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SEX MISCONDUCT ON  
'CRIMINAL MINDS' SET**  
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AND INDIA TO BEAT CORONAVIRUS**  
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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Government formation day celebrated at Samman Bhawan

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY (IPR):**

On the occasion of Government formation day a simple function was organised at Samman Bhawan here in the capital today. Exactly a year ago SKM Government had come into power dislodging the previous regime of 25 years.

The function which was graced by the Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang as the Chief Guest was attended by his Cabinet Colleagues MLA's and lone Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba.

Addressing the gathering the Chief Minister in his short address remembered everyone who was instrumental in bringing SKM party into Government and also thanked everyone including the BJP MLA's



who are now working in tandem with the Government for the well-being of Sikkimese people.

He also urged his council of ministers MLA's and party cadres

to work tirelessly and serve the people of Sikkim with utmost care, concern and compassion. The promises which we have made to our people should be taken heed of and fulfilled one by one, he added.

The Chief Minister also added that they believe in zero enemy policy and do not believe in political witch hunt but working together for the overall development of

Sikkim and her people.

He also remembered and thanked all the COVID warriors for their commendable job and said that it's due to their effort that Sikkim has been in the green zone.

## 4415 of 8766 stranded Sikkimese have arrived so far

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY:**

State Nodal Officer [Evacuation Cell], Rinzing Chewang Bhutia today informed that till the evening of 26 May, 8766 persons have registered online to return to Sikkim out of which 4415 have been brought home.

Till now, 2063 persons have been brought home on 7 special trains from various parts of the country with the first one coming from Chennai which brought home 134 persons. Sikkimese were also brought home on trains from Gujarat [168], Bangalore, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh [814], Chandigarh [865], Kerala [79], Madhya

Pradesh [12].

He thanked Sikkim House, New Delhi as well as state nodal officers of other states for helping out in the evacuation process.

"Sikkimese had to suffer on their train journeys because they had to travel in non-AC trains because as per the national guideline AC trains were not advised since the lack of air circulation would increase the risk of infection. There was traffic congestion on the railway lines because people from other states were also travelling home. We got complaints of lack of water, food, etc and we tried our best by coordinating with Rail-

way officers, staff. The situation is such and they had to go through a lot of trouble. I apologize for the inconvenience they had to go through," said Mr Bhutia.

He informed that the entry system has been changed and now only one entry pass will be provided to returning Sikkimese. Earlier, a vehicle pass and journey pass was being provided.

Mr Bhutia stressed that online registration is a must for those wanting to return to Sikkim. When registering online there are different options of travel and accordingly different systems have been put in place, he informed.

## Make amends instead of blaming us, SDF advises SKM



**SAGAR CHETTRI**

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY:**

Sikkim Democratic Front has advised Sikkim Krantikari Morcha to stop indulging in excessive blame-games and focus instead on correcting its mistakes in how it was handling the COVID-19 situation in Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, SDF spokesperson, Ashit Rai, refuted SKM allegations accusing SDF of putting undue pressure on the State Government to im-

mediately bring back all stranded Sikkimese and then blaming it of bringing the virus to Sikkim after a returnee tested positive for COVID-19.

Mr Rai, while reiterating his party's stand that stranded Sikkimese should brought back as soon as possible, blamed the difficulties faced by returning Sikkimese on mismanagement by the State Government.

The SKM Government, he said, was misleading the people by claiming that it was pre-

pared for every eventuality and pointed out the continuing lack of testing facilities at the check-posts and slack implementation of recommended SOPs as situations which were putting Sikkim at risk.

He asserted that the government should immediately work on the demands of the SDF party to declare all quarantine centres in the state as containment zones for the safety of the people at large and suggested

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## Two migrants found dead in Shramik train

**ALLAHABAD/VARANASI, MAY 27 (PTI):**

Two migrants were found dead in a special Shramik train at a Varanasi railway station on Wednesday morning.

North Eastern Railway spokesperson Ashok Kumar said the train had arrived at the Manduadih station of Varanasi from Mumbai's Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 8.21 am.

They were found dead by the Government Railway Police, he added.

He said during a medical examination, it was found that both suffered from serious health issues.

One of them, identified as Dashrath Prajapati (30), was a resident of

UP's Jaunpur.

He was differently abled and getting treatment for a kidney-related problem in Mumbai.

The other victim was identified as Ram Ratan (63), a resident of Azamgarh district.

A relative of Dashrath, who was travelling with him, said he had complained of some health problem when they reached Allahabad and then slept.

He did not wake up when they reached Varanasi.

Manduadih GRP post incharge B S Yadav said both bodies were handed over to relatives after autopsy.

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**MANGAN, 27 MAY [IPR]:**

Roads & Bridges Minister, Samdup Lepcha, visited the landslide-affected village of Bey under Sakyong-Pentong GPU in Upper Dzongu today. He was accompanied by the Dzongu MLA, DC North, SDM, DFO [T], BDO, RO, Panchayat Sakyong-Pentong GPU, DE Irrigation Department and officers from different departments.

During his visit, he interacted with the people of affected area.

The Minister also interacted with the son whose parents remain untraced since their house was swept away by the landslide and assured him help and support in every form.

He also inspected the kutchra bridge at Bey and directed the Irrigation Department DE to construct 2 to 3 steel bridges within a month to ensure better communication.

He further directed that the river course be diverted since it was posing threat to other houses in the area. He also directed that a forest bungalow and a temporary road be developed at Bey under the guidance of DC North.

The Minister handed over ex-gratia

of Rs 1,01,900 each to two persons - Nam Tshering Lepcha and Samten Lepcha - who have lost their home to the landslide.

Later, the Minister chaired a meeting in the Panchayat House during which the Panchayat President placed some demands:

1. Construction of a guest house should in Sakyong Pentong GPU.
2. Completion of road carpeting work.
3. Enquiry into the Sakyong Pentong bridge project.
4. Lack of transport connectivity.
5. Study into why the area is struck so frequently by natural disasters.

The area MLA informed that all affected people have been evacuated and accommodated in a safe place and assured that the demands, especially on transport and connectivity between villages, will be looked into.

The DC said that the government and District Administration will work together to rebuild the place as soon as possible.

The Minister directed that follow-up action be taken immediately.

## Locusts reach Jhansi, other UP districts on alert

Jhansi (UP), May 27 (PTI): After attacking crops in Madhya Pradesh, a swarm of locusts reached Jhansi district on Wednesday, an Uttar Pradesh official said. Other districts in the region are also on alert.

Locusts struck the district last week as well, but authorities said they eliminated half of that swarm with the help of local people.

The latest swarm was spotted in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh's Datia district. Anticipating its arrival, Jhansi administration had already deployed fire brigade vehicles loaded with pesticide.

The locusts reached Skill village in Garautha tehsil around 4.30 pm and efforts were on to drive them away, Jhansi division's Deputy Director Agriculture Kamal Katiyar told PTI.

The swarm is spread over an area of about one square kilometre, he said.

Insecticide is being sprayed, he said. Farmers have been advised to play loud music to deter locusts.

"A relatively small swarm of locusts was also spotted in Datawali village under Samthar police station area, Katiyar said.

Locusts had earlier attacked some parts of Jhansi district on May 22 and 24.

As part of preparations for another wave, two fire brigade vehicles with insecticide were deployed in all four Jhansi tehsils.

In addition, six vehicles were kept ready at the district headquarter. Ten municipal employees with two insecticide spraying machines have been posted in every block, Katiyar said.

Locusts don't target animals or humans but can devastate crop fields.

Banda, Mahoba, Hamirpur and Chitrakoot

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## Rio Tinto admits damaging Australian Aboriginal heritage site

Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto has admitted damaging ancient Aboriginal rock shelters in the remote Pilbara region -- blasting near the 46,000-year-old heritage site to expand an iron ore mine.

Traditional owners said the culturally significant cave in Juukan Gorge, Western Australia -- one of the earliest known sites occupied by Aborigines in Australia -- had been destroyed in a "devastating blow" to the community.

Explosives were detonated near the site on Sunday in line with state government approvals granted seven years ago, Rio Tinto said in a statement.

"In 2013, ministerial consent was granted to allow Rio Tinto to conduct activity at the Brockman 4 mine that would impact Juukan 1 and Juukan 2 rock shelters," the spokesperson said, adding the company had liaised with the Aboriginal community.

"Rio Tinto has worked constructively together with the PKKP people on a range of heritage matters under the agreement and has, where practicable, modified its operations to avoid heritage impacts and to protect places of cultural significance to the group."

Just one year after the blasting was approved, an archaeological dig at one of the shelters uncovered the oldest known example of bone tools in Australia -- a sharpened kangaroo bone dating back 28,000 years -- and a 4,000-year-old hair plait believed to have been worn as a belt.

DNA testing of the hair had shown a genetic link to the ancestors of indigenous people who still live in the area.

The 2014 excavations also found one of the oldest examples of a grinding stone ever found in Australia.

"There are less than a handful of known Aboriginal sites in Australia that are as old as this one", Puutu Kuntj Kurrama Land Committee chair John Ashburton said, describing the site as one of the earliest-occupied locations nationally.

"Our people are deeply troubled and saddened by the destruction of these rock shelters and are grieving the loss of connection to our ancestors as well as our land."

The local Aboriginal corporation said traditional owners had first learned Rio Tinto planned to blast the gorge near the rock shelters on 15 May after requesting access to the site. Attempts to negotiate with the mining company to stop the blast failed, the corporation said, and it received advice that the charges could not safely be removed or left undetonated.

"We recognise that Rio Tinto has complied with its legal obligations, but we are gravely concerned at the inflexibility of the regulatory system," Ashburton said.

# SRM hospital Kattankulathur cures 13 COVID patients

## SUMMIT REPORT

**KATTANKULATHUR, 27 MAY:** Thirteen Coronavirus patients admitted at SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre, Kattankulathur have been successfully treated with the help of Allopathy and Siddha medication in five days. The treatment was done in association with National Institute of Siddha, Tambaram.

This was announced at a press conference held at the hospital premises. Present for the meet were Pro Vice Chancellor (Medical and Health Sciences), Dr Lt Col, A Ravikumar, Dean

Medical, Dr A Sundaram, Medical Superintendent, Dr K Thangaraj, General Manager, A Vijaykumar and Director, National Institute of Siddha, Tambaram, Dr R Meena Kumari.

Among those admitted, 10 of them have been discharged while 2 are still under hospital observation.

Along with the prescribed government medication, the patients were also administered kabasura kudineer.

Those discharged have been asked to consume kabasura kudineer three times a day along

with the prescribed Allopathy medicines.

Among those treated was a high risk patient Ramachandran. This 63 year old male patient had recently undergone a heart surgery and also has diabetes and asthma. He has been cured of coronavirus and is to be discharged.

Everyone had responded to the treatment well and has been cured of Coronavirus in five to seven days.

Speaking at the press conference held at the hospital, Pro Vice Chancellor (Medical and Health Sciences) Dr Lt Col, A Ravikumar said,

"Our government has approved and allowed us to treat patients. Four wards have been prepared for the same. Everything has been sterilised and prepared well. Our staffs are also prepared to battle this disaster". "This combined treatment was done on a trial basis and in agreement with the patients," he added.

Director, National Institute of Siddha, Tambaram, Dr R Meena Kumari said, "In five days we have been able to treat and cure patients. We did this as a study and have succeeded.

Apart from the Government approved treatment we included kabasura kudineer."

Medical Superintendent, Dr K Thangaraj, "We did this combination approach with the help of National Institute of Siddha, Tambaram. The treatment has been effective and the patients have all responded well. Now we will keep monitoring those who have discharged as well so make sure that there is no relapse of the virus."

The patients thanked SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre for the treatment.

## SU Dept of Geology to get DST Centre of Excellence

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY (PIB):** Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India has granted financial assistance for the establishment of DST's Centre of Excellence (COE) on Water Resources, Cryosphere and Climate Change Studies at Department of Geology, Sikkim University under the National Mission for sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE).

This DST's Centre of Excellence will focus on advance studies related with management of water resources, Glacier studies and impact of climate change on overall environment of the state of Sikkim. This Centre of Excellence will create advance research facilities as well as opportunities for young researchers, who intend to work in the field of water re-

source, glaciology and climate change.

The objectives of the DSTs COE are both quantitative and qualitative variability of spring and river water in changing weather pattern in Sikkim. The other noteworthy objectives are monitoring and assessment of snow cover and glaciers to estimate future water availability, identification of glacial lakes prone to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) events and installing alarm system, capacity building by strengthening laboratories, field research and other infrastructure facilities. Such studies will develop conceptual basis of recharge process at local scale and find out best short-term and long-term measures for sustainable water security in the study area based on site ob-

servation and hydrological parameter analysis. This Centre will create a permanent infrastructure for carrying out water, climate and cryosphere research in this part of the country.

Under this proposal a total of 13 research positions including Research Associate, JRF, and Lab cum Field Attendant have been sanctioned which will be filled shortly. Scientists involved in this project are Dr Anil Kumar Misra, Dr Rakesh Kumar Ranjan, Dr Nishchal Wanjari from Sikkim University and Dr Smriti Basnet from Indian Institute of Science Bangalore. The establishment of COE at Sikkim University was possible because of the strong support and encouragement of the Vice-Chancellor of the University Prof Avinash Khare.

## GM Gurung distributes relief in Chisopani



## SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY:**

In the fourth round of relief distribution, GM Gurung from Rangpo along with his team of Sumati Chettri, Bimal Lami-chaney, Tenzing Sherpa, Mojesh Bantawa, Shyam Kumar Ghatani among others distributed face masks, sanitizers, rice, refined oils to more than 100 underprivileged families of Lower Chisopani village (workers of

Government Fruit Preservation Factory), Lower Ralap village, Bhirkuna village under Beng Ward and Rapdang village of Khamdong Singtam Constituency, East Sikkim.

At the same time he also distributed N95 masks and sanitizers to the frontline workers who are volunteering at the Quarantine Centre of NHPC Guest House situated at Ralap, East Sikkim.

## Sanitization work by Mickkhola Singithang GPU



**NAMCHI, 27 MAY (IPR):** 30-Mickkhola Singithang GPU sanitized the entire license shop holder, milk collection center, ICDS center, schools, orphans home, horticulture and other Gov-

ernment Office in South Sikkim. Distribution of hand sanitiser and mask to the road side workers, shop keepers and people involved in ICDS's were also carried out at the said GPU.

## Sensitisation on COVID prevention at Namphing

**NAMCHI, 27 MAY [IPR]:** A day-long sensitisation program organized by Gram Panchayats of 11-Namphing GPU for the

public was held at Namphing today. The program had the presence of Panchayat President, Bikash Sharma alongside office functionaries and health workers of the area.

Panchayat President, Bikash Sharma addressed the program where he spoke about various aspects of hygiene by the illustration

of various IEC modes. He also briefed the public on the basics of usage of masks and sanitizers.

The program also saw the sanitization being conducted at various locales like BAC, fair price shop, home quarantine houses, police out and other eatery outlets in the area. Similarly, distribution of soaps, hand sanitizers, disinfectant products and mask to the family members of the ones under home quarantine, health workers and Police personnel was also done.

## Make amends...

that the government segregate people at quarantine centres depending on where they were coming from.

Mr Rai added that housing the COVID-19 hospital and general hospital in the same facility [STNM Hospital] was ill-advised and that the government should consider setting up a separate COVID-19 hospital while it still had time.

He highlighted that as per prescribed protocols, there should be COVID Care Centre, COVID Health Centre and COVID-dedicated hospital but the state only has a COVID dedicated hospital at present.

Likewise, another SDF spokesperson, Prashant Chettri, underlined lack of preparation by pointing out that the Centre had issued directions to all states to begin preparing for movement of stranded people on 19 April but the State government came into action only on 30 April.

"Now to blame SDF is nothing but an attempt to cover-up the mistakes and loopholes of the government which is very irresponsible," Mr Chettri said.

## Locusts reach...

districts in UP are also on alert to the possibility of locusts flying in from Madhya Pradesh, where swarms have been spotted in Chhatarpur and Panna districts as well.

The locust threat also figured during a routine meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He said all protective measures must be taken, a spokesman said.

Swarms of locusts from Pakistan entered Rajasthan last month, affecting several districts and then spreading to other states.

Banda DM Amit Singh Bansal Wednesday said a committee has been formed under the chief development officer and all field officers alerted.

Bansal said farmers have been told to inform their village 'lekhpal' as soon as they come to know about locusts arriving in their areas.

He advised beating drums and playing music to prevent a swarm from settling on agriculture fields at night.

Rashtriya Kisan Manch said the government should conduct a physical verification to assess the damage caused in locust attacks.

## Health Services: An acclamation to the services of the Health Officials of West Sikkim

HB Health is wealth, an age old saying, told by many and believed by even more since time immemorial. Indeed, during these times of peril and despair being healthy and immunized is the only thing that is keeping everyone safe from the deadly COVID19 pandemic. No amount of money in the world has come in handy to save us from the deadly virus, however being healthy is the only shield which is keeping the population safe from the unseen enemy. The world has come to a standstill however, the only profession that has been on the constant move since the beginning of the pandemic are the health care professionals. Their services and dedication towards their duties are all over the internet and people have shown their gratitude towards the services of the health care professionals.

The medical team of the District Hospital Gyalshing, West Sikkim headed by Dr Anusha Lama as the Chief Medical Officer (CMO, West) along with Dr Bikash Pradhan, Addl Dir cum DTO and also the in charge of Quarantine Centers (Medical Ground) have been active responders to the situations and have been on the constant move ever since they were directed to do so by the State Health Department. The CMO West along with her dedicated fleet of Doctors, Medical Officers, Staff

Nurses and other officials have been engaged in keeping the district away from the harm's way. The health officials comprises of a limited number of manpower however, they have managed to



use every resource and engage every person to be stationed at their respective places of duties during the pandemic and lockdown.

The Sample Collection Team: Officials visit places and collect samples with their teams and send it to the testing facility located at Siliguri, West Bengal. Each day is a challenge as more returnees are coming back to the state and are stationed at the Quarantine Facilities located in parts of West Sikkim.

A dedicated team headed by the ENT Specialists, Dr Nim N Bhutia; Dr Rachna Rai along with District Surveillance Officer (DSO), Dr Leezum F Lepcha move to gather the samples at the Quarantine Facilities which are sent to Siliguri the same day in an emergency vehicle. The sample collection teams are suited with the PPE, masks, face shields and other necessary equipment. An intense routine to watch as they get ready to collect the samples of the returnees. Each medical personnel stationed at their respective loca-

tions do their jobs with utmost care. While encountering them in their routine procedure of taking the samples they seemed friendly with the persons at the quarantine centers while trying their best to make them comfortable by sharing a light conversation and laughs along the way and ease the process altogether. They seem relaxed in the PPE suits which otherwise looks uncomfortable. They quickly take the samples and perform the routine SOP and move on to the next facility for similar exercises. A total of 374 samples from West Sikkim has been sent for testing by the team and are continuing to do so every day.

The scene at Melli: Border for South and West Sikkim returnees.

As informed by the CMO West a total of 13 members of Doctors and other Medical Professionals have been stationed at the Screening Station located roughly 2 kms from the Melli Check Post. The screening team comprises of South and West Sikkim Medical teams, Police

and Administration staffs who are stationed at their respective places of work and simultaneously working in an efficient manner amongst themselves. The mechanism of work shared by the two districts of Sikkim is noteworthy as they perform their duties amidst the heat, humidity, rain and other weather anomalies.

The returnees arrive in the buses from Siliguri, West Bengal who are screened by the teams at Melli, South Sikkim and later after proper file work send the information to the District In-charge who sends them to the various quarantine facilities.

The medical teams stationed at the screening station perform their necessary duties dressed in their uniforms in closed makeshift structures which provide minimum comfort when one sees it. Each individual returnee is properly checked and the teams stationed at Melli work from early mornings to late nights as per the flow of the returnees at the spot.

However, each day is a risk which seem unavoidable to the medical teams still, they do their job with absolute care. They have the state depending upon them hence their role in the COVID19 is larger than life. The medical teams have managed to do their bid in performing their duties and keeping the citizens of Sikkim first.

Amidst the anxiousness present in the air at Melli for a normal person, the teams at their designated post stand firm and perform their duties out rightly.

## ~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

### GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 27 Lakhs (negotiable).

**Contact: 9800201335**

### LAND FOR SALE

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

### LAND FOR SALE

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





## Agri Minister discusses loan subsidy with RBI Gangtok

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY (IPR):** With an objective to provide subsidised loan to farmers, Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Lok Nath Sharma convened a meeting with the General Manager and Office-in-Charge, Reserve Bank of India (Sikkim State), Ravindra Sangvai and Assistant General Manager, IYT Namchu at his chamber at Tashiling Secretariat, today.

The Minister Sharma took detailed banking provision to release subsidised

loan to the farmers of Sikkim. He informed about increasing interest of the farmers in the field of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and allied sectors corresponding with the variety of loans catering to different needs by the banks with regard to Dairy, Poultry, Piggery, Fisheries, Kishan Credit Card (KCC), Mudra Loan etc. He also asked to address the disposal of the applications submitted by the farmers in various banks at the earliest. The Minister also urged to finance Farmer Producer Organizations

(FPOs), cooperatives, and to organize credit camps for farmers, issue of Kishan Credit Card and to resolve the pending issues.

General Manager, Mr Sangvai also assured to extend full-cooperation to increase agricultural and various livestock loan schemes to benefit the farmers.

During the meeting, it was also decided to hold a meeting with the bankers on 2nd June 2020 to formulate a comprehensive plan for the benefits of the farmers at large.

## Tougher for bowlers to find rhythm post lockdown: Lee

**MUMBAI, MAY 27 (PTI):** Former Australian speedster Brett Lee reckons that it will be tougher for bowlers to find their rhythm after the lockdown and they will require at least eight weeks to get back match fitness for any format of the game.

The ICC has recommended a minimum preparation period of eight-12 weeks for bowlers returning to Test cricket, six weeks for ODIs and five-six weeks for T20s.

Asked who will find it tougher to find their rhythm after the lockdown -- batsmen or bowlers, Lee responded, "I think it's hard on both batsmen and bowlers."

"Probably takes a bit



longer for a bowler to try to find that form, because its normally a six to eight week period where you get upto full pace again," Lee said on Star Sports show 'Cricket Connected'.

"Playing one day cricket or Test cricket, a good eight weeks of leading and bowling at full pace to get into that match fitness. So, it will be a bit tougher for the bowlers," added the pacer, who played 76 Tests

and 221 ODIs. On May 21, England's pace duo of Chris Woakes and Stuart Broad were among the first cricketers to return to individual training after the Coronavirus hiatus.

Similarly, in India, pacer Shardul Thakur became the first BCCI contracted player to resume his training last Saturday, after a two months break forced by the lockdown to curb the COVID19 outbreak.

## Shobhaa De to pen 'Lockdown Liaisons'

**NEW DELHI, MAY 27 (PTI):** Author Shobhaa De will come out with weekly installments of short stories for the next month-and-a-half, trying to capture the fragile zeitgeist of the coronavirus pandemic in her own unique way. Simon & Schuster India will publish "Lockdown Liaisons" in a digital format.

"Living through the most precarious of times, what helps us retain our sanity and sangfroid is often just narratives - words from gifted writers who spin stories out of universal experiences, from thoughts and ideas half-formed in our minds," the publishing

house said. "Shobhaa De is going to bring to us, for the next six weeks, stories that don't shy away from the tremulous uncertainties of the world as we know it but rather help us to confront and understand it all, just a little bit better," it added.

According to De, this is her way to respond to the "unprecedented, almost surrealistic global crisis caused by a bat".

"The stories emerged organically as the nationwide lockdown compelled all of us to look beyond ourselves... our worlds... and seek coherence, often in the most absurd situations and scenarios," she said.

## 23 new COVID-19 cases in Tripura, total rises to 232



**AGARTALA, MAY 27 (PTI):** Twenty-three more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Tripura, taking the total number of cases in the state to 232, officials said on Wednesday.

The number of active cases stands at 65 while 165 people have recovered and have been discharged and two have migrated to other states.

"More 23 people found Covid19 positive in Tripura today. Among them 18 people have come from Maharashtra by train & 5 others were in contact of Positive patients. Positive Cases: 232. Active Cases: 65. Discharged: 165. Migrated: 02. Tripura Covid19 Count," Chief Minister Bi-

plab Kumar Deb tweeted late Tuesday evening.

The majority of the recent cases have been detected among people returning from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and other states, officials said.

According to the latest reports, 16,349 people out of 26,943 have completed their 14-day observation period and have been discharged.

The total number of people currently under surveillance is 10,594, of which 300 are in institutional quarantine and 10,294 under home-quarantine.

Total samples tested so far in the state is 20,871, the officials said.

## NHPC provides ration to Sikkim Vikalang Sahayata Samiti



### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 27 MAY:**

NHPC-Teesta V Power Station, Balutar, East Sikkim provided dry ration items and facemasks to differently abled children of Sikkim Vikalang Sahayata Samiti (SVSS) at Reshap Tokal Bermiok, South Sikkim today under CSR & SD FY 2020-21, a press release informs.

Head of Power Sta-

tion, Teesta-V Power Station & CEO of Teesta-VI HE Project, Sahadev Khatua said that this step is to help the children live with dignity in the wake of Corona Virus outbreak and subsequent lockdown.

Furthermore, he said that earlier NHPC Limited has contributed Rs. 10 lakhs to Chief Minister's Relief Fund, Rs 2.5 lakhs for DC-East

Sikkim & Rs. 1 lakh for DC-South Sikkim in addition distribution of Personal Protection Equipments & Essential Commodities for Combating Corona Virus pandemic. Sulekha Aikat from Sikkim Vikalang Sahayata Samiti (SVSS), Reshap Tokal Bermiok South Sikkim thanked NHPC-Teesta-V Power Station for generous support.

## Congress to hold online agitation on May 28 for poor



**MUMBAI, MAY 27 (PTI):** The Congress will on Thursday hold an agitation through social media demanding monetary aid from the Centre for people from the unorganised sector in line with the 'Nyay' scheme proposed by the party leader Rahul Gandhi, Maharashtra minister Balasaheb Thorat has said.

Thorat, who heads the state Congress unit, said workers of the party will take part in the agitation through social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

He said a demand will be raised seeking the initial aid of Rs 10,000 for the poor and then Rs 7,500 per month for the next six months. The

agitation, with hashtag 'SpeakUpIndia', will be held online from 11 am to 2 pm on Thursday, he added.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections held last year, Rahul Gandhi had advocated implementation of the 'Nyay' scheme proposing that a certain amount of money will be paid to the poor per month to enable them to make purchases. The increased purchasing power of the poor will in turn help remonetise the economy, the Congress leader had said.

"We cannot go outside, on the streets now (due to the lockdown). Hence, we will be staging this agitation online tomorrow for those who are hit the worst by the

lockdown. "You have to take part in the agitation via YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook," Thorat said during an online interaction.

He said the Centre's Rs 20 lakh crore special economic package is "more of offering loans than spending money to help the people hit by lockdown".

"The economy will pick momentum only when the poor have money in hand to spend. So, the Centre should offer money in line with the Nyay scheme. This will in turn boost the economy," he added.

Thorat said 50 lakh workers of the Congress are expected to take part in the agitation across the country.

## Delhi records 635 fresh cases of COVID-19, total deaths 276 so far

**NEW DELHI, MAY 25 (PTI):** Delhi recorded 635 fresh cases of COVID-19 on Monday, taking the tally to 14,053 with 276 deaths so far in the national capital. The number of active patients of COVID-19 was 7,006 while 6,771 patients have either recovered and been discharged or migrated to other places, according to the Delhi government's daily health bulletin.

Earlier in the day, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the COVID-19 situation is under control in Delhi even after the easing of lockdown restrictions.

The death toll due to the novel virus was 261 on Sunday while the number of infections was 13,418. The highest spike in fresh cases -- 660 -- was reported on Friday. Delhi has been reporting 500 or more fresh cases every day for the last one week. The Delhi government's health bulletin reports cumulative death figures that refer to fatalities where the primary cause of death was found to be COVID-19 by the Death Audit Committee on the basis of case sheets received from various hospitals.

The bulletin said that a total of 1,74,469 COVID-19 tests have been conducted till date.

A total of 2,053 positive patients were admitted to various dedicated COVID-19 hospitals like LNJP, RML, Safdarjung, AIIMS among others.

Out of these patients 187 were in ICU and 29 on ventilators. Also, nearly 600 COVID-19 patients were admitted to various dedicated healthcare centres for coronavirus.

The number of COVID-19 positive people under home isolation was 3,421, the bulletin said.

The government on Sunday directed all the private nursing homes and hospitals having more than 50 beds to reserve 20 percent of them for COVID-19 patients.

## Dull phase for Goa's wedding industry due to lockdown

**PANAJI, MAY 27 (PTI):** The coronavirus crisis and the need to maintain social distancing has forced people in Goa to postpone their wedding ceremonies, which has also affected businesses of photographers, caterers and owners of marriage halls in the state.

April and May is considered as the peak season for Christian weddings in the state, but the wedding industry has witnessed a dull phase in these two months this year.

People of Christian faith, who comprise nearly 30 per cent of Goa's population, usually have their marriage ceremonies in churches in these two months following which they organise receptions in marriage halls and other venues.

However, this time there have been no such functions, severely affecting the state's wedding business segment. "The marriage season begins in the state after Easter and continues till May-end, before monsoon," Angelo Rebello, wedding photographer from South Goa district, told PTI.



### 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

#### 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.

#### 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.



If you seek help, you may call :  
-Toll free no. 104  
District surveillance Officer  
EAST : 7029372100  
WEST : 9593297809  
NORTH : 9641957468  
SOUTH : 7407691463  
New STNM  
AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE  
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM



## What After Cashing In?

*There is still need for better fiscal management tips for rural Sikkim*

It might actually be already too late to speak about the following concerns because too much has already been allowed to drain away. But then again, even if some sense is allowed to prevail despite the late waking up, it would be an effort well undertaken.

Sikkim has been blustering ahead on a fast clip of infrastructure and industrial construction ranging from wider roads to more roads to hydel projects to an airport to grand public facilities and industries. Projects invariably attract protests ranging from individual reservations to mass discomfort. Much, however, has been written about protests and responses, it is time now to deliberate on the post project-clearance scenario and the management practices that should be introduced. Land comes at a premium in a hill state like Sikkim and even though agricultural productivity is falling and cash crop/ horticulture options still in their infancy, land provides a sense of security to rural families. Most of the projects and investments require large transfers of land falling in the rural belt and this is where some initiatives, beyond the ones prescribed by laws and rules, need to be initiated. The required processes of public hearings, rate negotiations and enumeration of affected families are easy to deliver because these form part of the guidelines by which projects need to be undertaken and come in neatly listed out check-lists. Given the sheer number of projects on the anvil and the crores that will be handed over to private land holders across rural Sikkim to complete the acquisition process, it becomes necessary to ensure that the sudden liquidity in hands not used to manage finances does not drain away in momentary lapses of indulgence. One has to recognise the fact that Sikkim is not very organized when it comes to handling cash; there have been ample cases where even loans taken out for specific projects have been wasted on other non-productive pursuits and now one is looking at huge infusions of cash without any worries of repayment or interest servicing. A lot of these crores have already passed from the hands of project “developers” to affected land owners and then evaporated away leaving behind deep resentments. It is important that enough is done to generate genuine fiscal prudence among the affected families. Money covers for the property relinquished, but only wise investments can fill in for the security that land has traditionally provided.

This is where the State machinery needs to step up beyond the brief prescribed by Delhi, by staying with the people after the lands have been acquired, compensation handed over and projects completed. The State should have (and can still explore the possibility) put in place a system which empowers ‘compensated’ land owners with sound knowledge of investment options. The need for such an initiative is only amplified by the scams of private finance companies which did prolific business in rural Sikkim selling dubious schemes. Unless ‘informed’ otherwise, the suddenly cash-rich landowners will continue to become easy prey to the persuasive skills of such operators. And then there is always the possibility that the money will follow the personal loan inspired acquisition of luxuries wasted opportunities.

How can such a situation be averted? To begin with, the government can look into the possibility of the investors for whom land is being acquired also organise a series of workshops and sensitisation programmes on fiscal management for the affected people. Simultaneously, the real concept of rural banking should be aggressively promoted and a group of NGOs, selected after a thorough screening process, could be provided with specialised training on formulating rural investment options with which they could then approach the affected areas with. What the government could also incorporate is a special cell of handpicked officers to organise, monitor, improvise and advise such initiatives. It is the people’s money at the end of the day and the government can do no more than inform them of possible options on what to do with their money, but should this information be intelligent and practical, it could turn around the rural economy and stand it more firmly on its feet. Like with all other initiatives witnessed in the State in the recent past, this too will have to be one that is directed right from the top and if pursued in the earnest, could trigger an economic revival that delivers not only economic security, but catalyses rural prosperity as well.

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# The world needs pharmaceuticals from China and India to beat coronavirus

**RORY HORNER**  
*theconversation.com*

The biggest pharmaceutical companies in the world, known as “big pharma”, are American and European. The top five are Pfizer (US), Roche, Novartis (both Swiss), Merck (US) and GlaxoSmith-Kline (UK). Yet these companies – and the pharmaceutical industry as a whole – rely on global supply chains. And China and India play key roles in the supply of both ingredients and finished drugs.

Hopes for a vaccine or a medicine that will treat COVID-19 rest on this crucial sector. Yet the globalisation of pharmaceuticals and what some see as an over-reliance on products from China and India has been criticised in the US, the UK and the European Union.

Whether it be hydroxychloroquine (the “miracle” drug Donald Trump has admitted to taking), remdesivir (an antiviral drug used as an emergency treatment for the most acute cases of COVID-19) or a future vaccine, the physical as well as social and economic health of the world depends on pharmaceuticals. Production from China and India will be crucial if the pandemic is to be brought under control.

### THE SUPPLY CHAIN

The pharmaceutical manufacturing supply chain involves two main stages. The first is the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). These are the key parts of a drug which produce an effect. Such production is chemical-intensive, involving reactors for drug substance manufacture. The second stage is a physical process known as formulations production. Substances known as excipients are combined with APIs to turn a drug into a consumable form, such as a tablet, liquid, capsule, cream, ointment or injectable product.

For more than a decade now, China has been the largest producer of APIs in the world. The US, Europe and Japan produced 90% of the world’s APIs until the mid-1990s. But now it is estimated that Chinese manufacturers make around 40% of all APIs used worldwide and that China and India are the source of 75% to 80% of the APIs imported to the US. Janet Woodcock, the director of the Centre for Drug Evaluation and Research at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), told Congress in 2019:

“The number of Chinese facilities producing APIs for the US market has increased over the past decade, as part of a massive movement of pharmaceutical production offshore. This movement is being driven by the pharmaceutical industry’s desire for cost savings and less stringent environmental regulations.”

### PHARMACY TO THE DEVELOPING WORLD

India plays a prominent role in the formulations segment of the industry. India is the third largest producer of pharmaceuticals in the world by volume. The country’s Department of Pharmaceuticals reported that it supplies 20% of global exports of “generic” drugs. These are drugs that are no longer under patent and are open to any company to produce and sell, and are thus usually priced at a relatively low level. India has the largest number of FDA approved plants outside the US and it is estimated to supply 40% of the generic formulations in America.

It was the absence of product patents in pharmaceuticals from 1972 to 2005, combined with foreign investment restrictions in the 1970s and 1980s that led to the development of a rare and successful manufacturing industry in India – a country more known for its services role in the global economy.

India is also the major supplier of medicines to countries in the global south. This led the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières to dub the country the “pharmacy to the developing world”. Yusuf Hamied, then managing director of Indian pharmaceutical company Cipla, announced in 2001 that his firm would provide a year’s supply of anti-retroviral medicines for US\$350 a year (and is now less than US\$100 a year) – a fraction of the US\$10,000 they had been provided for until that point in time by American and European companies.

Indian companies, led by the likes of Cipla, Aurobindo, Emcure, Hetero, Macleods, Matrix, Ranbaxy and Strides have played an enormous role in supplying anti-retroviral and anti-malarial medicines to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria.

India is also a major vaccine producer. While the largest vaccine manufacturers in the world (in revenue terms) are GSK, Sanofi, Merck and Pfizer, India’s Serum Institute is the world’s largest vaccine producer by volume.

The Pune-based company makes 1.5 billion doses a year, 80% of which are exported and is UNICEF’s largest vaccine supplier (US\$307.8 million worth in 2018). India also produces 65% of the World Health Organization’s requirement of DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus) and tuberculosis, as well as 90% of its measles vaccines.

### FEAR OF DEPENDENCE ON CHINA

This globalisation of the pharmaceutical industry has led to fears of over-reliance on particular sources of supply, especially China, for APIs. Such concern has been particularly prominent in the US. Last year a representative of the Defence Health Agency argued that “the national security risks

of increased Chinese dominance of the global API market cannot be overstated”.

The state of America’s reliance on China for pharmaceuticals was documented in a book by health researchers Rosemary Gibson and Janardan Prasad Singh which highlighted that the last manufacturing plant for aspirin in the US closed in 2002, while the last acetaminophen (paracetamol) manufacturing plant in Europe closed in 2008.

India also gets most of its APIs from China – an issue of concern for its government, which has had a task force investigating this issue. The country once had considerable self-reliance in production of APIs, dating back to the establishment of two state-owned pharmaceutical companies in the 1950s and 1960s. But in recent decades there are stricter environmental controls, which many



believe has limited this aspect of the industry in India. China also has cheaper land, electricity and higher volumes of production.

So now India relies on China for about 70% of its supply of APIs. And for some well known drugs, such as paracetamol, amoxicillin and ibuprofen, India is almost 100% dependent on China.

While the US, Europe and India have worried about over-reliance on China, Africa is most dependent of all on the global pharmaceutical supply chain. Effectively all APIs and 80-90% of the finished medicines consumed on the continent are imported – mostly from India.

There has been significant concern for some time regarding the globalised nature of the pharmaceutical industry and its vulnerability, even before the pandemic. Gibson and Singh explicitly articulated fears over the potential implications of this in their 2018 book China Rx:

“The centralisation of the global supply for essential ingredients for drugs in China makes it vulnerable to interruption, whether by mistake or design. If disruptions occur for an essential ingredient made in China, the United States will wait in line along with Europe, India, and other countries to obtain it. If a global public health crisis occurs, China will likely keep its domestically produced medicines at home and stockpile them to secure access for its citizens before seeing to the needs of other nations.”

Those were the fears before COVID-19, yet China has not acted in this way so far. And most of India’s export bans have been rescinded. However, the tensions between nationalism and globalisation have plagued the initial search for treatments.

### MIRACLE DRUGS AND GEOPOLITICS

Although China did not initiate an export ban on pharmaceuticals, tensions escalated in early March when India’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced restrictions on the export of 13 APIs including paracetamol, tinidazole, vitamin B1, B6 and B12, as well as any formulations made from those APIs. Reports emerged about concerns over drug shortages elsewhere in the world as a result, with European industry said to be “panicking”.

The Indian government also moved to address its own reliance on supply of APIs from China. On March 21, they announced a US\$140m scheme, involving support for three bulk drugs parks as well as the manufacturing of 53 priority APIs, to “reduce ... dependency on other countries for bulk drugs”.

Tensions escalated as hydroxychloroquine (and a similar drug chloroquine) emerged as a potential treatment for COVID-19. Long established as an anti-malarial, but also used for treating rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, research from the Méditerranée Infection University Hospital Institute in Marseille found a significant reduction of the viral carriage in 20 COVID-19 cases treated with the drug.

On March 14, the UK announced an export ban on hydroxychloroquine. Then, Donald Trump began touting it as a “game-changer”. The space and electric car entrepreneur Elon Musk also joined the hype.

Although US-based Mylan announced it would restart production of hydroxychloroquine in West Virginia, it was clear America and much of the world would require supply from India if this drug was to be effective in treating the disease.

India is estimated to produce 70% of the world’s hydroxychloroquine, with Ipca Labs and Zydus Cadila the two largest producers of the drug in the country. Ipca Labs accounts for more than 80% of India’s hydroxychloroquine supply, yet there was a problem for the US here.

The FDA had restricted Ipca’s exports from some of its facilities to the US, arising from problems found in quality control checks from 2014 onwards. But with hydroxychloroquine attracting

such attention, the US lifted its ban on supply on March 23.

The Indian government, however, wanted to ensure it had sufficient supply for its own domestic needs. On the same day India’s National Task Force for COVID-19 recommended hydroxychloroquine for treating high-risk cases. Two days later, India’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry prohibited the export of the drug and formulations made from it, with exceptions (such as where pre-existing commitments had been made, as well as on humanitarian grounds).

But then doubts about hydroxychloroquine’s effectiveness at treating COVID-19 began to emerge as the International Society of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy – which houses the journal where the Marseille-based research was published – criti-

cised the study. Yet, on April 4, India banned the export of hydroxychloroquine without any exception. President Trump didn’t take long to respond. At his White House press conference on April 6, he warned “there may be retaliation” if India didn’t supply hydroxychloroquine to the US. Just a day later, India’s complete export prohibition was lifted. Supply would be allowed to more than 20 countries on a commercial and humanitarian basis. World leaders including Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu and Jair Bolsonaro all thanked Narendra Modi, the Indian prime minister.

### SEARCHING FOR MEDICINES AND VACCINES

While the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine is still hotly contested, the tribulations over the drug are an insight into some of the challenges to be overcome in fighting the virus. Efforts to develop a vaccine are well under way yet projected to take considerable time, so the search continues for repurposed drugs to treat and reduce deaths from the disease. Having China and India involved as manufacturing partners for any treatment or vaccine will be vital given their unparalleled ability to produce in high volumes and cost effective economies of scale.

Manufacturing capabilities are also present in China and India for two other potential treatments. Favipiravir, normally used to treat influenza, was approved in China and Italy for experimental use against COVID-19 in March 2020. By late April, it was reported that Mumbai-based Glenmark had developed the API in-house and was applying for regulatory approval for its use against COVID-19. And another Indian firm, Strides, also announced it had commercialised and begun exporting favipiravir to a number of countries in the Middle East.

Meanwhile remdesivir (owned by US firm Gilead Sciences) has been authorised by the FDA to treat COVID-19 in emergency cases.

As early as mid-February, Gilead partnered with the China-Japan Friendship Hospital and the Chinese Academy of Sciences for human trials of remdesivir in Wuhan. A Chinese company quickly manufactured the API for remdesivir and by the end of March a total of five Chinese companies and the Taiwanese National Health Institute announced they had the capacity to produce the drug.

### PATENT BARRIERS?

Remdesivir is distinct from the other drugs which have attracted attention as COVID-19 treatments so far in that Gilead has a patent for it, raising serious concerns of intellectual property issues restricting access to medicines or vaccines. Since mid-April, various Indian pharmaceutical companies had already begun developing remdesivir, as has Bangladeshi company, Beximco.

Facing a public health emergency, global trade rules permit governments to issue a compulsory license. Such a provision allows a manufacturer to produce a medicine without the permission of the patent holder, who is paid a royalty fee instead. A variety of countries including Chile, Ecuador, Israel, Canada and Germany have all moved to make it easier to issue a compulsory license, if needed, for COVID-19.

Perhaps anticipating such a move, Gilead announced on May 12 that it had issued voluntary licensing agreements for remdesivir to one company in Pakistan (Ferozsons Laboratories) and four in India (Cipla, Hetero Labs, Jubilant Life Sciences and Mylan). The deal would involve transfer of technology and allow the five companies to make remdesivir for subsequent distribution in 127 countries, primarily in the global south.

Gilead has agreed a deal with these five generic companies to manufacture and supply this drug on which so much hope has been placed. Gilead has also entered discussions with the Medicines Patent Pool – a UN backed agency which tries to increase

turn page 5



## 5 more test positive for COVID-19 in Meghalaya

**SHILLONG, MAY 27 (PTI):** Five more persons tested positive for COVID-19 in Meghalaya, taking the total number of active cases in the state to seven, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Wednesday.

All the five who tested positive for COVID-19 had returned from Delhi and Haryana recently.

"Five more people who came recently from Delhi-Haryana have been tested positive for COVID-19. They are at Corona Care Centre, Shillong and asymptomatic. Total active cases in the state as of now is 7 (2+5)," the chief minister tweeted.

With the five new cases, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Meghalaya increased to 20. Twelve persons have recovered from coronavirus while one person had died.

## Two more test positive for COVID-19 in Manipur; total 41

**IMPHAL, MAY 27 (PTI):** Two more persons have tested positive for COVID-19 in Manipur, taking the total number of cases in the state to 41, officials said on Wednesday.

A 22-year-old male and 23-year-old male both of Thoubal district who recently returned from Bengaluru and Gujarat tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday night, they said.

Necessary measures and treatment have been initiated, the officials said.

Thoubal district now has six COVID-19 cases.

Of the 41 total COVID-19 cases in Manipur, 37 are active as four have recovered and have been discharged from hospital.

Churachandpur district has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Manipur with 18 cases, the officials added.

# Four new COVID-19 cases in Assam, total rises to 686



**GUWAHATI, MAY 27 (PTI):** Four new COVID-19 positive cases were reported in Assam on Wednesday, taking the total to 686, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Three new cases were reported from Nagaon and one from Dhemaji, the minister said.

"4 new cases of #COVID19+ reported. Three Nagaon, One Dhemaji", he tweeted.

Of the total 686 COVID-19 cases, 617 are active cases, 62 have recovered and discharged from hospital, three have migrated to other states and four have died

Sarma said that the latest cases of increasing COVID-19 patients are mostly those who have returned to the state from other states.

He said that swabs are collected from people soon after they arrive from outstation, before they are transferred to the quarantine centres and most of the positive cases in Assam are imported and not home-grown.

The Assam Cabinet on Tuesday stressed on strict quarantine for people coming from outside to the state in view of the reported spike of posi-

tive cases and all coming from outside will be sent for institutional quarantine and no home quarantine will be allowed for the first seven days till the results of the swab tests are received.

Meanwhile, a Microbiology Laboratory has been set up at Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), Guwahati as an annexe of Guwahati Medical College and this shall increase the sample testing for COVID-19 to a large extent, the minister said.

He said the laboratory will start func-

tioning soon.

Assam has seven other laboratories where 72,564 samples have been tested so far with 686 testing positive, 66,562 found negative and the remaining results are awaited, according to the bulletin of the state Health and Family Welfare department.

The state government is following the policy of declaring containment and buffer zones after positive cases are declared in particular areas and as of date, there are 46 containment zones with Kamrup (Metro) having the highest of 14 followed by six each in Cachar and Bongaigaon, Dhubri with four, Kamrup (Rural) with three, Golaghat, Goalpara and Bishwanath with two and one each in Majuli, Charaideo, Karbi Anglong, Kokrajhar, Karimganj, Hojai and Nagaon.

Meanwhile, ten domestic flights are scheduled to arrive and depart from the Lokopriyo Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport on Wednesday after flight services resumed on Monday, an airport spokesperson said.

## Schools in West Bengal to remain closed till June 30



**KOLKATA, MAY 27 (PTI):** Schools in West Bengal will remain closed till June 30, the state government announced on Wednesday.

Education Minister Partha Chatterjee said the decision was taken as several school buildings were damaged by cyclone Amphan in eight districts and there is also a possibility that some of the buildings may be used as quarantine centres for the migrant workers.

The government had earlier announced that schools will remain closed till June 10.

The rescheduled dates for Class 12 state boards exams remain unchanged and they will be held on June 29, July 2 and July 6 as announced last week, Chatterjee said addressing a press con-

ference in Bikash Bhavan here. He said the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education has been asked to put in place all necessary precautions for holding the exams in 1,058 examination centres.

"If necessary, the buildings of some colleges can also be used for the higher secondary exams," he added.

The cyclone has caused damage to 462 examination centres and alternative venues are being scouted, the minister said.

These affected exam centres are located in Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, East Midnapore, East Burdwan, Nadia, Hooghly and Howrah districts.

The minister, who earlier in the day met senior officials of the

education department, said as per preliminary estimate the damages to educational institutions, including colleges, due to the cyclone has been pegged at Rs 700 crore and the department will soon be submitting a report to the state government for help.

To make up for the prolonged disruption in classes, the government will ask coordinators to ensure that teachers take classes of students at home if they live in the same locality, he said. "We will work out the modalities in this regard very soon," Chatterjee said.

The department was also actively considering the proposal to provide free textbooks to the cyclone-affected students, particularly those in the higher secondary level, he said.

## Private buses to run in Odisha from May 28

**BHUBANESWAR, MAY 27 (PTI):** After a gap of over two months private buses will operate in Odisha from Thursday, the All Odisha Private Bus Owners Association said.

The association in its general body meeting here on Wednesday decided to run buses "in phases" with the state government agreeing to fulfill some of their "genuine demands".

"The state government has fulfilled our three primary demands and assured us that it will pay heed to some others in view of the losses incurred by bus owners due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

"After an unanimous decision among all the stakeholders and keeping in mind the interest of the public, we have decided to run the buses across the state from Thursday," association secretary Debendra Sahoo said. There are over

14,000 buses providing service to passengers across the state, he said.

"Bus fares will not be increased in view of the COVID-19 pandemic," the association secretary said.

Private buses are the lifeline of the state as government buses are not adequate to cater to passengers, Sahoo said.

The association secretary said, the transport minister has assured the private bus operators that taxes payable by the bus owners during May have been waived and steps are being taken for providing insurance facilities to the staff.

The association has demanded insurance for the driver, helper and conductor of buses who will be exposed to passengers.

Sahoo said that the association is aware about the losses to be incurred due to dwindling passenger count, but keeping in view its social

obligation it has decided to begin bus services.

Social distancing will be maintained in the buses and the vehicles will be sanitised frequently as per the guidelines of the state government, Sahoo said. Earlier, the private bus owners were not ready to operate intra-state buses after the government had given them a permission on May 24 as they felt that they would have to pay taxes for the month of May.

Meanwhile, the city bus service resumed operation in the state capital from Tuesday, officials said.

The "Mobus" service run by Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) is initially operating in 7 routes of the Capital Region from 7 am to 7 pm.

Auto-rickshaws and cabs are also plying with drivers and passengers maintaining social distancing and wearing masks.

## 76 new COVID-19 cases in Odisha, total rises to 1,593

**BHUBANESWAR, MAY 27 (PTI):** As many as 76 people tested positive for COVID-19 in Odisha, taking the total number of cases in the state to 1,593, a Health department official said on Wednesday.

Of the 76 cases, 74 people had returned to Odisha from other states and were staying in different quarantine centres, while the remaining two had come in contact with the earlier detected patients, he said.

The fresh cases have been reported from Khurda district (13), Cuttack (11), Ganjam (10), Mayurbhanj (1), Balasore (2), Bolangir (16), Nuapada (13), Jagatsinghpur (6), Nayagarh (2), Sundergarh (2), the official said.

Of the 30 districts of Odisha, COVID-19 cases have so far been reported from 29 districts barring



Rayagada district in the southern part of the state.

With the fresh cases, the total number of COVID-19 cases in the state has increased to 1,593, of which 853 are active cases, while 733 people have so far recovered from the disease and seven have died.

Ganjam district remains on top of the list of COVID-hit districts in the state with 368 patients followed by 242 in Jajpur district, 139 in Balasore districts, 106 in Bhadrak district, 99 in Khurda district, 86 in Cuttack, 85 in Puri district, 61 in Kendrapara and 54 in Bolangir.

## The world needs...

access to treatments for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis. It has now expanded its remit to include "any health technology that could contribute to the global response to COVID-19".

### GLOBAL PUBLIC GOOD

Any prospective vaccine faces a challenge of not just being effective, but also requiring enormous manufacturing capacities to reach the majority of the world's population.

As of late May, more than 200 COVID-19 vaccine candidates are in development around the world, according to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. While 42% are in North America, six of the ten which have already progressed to human trials are being developed in China. Many hopes are riding on a vaccine candidate at the University of Oxford, which began human trials on April 24. AstraZeneca has been given the worldwide development, marketing and distribution licensing rights for the vaccine. The UK company has also received more than US\$1 billion in support for the vaccine from the US Biomedical and Advanced Research Authority. And AstraZeneca is in discussions over increasing production and distribution with India's Serum Institute, which has already been involved in collaborations with Oxford on the vaccine.

In addition to its involvement with the Oxford vaccine, Serum Institute is also working with the US-based Codagenix to develop a vaccine. Other manufacturers in India trying to develop vaccines include Bharat Biotech (with University of Wisconsin-Madison and FlyGen), Zydus Cadila, Biological E, Indian Immunologicals and Mynvax.

Given the chance of re-infection (unless billions of people are inoculated) any effective vaccine must be manufactured at

considerable scale, a task which would benefit considerably from Chinese and Indian involvement. Ngozi Okonji-Iweala (Board Chair of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and WHO Special Envoy on Global Collaboration to fight COVID-19) has warned:

"It is the duty of every government to put its citizens first, but during a pandemic this duty also requires thinking and acting globally. If manufacturing agreements or export restrictions impede the deployment of vaccines and allow the virus to survive anywhere, nowhere can be safe from reinfection."

On May 4, a number of countries and global health organisations committed €7.4bn for a coordinated approach to COVID-19 through the development of vaccines, treatments and diagnostics. Notably, while China, the UK and several major European countries participated, the US, Russia and India were absent.

A lot depends, of course, on whether China and India share the products of their manufacturing with the rest of the world. India's restrictions on exporting key drugs in March (albeit later rescinded) are a worrying sign of things that may be to come. Recent history from mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS demonstrates the huge benefits for global access to medicines when India is involved. The all-time high for AIDS deaths in the USA was in 1995. But for the world as a whole, mortality from HIV only fell from the mid-2000s, when anti-retrovirals became more widely available in the global south.

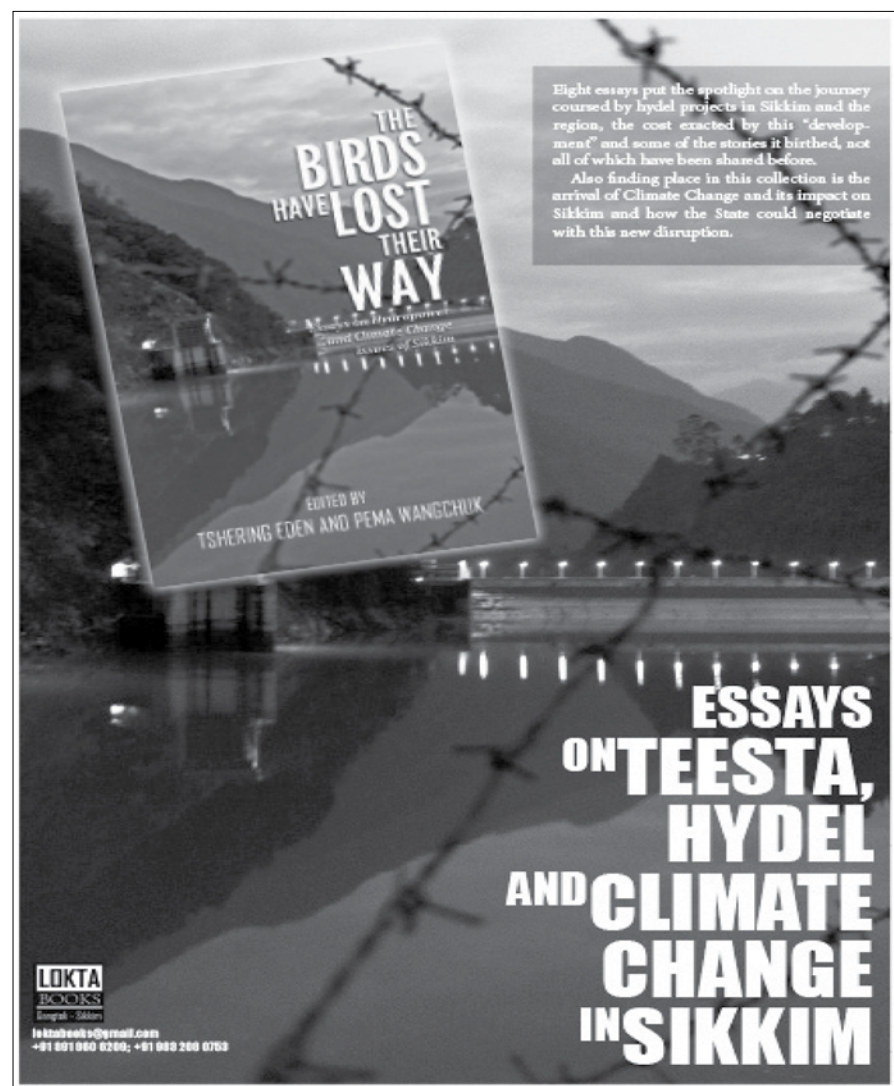
In contrast to some of the doomsday fears of what might happen amid a global public health crisis, China has not yet issued any restriction or ban on export of medical goods. Although often framed in the US as an unhealthy dependency on China, what

is often overlooked is that China also relies on the US and major European countries for some of its medicines. In 2019, Germany was the largest source of China's medicine imports, followed by France, the US, Italy and Sweden. Much of China's anti-cancer drugs are imported. This inter-dependence in pharmaceuticals, rather than dependence, means China may not be as quick to putting up a seal around its border as some thought.

Confounding fears of "vaccine nationalism", China's President Xi Jinping announced at the World Health Assembly on May 18 that "COVID-19 vaccine development and deployment in China, when available, will be made a global public good, which will be China's contribution to ensuring vaccine accessibility and affordability in developing countries".

The dependencies and inter-dependencies of globalisation have been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic – and nowhere more so than in the pharmaceutical industry. We don't yet know how the medicine and vaccine challenge will end. Whether it be hydroxychloroquine, favipiravir, remdesivir or something else, it is unclear which drug, if any, will work. It may be a vaccine. While it may be an American company or an Oxford lab that is hailed as a hero for a treatment or prevention, the task is not just about discovering a treatment or vaccine that works, but making it available to as many people as possible in as short a time as possible. Successful accomplishment of that task – especially in the global south – is difficult to envisage without Chinese and Indian involvement. COVID-19 ignores borders and the solutions to address it will need to overcome them too.

*[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester]*





## Ravin-der Singh to come out with short tales on love

**NEW DELHI, MAY 27 (PTI):** Eight digital-only short stories exploring different facets of modern love and relationships by author Ravinder Singh will form part of eSingles, a new venture of HarperCollins India in this time of lockdown and quarantine.

Each story is complete unto itself, but also part of a series of short reads on contemporary love.

Co-authored with some of the most promising new voices in English fiction in India, each eSingle explores a different facet of modern love and relationships, a HarperCollins statement said.

The series will have a periodic weekly release every Friday over the next couple of months. The eSingles will be available on Kindle Short Reads, Google Play Books and also on the Juggernaut App.

The first eSingle in the series, "My Ex", co-authored by Singh and Ruchi Kokcha, is slated for release on May 29.

In "My Ex", a man runs into the only woman he has ever loved and gets a chance to find answers to questions he's spent years asking. In "My Mother's Boyfriend", a marriage falls apart, and a question arises - can love be found again in the twilight years? "A Kiss in the Air" brings the thrill of the chase and the excitement of finding a connection with a stranger. Singh said he is excited about the eSingles series.

"The consumption of short-format content is on the rise across all mediums. There is a demand for quick reads, and these eSingles give me an opportunity to bring more stories to my readers, within a shorter timeframe. This, while I continue to write my next novel for them at the same time," he said.

"Also, this is a great format for non-readers who want to read, but are intimidated by novels that are 300-odd pages long," he added.

Swati Daftuar, senior commissioning editor at HarperCollins India, said, "Now more than ever, we are turning to the written word, to books and stories that offer hope and solace. And with these eSingles, Ravinder Singh offers us exactly that - a balm for the soul."

According to Daftuar, these are "stories you'll be able to access, start and finish in those small pockets of time you get for yourself between daily chores and work meetings".

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# Bayern end title race and reaffirm game's significance in strange times

ANDY BRASSELL

BERLIN, 27 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]:

As Joshua Kimmich roared his approval on the final whistle, hearts may well have sunk among newly assembled enthusiasts around the world and, likewise, in the Bundesliga's marketing department. Bayern Munich's Tuesday tea-time win in the table-top clash at Borussia Dortmund may have been narrow, but it was also as significant as football can be in the strange world we currently inhabit.

Moving the incumbent champions seven points clear of their most common irritants with six games to go, there is really no way of looking at the aftermath that suggests that the contest is still going. Just as the Bundesliga opens itself up to the world, any pretence of a title race has been closed off. "From today," lamented Dortmund's outstanding defender Mats Hummels, "I think all the other teams are out of it." Winning goalscorer Kimmich appeared to take no little delight in proclaiming how "mentally tough" it would be for BVB to find their way back from here if, indeed, they were ever really in the title race in the first place.

Yet if we as observers and enthusiasts of football have become quite bad at using the end point to rewrite the details of the journey, now would be a good time to stop. The efforts of both teams made this an occasion to savour, and it was a more than worthy battle. The tension that one mistake could be vital in the title race propelled the spec-



tacle, rather than constricted it. It was, certainly in the first half, thrilling fare and a rare occasion on which the football itself was so involving that the emptiness of the stadium sank to the back of the mind.

It signalled its intentions early on, with Erling Haaland threading the ball through a retreating Manuel Neuer's legs after he had rushed out to stop Thorgan Hazard. Jérôme Boateng mopped up the danger from in front of the goal-line, his first decisive action in a late afternoon that saw him - like Hummels - roll back the years towards his majestic best of Brazil 2014.

The claim of finding the fire within might be a cliché but both teams did here, and Bayern increasingly so as the game unfolded. "Maybe with

the ball, it was not our best," Thomas Müller told the Bundesliga's world feed broadcast in the moments after the final whistle. "But with the heart," he continued, beating the left side of his chest, "and that's the most important thing."

In close games at the top we often hear of Bayern-Dusel - the mythical 'luck' particular to the Rekordmeister which means sometime, somehow, they always get it done. There was none of that here though, even if other VAR officials would have suggested a look when the grounded Boateng's upper arm deflected Haaland's second-half shot wide. Bayern got it done through application and strength of will, and they deserve their extended lead at the summit.

It was more than desire

alone, of course. Bayern's ability "to bring the skills of a league leader into the game" as it progressed, as Süddeutsche Zeitung's Christof Kneer put it, was the fine margin that won them the game - part mentality, part sheer quality. Kimmich will take deserved credit for his goal, less a bolt than a looped vapour trail from the blue, and Hansi Flick grinned that he was "satisfied with him in every training session and every game," though both player and coach hinted that the latter had put the idea in the former's head, pointing out Roman Bürki's habitual position off his line. It underlined Flick's starring role in shaping and enabling this talent in recent months.

As well as being a goal worthy of winning most

games, Kimmich's strike did underline what was lacking in their challengers. It would be churlish to skim too much credit from the midfielder's visionary moment but having got a hand to it, Bürki must have felt great disappointment in not being able to avert it. The Swiss goalkeeper should not be hung out to dry for this but it was perhaps him, and Dortmund under Lucien Favre, in microcosm. Very good (and Bürki has been one of his team's outstanding players in the past two years), but not quite elite.

Much of the focus on Favre's words after the match were about him seemingly casting doubt on his own future, as Sky's Patrick Wasserzehr asked if he was capable of taking the team on to the

next step, and Favre enigmatically replied that he would explain his views further "in a few weeks." Perhaps the greater proclamation of note, however, was the sympathetic arm-around-the-shoulder he offered his team arguing "we played well, better than against Wolfsburg or Schalke." That may well have been true, but it felt like settling for what was not quite good enough.

On Wednesday morning, Kicker's survey for the day asked if Favre should remain at BVB beyond the season's end. If it seems harsh, that's because it would be to some extent (and Lothar Matthäus's post-match suggestion that Kovač would fit well as a replacement would do little to lift the spirits of fans, one imagines, feeling like a change for the sake of it), and the leaden displays of Emre Can and Jadon Sancho, two usually sure-fire game changers whose second-half introductions instead caused Dortmund's tempo to plunge, underlined how fitness issues tied the coach's hands when it came to the crunch. It wouldn't, however, be out of kilter with the prevailing breeze of the campaign, in which Favre has already survived a few hairy moments.

That scent of nearly but not quite has always clung to Favre's Bundesliga career. Judging him, or anyone, against this magnificent Bayern, is not entirely even-handed. For even in smothering hopes of a thrilling run-in, the champions' palette has already offered plenty to savour.

## Playing in bio-secure environment is unrealistic, feels Dravid

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI):

Former India captain Rahul Dravid feels the ambition to resume cricket in a bio-secure environment is "unrealistic", giving a thumbs down to the concept primarily floated by the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Seeking to restart its cricket season after weeks of inactivity owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECB recently announced that it would have in place bio-secure venues to host Pakistan and the West Indies later this summer.

But batting great Dravid is not convinced with the concept.

"It is a bit unrealistic to have things at the level, the ECB is talking about. Obviously, the ECB is very keen to conduct these series because they have had no other cricket...." Dravid said during a webinar conducted in support of YUVA, a non-profit organisation.

"Even if they are potentially able to create a bubble and manage it in that way, I think it will be impossible for everyone to do it with the kind of calendar that we have, with the travelling that you do on tours and the number of people involved," he added.

Not just the ECB, even South Africa has suggested that the scheduled tour by India can be tried out in a bio-secure environment.

"All of us are hoping that things will evolve

with time and get better once we have better medication.

"In case of the bio-bubble, you do all the testing, the quarantine and then on day two of the Test match, what if one player tests positive? What happens then? The rules, as they stand now, will see the Public Health Department coming in and putting everyone in quarantine."

That will mean an abrupt end to proceedings in the Test match.

"...that ends all the expenses that were made to get everyone there and create that environment."

"We're going to have to work with the Health Department and Government authorities to find out a way in which even if a player tests positive, the whole tournament isn't cancelled," Dravid, who heads the National Cricket Academy, added.

Cricket, like all other global sports, has come to a screeching halt owing to the pandemic that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei province. Players have been confined to their homes due to the lockdowns enforced to contain the pandemic.

"At a professional level, players will adjust and not let it affect their performances much. A professional, once he or she gets on to the field, has a lot of pride in oneself."

"So they will find a

way to deal with that. But the experience at the end of the day is not going to be the same."

He said sportspersons will definitely miss the experience of performing in front of packed stands if sport goes behind closed door.

"Players love to perform in front of a crowd, engage with their fans and that adds incredible complexity to a sport. I think that's what a player will definitely miss. There is a personal self-satisfaction when you perform in front of a large crowd."

Dravid advised the players to only focus on things that are within their control, like ways to regain their skills after such a long and unforeseen hiatus.

"As sportsmen, we are used to dealing with a lot of uncertainty during our careers. Everything doesn't fall into place. You tend to get scared and worried about stuff but I think one of the things that I would have done is think about things I can control."

"All you can control is your preparation, practice, emotional and mental well-being. You cannot control your results or performances...maybe it would take a bit of time to catch up to their original skill level. But that won't take long. It is just like riding a bicycle."

## Kvitova would 'rather cancel' Grand Slams than play without fans

PRAGUE, MAY 26 (AFP):

Two-time Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova has said she would prefer Grand Slams did not take place as opposed to playing them behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking on the eve of her court return in an all-Czech tournament the 30-year-old echoed the thoughts of Roger Federer, who said last week he would be against the idea of an empty Roland Garros or Flushing Meadows.

"I have my age and of course I would like to play another Grand Slam, but if it's like this, I'd rather cancel them," Kvitova said.

"Playing a Grand Slam is the greatest thing there is and playing without fans who are our engine doesn't look nice to me and the Grand Slam doesn't deserve it," she added.

This year's French

Open has been moved to September, Wimbledon has been cancelled and the WTA tour will not resume until at least July 20 due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This week's competition in Prague has eight men and eight women in separate draws but there will be no spectators or handshakes.

There will be referees and ball boys at the tournament, but they will not hand towels to those on the court.

"It's not ethical not to shake hands and just give a racquet bump, I think that's the most unpleasant thing I'm in for," Kvitova said.

Sports came to a halt in Kvitova's homeland, where the virus has claimed 300 deaths from 9,000 confirmed cases, in mid-March.

"We are here to reintroduce tennis not only to the Czech Republic, but also to the world,"

Kvitova said.

"The hardest thing will be to find the rhythm, we haven't played a match for a very long time," said Kvitova, who faces doubles specialist Barbora Krejickova in her opening contest on Tuesday.

"I hope nobody expects us to play fantastic tennis, because it may happen or it may not," added the world number 12, wearing a face mask which, she said, had a good thing about it.

"I don't have to wear a make-up."

- 'NOT THE SAME THING' -

World number three Karolina Pliskova has pulled out of the women's hardcourt draw as she recovers from a back injury, while 18th-ranked Marketa Vondrousova is getting ready for the final exams at her secondary school.

The men's part will be played on clay.

## Premier League clubs approve return of contact training

PAUL MACINNES

LONDON, 27 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]:

Premier League players are free to resume tackling in training after clubs voted to approve the implementation of stage two medical protocols at a shareholders' meeting on Wednesday.

The outcome of the vote was unanimous among the top tier's 20 clubs and had been anticipated as opposition to the league's Project Restart falls away after weeks of negotiations.

Clubs will now be able to start contact training from Thursday, and work together in small groups. This process is vital in getting

players match fit, but would also increase the risk of exposure to Covid-19. The outcome of the vote shows clubs believe that the risk can be contained.

The new protocols place continued emphasis on personal hygiene as well as introducing new practices, such as using GPS trackers to measure the extent of physical contact between players.

In a statement, the Premier League said: "Shareholders today voted unanimously to resume contact training, marking another step towards restarting the Premier League season, when safe to do so. Squads are now able to train as a

group and engage in tackling while minimising any unnecessary close contact. "The Premier League's priority is the health and wellbeing of all participants. Strict medical protocols are in place to ensure the training ground is the safest environment possible and players and staff will continue to be tested for Covid-19 twice a week.

"Stage Two of the Return to Training protocol has been agreed following consultation with clubs, players, managers, the PFA, LMA and the Government. Discussions are ongoing as work continues towards resuming the season, when conditions allow."

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# EU proposes huge aid plan as virus hammers Latin America

The EU unveiled a proposed 750-billion-euro recovery plan Wednesday to get the continent back on its feet after the devastation wreaked by the coronavirus pandemic, as Latin America outpaced Europe and the US in the number of daily infections.

The massive European plan follows other unprecedented emergency measures introduced around the world to rescue economies shattered by the disease, which has claimed more than 350,000 lives with infections rapidly approaching 5.6 million.

While the virus continues to cause havoc in Latin America, Europe has slowly started reopening businesses as outbreaks on the continent slow, but Italy and Spain lack the firepower of richer European nations to rebuild their economies.

The European Commission put forward a 750 billion euro (\$825 billion) proposal to the European Parliament and member states on Wednesday, aiming to help the worst-affected countries with a mix of grants and loans.

Economic Affairs Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni hailed the proposal as a "European breakthrough" that would "tackle an unprecedented crisis".

Last week EU officials said the recovery package could be as much as one trillion euros, but the amount was announced Wednesday as 750 billion euros -- a mixture of grants a loan credits.

Heavily indebted Italy and Spain are slated to be the biggest beneficiaries, according to a document seen by AFP. Italy would receive up to 81.8 billion in direct aid and 90.9 billion in loans, while Spain would receive 77.3 billion in aid and 63.1 billion in credits, the



document said.

The proposed package is expected to kick off tough negotiations, as backers try to win the support of some northern EU states that oppose paying out aid in grants to nations already under mountains of debt -- such as Italy and Spain.

The proposal comes as the continent -- which has lost at least 173,000 people to COVID-19 -- grapples with the human tragedy and economic destruction.

Spain on Wednesday will begin 10 days of official mourning for the more than 27,000 people who died in the country, with all flags on public buildings at half-mast.

The Iberian nation and others hit particularly hard, such as Italy, Germany, France and Britain, have all started easing their lockdowns, as people head to shops, sunbathe at beaches and run in parks after months of confinement.

Russia, meanwhile, said it had passed its peak of infections, promising to hold postponed World War II victory celebrations next month.

While desperate to kickstart their economies, especially the tourism sector, most governments in Europe are also trying to move cautiously, afraid of a second wave of infections.

That fear has meant some activities have been allowed again, while others must wait -- including choir singing.

After horror stories emerged from choirs around the world of mass infections among singers, the activity is now considered dangerous by German authorities.

At the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Berlin's Schoeneberg district, there have been no choir rehearsals since early March.

"I do miss it," said soprano Heike Benda-Blanck. "You can still sing in the shower but it's not the same."

- 'Still accelerating' -

But while many Western nations are inching back towards some form of normality, the virus has continued its march in Latin America, which has outpaced Europe and the United States in the number of daily infections.

"We are particularly concerned that the number of new cases reported last week in Brazil was the highest for a seven-day period, since the outbreak began," said Carissa Etienne, director of the Washington-based Pan American Health Organization.

"Both Peru and Chile are also reporting a high incidence, a sign that transmission is still accelerating in these countries."

Brazil reported the highest daily death toll in the world for the fifth straight day, pushing its total to 24,512 with infections soaring to more than 390,000.

The virus is also fuelling a po-

litical crisis in Brazil, where right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro has downplayed the COVID-19 threat and lashed out at state governors who have asked people to stay at home.

Police on Tuesday raided the official residence of one of Bolsonaro's leading critics over the response, Rio de Janeiro Governor Wilson Witzel, alleging he embezzled public funds for the virus.

Witzel called the raid "political persecution" and warned: "What happened to me is going to happen to other governors who are considered enemies."

- 'Absolute fool' -

The United States remains the hardest-hit nation in the world and with a death toll approaching 100,000, President Donald Trump has weathered a torrent of criticism for his handling of the crisis -- and for not wearing a mask in public despite recommendations from

his own administration's experts.

The right-wing leader, battling to get re-elected this year, kicked off another storm by retweeting criticism of his presumptive election rival, Joe Biden, for following guidelines by wearing a mask during Memorial Day commemorations.

Biden hit back, blasting Trump as an "absolute fool".

But Trump's principal pre-occupation has been for a quick turnaround for the badly battered US economy, and has pressured local and state leaders to ease lockdowns.

The US leader kicked up a fresh cloud of controversy this month when he said he was taking the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a preventative measure against coronavirus.

France said Wednesday it was banning the drug as a COVID-19 treatment, following a similar decision by the World Health Organization over fears of the drug's dangerous side effects.

Across the Pacific, Japan -- the world's third-largest economy -- has already started a cautious roll-back of virus restrictions, ending a state of emergency on Monday.

And as Japan's funfairs slowly open, a group of park operators released joint guidelines on virus safety, including visitors wearing masks at all times.

They recommended that thrill-seekers on rollercoasters and other rides refrain from screaming, and park staff dressed as superheroes and stuffed animal mascots not shake hands with or high-five fans.

The guidelines also include appropriate social distancing between ghosts and victims in haunted houses.

## Stock markets mixed as China-US tensions return to fore

Asian equities were mixed Wednesday as profit-taking and worries about deteriorating China-US relations were weighed against optimism over the gradual reopening of economies around the world.

Hong Kong extended losses as police fired pepper ball rounds at protesters in the afternoon, with investors fearing the demonstrations could erupt into the worst unrest since last summer.

The broad trend across global markets has been upward for weeks as virus deaths and infections ease in most countries and governments begin to reopen their battered economies, fanning hopes for a recovery in the second half of the year.

Confidence has also come from mind-boggling amounts of stimulus and central bank pledges of support, with the latest coming from the euro-zone, where European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is due to unveil a trillion-euro revival plan for the bloc.

However, there was little fresh desire for risk assets with eyes on the simmering row between the world's top two economies, fuelled by Donald Trump's barracking of China over its role in the pandemic, and made worse this week by Beijing looking to tighten its grip on Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was thrown back into the spotlight Friday when Chinese officials proposed a controversial security law that many fear could ring the death knell for the city.

And Trump appeared to agree, with his press secretary Kayleigh McEnany telling a briefing he had said it is "hard to see how Hong Kong can remain a financial hub if China takes over".

Washington has already said it could terminate its preferential trading status over the issue.

Markets are also fretting over reports that the US has warned it will impose sanctions on Chinese entities and officials if it goes ahead with the law.

While China and Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam have sought to ease worries about the extent of the law plans, Jeffrey Halley at OANDA warned that no matter how that try to dress it up "the passage of the security legislation from Beijing will have consequences for the beleaguered (city) and will further darken relations between the US and China." Concerns about the growing cri-



sis have weighed on the yuan, losing almost three percent this year, with observers suggesting it could hit a record low.

- Hong Kong protest worries -

Meanwhile, there are concerns about another flare-up in the city as lawmakers prepare to discuss a law that bans insulting China's national anthem. Seven months of sometimes violent demonstrations last year hammered the local economy and raised questions about its future.

Hong Kong fell 0.9 percent, Shanghai lost 0.3 percent and Sydney fell 0.1 percent, while Kuala Lumpur dropped more than one percent as Malaysia struggled to contain its virus. There were also losses in Jakarta, Bangkok and Singapore.

But Tokyo, Mumbai, Manila, Seoul, Taipei and Wellington saw gains.

In early trade, London, Paris and Frankfurt were all higher.

Still, National Australia Bank's Tapas Strickland, said in a note: "Risk sentiment continues to surge as activity lifts following the gradual easing of containment restrictions around the world, while vaccine hopes remain high with 10 different vaccines currently at the human trial stage."

He also cited comments from Federal Reserve official James Bullard that the third quarter "very likely, right behind the worst quarter, will be the best quarter of all time on the growth perspective".

Wall Street, where the New York Stock Exchange trading floor reopened after two months of closure, finished higher, with the

Dow gaining 2.2 percent.

Oil markets slipped on China-US tensions, and after reports said Russia could begin easing up on its supply cuts in July.

Massive reductions by Moscow and other major producers including Saudi Arabia have helped fuel a surge in prices over the past month, with WTI doubling since the end of April.

But analysts said the commodity will likely continue to win support from the easing of lockdowns, which is expected to boost demand as people get back on the road.

- Key figures at around 0720 GMT -  
Tokyo - Nikkei 225: UP 0.7 at 21,419.23 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng: DOWN 0.9 percent at 23,175.19

Shanghai - Composite: DOWN 0.3 percent at 2,836.80 (close)

London - FTSE 100: UP 0.6 percent at 6,103.50

Euro/dollar: DOWN at \$1.0958 from \$1.0984 at 2040 GMT Friday

Dollar/yen: UP at 107.55 yen from 107.54 yen

Pound/dollar: DOWN at \$1.2311 from \$1.2335

Euro/pound: DOWN at 89.01 pence from 89.04 pence

West Texas Intermediate: DOWN 1.7 percent at \$33.78 per barrel

Brent North Sea crude: DOWN 1.7 percent at \$35.56 per barrel

New York - Dow: UP 2.2 percent at 24,995.11 (close)

## First virus-era Chinese expedition measures Everest

A group of Chinese surveyors on Wednesday became the first team this year to summit Mount Everest, where they will try to pinpoint the height of the world's tallest peak using satellite technology.

The state-backed expedition is the first this year to reach the top of the mountain after China and Nepal in March suspended the busy spring climbing season due to coronavirus fears. It remains suspended.

Under clear blue skies, the team set up surveying equipment at the peak and expedition leaders later popped bottles of champagne at their assault camp below the summit, according to a video livestream provided by Chinese state media.

The exact height of

the massive mountain, which straddles the China-Nepal border, remains a point of debate.

The most recent official Chinese survey in 2005 measured the peak at 8,844.43 metres, not including the snow and icepack on the summit, while Nepal's official figure includes the Everest's frosty crown and is four metres higher.

There also has been speculation over whether recent seismic events, particularly a powerful 2015 earthquake in Nepal, had affected the mountain's height.

State-run Xinhua news agency have touted the expedition as a chance to achieve a highly accurate measurement, saying survey equipment will ping signals off a Chinese satellite and that other "advanced domestic

surveying and mapping instruments" will be employed.

It was not clear when the survey results would be released, but China and Nepal agreed last year to reveal the findings in a joint announcement.

The expedition set out on April 30, but was delayed twice due to bad weather.

Climbers only have a short window of opportunity to make the risky ascent during the main spring climbing season before the approaching summer monsoon brings dangerous climatic conditions.

The 2019 climbing season saw record overcrowding on Mount Everest, which led to 11 deaths as climbers waited hours in lines to reach the summit with dwindling oxygen supplies.

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**A REFRESHING REFRESHMENT!** Actress, Gabrielle Union kicked off her summer poolside with a CÎROC Summer Watermelon Spritzer.

## Guardians of the Galaxy Fan Theory Explains Why Drax Thought He Was Invisible

At long last, we may know why Drax (Dave Bautista) truly thought he was invisible in his now-iconic Avengers: Infinity War joke sequence. Be warned, it's not like James Gunn came out with a new revelation, but one intriguing new fan theory sets up some decent evidence as to why the Guardian thought he wouldn't be able to be detected by other members on the ship should he remain completely still. As one/r/FanTheories Redditor points out, it's could be because the alien race Drax belongs to can't see beings that are completely still.

As the Redditor in question says, the evidence largely has to do with Groot and his mid-dance freezes so that Drax doesn't see. Should this theory prove accurate, that means Groot purposefully pauses his dancing so that Drax misses him completely.

"I think he then came to the realization that things that don't move or move incredibly slowly are essentially invisible," the theorist hypothesizes. "Similar to how the vision of the T-Rex is described. What he doesn't realize, however, is that other species don't have this same handicap. So when he tries his hilarious invisibility bit in the following Avengers movie, he's unable to comprehend why it's absolutely absurd to the others. He's convinced of a reality that simply isn't so for everyone else."

## AT&T launches HBO Max, vying with Netflix, others for quarantine viewing



(REUTERS) - AT&T's WarnerMedia division launches its HBO Max streaming service on Wednesday, taking on Netflix, Disney and Amazon at a time when coronavirus lockdowns have boosted demand for streaming even as rising unemployment has cut disposable incomes.

HBO Max launches to a captive audience stuck at home without access to theater, live music, shopping excursions or live or televised sporting events. That situation helped Netflix Inc sign up 15.8 million new paying customers in the first three months of the year, more than double what it expected to attract.

But with film and TV productions halted across the globe, HBO has postponed dozens of releases - most notably a "Friends" reunion special originally planned for launch. If HBO Max does not resume production by this fall, the service could start to see a shortage of original content as early as January, according to a source familiar with the company.

At \$15 per month, the service is more expensive than both the \$7 per month Disney+ streaming service and the \$13 per month standard Netflix plan. Still, WarnerMedia hopes to reach about 80 mil-

lion global HBO Max subscribers by 2025. Many existing HBO subscribers in the United States will not need to do anything to get the new service, as WarnerMedia revised deals with distributors including Apple Inc, Charter Communications Inc, Hulu and Alphabet Inc's Google and YouTube TV.

But subscribers of HBO through Comcast Corp, Amazon.com Inc and Roku Inc are out of luck as WarnerMedia has yet to strike new agreements. For these and new customers, WarnerMedia is offering a promotion for subscribing directly with the company: \$3 off the regular \$15 price. Some AT&T customers will also get it at no additional cost.

HBO Max will feature 10,000 hours of content from WarnerMedia brands and libraries such as Warner Bros, New Line Cinema and Cartoon Network. At launch it will include six original titles, including "Love Life," a romantic comedy anthology series featuring Anna Kendrick, and a Sesame Workshop children's show "The Not Too Late Show with Elmo." More original programming will come over time, including the DC Comics film "Justice League," recut by director Zack Snyder.

## California sues over sex misconduct on 'Criminal Minds' set

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The state of California filed a lawsuit Tuesday against CBS, Disney and producers of the long-running series "Criminal Minds," alleging that the show's cinematographer engaged in rampant sexual misconduct against crew members for years.

The suit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing says the show's production team knew of and condoned the behavior of cinematographer Gregory St. Johns throughout the 14 years he spent on "Criminal Minds," and fired more than a dozen men who resisted his unwanted groping and sexual harassment.

"With the aid of defendants, St. Johns created an unchecked intimidating, hostile, and offensive work environment on the set of Criminal Minds," the lawsuit alleges.

The popular crime procedural, which ran on CBS from 2005 until earlier this year, was co-produced by CBS and the Disney-owned ABC Signature Studios.

Those three entities along with production company Entertainment Partners, several of the show's producers and St. Johns himself are named as defendants in the suit, which seeks back pay and other damages for the crew members who were fired.

ABC Signature Studios said it intends to vigorously defend against the claims.

"The company works hard to maintain a work environment free from discrimination, harassment, or retaliation," the studio said in a statement late Tuesday.

Emails sent to representatives for the other defendants were not immediately returned. The state agency began an investiga-

tion in March 2019 and found that St. Johns had engaged in a pattern of unwanted sexual touching including the groping of men's genitals and buttocks and kisses and caresses on their necks and shoulders. "St. Johns' conduct was rampant, frequent, and in the open," the suit states.

He unfairly criticized, socially ostracized and publicly shamed those who resisted him, the suit alleges, and executives overseeing the



show routinely approved of the retaliatory firings he recommended.

Complaints to human resources did not result in meaningful discipline against St. Johns, and investigations by the corporate defendants were toothless and designed to hide the misconduct, the suit says.

ABC Signature Studios disagrees. "The company took corrective action," the ABC statement said. "We cooperated with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing during its investigation, and we regret that we were unable to reach a reasonable resolution."

St. Johns was fired in 2018 after a story in Variety that detailed complaints from crew members.

## Rick and Morty FINALLY Makes Rick a Good Dad - in a Warped Way

Season 4 of Rick and Morty takes the family on a wild cosmic road trip where Rick finally becomes a good father -- with a sick twist.

WARNING: The following contains major spoilers for "Childrick of Mort," Episode 9 of Rick and Morty Season 4.

Rick and Morty has taken major shots at Rick being a deadbeat dad over the past few seasons, especially because Beth won't let it go. She harbors resentment for how Rick didn't fulfil his paternal duties, neglecting her for his love of science, albeit it was his coping mechanism after he lost her mom.

Still, Rick's alcoholic behavior and his obsession with tinkering with the universe kept annoying her, and seeing as he has an ego about it, she never eased up with reminding him he was terrible. However, in "Childrick of Mort," Rick finally becomes a good father and Beth is actually impressed by how genuine he is about it after she plays a key role to play in the evolution.

While the family's en route to a camping trip, Gaia phones in and lets Rick know he has to come take care of his

kids. He tries to ditch responsibilities but Beth forces him to fly over and when they get there, they're shocked to see Gaia's actually a planet, not an alien woman as expected. She starts shooting out clay kids from a geyser and when Rick realizes he can't catch the deformed beings, he once more tries to dart out. Again, Beth lays the law down about actions and consequences, and Rick realizes this is his chance at redemption.

He builds a production line and extractor to suck up the kids but knowing he has to create a society for them, he works with Beth to begin building a caste system. Some are turned into teachers, others are grouped into lawyers, scientists, mathematicians and others are turned into drama kids. Of course, these in the arts are the ones Rick looks down upon. There are even the unproductive ones thrown outside this citadel as Beth admits they need balance.

It's harsh but she understands all this time what goes through Rick's mind -- he really does care for his offspring but logic has to come first. It also allows him and

Beth to bond as they fix the wrongs of old in their relationship, and so, they learn to appreciate the love they've kept secret for each other. However, it goes awry when God arrives and Gaia reveals he's actually the real father. Known as Reggie, he's jealous Rick's doing such a good job and wants him to leave so he can raise the kids. But Rick knows Reggie is nothing but scum and someone who won't be a good role model.

This leads to a massive brawl in space between the two as Rick doesn't want to leave them for Reggie to ruin. He's also angry Gaia would let a loser like Reggie corrupt the kids so it shows Rick's growth has come full-circle. Hearing Reggie say the kids must learn through fear pisses him off as he's cultivated warmth and compassion in them, and luckily, Morty and Summer help kill Reggie, albeit by accident. Nonetheless, Rick has no choice but to abandon them because Gaia's angry he killed Reggie. However, this time Beth's a lot more forgiving because she witnesses a side she never saw before in her father.

### ARIES:

We all have a comfort zone, a creative confinement within which we feel the most safe. Playing within this field guarantees both money and acclaim. So there is not much to work towards, right? Wrong. This is where you need to tap into your competitive side—in a healthy way. Challenge yourself to do something you have never done before.

Tip: You have the power to dream a new world into being.

### TAURUS:

Do you ever look at your dreams and say, "What was I thinking? That seems impossible!" This, right here, is a limitation, Taurus, a sum total of the many voices in your head. An internal configuration is the need of the hour. Take a moment to assess which of the beliefs have been handed to you by society or your ancestors. Truth is, the given script may have applied to them in the past. But there is no reason for you to hold on to a story that's keeping you from spreading your wings and coming into your own.

Tip: You possess infinite potential.

### GEMINI:

Isn't it exhausting trying to micromanage the people around you and the Universe? Nobody likes to be controlled, Gemini, a Universal truth you are well aware of. Let go of the reigns and allow things to unfold, knowing that the divine plan is so much better than the one you have in mind right now. Remember, your willingness to step back is not an act of defeat. It is an act of courage.

Tip: Let go of your false sense of control and allow things to unfold as they are meant to.

### CANCER:

...And slowly and steadily, the world went back to normal. Truth is, returning to 'normalcy' can be intimidating too. You were just getting a hang of your new routines and rituals, but now you're being asked to readjust. Be aware of the resistance, Cancer, and where it is stemming from.

Tip: It's time to jump into action mode.

### LEO:

"What happens with most people is that they muddy their vision with 'reality'. Their vision becomes full of not only what they want, but what everybody else thinks about what they want, too." What are these wise words by Abraham Hicks awakening within you? Are you allowing the opinions of others to mess with your head? Truth is, you're capable of moving any mountain you set your mind to.

Tip: Go after what seems impossible.

### VIRGO:

Blessings are not a trust fund, Virgo. There is no cap on the miracles the Universe manifests on our behalf, and there are no limitations on how you can tap into this energy and what you can create. Breathe. Trust what's coming through. The more open you are, the more you will allow. Breathe. Let go of any and all resistance. Remember, the happiness you're experiencing right now is

more than just a fleeting emotion.

Tip: The miracles are endless.

### LIBRA:

Here are the rules of being a team player. 1: Honour what your fellow warriors bring to the table. It's the coming together of complementary skills that makes space for magic. 2: Be receptive to the opinions of the crew, even if they differ from yours. 3: Most importantly, be willing to share the spotlight and let others shine with you. This doesn't take away your sparkle. It makes you more of a star than you already are.

Tip: Learn to be a team player.

### SCORPIO:

What if the ideas we channel are not random? What if they are coming through from a higher plane of consciousness, one where time and space do not exist in the same manner as they exist in our three dimensional reality? In other words, what we consider as the future has already manifested in a parallel universe, and this parallel universe is giving you the sign that you are on the right track and that the idea is divinely guided.

Tip: Manifest the given idea in your physical reality.

### SAGITTARIUS:

They say God is in the details. But there are times we get so engulfed in the intricacies that we lose sight of the larger picture. Be aware of how this narrative is playing out in your existence, Sagittarius. Notice all the ways in which you are giving away your power. The given situation requires you

to embrace the eagle spirit and rise above.

Tip: Focus on the big picture.

### CAPRICORN:

Capricorn, you're a shaman. A seer. As old as the earth itself. To doubt the wisdom that lives in your bones would be an act of self-betrayal. Today, you're being asked to trust the guidance that's coming through, whether it concerns you or somebody close to you.

Tip: Trust the wisdom in your bones.

### AQUARIUS:

"Often, you begin your day much as you ended the day before. But if we were standing in your physical shoes, we would acknowledge the fresh new day!" An Abraham Hicks quote to inspire you to hit the reset button and become cognisant of the blessings that are unfolding in your reality. You are now able to manifest the things that you once believed were a distant dream. If that doesn't call for a celebration, what does?

Tip: Become cognisant of the blessings.

### PISCES:

They say God is in the details, but the devil is starting to make an appearance here. Be aware of how your obsessive nature is getting the better of this project, and how you are setting yourself up for failure by becoming a victim of your own unrealistic expectations. You are perfect just the way you are, Pisces, and you have multiple milestones to your credit. So, breathe.

Tip: Zoom out.