (PTI):** The Assam government on Monday extended inter-district movement of the stranded people till May 2 in personal and public transport with prior approval from the concerned authorities.

The decision of travel within the state was taken during a meeting of the Cabinet, Assam Parliamentary Affairs Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary told reporters here.

"The Cabinet decided to allow this inter-district movement till May 2," he said.

Explaining the reasons behind the extension, Patowary said many people could not make journey during the permitted days and the authorities were getting information that a considerable section of the stranded

people could not book their tickets through 104 helpline.

"During the first two days, 27,000 tickets were offered by ASTC to travel within the state. We initially got queries from more than 41,000 people in the 104 helpline," he added.

On Sunday, the movement of those stranded people, who had already applied for passes to travel home by personal vehicles and public transport within the state, was extended by three more days till April 30.

The state government had earlier allowed one-way movement within the state for three days by personal vehicles and Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) buses from April 25 as per the guidelines of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

## Our aim must be rapid response, need to follow mantra of 'do gazdoori': PM



**DELHI, 27 APR (PIB):**

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi today interacted with Chief Ministers of states via video conferencing to discuss the emerging situation and plan ahead for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the fourth such interaction of the Prime Minister with the Chief Ministers, the earlier ones had been held on 20 Mar, 02 Apr and 11 Apr, 2020.

Prime Minister underlined that the Lockdown has yielded positive results as the country has managed to save thousands of lives in the past one and a half months. He added that India's population is comparable to that of the combined population of several countries. The situation in many countries, including India, was almost similar at the start of March. However,

due to timely measures, India has been able to protect many people. He however forewarned that the danger of the virus is far from over and constant vigilance is of paramount importance.

Prime Minister said that the country has seen two Lockdowns till now, both different in certain aspects, and now we have to think of the way ahead. He said that as per experts, the impact of coronavirus will remain visible in the coming months. Reiterating the mantra of 'do gazdoori', he said that masks and face covers will become part of our lives in the days ahead. He added that under the circumstances, everyone's aim must be rapid response. He pointed out that many people are self-declaring whether they have cough and cold or symptoms,

and that this is a welcome sign.

Prime Minister said that we have to give importance to the economy as well as continue the fight against COVID-19. He emphasized on the importance of usage of technology as much as possible and also to utilize time to embrace reform measures. He emphasized on the significance of ensuring that more people download the AarogyaSetu app to bolster the efforts of the country in the battle against COVID-19. He said "we have to be brave and bring in reforms that touch the lives of common citizens." He also suggested that people associated with Universities can be integrated on devising ways to fight the pandemic and strengthen research as well as innovation.

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## RBI announces Rs 50,000 cr special liquidity facility for mutual funds



**MUMBAI, APR 27 (PTI):** The Reserve Bank of India on Monday announced a Rs 50,000 crore special liquidity facility for mutual fund, days after Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund decided to close six debt schemes.

In a statement, the central bank said heightened volatility in capital markets in reaction to COVID-19 has imposed liquidity strains on mutual funds (MFs), which have intensified in the wake of redemption pressures related to closure of some debt MFs and potential contagious

effects therefrom.

The stress is, however, confined to the high-risk debt MF segment at this stage; the larger industry remains liquid, it said.

"With a view to easing liquidity pressures on MFs, it has been decided to open a special liquidity facility for mutual funds of Rs 50,000 crore," it said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also stressed it remains vigilant and will take whatever steps are necessary to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 and preserve financial stability.

## Ladakh gets its first COVID-19 testing lab

**LEH/JAMMU, APR 27 (PTI):** A COVID-19 laboratory has been set up in the Union Territory of Ladakh to ensure timely and cost-effective sample testing, officials said on Monday.

Earlier, the samples had to be sent to Delhi by flights leading to delays and heavy expenditure, they said.

The COVID-19 testing laboratory, first such facility in the union territory, was set up with the help of Pernod Ricard India foundation, the officials said.

At this crucial time when COVID-19 poses a national challenge, we believe that urgent emergency resources need to be deployed to fight the crisis. We are happy to

support Ladakh in setting up its first COVID-19 testing lab, said Sunil Duggal, Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Pernod Ricard India.

The new laboratory is a fully equipped facility compliant with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) standards, he said.

It would enable the administration to understand the scale of the disease spread, gauge preparedness of the local healthcare system and enforce preemptive measures, Duggal added.

The foundation has also provided 40,000 medical masks, 500 N95 masks and 1,000 hand sanitisers for the front-line workers in the union territory, he said.

## This institution is not hostage of government, says SC

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** This institution is not hostage of government, the Supreme Court said on Monday as it sought reply from the Centre on a plea seeking direction to authorities to allow migrant workers across the country to return home after conducting coronavirus tests.

The top court's remark came after advocate Prashant Bhushan told the court that the government's view is being blindly considered without verifying it, while fundamental rights of people especially migrant workers are not being enforced.

A bench of Justices N V Ramana, Sanjay Kishan Kaul and B R Gavai questioned Bhushan, appearing for petitioners Jagdeep S Chhokar, former director in-charge of IIM, Ahmedabad, and lawyer Gaurav Jain, and said as to why should the court hear him, if he does not have faith in the system.

Bhushan said that this is an institution created by Constitution but the fundamental rights are being violated of these migrant workers and I am entitled express by anguish. The bench told Bhushan, You don't have faith in judiciary. This institution is not hostage of government."

Clarifying that he never said that he has no faith in this system, Bhushan added he could be wrong but similar opinion is expressed by some retired judges.

The bench told him that he claims to be practising in the apex court for past 30 years and then he must know that some orders are favourable and some are not and therefore he should not say such things. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre told Bhushan that he should not be under the impression that he is the only one who is concerned with enforcement of fundamental rights.

He said the government is very much concerned with the issue and trying to provide all possible help to migrant workers. Bhushan said that if there was any objection with regard to his appearance as a lawyer in the case, then he was willing to withdraw from the matter and some other lawyer will appear. The bench said that it

had never asked him to withdraw from the matter.

Bhushan said the central government seems to have shut its eyes and should consider the distress situation faced by the migrant workers during the lockdown.

He said that more than 90 per cent migrant workers have not received the ration or wages; they are in desperate situation and should be allowed to go to their native places.

Mehta however said that these are incorrect reports and questioned the basis of the data given by the petitioners.

He said the Centre is consulting states on the issue as to how many of migrant workers have to be transported, how many have to be given help and what kind of help.

The bench told Mehta that it means that Centre is in consultation with states and is ready to examine the issue.

Mehta replied that the government is examining everything but the ideas of petitioner are not required and urged the court to not keep the petition pending as there are already several pleas, which have similar prayers.

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## COVID-19 death toll rises to 872 in country; cases climb to 27,892: Health ministry

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 872 and the number of cases climbed to 27,892 in the country on Monday, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The number of active COVID-19 cases stood at 20,835 while 6,184 people were cured and discharged, and one patient has migrated, the ministry said.

The total number of cases include 111 foreign nationals.

A total of 46 deaths were reported since Sunday evening of which 19 fatalities were reported from Maharashtra, 18 from Gujarat, four from Madhya Pradesh, two from West Bengal and one each from Punjab, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Of the 872 deaths,

Maharashtra tops the tally with 342 fatalities, followed by Gujarat at 151, Madhya Pradesh at 103, Delhi at 54, Rajasthan at 33 and Andhra Pradesh at 31.

The death toll reached 29 in Uttar Pradesh, 26 in Telengana, 24 in Tamil Nadu, 20 in West Bengal while Karnataka has reported 19 deaths.

Punjab has registered 18 fatalities so far. The disease has claimed six lives in Jammu and Kashmir, four in Kerala while Jharkhand and Haryana have recorded three COVID-19 deaths each.

Bihar has reported two deaths, while Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Assam have reported one fatality each, according to ministry data. According to the ministry's data

updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 8,068 followed by Gujarat at 3,301, Delhi at 2,918, Rajasthan at 2,185, Madhya Pradesh at 2,096 and Tamil Nadu at 1,885. The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 1,868 in Uttar Pradesh, 1,097 in Andhra Pradesh and 1,002 in Telangana.

Cases have risen to 649 in West Bengal, 523 in Jammu and Kashmir, 503 in Karnataka, 458 in Kerala, 313 in Punjab and 289 in Haryana.

Bihar has reported 274 coronavirus cases, while Odisha has 103 cases. Eighty-two people have been infected with the virus in Jharkhand and 50 in Uttarakhand. Himachal Pradesh has

40 cases, Chhattisgarh has 37 cases and Assam has registered 36 infections each so far.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands has 33 COVID-19 cases while Chandigarh has 30 cases and Ladakh has reported 20 infections so far.

Meghalaya has reported 12 cases, and Goa and Puducherry have seven COVID-19 cases each.

Manipur and Tripura have two cases each, while Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have reported a case each.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR," the ministry said on its website.

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



## Over 1.5 lakh NRKs register to return to Kerala

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 27 (PTI):** Over 1.5 lakh Non-Resident Keralites (NRK)s, stranded in various countries, have registered online for returning to the state, once the Centre gives the nod and air services resume.

The Norka (Non Resident Keralites Affairs) department had commenced the registration process at around 6pm on Sunday and within an hour 25,000 had registered, government sources said.

Till Monday morning, over 1.5 lakh NRKs have registered, the maximum is from UAE-- over 60,000.

The aged, pregnant women, children, critically ill patients, those with expired visas and those who had gone abroad on visiting visa are among the large numbers of people who are waiting to return.

Those wanting to return, have to get themselves tested for COVID-19 in the respective countries, where they are and register after getting a negative certificate for the infection.

The registration is for arranging quarantine facilities in the state, if necessary, and not for getting any priority on flight bookings, the sources said.

After the NRKs register themselves, the government would draw up a list on how to bring them back as per priority.



## Essential commodities distributed at Singtam

**YOGEN THATAL SINGTAM, 27 APR:**

Essential commodities were distributed at the old food godown,

Singtam. Bazaar Inspector of Singtam Nagar Panchayat, Biren Rai along with staff, Convenor of Singtam Bazaar, Anita Tamang representing SKM were present today.

## Tibetan community contributes to CM's Relief Fund



**GANGTOK, 27 APR (IPR):** All Tibetan communities of Sikkim have come forward to contribute towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to combat Covid-19.

Tibetan Settlement Office, Mingyur Youdon and vice chairman, Local Tibetan Assembly, Jimpa Phuntsok called on Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang at Samman Bha-

wan this afternoon and handed over cheque of Rs. 7,78,791.

The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to the Tibetan communities of Sikkim for their noble gesture of coming forward to augment the Government's efforts to combat the pandemic.

## Police take out flag march in Jaipur's walled city



**JAIPUR, APR 27 (PTI):** The Rajasthan Police on Monday took out a flag march in the Jaipur's walled city as a confidence-building measure in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

Ramganj in the walled city is the worst-hit area from where the maximum coronavirus cases have surfaced in Jaipur.

So far, the state capital has reported 827 cases, including 25 fatalities.

It was aimed at confidence-building among people and to ensure that the coronavirus lockdown and curfew is followed properly, Jaipur Police Commissioner Anand Srivastava said.

He said nearly 800 policemen participated in the flag march, which covered Tripolia Bazaar, Badi Chaupad, Ramganj, Char Darwaja, Subhas Chowk and the Jorawar Singh gate.

## ABKM distributes relief materials

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

Am Bihari Kalyan Manch [ABKM] Sikkim has been distributing food items to migrant workers and others in need in several parts of East and South Sikkim from the beginning of the lockdown period, a press release informs.

National president of ABJM, Chotelal Prasad informed that the organization is distributing food in different parts of the State through their respective branches. ABKM Gangtok



team continues to distribute food items at Lal Bazaar, Gangtok in the presence of ABKM vice presi-

dent, Babita Prasad, general secretary, Chandan Prasad, and other executive committee members.

## Marwari Yuva Manch distributes relief items in WB and Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

Paschim Bengal Sikkim Prantiya Marwari Yuva Manch is working actively to help underprivileged families and stranded people in and outside Sikkim, a press release informs.

More than 60 branches across West Bengal and Sikkim are continuously carrying out distribution of relief materials. According to the West

Bengal Sikkim State Marwari Yuva Manch State president, Vipul Sharma and general secretary, Dheeraj Nahar, with the help from police administration in various parts of the State, the distribution work has also been extended to the villages from 20 April.

Recently, distribution of relief materials was carried out in Gajaldoba, Forest area of Saraswati Pur Tea Plantation, fami-

lies who are living on the banks of Mahananda River, and also in many tribal areas of Naxalbari with support from Bajaj Health Care Social Foundation.

They are also providing their service in places where there are no branches through other means. According to the state treasurer, Saugandh Goyal, all the guidelines of the government have been followed at the time of distribution.

## Our aim must...

He highlighted the importance for states to enforce guidelines strictly in the hotspots i.e. the red zone areas. He stated that the efforts of the states should be directed towards converting the red zones into orange and thereafter to green zones.

On the issue of getting back Indians who are overseas, he said that this has to be done keeping in mind the fact that they don't get inconvenienced and their families are not under any risk. Prime Minister also urged Chief Ministers to factor in the changes in weather - advent of summer and monsoon - and the illnesses that can potentially come in this season, while strategizing ahead.

Union Home Minister reaffirmed the need to enforce lockdown so that maximum lives are saved.

The Chief Ministers praised the leadership of the Prime Minister during this period of crisis, and also highlighted the efforts undertaken by them in containing the virus. They spoke about the need to keep a close vigil on international borders, and also on addressing the economic challenge and ways to further boost health infrastructure. The leaders expressed gratitude towards the police force and medical staff for the exemplary work done by them in the fight against COVID-19.

## This institution...

Bhushan urged the court to allow inter-state transportation of migrant workers which was objected to by Mehta saying that it is for the government to look into all aspects keeping the larger interest of people in mind.

The Solicitor General requested the court to not issue notice and give directions on the plea as it would send wrong message and instead he would file a reply within two weeks.

The bench said it is giving one week time to Centre to respond whether there is any proposal on allowing inter-state transportation of migrant workers.

Meanwhile, the top court disposed of intervention applications filed by advocate Alakh Alok Srivastava on the issue of stopping inter-state migration of workers and said that it is the Central government to look into the issue.

The top court said it is not the coordinating agency between the Centre and states, and the Union government has to take necessary action in this regard.

Chhokar and Jain in their plea had said that in wake of the extension of the nationwide lockdown, the migrant workers who are among the worst affected category of people must be allowed to go back to their homes after being tested for COVID-19.

It said that those migrant workers who test negative for COVID-19 must not be forcefully kept in shelters or away from their homes and families against their wishes.

It said that although the national lockdown has been necessitated because of the unprecedented pandemic of COVID-19 and its imposition is much needed, it is submitted by the petitioners that the fundamental right of the migrant workers enshrined under Article 19(1)(d) (right to move freely throughout India) and Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution (right to reside and settle in any part of India) cannot be suspended for an indefinite period.

It said that these migrant workers cannot be forced to stay away from their families and living in unpredictable and arduous conditions, as the same is an unreasonable restriction beyond what is envisaged under Article 19(5) of the Constitution.

The petition said that necessary transport services may be provided by the state governments in abundance so that the purpose of 'social distancing' is not defeated.

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# SAAF-AFI online seminar draws massive attendance

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** The Athletics Federation of India's online seminar for track and field sport's technical officials attracted as many as 911 participants from across South Asian Athletics Federation member nations.

During the seminar, Ireland's Pierce O'Callaghan erased doubts about judging race walking and Luis Saladie of Spain helped with drawing up timetables for competition.

Answering a question on why there were more disqualifications in race walking than in other events at the world championships, O'Callaghan said there could be a number of reasons, including a walker trying too hard or being too nervous and making mistakes as well as coming through to the biggest event after passing scrutiny by inexperienced or lenient judges.

Race walking accounts for more than a third of the 885 disqualifications in the IAAF World Athletics Championships since 1983. "Obviously, they have



been disqualified because they were found to be not complying with the rules. For, race walking is a borderline very sport," he said, after showing the participants common violations made by race walkers.

O'Callaghan also sought to allay the fears of track and field officials that prevents many of them from talking up race walking judging, reassuring them

that it is not so technical and complicated as many imagined it to be.

"It is a simple sport, race walking. Very basic human movement. Not everyone will jump a hurdle or throw a javelin, but everyone walks," he said.

The simplicity with which O'Callaghan spoke about judging race walking enhanced the knowledge of the technical officials. "I am sure that

whether or not they become race walking judges, they will all be able to enjoy watching the event the next time they are in any athletics meeting that includes race walking," he said.

A regular visitor to India, including for conducting race walking judges courses, O'Callaghan said that with its population, passion and enthusiasm, South Asia is the sleeping giant of world athletics.

He said the seminar, a brainchild of AFI president Adille J Sumariwalla and AFI Planning Committee chairman Lalit K Bhanot, was a step towards awakening the giant.

O'Callaghan was addressing 911 technical officials from eight South Asian countries who attended the third day's session in the five-day online seminar.

The seminar, designed to update the knowledge of the technical officials in the region, will conclude on Wednesday.

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### LAND FOR SALE

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



### 33 staffers at Max hospital test positive for COVID-19

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** As many as 33 staffers of a leading private hospital in east Delhi, including two doctors, nurses and paramedic staff, have tested positive for coronavirus over the last two weeks, sources said on Monday.

Max Healthcare group had announced two weeks ago that it was going to conduct tests for COVID-19 on all its employees and patients at its facilities across the country.

"Since the test started, 33 staffers, including two doctors, nurses, paramedics, and non-medical staff have tested positive for COVID-19 at Max Hospital, Patparganj, till date," a source said.

Max Hospital, Patparganj is an upscale health facility in east Delhi.

All the affected people have been shifted to a quarantine facility in East Block of Max Hospital, Saket in south Delhi, sources said.

The East Block of the hospital is a dedicated COVID-19 facility.

Healthcare workers from hospitals under Max Healthcare (18,000), BLK Hospital (3,000) and Nanavati Hospital, Mumbai (3,000) will be tested over the next few weeks, officials of Max Healthcare had earlier said.

The move had come in the wake of a doctor, a nurse and a non-medical staff at Max Hospital, Saket earlier testing positive for coronavirus.

### Kerala favours partial lockdown till May 15

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 27 (PTI):** The Kerala government favoured 'partial' coronavirus lockdown in the state till May 15 and sought aspecial financial package from the Centre for various sectors, including rehabilitation of expatriates who wish to return, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Monday.

Conveying the state's views to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and union Home Minister Amit Shah, he has informed Kerala would have a cautious approach on lifting the curbs after May 3 and would favour having a partial lockdown till May 15, Vijayan said here.

The state favoured continuation of restrictions on inter-state and inter-district travel and the ban on public transport till the middle of next month, he told reporters.

Vijayan said Chief Secretary Tom Jose represented the state in the virtual meeting held by Modi with chief ministers since it was informed that Kerala may not get a chance to speak at the meeting due to paucity of time.

In a telephonic conversation with Shah, he suggested a national policy on lockdown that also caters to state-specific and regional needs.

The state would prefer having a partial lockdown till May 15 and then review the lockdown based on the COVID situation then. The state is of the opinion that, in districts where no cases are reported in the previous week, relaxations on public movement and public transport can be partially allowed by adhering to all safety precautions, he added.

# China fails to stop racism against Africans over Covid-19

**JOHANNESBURG, 27 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:** African people continue to be barred from hotels, shops and restaurants in Guangzhou, despite Chinese officials assuring governments across Africa that discrimination resulting from efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak would stop. Racist discrimination in Guangzhou earlier this month caused outrage in Africa, provoking rare official protests to China by several countries.

Africans in the city who were contacted recently by the Guardian said they still faced hostility and racism, prompted by fears they may be carriers of Covid-19.

Frank Nnabugwu, a Nigerian businessman who has lived in Guangzhou for a year, said he was not allowed to return to his rented accommodation last week after being released from two weeks' quarantine. "The security guards said to us: 'No foreigners are allowed'. I was upset, very upset. I slept on the street," the 30-year-old said.

Police eventually found a hotel willing to rent Nnabugwu a room.

"We use the receptionist to order food," Nnabugwu said. "If they [food delivery companies] know it is a foreigner ordering food they will not come. You cannot buy anything in a shop; if you go in they will cover their face and chase you out."

Kidus Mulugeta, an Ethiopian who moved to China four years ago to study mechanical engineering, said the atmosphere in Guangzhou had changed rapidly.

"It was so fast," he said. "I went into quarantine ... We were treated fine. Then we came out. Everything was different, uncomfortable. Like Chinese people changed their minds." Mulugeta, who has a job offer at a Chinese company when he



graduates, said many African people found it impossible to rent accommodation and hadn't been allowed into supermarkets.

"They say 'no foreigners', but if it's a Russian or European, they allow white people to enter," he said.

A Ghanaian computer science student said he had been in a hotel when police officers took him to another hotel to be mandatorily quarantined and he was tested more than five times.

The 25-year-old, who requested anonymity, said he was denied entry at "about 15 hotels" and slept on the streets. "I have been denied entry into public places, denied into restaurants. All the tests they did have been negative." Anger in Africa rose earlier this month when images of African residents in Guangzhou being barred from various locations began circulating on social media. Other images showed evicted Africans sleeping on the streets.

China has maintained strict

screening protocols, concerned about any resurgence in infections by virus carriers who exhibit no symptoms or by infected people arriving from abroad.

Authorities have limited international flights and blocked almost all foreigners from entering the country, as well as required mandatory centralised quarantines for those returning from overseas. Experts say such wariness has given rise to new levels of xenophobia and that Africans have borne the brunt of this.

Guangzhou tightened measures after reporting more than 100 imported cases of Covid-19, including 25 involving foreign nationals, some from Africa, Chinese state media reported. The new measures included retrospective screening of previous arrivals.

African leaders are generally reluctant to criticise China, which has loaned governments massive sums and provided medical assistance in recent weeks, but the reports

provoked rare official protests to Beijing. Many African leaders were shocked by the vehemence of the online reaction in Africa to the incidents, said Cobus Van Staden, an expert in China-Africa relations at the South African Institute of International Affairs. "They realised there was domestic pressure ... They usually tend to downplay [problems] but I think they realised that would be politically impossible this time," he said.

A number of African states called in Chinese ambassadors and the African Union, which represents more than 50 states, said the discrimination had caused grief, pain and humiliation to all Africans.

Ghana's information minister, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, told the Guardian his government had summoned the Chinese ambassador for "a very stern conversation".

Chinese officials moved quickly to deal with the initial accusations of discrimination. The Chinese ambas-

sy in Nairobi, for instance, told Kenya's foreign ministry that authorities in Guangzhou "have been tasked to take immediate action to safeguard the legitimate rights of the Africans concerned".

China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian acknowledged at the time that "there might be some misunderstandings in the implementation of measures" designed to prevent "overseas imports" of the virus. China treated all foreigners equally, Zhao said.

However, Beijing has also tried to suggest that reports of Africans targeted in Guangzhou are a plot to smear the country. An editorial in the state-run Global Times said western media, US politicians and "Hong Kong separatists" were among those "hyping" such incidents. Roberto Castillo, an assistant professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong who has been researching the African presence in China, said: "Unsurprisingly, China's response was to deflect and spin the narrative as yet another situation distorted by western media and fake news, and to point out that China does not discriminate against any foreigners."

China has made massive strides in its political, commercial and cultural presence in Africa in recent years and launched a diplomatic offensive at the beginning of the pandemic. The row over racism threatens some of these gains.

"The images of black people sleeping under bridges, families with children being evicted from their legally rented places of abode, as well as entrance and service denial to blacks, were seen by many as Chinese racism and as a Chinese betrayal of African solidarity in these difficult times," said Castillo.

## Don't judge Sweden's light touch on Covid-19 yet, says minister

**JON HENLEY**

**STOCKHOLM, 27 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:** Sweden's foreign minister has said it is way too early to judge her country's light-touch approach to Covid-19, but warned that the government would take tougher action if needed after five Stockholm pubs were shut for not observing physical distancing.

"There's been a lot of misunderstanding," Ann Linde said. "We have pretty much the same goals as every other government ... And as we have always said, we are perfectly ready to go with more binding regulations if the population does not follow."

Sweden has closed senior schools and banned gatherings of more than 50, but asked - rather than ordered - people to avoid non-essential travel, work from home and stay at home if they are elderly or ill. Relying on citizens to act responsibly, it has left shops and restaurants and gyms open, but expects those visiting them to obey distancing norms.

Many Swedes support and are complying with the policy, which contrasts with the strict mandatory lockdowns imposed in many EU countries and has been heavily criticised by some scientists. The country's death toll per million, while far lower than Italy's and Spain's, is also many times higher than those of its Nordic neighbours.

Linde told the Guardian in an interview that Sweden's aims were to "save lives, stop the virus from spreading, ensure the healthcare system can cope and mitigate the consequences for business and jobs". It must also be sustainable for the long term, she said: "This is a marathon, not a sprint."

Stockholm authorities shut down five pubs and restaurants that failed to observe the recommendations this weekend, only allowing customers time to finish their food before obliging them to leave.

"This was a strong signal,"

Linde said. "These are not voluntary measures. You are meant to follow them. We believe the best way for us is a combination of some binding regulations and clear advice to the public. As far as possible, we want to build on a strong, longstanding relationship of trust between authorities and the public."

There is plenty of evidence that most people are falling in line, she said, citing a 96% fall in reservations at the country's two most popular domestic holiday destinations after the government repeated its advice to stay at home over the Easter break. The country's rate of infection is also showing signs of levelling off and the Public Health Agency estimates up to 20% of its population has contracted the virus.

Linde said she "would have been surprised if there had not been criticism" of the strategy, spearheaded by the country's chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, who has described it as being not about creating "herd immunity" but containing the spread of the virus while preserving the capacity of the health service to respond.

Some of the country's leading medical professors and academics have been fiercely critical of the decision not to follow much of the rest of Europe into strict lockdown, publishing open letters and petitions calling for an urgent change of course and highlighting a death toll which, at 2,194, is three times the per-million tally recorded in Denmark and Germany and more than six times that of Finland.

Linde said Sweden's relatively high death toll was "certainly not part of the plan" but conceded that the exceptional number of deaths in care homes, which so far account for more than half of all the country's deaths from the coronavirus, was "one area where we have failed".

The government passed early binding legislation banning visits to care homes for elderly people,

she said, "but still the virus got in and a lot of deaths have occurred. We don't know why this is - perhaps because some homes did not observe regulations, perhaps because staff's jobs were not secure so they felt they could not afford to take sick leave ... We're investigating."

Linde said that while cooperation between the Nordic countries had generally been excellent despite "very different views of what was effective" in tackling Covid-19, there had been "long discussions" with Denmark and Finland over the issue of border closures before arrangements were found that were acceptable to both sides.

Finland in particular had to be persuaded to allow the healthcare sector workers on whom Sweden relies in some regions to continue commuting across the border every day. "I have, generally, had to answer a lot of questions from my counterparts around the world about our approach," she said.

Despite avoiding total lockdown, Sweden's heavily export-dependent economy has been as hard hit by the pandemic as most countries. The government has launched relief measures worth about 100bn kronor (£8bn) but still expects GDP to contract by up to 10% this year. Unemployment is already surging.

Linde insisted it was too early to judge the success or otherwise of her government's decisions relative to those of others, or even to tell what the criteria for success might eventually be. "I won't evaluate or judge the strategy in Sweden or anywhere else," she said. "It will take rather a long time before anyone can do that."

Different countries have different methods of counting Covid-19 deaths, she pointed out. And the longer-term consequences - for example, the impact on public health of lengthy enforced lockdowns, or of widespread job losses - would take years to assess. "We have simply tried to do what we believe to be right," she said.

## Bangladesh urged to open ports to allow in Rohingya refugee boats

**REBECCA RATCLIFFE**

**DHAKA, 27 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:** The Bangladeshi government has been urged to open its ports and allow two boats carrying hundreds of Rohingya refugees to come ashore so they can be given urgent medical care, food and water.

It is believed more than 500 people, including children, are onboard the stranded trawlers, which were recently seen in the Bay of Bengal but have reportedly returned to the high seas.


Last week, Bangladesh's foreign minister, Abdul Momen, said the boats would not be allowed entry, adding: "Bangladesh is always asked to take care of the responsibility of other countries" Earlier this month, Bangladesh res-



cued a separate boat that had been left adrift for two months after attempting to reach Malaysia. The charity Médecins Sans Frontières, which treated about 400 survivors, said the passengers were mostly aged between 12 and 20, and some younger children were also onboard. More than 70 people are reported to have died on the boat.

"Many of them couldn't stand or walk

on their own," said Hanadi Katerji, MSF nurse and medical team leader. "They were just skin and bone - a lot of them were barely alive." The boat had carried hundreds of Rohingya refugees fleeing desperate conditions in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where more than 1 million refugees live in overcrowded camps. It had attempted to reach Malaysia but was turned away.



**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.

**Symptoms of nCoV**

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

**Precautions to Prevent nCoV**



- 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.

**Treatment**

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition
- No vaccinations available as of now
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected

If you seek help, you may call :

Toll free no. 104  
District surveillance Officer  
EAST : 7028372100  
WEST : 9593297809  
NORTH : 9541957468  
SOUTH : 7407691463  
New STNM  
AMS : 9434711402

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## Politically Empowered Women

*The idea scares the establishment which is why they dodge and sabotage*

Reservation, even though its pursuit is obsessive, has been ineffectual by and large and is excessively compromised. There is hence no reason it will help empower women. Power, everyone involved in securing empowerment for the womenfolk of the nation through reservations, should realize is never gifted, it has to be claimed, snatched even. Reservations, not just for women but of any kind, in elected positions force an uneasy compromise in the political sphere and promote segregation more than assimilation. That said, reservations for the under-represented sections of society is required to strip away the restraints of the social structure that the nation is trying to grow out of even at seventy. On that justification, the reservations already secured for women in panchayati raj institutions is a good move. The reservations would have worked if women start getting elected even from the unreserved wards, moving beyond the quota on their own merit. This, they can achieve in two ways – with their performance as elected representatives and by leveraging their numbers. If women can earn the stereotype of being considerate and effective representatives, then voters elsewhere [outside the reserved wards] will demand women representatives too, and as the demand gathers strength, political parties will begin offering even more tickets for women.

Before that can happen, however, the field will need to be leveled so that elected women representatives acquire the critical mass required to tip-over status quo. At present, women enjoy only token representation, and many of even these seats and tickets through their pedigree. This constricts their feminist instincts, but if there were enough of them in positions of power and influence, real empowerment could be unleashed. It is perhaps this eventuality that scares the establishment so much that its cohorts have managed to stall the Women's Reservation Bill for twenty years. The Bill is of the United Front Government vintage, introduced in the Lok Sabha in September 1996. Just like no one really remembers what the United Front Government at the Centre was, no one really remembers that there is this 'pending Bill' in parliament. And so the charade continues. As for the Bill itself, it did not even call for a permanent reservation, but maybe it was its circulation through all constituencies that frightened the patriarchs. The Bill called for reserving 33% of the seats in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies for women. As per the draft, the seats were to be reserved for women on a rotation basis and would be determined by draw of lots, in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections, meaning that over three elections, every constituency will get a chance to elect a woman representative. The draft proposed that reservation of seats for women would cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of the amendment Act, i.e. after every constituency had received the opportunity to elect a woman representative. And the men who currently hold all power will not even allow that, for the obvious reason that if there are 33% women at all levels of decision-making at any given time, they could change how things are done. And that obviously scares the powers-that-be. That is also why this is an initiative that needs to be snatched and delivered.

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## Five years on from the earthquake in Bhaktapur, Nepal, heritage-led recovery is uniting community

VANICKA ARORA  
*theconversation.com*

Since the Gorkha earthquake killed almost 9,000 people in April 2015, Nepal has been on a slow and arduous route to recovery. Nepal's vibrant cultural heritage of monuments, religious places, crafts, festivals and traditional practices has been key to this process.

Heritage reconstruction in Nepal has been prioritised in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kathmandu Valley and received vast amounts of international assistance. But this reconstruction has also become the source of growing tensions between global institutions, national politics and local aspirations.

Bhaktapur city is home to one of seven monument zones of the valley. It has been undertaking a novel form of locally led recovery, focusing on built heritage to restore its tourist potential and – more importantly – rebuild community life and the resilience of residents.

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### HERITAGE IN RECOVERY

Bhaktapur is 13km from Kathmandu with a population of 82,000. The city has a long history stretching back to the 12th century as a prominent seat of power for the Malla Dynasty.

The central Durbar Square, an ensemble of palaces, temples and rest-houses, showcases centuries of history, architecture and craftsmanship. De-

clared a World Heritage Site in 1979, Bhaktapur is often referred to as a city of "living heritage", with over 130 heritage sites and an annual calendar of festivals, processions and crafts.

Bhaktapur suffered extensively in the earthquake, with over 300 deaths and 2,000 wounded. Over 30,000 houses and 116 monuments were significantly damaged.

For residents, heritage reconstruction is a prominent, tangible sign of post-earthquake recovery, offering a renewed sense of local pride. Sites being reconstructed are not simply monuments for tourists to visit, but essential places for public life: temples for worship and rest-houses for community gatherings.

The president of one of the local user committees, Ram Hari Kora, tells me why he volunteers for heritage reconstruction: "All these monuments are properties left by our ancestors. They have cultural significance as well."

Continuing to celebrate festivals has become the city's way of returning to normalcy. The annual August festival of Gai Jatra commemorates the dead through a week-long series of rituals and processions through the city.

Images of deceased family members are part of the processions, accompanied by riotous and energetic dances, traditional costumes and masks.

In 2015, the festival offered locals the opportunity to share in collective grief.

### GLOBAL HERITAGE, LOCAL ACTION

Five years on, close to 80% of the restoration and reconstruction work in Bhaktapur has been completed. Local consumer committees handle finances and planning of individual projects. Funds are supplemented with donations of cash and building materials from residents, and locals volunteer to work on reconstruction sites themselves.

Bhaktapur resident Deepesh Raj Sharma recalls how, in the aftermath of the earthquake, residents rallied together to catalogue and store important fragments of several temples that had fallen down to ensure their safety.

"Protecting our heritage and the wealth of our ancestors is part of our duty towards the community," he says.

In stark contrast to its neighbours Kathmandu and Patan, Bhaktapur maintains a high degree of autonomy in reconstruction. Less than 10% of heritage sites in Bhaktapur have been directly as-

signed to the Department of Archaeology of Nepal. The city famously declined over US\$10 million (A\$16 million) in foreign funding from the German Development Bank in 2018 over disagreements about the way reconstruction projects would be commissioned and implemented.

Several local approaches conflict with international guidelines on heritage protection, which has led to critiques by conservation experts. The use of new materials and techniques and the lack of detailed documentation and research are ongoing concerns.

But most locals I interviewed are satisfied with the steady progress that is visible within the city. Many have a distinct sense of ownership of their city's heritage recovery.

Literature student Samridhi Prajapati tells me: "Ongoing reconstruction of heritage makes me proud, because this way we can preserve our culture and encourage tourism side by side."

### NOT ALL HERITAGE, NOT ALL PEOPLE

Unfortunately, not all Bhaktapur's heritage buildings have received the same care.

While public and community heritage has received sustained attention and funding, many private houses have disappeared into piles of rubble. Houses that survived have been languishing.

Housing needs to follow strict bylaws to qualify for funding incentives, leading to conflicts slowing down reconstruction. Concerns for safety and efficiency also override heritage, so almost all new houses are built using modern construction materials. The city's ageing housing stock is being abandoned or replaced.

Heritage is not a priority for all of Bhaktapur's residents, particularly its poorest and most marginalised communities, which have more immediate concerns about housing, food and employment. For them, recovery is a distant dream and heritage is a luxury.

But Bhaktapur's heritage recovery process leverages its past for its future, building disaster resilience and fostering social and cultural ties while rebuilding local and national identity.

As tourist guide Sahana Chitrakar tells me: "People can see their reflection in heritage, they can see their parents and grandparents, so they want to keep it for the future".

*[the writer is PhD Candidate at Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University]*

## Women's stories of breaking the mould as Muslim preachers in Kenya

HASSAN JUMA NDZOVU  
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Ramadan is a period during which Muslims across the world are deeply immersed in worship and are particularly attuned to exhortations by religious scholars.

In Kenya, Islamic public sermonising has traditionally been the domain of male clerics. However, according to my recent study, there is an emerging clique of female preachers engaging in this form of public participation through Muslim radio stations.

What explains this development? First, due to media liberalisation in the 1990s, numerous local FM radio stations were allowed to operate. These include those inclined to religious content. Second, this process of democratisation promoted a pluralism that embraced female articulations of religious doctrines and texts.

Whether espoused in a Salafi-Wahabi or Sufi framework, the emerging group of female preachers is using their advanced religious knowledge to deliver sermons through the radio stations.

My study sought to examine this phenomenon, given that radio religious sermons are easily accessible to people lacking strong literacy and religious training. This has the potential of being the most attractive religious commodity to consume.

The study also explored the controversial status of the female voice as a medium of transmitting religious knowledge to the Muslim public. Here, I was interested in interrogating the role of the female voice as a means of expression and debates

over authoritative public speech. The data led me to conclude that in spite of the limitations imposed by some conservative Islamic religious scholars, new forms of female religious authorities represent a significant development among Kenyan Muslims.

Though the Kenyan Muslim communities are generally biased towards women, there is increased public presence of women in radio programmes as a religious authority. This has raised their social reputation in society.

### WHY WOMEN HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED

Female Islamic authority in Kenya is restricted by the traditional gender customs also evident in other Muslim societies. Notwithstanding their level of Islamic knowledge, the general instructional role of women is restricted to the traditional Qur'anic school to teach to read and memorise the Qur'an. This explains why, historically, Muslim women were denied opportunities to pursue higher Islamic learning beyond the "essential" basics.

Even reputable early Muslim scholars in Kenya, like Sheikh Al-Amin Ali Mazrui and Sheikh Sayyid Ali Badawi did not make efforts to recruit and encourage women to advance their knowledge in Islamic education. What could have attributed to this scenario?

Historically, the male members of the society have occupied all the institutions of Islamic authority. These range from caliph, scholar, mufti, kadhi, Sufi Sheikh and mosque preacher. The male religious scholars regarded women to be unfit to quali-

fy for these public positions because of their supposed ability to distract the attention of the males in their company.

These conservative restrictions led Azara Mudira, a leading female scholar who sought to feminise Islamic education in Kenya, to establish an advanced Islamic theological school for Muslim women in Kenya in 1987. Established in Nairobi, its mission is

- to challenge the exclusionary male-centered tradition of advanced education in Islamic studies and
- to create an alternative space for authoritative intervention by Muslim women Islamic scholars in the religious realm.

A few female preachers in Kenya have made their mark. One illustrious contemporary example is that of Nafisa Khitamy Badawi, who emerged as one of the highly respected female religious authorities in Kenya (and maybe the East African region).

Despite their advanced education, Muslim women are not mandated to speak in public. They must also not engage in a public disputation of religious matters. However, this notion is being put into question with the appearance of female preachers who offer lectures – mawaidha in Kiswahili – to the Muslim public in coastal Kenya.

### WOMEN'S VOICES

Regardless of their exceptional position as female preachers, these women are confronted with the challenge of justifying their activities. They have to convince the male religious scholars that they are knowl-

edgeable. They also have to plead the case that – in spite of being women – their voice is deep and less feminine. And not soft and seductive.

This is because female preachers are confronted with the prevailing belief that classifies their voices as nakedness (aura). One of the female preachers argued that, "For me being at the radio station is similar to being behind a curtain, a strategy that Aisha used to conceal herself while addressing her male students."

According to Islamic history, Aisha – the wife of Prophet Muhammad – was very knowledgeable on Islamic matters. Several companions of Prophet Muhammad went to her to seek religious knowledge, but behind a curtain. In equating a radio station to a curtain, the female preachers emphasized that it is "possible to interact with the public without people [read men] seeing me."

Female preachers in coastal Kenya are compelled to talk with a "manly" voice in order for them to be accepted and provided with a platform to articulate issues concerning their faith. As a result, the female preachers can only exist with the consent of the male religious authorities in the Muslim communities.

But female preachers are reluctant to challenge the existing behavioural norms. This out of fear of losing the preaching platforms availed to them at the Muslim radio stations. Their adherence to the "acceptable" religious and social norms guarantees their participation in the Muslim public sphere.

*[the writer is Senior Lecturer of Religious Studies, Moi University]*



# Meghalaya wants lockdown to continue beyond May 3: CM

**SHILLONG, APR 27 (PTI):** Meghalaya wants the lockdown in the state to continue beyond May 3 to stem the spread of COVID-19, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said on Monday after a teleconference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The chief minister, however, said some relaxations will be introduced in green zones and non-COVID-19 affected districts after the nationwide shutdown has been lifted.

"At the video conference called by Honble PM @narendramodi ji and Honble Home Minister @AmitShah ji. We have mooted to continue with the lockdown in #Meghalaya.

#CovidUpdates," Sangma tweeted after the video conference.

Meghalaya has so far reported 12 COVID-19 positive cases of which 11 are active and one person has died. Two districts have been classified as red zones.

Sangma suggested to the prime minister that the Meghalaya model of



"Rapid Response System", where the health department, general administration and police respond in unison within a specified time for detection of the new COVID-19 cases, be adopted elsewhere, too.

He said, "The rapid response system will enable the government to work at the micro-level, like the panchayat institutions, and prepare us for any such situation that may arise

in the future."

The chief minister suggested that the response of different stakeholders should be specified in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs) so they can respond within an hour of getting information about a patient.

Sangma also recommended setting up an 'Economic Task Force' by all states for exchange of ideas for reviving economic activities while

adhering to necessary precautionary protocols.

"There is an economic state to state dependence. The establishment of economic task force will help states and their neighbours to a large extent in devising practical measures to revive the economy," he added.

He also underscored the need for integrating technology general governance practices health care and business."

Sangma was the first

chief minister to make the submissions during the video conference.

Meanwhile, the state government on Monday relaxed a number of activities, including the sale of essential goods and their movement through courier services, and online sale of essential commodities, except for the state capital Shillong and in Myliem Block of East Khasi Hills District, Chief Secretary M S Rao said.

# Centre making conflicting statements on lockdown: Mamata

**KOLKATA, APR 27 (PTI):** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday alleged that the Centre was making contradictory statements on enforcement of the lockdown, and wanted greater clarity on the recent union home ministry order on reopening shops.

Claiming that many states were not allowed to speak during prime minister Narendra Modi's video conference with chief ministers owing to the rotation system, Banerjee said given a chance she would have raised several questions, including the need to send central teams to



Bengal. "The Centre is making conflicting statements on lockdown. There is no clarity. We are in favour of lockdown.

But the Centre on one hand emphasises on enforcement of the lockdown,

and on other hand it issues order to open shops.

"If you open shops, how would you enforce lockdown? I think the Centre should come out with a clarification," Banerjee said.

# Tripura working to increase production in primary sector

**AGARTALA, APR 27 (PTI):** Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb on Monday said his government has started work to increase production in primary sectors like agriculture, horticulture, poultry and dairy farming to deal with losses suffered due to the lockdown.

He said Tripura usually earns around Rs 1,500 crore per annum from the rubber productions, which suffered losses of Rs 250 crore due to the lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Deb said poultry, fisheries, animal husbandry, dairy, agriculture, horticulture and floriculture could generate early income with less investment and may be focused to increase primary sector productivity

"... considering the present situation, the deadline set by our government for achieving self-sufficiency in primary sectors has been reduced by 1-2 years so that the economy which suffered a lot due to COVID-19 pandemic can be balanced if produc-

tion could be increased in primary sectors," a government press statement quoting the chief minister said on Monday.

Deb said his government is considering providing subsidized loans under various government schemes in primary sectors.

"Closure of rubber industries in some states due to lockdown might be the reason for Rs 250 crore losses. So the government has decided to boost the primary sectors as an alternative to increase the revenue," he added.

"A good number of people, especially from indigenous communities, are involved in fisheries sector for livelihood.

Fish seeds are produced in Tripura. Andhra Pradesh procures fish seeds of Rs 150 crore from West Bengal. If Tripura can meet the demand then the state will earn the same amount and the income of fish cultivators will increase substantially," Deb said.

He said his government is already in touch

with Andhra Pradesh on the issue and urged everyone associated with fishery sector to work hard so that Tripura can supply fish seeds to Andhra Pradesh.

Deb said Tripura produces plenty of fruits like jackfruit, pineapple and oranges, adding that his government is contemplating to apply "one district, one fruit or one crop" formula up to block level to increase productivity three times.

Deb also stressed on increasing dairy, agriculture production and output in other primary sectors to achieve self sufficiency.

The chief minister also appealed to people to strictly maintain social distancing everywhere in the state.

He said, single shops and rural markets could open by maintaining the social distancing norms but urged market committees to follow the norms and guidelines.

Deb said his government has planned to engage volunteers for thermal screening of visitors in the markets.

# Bus operators in Bengal seek financial help from Gadkari

**KOLKATA, APR 27 (PTI):** Two bus operators' associations in West Bengal said on Monday that they have written to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari seeking a financial package for the passenger transport industry, which has taken a severe hit amid the coronavirus-triggered lockdown.

Drawing attention of the Road Transport and Highways minister to the plight of thousands of bus owners and their employees, the Joint Council of Bus Syndicates and Inter and Intra Region Bus Association said the industry would suffer an irreparable loss without any aid from the government.

"The operators of around 49,000 buses in the state and over 2.5 lakh workers are in financial distress on account of the lockdown," Joint Council of Bus Syndicates general secretary Tapan Banerjee said.

Pallab Majumdar, the general secretary of Inter and Intra Region Bus Association, in the letter to Gadkari, said bus operators and employees were finding it difficult to sustain their livelihood.

# UGC calls meet to discuss fresh admissions, exams

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Monday called an emergent meeting to discuss issues of academic calendar and conduct of examinations as well as fresh admissions postponed due to COVID-19 lockdown. The commission officials deliberated on the recommendations made by two panels set up to look into the issues of academic loss and online education in the wake of the lockdown in the country due to the coronavirus pandemic.

One of the committees led by Haryana University Vice-Chancellor RC Kuhad was formed to look into the ways of conducting exams in universities amid the lockdown and work on an alternate academic calendar.

The second committee, to suggest measures to improve online education, was led by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) VC Nageshwar Rao. Both the panels submitted their reports on Friday last week.

"An emergent meeting was held today through video conferencing. Both the reports, guidelines and implementations plans were discussed at length and some suggestions were given by the commission members. We will soon issue guidelines for universities and colleges," UGC Secretary Rajnish Jain said.

Universities and schools across the country have been closed since March 16 when the Union government announced a countrywide classroom shutdown as one of the measures to contain the outbreak. Later, a nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24 which has now been extended till May 3.

The panels are believed to have recommended that the academic session be started from September than July and universities should conduct online exams if they have the infrastructure and means or wait for the lockdown to get over and then decide a date for pen-and-paper examinations.

# 'No mask, no fuel' rule implemented in Arunachal capital



**ITANAGAR, APR 27 (PTI):** The Arunachal Pradesh government has asked all petrol depots and gas agencies here to refuse service to customers who visit their outlets without wearing mask, an official said on Monday.

District Food and Civil Supplies Officer (DFC-SO) Amit Bengia, in a notice issued to the fuel stations, said the government's move was aimed at ensuring safety of people living in the state capital, amid the spurt in COVID-19 cases across the country.

"No consumer will be allowed to purchase fuel or LPG cylinders in the capital region without a mask," Bengia added. Taking to Twitter, Chief

Minister Pema Khandu also stated that 'no mask, no fuel' rule has been implemented in Itanagar.

Capital Complex Petroleum Depot Association president Arun Kipa Loram said necessary instructions have been forwarded to petrol pump owners and managers in this regard.

"We have specifically asked them to ensure that there is no negligence during working hours and appealed to the people to follow the government order and wear masks when they step out to buy fuel," Loram said.

Meanwhile, the administration in the state capital has designated the Police Training Cen-

tre (PTC) at Banderdewa near here as the "official quarantine centre" for people arriving from outside.

Doctors along with health workers, magistrate and police personnel have been stationed at the centre for screening the returnees.

"People coming from other states to Itanagar will be quarantined at the PTC for 14 days or more to avoid chances of virus transmission. The entire PTC area has been disinfected on Sunday under the supervision of Naharlagun SDPO R Kamsi and Deputy Superintendent of Police (Headquarters) Gari Tai," Capital SP Tumme Amo said.

# Amit Khare assumes charge as I&B Secretary

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** Amit Khare, a 1985-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre, on Monday assumed charge as Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for a second time.

Khare, who was appointed Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for the first time in May 2018, was replaced by Ravi Mittal in December last year.

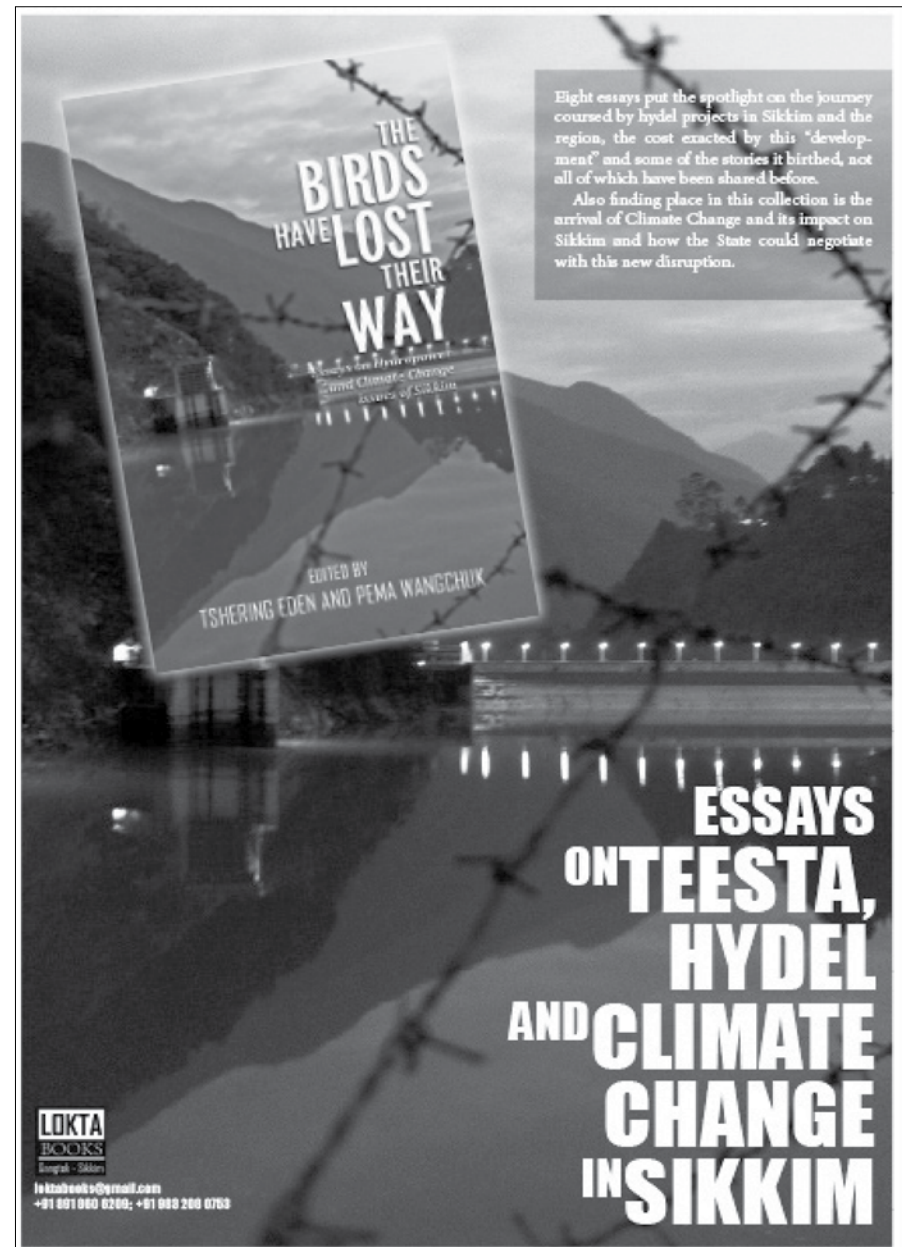
In a bureaucratic reshuffle on Sunday, Higher Education Secretary



Amit Khare was given additional charge of the I&B Ministry, while Mittal was shifted to the Department of Sports.

Khare, who has been an old hand in the I&B Ministry, comes in at a

time the media industry's finances have been hit hard due to the coronavirus pandemic. He will also have a crucial role in dissemination of information related with the pandemic.





# Many thought I would be last person to play for India: Bumrah

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** Jasprit Bumrah has risen rapidly to become one of the leading fast bowlers in the world but he says many thought that he would be the "last person to play for India" given his unusual bowling action.

The Indian pacer made this revelation during a live session on Instagram with former India batsman Yuvraj Singh.

"Many people told me that I won't play for long, there was an expectation that the last person to play for the country would be me," said Bumrah when Yuvraj asked him about his high-arm bowling action.

"They told me that I would just play one or two Ranji Trophy games, that it (the action) is difficult for the body. But I kept on improving and I persisted with my ac-



tion," said the 26-year-old, who made his India debut in January 2016 following his exploits in the IPL.

Bumrah, without taking names, also revealed

the inspiration behind his action.

"I have not taken special coaching and whatever I have learnt is from seeing the TV. I used to replicate the action of a

tennis ball bowler.

"I don't know when this action was developed. Till under-19, I had a different action. That used to change, but when this action got developed,

then nobody allowed me to change it and I worked on it," he said.

Bumrah has gone on to play 64 ODIs, 50 T20s and 14 Tests for the country since breaking into the side.

He made his Test debut in January 2018 and in quick time, became Virat Kohli's go to bowler even in the five-day format.

"...I value Test cricket as we have to work hard for every wicket and it's satisfying. Every Test is important for me, even though I haven't played (a Test) in India, I'm waiting (for it)," he said.

During the chat, Yuvraj reminded Bumrah that he had predicted that the pacer would go on to become the "number one bowler in the world".

And he did in 2017 when he reached the top spot in the T20 rankings.

## Serie A edges towards resumption but La Liga may not return before summer

**ROME, 27 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:** The Italian top flight edged closer to resuming behind closed doors on Sunday after the country's prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, gave the go-ahead for professional sports teams to resume training in May.

As part of measures to ease the national lockdown during a televised address, Conte said individual training could start on 4 May, with players still respecting social distancing rules, and that team training could begin on 18 May. Conte said the sports minister, Vincenzo Spadafora, would work "intensively" with scientists and league officials to ensure training was safe. Conte added that the next step would be to resume sporting events behind closed doors, but did not give a potential date.

"We will try to see if they can continue with the championships that are suspended," Conte said. "We will only reach this conclusion if it can be guaranteed that it is safe. We don't want our athletes to get sick."

"I'm passionate for football," Conte added. "Like many Italians, I initially found it strange that the championship could be interrupted or suspended, but I think even the most ardent fan understands there wasn't an alternative."

The Italian FA (FIGC) has already drawn up a medical protocol for training. Each club will form a core group of players and staff who will be tested and then isolated in a training camp. There are also plans to donate five Covid-19 test kits for each one used by clubs.

Italy was the first European country to be hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic and Serie A has been suspended since 9 March. Eight-time defending champions Juventus are one point clear of Lazio at the top; every team has at least 12 games left to play.

In Spain, the outlook appears less positive after the health minister,

Salvador Illa, said elite sports are unlikely to return until the summer. The league has also advised clubs that player testing has been put on hold because "the resumption of training sessions is going to be delayed".

The La Liga president, Javier Tebas, has been bullish about the need to complete the current campaign to avoid significant financial losses. The league has proposed a strict four-phase protocol to resume training, with Tebas putting forward three potential restart dates: 29 May, 7 June and 28 June.

Top-flight football has been suspended in Spain since 10 March, with the national sports ministry setting out a plan for a return to action in closed stadiums. Illa was careful not to set any date for a return during Sunday's coronavirus briefing, perhaps signalling a shift in government strategy.

"I cannot say now if professional football will be able to restart before the summer, it would be imprudent of me," Illa said. The health minister added that La Liga's plans to provide daily Covid-19 tests for players would require government approval.

"There is an order from the health ministry which is in place for all types of groups, including professional football," he said. "They have to put whatever type of diagnostic tests they have at the disposition of the regional governments." The Spanish footballers' association (AFE) has written to the government to express players' concern over tests and a resumption of training. The AFE added that players believe "there are other groups that need the tests more at this time", and that they want the government and not the league to make key decisions. Rafa Ramos, president of the association of Spanish football club doctors, has said that footballs and playing surfaces will have to be sterilised if matches are to resume.

## Five substitutions proposed by Fifa to help teams after coronavirus layoff



**LONDON, 27 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:** Teams will be able to make up to five substitutions under a Fifa proposal to help players cope with fixture congestion amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The substitutions will be allowed in a maximum of three in-play slots and at half-time to avoid unnecessary stoppages but are being proposed in recognition of the long layoff and anticipated high volume of matches if and when games resume.

The Fifa proposal is subject to the approval of the game's law-making body, the International Football Association Board, and competitions such as the Premier

League could then decide whether to implement it.

"When competitions resume, such competitions are likely to face a congested match calendar with a higher than normal frequency of matches played in consecutive weeks," a Fifa spokesperson said.

"Safety of the players is one of Fifa's main priorities. One concern in this regard is that the frequency of matches may increase the risk of potential injuries due to a player overload.

"In light of this and the unique challenge faced globally in delivering competitions according to the originally foreseen calendar, Fifa pro-

poses a larger number of substitutions be temporarily allowed at the discretion of the relevant competition organiser.

"In competitions where less than five substitutions are currently allowed, each team would now be given the possibility to use up to five substitutions, with the possibility of an additional substitution remaining during extra time where relevant."

The temporary dispensation would apply to competitions due to be completed or to start in 2020 or 2021. It would also cover national team matches up to and including 31 December 2021.

## Not gutted about IPL snub: Vihari

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** Happy to be a Test specialist, India batsman Hanuma Vihari says being snubbed by IPL franchises this season has neither made him sad nor affected his belief that he is good enough for the shorter formats as well.

Vihari was bought by Delhi Capitals for Rs 2 crore in the 2019 IPL but he didn't find any takers this season, which has been indefinitely suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I realised that when things are not in your control, you can't do much about it. No regrets. I am not gutted about IPL (snub)," Vihari said during an Instagram chat on the show 'Homerun with AV'.

"My focus always was on Tests from an early age and I am happy I could achieve whatever I did,"



added Vihari, who kept his base price at Rs 50 lakh this season. Vihari said he is in awe of captain Virat Kohli's work ethic and has learnt a lot by watching his preparation before matches. "The best part of Kohli's game is his preparation. I have learnt that from him. His work ethic is also amazing."

A regular in India's squad for overseas Tests, Vihari said he always tries to put a price on his wicket so that he is not left out of the team. "I am ready to do anything for my team. I al-

ways tried to score runs, dig deep and play long innings whenever I play abroad. I always try to do my best so that team can't drop me," said the 26-year-old, who scored a gritty 55 in the second Test in New Zealand earlier this year.

Successful as a Test specialist, Vihari believes he also has the ability to do well in other formats.

"See I can't change what people think about you. I have to score runs consistently and those are the thoughts that come to my mind.

## French Open champ turns shelf stacker during pandemic



**BERLIN, APR 27 (AFP):** A year after winning the men's doubles title at Roland Garros, German tennis player Kevin Krawietz is helping out during the coronavirus pandemic by stacking shelves in his local supermarket.

"I've been working for a discount supermarket on a 450 euros (488) basis for a few weeks now," Krawietz, who won the 2019 French Open title with Antoine Mies, told magazine Der Spiegel.

Munich-based Krawietz, ranked 13th in doubles, says that as a pro he has a special permit to "train three or four times a week" at a local tennis hall.

The 2020 tennis season has been decimated by the coronavirus and the French Open has been postponed from May until September.

When not training, Krawietz, 28, is busy

stacking shelves during the pandemic. Germany currently has 155,193 cases of the virus and 5,750 deaths so far.

"I sort out the shelves, make sure the sausage and cheese is well stocked and sort out the empty boxes," he explained.

"Last week, I was on security duty at the entrance, spraying shopping trolleys with disinfectant." Krawietz had been considering "a normal job", but "thanks to coronavirus, I now have the opportunity to do so".

He says the experience gives him a greater "appreciation" of his career as a tennis pro.

"My colleagues are sometimes in the shop from half past five to fill the shelves," he said.

"I, on the other hand, have had the luxury of being able to turn my hobby into my profession." Krawietz and Mies

enjoyed a breakthrough year in 2019, backing up victory in Paris by reaching the semi-finals of the US Open. Before that however, Krawietz admits often having struggled to make ends meet, "some years I finished in the red".

"Once I won a little over a thousand euros in prize money for a tournament in Italy, that was my weekly salary," he added.

"I have to pay tax on that, take out travel expenses and the fee for a coach. There was not much left." He backed Novak Djokovic's recent calls to set up an aid fund to help low-ranking pros struggling financially.

"That can certainly help some players survive," said Krawietz.

"But all in all it would be nice if we - independent of coronavirus - could make it possible to make a good living out of the sport even beyond the Top 100.

## Pressure of replacing Dhoni behind wickets was immense: KL Rahul

**MUMBAI, APR 27 (PTI):** The pressure to replace iconic Mahendra Singh Dhoni behind the stumps was "immense" due to high expectations from fans says K L Rahul, who has been doing the wicket-keeping duty for India in the limited overs format for some time now.

Dhoni quit Test cricket in 2014 and has not played for India in the limited overs format since last year's ODI World Cup in England.

Rahul kept the wickets in the limited overs series against Australia in January this year and also during the team's tour to New Zealand.

"I was nervous when I

was doing it for India because of the crowd pressure. If you fumble, people feel that you cannot replace MS Dhoni. The pressure of replacing a legendary wicket-keeper like MSD was immense as it involved people accepting someone else behind the stumps," Rahul told Star Sports on its show 'Cricket Connected'.

Rahul, who has played 32 ODIs and 42 T20Is, said keeping the wickets is not alien to him since he dons the gloves during the Indian Premier League (IPL) and also when he plays for his Ranji side Karnataka. "People who fol-

low cricket know that I haven't been away from wicket-keeping for too long as I donned the gloves in the IPL and every time I played for Karnataka," the 28-year-old said.

"I am always in touch with wicket-keeping but am also somebody who is more than willing to take up the role if the team needs me to," he stressed.

Dhoni's career is a matter of intense speculation. Many former players feel that it won't be easy for Dhoni to make it to the national squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in Australia.

## White House aiming for Trump pivot from virus to economy

Washington, Apr 27 (AP): After two months of frantic response to the coronavirus, the White House is planning to shift President Donald Trump's public focus to the burgeoning efforts aimed at easing the economic devastation caused by the pandemic.

Days after he publicly mused that scientists should explore the injection of toxic disinfectants as a potential virus cure, Trump has now rejected the utility of his daily task force briefings, where he has time and again clashed with scientific experts. Trump's aides are aiming to move the president onto more familiar and safer, they hope ground: talking up the economy, in tighter controlled settings.

It's a political imperative as allies have seen an erosion in support for the

president. What had been his greatest asset in the re-election campaign, his ability to blanket news headlines with freewheeling performances, has become a daily liability. At the same time, new Republican Party polling shows Trump's path to a second term depends on the public's perception of how quickly the economy rebounds from the state-by-state shutdowns meant to slow the spread of the virus.

Some states have started to ease closure orders, and Trump is expected to begin to highlight his administration's work in helping businesses and employees.

Aides said the president would hold more frequent roundtables with CEOs, business owners and beneficiaries of the trillions of dollars in federal aid already approved by Congress, and

begin to outline what he hopes to see in a future recovery package. Trump last left the White House grounds a month ago, and plans are being drawn up for a limited schedule of travel within the next few weeks, aide said. It would be a symbolic show that the nation is beginning to reopen.

The shift comes in conjunction with what the White House sees as encouraging signs across the country, with the pace of new infections stabilizing and deaths declining. Still, medical experts warn that the virus will remain until at least a vaccine is developed and that the risk of a severe second wave is high if social distancing is relaxed too quickly or if testing and contact tracing schemes aren't developed before people return to normal behaviors.



# China's Wuhan city discharges last COVID-19 patient from hospital

BY K J M VARMA

**BEIJING, APR 27 (PTI):** The last COVID-19 patient in Wuhan has been discharged and the hospitals in the epicentre of the global coronavirus pandemic in the central Chinese city have no coronavirus cases for the first time after more than three months of arduous battle against the deadly virus that infected over 80,000 people on the mainland, health officials said.

China's National Health Commission (NHC) announced on Monday that three new confirmed coronavirus cases, including two from the Chinese returning from abroad and one local transmission were reported on Sunday.

The overall death toll stood at 4,633 and no new fatalities were reported on Sunday. The overall confirmed cases in China reached 82,830 by Sunday, including 723 patients still being treated and 77,474 people who had been discharged.

Altogether 80 patients were discharged from the hospitals after recovery on Sunday, while the number of severe cases increased by one to 52, the NHC said.

Meanwhile, after more than three months of fight against the deadly virus, Wuhan where coronavirus first emerged in December last and became a pandemic, cleared all COVID-19 cases in hospitals on Sunday.

The outcome was



earned through the hard work of medical workers in Wuhan and those sent from across the country, Mi Feng, a spokesperson for the NHC, was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

This came as a 77-year-old man nicknamed Ding tested negative for the second time for coronavirus in the capital city of Hubei Province, the report said.

He no longer had clinical symptoms and was able to be discharged, an official with Wuhan Municipal Health Commission said.

Sunday's announcement was a new testament that the local spread of COVID-19 in the country has basically been curbed, it said.

It was also a milestone for Wuhan. This came five days after its cases dropped to double

digits and less than 70 days after daily hospitalised cases peaked at 38,020, Xinhua reported.

"It is a historic day," said Shang You, a critical care unit doctor in Wuhan. "We have been waiting for this day for so long."

As of Sunday, 627 Chinese who has returned from abroad were being treated with 22 in severe condition, the NHC said.

Also on Sunday, 25 new asymptomatic cases, including one from abroad, were reported on the mainland.

The NHC said 974 suspected asymptomatic cases, including 131 from abroad, were still under medical observation.

Asymptomatic cases refer to people who tested positive for the coronavirus but develop

no symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat.

They are infectious and pose a risk of spreading to others. The novel coronavirus is believed to have originated in a wet market in Wuhan and first emerged in December before spreading quickly worldwide.

Beginning January 23, Wuhan was put under a lockdown that lasted 76 days.

In Wuhan, scores of hospitals were designated to treat COVID-19 patients and 16 temporary hospitals were set up, opening up 60,000 hospital beds to meet the surging demand. Over 42,000 medical workers were sent to Hubei from across the country, as well as key medical supplies such as ventilators, protective suits, masks and daily necessities.

Since February 18, the cases in Wuhan have been on the decline. As of

the end of Saturday, Wuhan had reported a total of 50,333 confirmed cases and 3,869 deaths. The recovery rate has topped 92 per cent.

In Hubei, no new confirmed cases have been reported for over 20 days, and the number of remaining cases dropped below 50, the report said.

Life is returning to normal. Hubei's work resumption rate of major industrial firms has reached 98.2 percent and most of their workers have got back to work.

Schools will soon open. Students in the final year of senior high schools in Hubei are expected to return to classes on May 6, it said.

Officials said for the next step Wuhan must keep guarding against imported cases while preventing a resurgence of the outbreak.

## Netanyahu 'confident' US will support West Bank annexation

**JERUSALEM, APR 27 (AP):** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said he was confident he will be able to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank this summer, with support from the US.

Speaking to an online gathering of evangelical Christian supporters of Israel, Netanyahu said President Donald Trump's Mideast plan envisions turning over Israel's dozens of settlements, as well as the strategic Jordan Valley, to Israeli control.

A couple of months from now, I'm confident that that pledge will be honored, that we will be able to celebrate another historic moment in the history of Zionism, Netanyahu said.

Israeli annexation of West Bank territory would be highly controversial, drawing widespread international condemnations and extinguishing any lingering hopes of establishing a viable independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The Palestinians, with wide international backing, seek the entire

West Bank as part of an independent state.

They have already threatened to cancel existing peace agreements if Netanyahu moves forward with his plan, while the European Union foreign policy chief said annexation would be a violation of international law and force the bloc to act accordingly.

The UN's Mideast envoy said such a step would ignite the region.

But Netanyahu and his hard-line base are eager to move ahead while Trump remains in office. Annexation would be popular with Trump's evangelical base as he seeks to shore up support ahead of a difficult reelection battle.

In Washington, a US official said the American position hasn't changed.

The official said the US is prepared to recognize Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty in parts of the West Bank, and that the US is consulting closely with Israel on the timing and scope of those actions.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss

the matter with the media. Netanyahu last week reached a power-sharing deal with his main rival, Benny Gantz. Although Gantz, a former Israeli military chief, has given only lukewarm support for West Bank annexation, their coalition agreement allows Netanyahu to present the plan to his Cabinet and to parliament for fast-track approval.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, and its settlements are now home to some 500,000 Israelis, in addition to over 200,000 Israelis living in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

After Trump unveiled his Mideast plan in January, Netanyahu pledged to begin annexing territory immediately. But the Trump administration quickly delayed the plan, and the sides set up a joint committee to formulate a plan together.

Netanyahu addressed a conference marking the 100th anniversary of the San Remo Conference, a post-World War I gathering in Italy that helped lay the foundations for Israel's establishment in 1948.

## 'We're going out!': Spanish kids reclaim streets after weeks indoors

After six weeks stuck at home, Spain's children were allowed out Sunday to run, play or go for a walk as the government eased one of the world's toughest coronavirus lockdowns.

Spain is among the hardest hit countries, with a death toll running at more than 23,000, putting it behind only the United States and Italy despite stringent restrictions imposed from March 14.

But unlike other countries, Spain's children were kept indoors, with only adults allowed to leave the house to buy food, medicine, briefly walk the dog or seek urgent medical care.

On Sunday, Spanish children took to the streets of Madrid to enjoy their newfound freedom after weeks under lockdown.

Some rollerbladed while others rode bikes or pushed toy prams around, many wearing small masks to cover their faces.

"The children just went out with my wife.

They're all properly equipped with masks and gloves," said Miguel Lopez, father of two children aged six and three, and who lives in an apartment in northwest Madrid. "It's like a day out for them, it's the most interesting thing for them in a month," Lopez told AFP.

- 'Super excited' -

Alvaro Paredes, seven, and his brother Javier, four, were just getting ready for their big adventure.

"We are going to go out in an hour's time, going about a kilometre (0.6 miles) on scooter or bicycle to do a tour around our neighbourhood," their mother Inmaculada Paredes said.

"They are super excited, very, very impatient. They were up at 6:30 am, saying 'We're going out, We're going out!'," she said.

From Sunday a maximum of three children under 14 years will be able to go out once a day, for one hour between 9:00 am (0700 GMT) and 9:00 pm, accompanied by one parent -- and no fur-

ther than one kilometre from their home. Health Minister Salvador Illa on Friday said it would be "a first step towards easing" the lockdown after earlier insisting that people be very prudent "because the health of the nation is at stake".

The restriction on children had come under increasing criticism in Spain, with specialists warning of the danger it posed for their health and mental wellbeing. Last week one of Spain's deputy prime ministers Pablo Iglesias apologised to the nation's children for keeping them at home for six weeks, acknowledging it was "not at all easy" for them and saying thank you.

- 'Common sense' -

The government's initial plan to allow children to accompany adults only on their rare authorised trips, for example to supermarkets, satisfied no one and prompted a hasty retreat.

"All our common sense tells us that it is safe for the children," said mother Paredes.

## 17 police officers killed by coronavirus in Peru

Seventeen police officers in Peru have died after contracting novel coronavirus while enforcing the nation's pandemic lockdown, officials and state media said.

Authorities admitted earlier this week that at least 1,300 officers had been infected by COVID-19.

On Saturday new interior minister Gaston Rodriguez, who was sworn in a day earlier after the sudden resignation of his predecessor when the infections tally emerged, said: "We have 17 deceased police officers nationwide, 11 of them in Lima."

The high number is linked to "the exposure that police officers have when intervening with people who violate the measures issued to contain the spread of the coronavirus," state news agency Andina said Saturday. Peru has been on lockdown since March 16.

Rodriguez said his department had allocated 50 million soles (\$15 million) "for the purchase of protection elements such as masks and gloves" for Peru's police.

He added that roughly 220,000 COVID-19 tests for the force were due to arrive by the first week of May. "We have an obligation to take care of them," said Rodriguez. "The police must be well equipped."

## Lockdowns ease as global infections near 3 million

Spanish children were allowed outside on Sunday for the first time in six weeks as countries eased lockdown measures and reopen economies gutted by the coronavirus pandemic that has infected nearly three million people worldwide.

Governments from France to Italy and the United States are gearing up for a partial easing of severe restrictions that have kept more than half of humanity indoors for weeks on end.

Coronavirus cases around the world rose to 2.9 million and deaths have doubled since April 10 -- hitting nearly 203,000 people on Sunday -- with well over half of them in Europe, according to an AFP tally. The daily toll in Western countries appeared to be levelling off and even falling, but fears abound in many places of a second surge after restrictions on movement are lifted.

Governments are planning to slowly peel back lockdown measures in order to avoid a sudden rush back to normal life -- and the risk of a resurgence amid warnings from the World Health Organization that recovered people might not be immune to reinfection.

Spanish families embraced new rules allowing children outside for the first time since March 14, with kids hopping on bicycles and scooters on the streets of Madrid -- some wearing small masks and gloves.

"They are super excited, very, very impatient. They were up at 6:30 am, saying 'We are going out, We are going out!'," Inmaculada Paredes told AFP, readying to take her seven- and four-year-old kids outdoors. Under the revised rules, children are allowed out once per day between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm, but cannot venture more than one kilometre (0.6 miles) from their homes.

The new rules were rolled out as the death toll in the hard-hit country dropped to 288 people on

Sunday, the lowest since March 30.

With more than 23,000 fatalities, Spain has the third highest death toll in the world after Italy's 26,000 and more than 53,000 in the United States. Other hard-hit countries across Europe are also starting to look toward a slow crawl back to normality.

Italy on Sunday said schools would reopen in September, while many business could resume work next week, and France was expected to unveil details of its de-confinement plan on Tuesday.

Belgium said schools and businesses will reopen from mid-May, while Germany started to reopen some shops earlier this week.

- Ramadan at home -

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia on Sunday said it would partially lift its 24-hour curfew, allowing malls and retailers to open their doors during certain hours. But the kingdom said it would maintain a round-the-clock lockdown in the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

Worshippers in the country joined hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world who marked the second day of Ramadan at home, avoiding traditional, large family meals to break their day-time fasts under social distancing rules.

Rejecting the advice of top disease experts, the US state of Georgia allowed thousands of businesses to resume operations, from hairdressers to bowling alleys.

"How long are we supposed to imprison ourselves?" said 30-year-old Mackenzie Scharf, one of many in Georgia embracing the return to something resembling normalcy.

"This is much safer than going grocery shopping," she told AFP on the beach at Tybee Island, where her five-year-old son flew a kite under a cloudless sky.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he wants to resume business in the world's biggest economy, even as medical

advisors have cautioned against easing lockdown too soon or too fast. The US leader faced a fresh volley of criticism after suggesting that coronavirus could be treated by shining ultraviolet light inside patients' bodies, or with injections of household disinfectant.

He lashed out at the media on Twitter, accusing journalists of posing hostile questions, and suggested his daily coronavirus briefings were not worth his time.

"They get record ratings, & the American people get nothing but Fake News. Not worth the time & effort!," Trump wrote.

- Immunity warning -

While new reported cases appear to have plateaued at about 80,000 a day, the world remains in wait as companies and governments race to develop treatments and, eventually, a vaccine for the virus. Some governments are studying measures such as "immunity passports" as one way to get people back to work after weeks of shutdowns that have roiled the global economy.

"If I've already had corona then I'm not infectious," said Berlin resident Lothar Kopp, hoping to test positive for antibodies as it could allow him to visit his elderly mother.

But the WHO warned that people who survive infection cannot be certain they will not be hit again by the respiratory disease, which first emerged in China late last year.

"There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from #COVID19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," the UN health body said in a statement.

The White House's top pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said this week that the US will certainly have a coronavirus problem in the fall, which could be complicated by the return of seasonal flu towards the end of the year.

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## Dulquer Salmaan Explains Prabhakaran Joke In Varane Avashyamund After Outrage

Dulquer Salmaan has issued a statement assuring the Tamil community that a reference to "Prabhakaran" in

his new film Varane Avashyamund was not meant as an insult. The Malayalam film, currently streaming on Netflix, features a dog named Prabhakaran, owned by actor Suresh Gopi's character Major Unnikrishnan. The dog's name has prompted controversy with Tamil viewers interpreting it as a derogatory reference to LTTE founder Prabhakaran and an affront to Tamizh pride. Prabhakaran, who died in 2009, formed the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka and while the LTTE is considered a terrorist organization, it is viewed with some amount of sympathy by the Tamil community.

After widespread outrage, Dulquer Salmaan, who also produces the film, said in his statement, "A lot of people have brought to my notice that the Prabhakaran joke in Varane Avashyamund is insulting to the Tamizh people. It was not intentional." Instead, the 33-year-old actor explained, it is a reference to the 1988 Malayalam comedy Pattanapravesham in which a central character was named Prabhakaran. "It is a common meme in Kerala as well so it wasn't directed at any person dead or alive as our disclaimer mentions in the beginning of the film," Dulquer Salmaan's statement read.

Dulquer Salmaan also noted that a

torrent of abuse was being directed at his father, Malayalam superstar Mammootty, and at Pattanapravesham direc-



tor Sathyan Anthikad, whose son Anoop Sathyan directed Varane Avashyamund. "Hating on me and my director Anoop we can accept. Kindly keep it to us and not our fathers or senior actors from the film," Dulquer said in his statement.

"I apologise to all the good and kind Tamizh people who felt offended. I have never intended to offend anyone through my films or my words. It's genuinely a misunderstanding," Dulquer Salmaan tweeted.

Varane Avashyamund director Anoop Sathyan shared Dulquer's statement and added a clarification of his own: "The sequence is a direct reference from the Malayalam film Pattanapravesham. A hilarious scene, which is a common Meme/Sticker/Troll because of its genuine humour. It got no reference to the LTTE leader Prabhakaran."

## Samurai PC game 'Total War: Shogun 2' is free for a limited time

If being stuck at home has you going stir crazy, fret not. Video games are here to save the day once more.

Acclaimed PC strategy game Total War: Shogun 2 will be available free from 10 a.m. PDT on April 27, providing entire armies of samurai to keep you entertained. Grab it on Steam before 10 a.m. PDT on May 1, and the game is yours to keep forever.

Set in 16th century Japan, Total War: Shogun 2 has players command armies, govern settlements, and engage in diplomacy, aiming to unite warring clans under their rule. Gameplay is a mix of turn-based strategy and real-time battles, but there are also role-playing elements, with politics and personality traits influencing how you manage your generals. You can also send geisha assassins to murder your enemies, in a historically inaccurate but no less awesome touch.

Total War: Shogun 2 was well-received upon its release, winning the title of IGN's Best Strategy Game of 2011 as well as the 2012 British Academy Video Game

Award for Strategy. Even now, it's still considered one of the best games in the Total War series. Developer Creative Assembly was prompted to do this giveaway by the current coronavirus pandemic.

"The past few weeks have presented unimaginable challenges for many of us, but the remarkable collective effort being made by the global community to overcome this moment of adversity has been truly inspirational," Creative Assembly wrote in a blog post.

"With this in mind, we want to continue to encourage you all to stay home and save lives by extending a gift to everyone to help make this difficult situation a little bit easier." It will also run a sale on other Total War titles and DLC from April 27, ending 10 a.m. PDT on May 4.

If you prefer to do your gaming on consoles, Sony has also gotten into the lockdown giveaway spirit. Journey and Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection are both currently available free for PlayStation 4, and are yours to keep if you grab them before 8 p.m. PDT on May 5.

## Weeks Ago Dr. Anthony Fauci Joked That Brad Pitt Should Play Him on 'Saturday Night Live.' Brad Pitt Delivered

Weeks ago, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease Dr. Anthony Fauci says he would want "Brad Pitt, of course" to play him on Saturday Night Live. During the show's second socially distanced episode, the nation's top infectious diseases expert had his wish come true.

Pitt played what has become one of America's favorite doctors in the episode's cold open on Saturday and delivered a monologue with Fauci's signature raspy voice, enthusiastic hand gestures and commitment to making sure the facts are clear. The task at hand: addressing misinformation about the coronavirus. "There's been a lot of misinformation out there about the virus and yes the President has taken some liberties with our guidelines. So tonight, I would like to explain what the President was trying to say," Pitt said in the sketch.

Pitt expresses some reservations after a clip of Trump plays, in which the President promises that "anybody that

needs a test gets a test" and that the "tests are beautiful."

"I don't know if I would describe the test as 'beautiful,' unless your idea of beauty is having a cotton swab tickle your brain," Pitt said. "Also when he said everyone can get a test what he meant was almost no one."

Pitt also seemed distraught at Trump's now-infamous pondering about hitting the body with "very powerful light" or injecting disinfectant.

As the clip played, Pitt/Fauci was first open-mouthed and speechless before hiding behind his hands. "I know I shouldn't be touching my face but—," he said.

Pitt ends the sketch on a more earnest note, expressing his gratitude for Fauci, as well as medical worker and first responders.

"And to the real Dr. Fauci thank you for your calm and your clarity in this unnerving time and thank you to the medical workers, first responders and their families for being on the front line," Pitt said.

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**GO GROCERY!** The actress, Dakota Johnson is seen going to the grocery store in Malibu.

## I got the golden ticket: Natalie Dormer on her time on 'Game of Thrones'

**LOS ANGELES, APR 27 (PTI):** Actor Natalie Dormer, who played Margaery Tyrell on "Game of Thrones", says her character on the HBO epic fantasy series enjoyed the "perfect length of time".

Dormer's Margaery entered the series infamous for suddenly killing off its characters in the second season and literally went out in the season six finale with a blast, thanks to a scheming Cersei Lannister (Lena Heady).

The British actor said she knew about the fate of her character a year in advance.

"I was ever so grateful that I was with Jonathan (Pryce who played the High Sparrow). To have such a partner for my last scene was really a gift," she told Variety.

"I got the golden ticket, the perfect length of time. I watched season one as a fan, came in the second season, did a good solid five years just as the show had this incredible explosion, and then I got out in time to watch the end and sit on the couch again," Dormer added.

Talking about the finale of the show, which ended last May, the 38-year-old actor said showrunners Dan B Weiss and David Benioff had an "almost impossible task" in wrapping

up. The showrunners were severely criticised for below par script writing and poor portrayal of women in the eighth and final season of the HBO series, based on author George RR



Martin's book series "A Song of Ice and Fire".

Dormer said it was always going to be difficult for the writers to satisfy everyone. "By the very nature of the sheer quantity of storylines and characters, they had to start wrapping up around season six, which they did with the Tyrells and other beloved characters.

"It was almost going to be the impossible task, I think, regardless of what they had done, to satisfy a third act for everyone in the time that they had," she said.

The actor is currently seen in Showtime's "Penny Dreadful: City of Angels".

### ARIES:

You may have settled for less in the past, but that's not your style anymore. You are honing your skills, realising your magical abilities, and coming into your power. Knowing what you deserve will prove to be a turning point for you, Aries. You are ready to attract opportunities that are in alignment with who you are right now. Rule #1: learn to stay open. If you've had any guilt around self-care or choosing yourself, you're learning to let go of that too. How about starting (or ending) your day with a ritualistic bath followed by a cup of sereni-tea?

Tip: You know your worth.

### TAURUS:

You may feel like everything is falling apart. Is it really, though? Look beyond the illusion. Understand your vantage point here. This is the secret to overcoming the given obstacle. Yes, it's true that there are people who may be trying to get in the way of your success or poison others against you. Don't feel threatened by the juvenile games. Focus on what you came here to do.

Tip: Understand your vantage point in any given situation.

### GEMINI:

No love story is devoid of drama. But you're learning to take everything with a pinch of salt and focus on the essence of your relationship—the love that brought you together. Date night promises to start early in the Gemini headquarters. Single or away from your partner? You're likely to spend quality time with your siblings or somebody you consider as one. Share stories, both old and new. Know that it is vulnerability that is bringing you together.

Tip: Love like nobody's watching.

### CANCER:

There were times in the past when you resisted self-care and considered turning inwards a colossal waste of time. But you're letting go of this limiting belief. You're learning the importance of giving yourself the love you deserve. It's all about coming up with small, simple rituals that make you feel celebrated. Movement meditation is also going to be a big theme for you today.

Tip: Give movement meditation a shot.

### LEO:

As a fire sign, you revel in living on the edge. The idea of slowing down has always sounded more appealing on paper than it does in practice. But what you're experiencing now is a deep inner alchemy. Yes, there are days you resist the process. But the days you embrace mindfulness outnumber them. Remember, awareness is about the small, simple things, like connecting with the ground when you walk or sipping on your tea like it's source of ecstasy.

Tip: Slow down.

### VIRGO:

While the new moon is synonymous with beginnings, la luna in her fading glory encourages us to face our shadows; to release and to let go. Inner work is the need of the hour, Virgo. You already have a sense of what you need to part ways with. It's now time to set a strong intention and take the required action. Want to take the witchy route to liberation?

Tip: La luna, in her fading glory, is encouraging you to release.

### LIBRA:

Your relationship with confrontation has always been a complicated one. What's keeping you from speaking your truth? Do your needs not deserve to be met, Libra? Remember, the wounded child is now an empowered adult. Befriend courage, stand up for yourself, and speak your mind. This is the only way the world will meet you halfway. If you're feeling especially sensitive today, be mindful of your boundaries. Be mindful of what you may be consuming consciously or unconsciously. Most importantly, take time to ground your energy.

Tip: The wounded child is now an empowered adult.

### SCORPIO:

A powerful affirmation by Danielle LaPorte to start your day with: "I call all of my power back to me now. I am whole and complete." This is a time of reclaiming your reins, Scorpio. The limitations that once held you back are now intimidated by your very presence. It's true that there are certain things in our life that are predetermined, but don't forget the role of free will. Steer your chariot in a direction that you feel called towards, and know the Universe will realign itself for you.

Tip: Call your power back to you.

### SAGITTARIUS:

You're craving solo time like never before, especially if you've been sharing space with other people. It's okay to check out once in a while as long as you're not harming anybody in the process. Let your loved ones know your need for space as you bury yourself underneath a pile of books. You may or may not have a way around the chores though. By tapping into the gift of awareness, you will find a way to make the most mundane tasks meditative.

Tip: Your need for space is real.

### CAPRICORN:

We all have an army of angels, guides, and masters assigned to us at birth. We may not be able to see them through our naked eyes, but we can perceive them via our third eye or the 'ajna chakra'. Tune in, Capricorn. Feel their presence. Become aware of the many miracles they are manifesting on your behalf. As you do, be sure to express your gratitude for each one of them.

Tip: Your spirit team is trying to get through to you!

### AQUARIUS:

You may have been at loggerheads in the past, but you're slowly finding your balance. You're learning to appreciate their contribution to your life, and acknowledging the love that brought you together. Domestic bliss is on the cards, Aquarius. As such, interpersonal relationships are taking centre stage. Be mindful of the wounds that are calling for your attention.

Tip: Love conquers all.

### PISCES:

Your time away from the matrix has provided you with the opportunity to not just inculcate new habits, but also to put them into practice. It's not just about who you are becoming in this time period, it's about what you are taking into the world with you. Make it count, Pisces. There are positive changes on the health and wellness front too. You couldn't fathom the idea of not having access to your gym or your trainer, but look at you now! The cheat code to staying motivated: workouts that allow you to be your most playful self as you sweat it out.

Tip: Make this period of self-isolation count.