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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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FRIDAY, 08 MAY
ODD NUMBER TAXIS ALLOWED TO PLY TODAY
No private vehicles, except those with permits, allowed to ply.

Mi-17 helicopter makes emergency landing in Sikkim

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): An Mi-17 medium-lift transport helicopter of the Indian Air Force made an emergency landing near Mukutang in Sikkim on Thursday due to bad weather, officials said.

All four aircrew of the IAF and two Indian Army personnel on board the chopper are reported to be safe, they said.

The helicopter was on a routine air maintenance sortie from Chhaten to Mukutang and it sustained damage in the incident, the officials said.

"An investigation has been ordered to ascertain the cause of the accident," an IAF spokesperson said.

COVID-19 death toll touches 1,783; number of cases climb to 52,952

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): The death toll due to COVID-19 in the country rose to 1,783 while the number of cases climbed to 52,952 on Thursday, registering an increase of 89 deaths and 3,561 cases in the last 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry said.

The number of active COVID-19 cases stood at 35,902 while 15,266 people have recovered and one patient has migrated, it said.

"Thus, around 28.83 per cent patients have recovered so far," a senior health ministry official said.

The total number of cases also include 111 foreign nationals.

A total of 89 deaths have been reported since Wednesday morning, of which 34 people died in Maharashtra, 28 in Gujarat, nine in Madhya Pradesh, four each in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, three in Rajasthan, two each from Punjab and Tamil Nadu and one each from Delhi, Haryana and Orissa.

Of the 1,783 fatalities, Maharashtra tops the tally with 651 fatalities, Gujarat comes second with 396 deaths, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 185, West Bengal at 144, Rajasthan at 92, Delhi at 65, Uttar Pradesh at 60 and Andhra Pradesh at 36.

The death toll due to COVID-19 climbed to 35 in Tamil Nadu while Telangana and Karnataka have reported 29 fatalities each due to the disease. Punjab has

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Chamling accuses State Govt of still being unprepared for COVID-19 situation

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 07 MAY:

Sikkim Democratic Front party president, Pawan Chamling, today accused the State government of having "totally failed" to make appropriate planning and preparedness in the face of the COVID-19 situation, a task it continues to come short on despite the lockdown having entered phase-3. The State government's actions reek of lack of seriousness and reflect unpreparedness, he said.

Regarding the same, he led a party delegation to Governor Ganga Prasad on Thursday and submitted a six-page memorandum calling on him to address the present situation. The memorandum has made 12 submissions and re-

quested the Governor to take judicious note of the matter and use his office in the larger interest of the people of Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here later this evening, Mr Chamling stated that although Sikkim falls in the Green Zone, it was still vulnerable to come short on despite the lockdown having entered phase-3. The State government's actions reek of lack of seriousness and reflect unpreparedness, he said.

He claimed that the state government has failed to take up appropriate steps to set up necessary medical, economic and associated infrastructure to handle possible challenges in the future should the COVID-19 pandemic reach the State.

He also placed some suggestions to the state government and urged that it work on in the interest of

the people of Sikkim.

Mr Chamling suggested that even food and other items coming in from Siliguri be disinfected. He believes that disinfection of drivers and vehicles coming from outside the state was not enough.

He mentioned that more than one crore people are expected to move around in this third phase of the lockdown and that many stranded Sikkimese will be returning from red zones. On the same, he asserted that screening and testing of every person returning to the State should be mandatory.

He also pulled up the State Government for setting up most of the quarantine centres in residential areas instead of in isolation and sug-

gested that these be relocated and that those areas be declared Containment Zones and strict protocols spelled out by the Centre be followed.

He further contended that installation of just four Truenat machines for screening tests reveals that the state government was not serious. Truenat machines should be available at the PHSC level, he stressed. Constituting a Health Advisory Committee would help in such planning, he said.

"We want stranded students to return safely but not in the pick-and-choose manner like is the case in Kota where six students from weak financial backgrounds have been left behind. There should be proper coordination between states before

bringing back stranded people," he added.

He also criticized the Sikkim Government for being the only one which has not allocated a dedicated fund for COVID-19.

About the setback to the service industry, he suggested that a Rs 10,000 per month relief be provided to everyone in the service sector, drivers, farmers and those in the animal husbandry sector. He further demanded the state government to give life insurance of Rs 1 crore to frontline warriors and double their salary until the pandemic lasts.

Mr Chamling demanded the state government to give a moratorium to all loanees of Startup and other schemes and to waive off interest.

Minister warns of strong legal action against overcharging



SANDEEP PRASAD GANGTOK, 07 MAY:

Food and Civil Supplies Minister, Arun Upreti today said that legal action will be taken against shopkeepers who charge more than the retail price of products and their license will be cancelled for taking advantage of the COVID-19 situation.

Addressing a press briefing today, he appealed to shopkeepers to follow the guidelines set by the government failing which their shops will be sealed.

"We have learnt that

a bag of cement which is normally sold at Rs 425 per bag is now being sold for Rs 600. Cigarette packets costing Rs 50-60 are now being sold for Rs 100-120. Those who are doing this will face legal action," said Mr Upreti.

He further informed that consumers can register complaints at Legal Metrology Unit located on the Paljor Stadium Road by calling the toll free number - 18003453209 or the landline number 03592-202675 [from 10 am till 4 pm].

11 dead, 1,000 exposed due to gas leak in Vizag: Govt

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): A specialised CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) team of the NDRF and medical specialists are being rushed to Vishakhapatnam where 11 people have been killed and about 1,000 affected due to gas leak at a chemical factory, the Centre said on Thursday.

Director General of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) S N Pradhan said the leakage from the factory is now minimal but the NDRF personnel will be at the spot till it is totally plugged.

As of now 11 people have lost their lives and 20-25 people are critical due to the gas leak, he said at a hurriedly convened press conference here.

Member of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Kamal Kishore said that about 1,000 people living in nearby areas of the factory have been exposed to the gas leak.

Pradhan said 500 people belonging to 200-250 families living in

3 km radius have been evacuated to the safer places.

Kishore said the gas that has leaked is Styrene and the site of incident is about 20 kms from Vishakhapatnam.

"It is toxic and injurious to human health. So far what we know is that nearly 1,000 people were directly exposed living in close proximity to the plant where the leak took place," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the NDMA, of which he is the chairperson, and took stock of the situation on the ground as well as the response that has taken place till now and the response required from across the board.

Subsequently, the National Crisis Management Committee, headed by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, met and designed specific steps that needed to be taken to contain the effect and ensure the safety of people who were affected, and manage the emergency on ground, he said.

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172 stranded Sikkimese return on day-03 of evacuation



GANGTOK/ MELLI, 07 MAY [IPR]: A total of 172 stranded Sikkimese returned to the State today, day-three of the ongoing evacuation process bring them back from wherever they were stranded because of the nationwide lockdown which a month and half old now.

All the 172 returnees have been quarantined in institutional and paid quarantine Centres set up in their respective districts.

79 of the returning Sikkimese are from East and North districts and were screened at Rangpo checkpoint before being taken to quarantine facilities. Of these, 73 are from East Sikkim and six from North district.

Meanwhile, 93 people evacuated from different parts of the country arrived at the screening centre set up at Melli in seven SNT buses today.

Out of the 93, twenty eight are from South and

65 from West District.

After going through thorough screening assessment following all safety protocols, the returnees were found to be asymptomatic.

Further, a total of 22 people belonging to South District have been sent to institutional quarantine centre at IHCAE-Chemchey which is free of cost, while six remaining have opted for the paid quarantine facility at Hotel Pangolin,

Assangthang.

The entire screening process was undertaken by South District administration in coordination with medical officials and staff of South and West districts respectively.

As things stand, thus far 6,084 stranded Sikkimese have registered with the State Government, 1,601 from the neighbouring areas of Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and surrounding areas alone.

What Sikkim Needs from its bureaucracy

JIWAN RAI

I love the bureaucracy as much as the next Sikkimese man. Why not, when nine out of ten Sikkimese parents want to see their children becoming an government officer or at least a government employee? Why not, when life's success and failure in general is determined by how high one climbs the bureaucratic hierarchy? What other craze can a man habitually cultivate in a culture where bureaucratic aspirations are the most overpowering force in the fundamental way we think of life?

Like in any other system, some get lucky and attain the glory and others will have to let go of the dream as not everyone has the right capability, backing and connections to pull off the

dream. When you miss the cut, you are left with the easiest and most vindictive option of mocking bureaucracy like sour grapes.

However, the widespread complaints and almost sweeping indignation against bureaucracy in developing countries like ours are not without some justifiable reasons. The bureaucrats, for the most part, are understandably unaware of the intense dislike felt for them on the part of outsiders. It is difficult for them to be in the system and look in on it at the same time. It would therefore be helpful if an outsider made a few comments on how the bureaucracy looks like from outside.

There are two kinds of bureau-

crats in particular and government employees in general. The first group is a bunch of desperately power-hungry people who, by virtue of holding a government position, smash the noble idea of civic service to smithereens.

These power-hungry fellows are marked by self-importance, constipated looks, abusive behaviour, calculating interests and are irredeemably arrogant. They can slyly grin from ear to ear to please their masters if they need your help. But in reality they are maniacally determined to latch onto every nanoscopic chance to impose their "power" in order to assert their "importance". They use their power, NOT to make our lives easier, but just the opposite. They think that their

position is their BABUKO BIRTA (patrimony). They are fatedly stuck up in their narcissistic world populated with self-important colleagues. They are shamelessly intoxicated with the concoction of their own self-image and a disdain for the people who they are supposed to be serving. Many of them live in perennial insecurity as their "importance" is not based on their capability. Their eventual downfall makes half the universe happy and relieved! Isn't there an indubitable pleasure in seeing power-hungry government officers being denuded of their power?

Mind you, they are enjoying the lockdown like hungry leeches enjoy human blood

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SKM Nari Shakti president files FIR against fake FB accounts

Refutes claims that son was among 19 Kota returnees

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 MAY: Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's Nari Shakti president, Kala Rai today held a press briefing wherein she responded to alle-

gations of preferential treatment in evacuation of stranded Sikkimese. She also refuted claims on social media about her son being one of the students evacuated from Kota, Rajasthan.

Ms Rai said that the government is doing its best to bring back Sikkimese safely to the State and allegations on social media about preferential treatment in evacuation of stranded Sikkimese is not doing anyone any good.

She clarified that her son had gone to Kota to study in 2017 but had returned shortly after and is now studying in Tashi Namgyal Academy.

Ms Rai also informed that she has filed an FIR against some fake accounts on Facebook today for spreading misinformation.

On allegation of leaving behind 06 students in Kota and preferential treatment given to the 19 Kota students who returned on 05 May, she

said that those who returned had arranged the return on their own.

"Allegation that the six remaining students are not from well to do families and therefore have been left behind does not make sense. If the families could afford to send them to Kota for studies then they are surely not poor," she stated.

Referring to a video shared by a Sikkimese girl from Maharashtra, Ms Rai said that the gov-

ernment is trying hard to contact and arrange returns for all those stranded outside but it is not an easy task and will take some time. However, she also criticized the way the girl spoke in the video and said that you should not blame the government blindly.

It may be mentioned that in the video, the girl criticizes the government for not providing proper support to those stranded in Maharashtra.

11 dead...

Kishore said the central government is flying in a specialised CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) team of the NDRF from Pune to Vishakhapatnam and they will extend all technical support to the local authorities.

"We are also mobilising specialised technical support to assist the medical practitioners in the area who may not have dealt with this kind of emergency," he said.

When asked if the Centre will issue some guidelines in the wake of similar factories opening after the lockdown, Kishore said there are detailed guidelines on chemical safety and these are very clear and industries need to implement them vigorously like before.

There is no need to issue fresh directives but social distancing measures should be enforced properly in the wake of coronavirus outbreak, he said.

Giving details of the incident, Pradhan said it happened at around 2:30 am. Initially the people were affected by some throat and skin irritation and toxic gas smell, he said.

COVID-19...

registered 27 COVID-19 deaths, Jammu and Kashmir eight and Haryana seven. Kerala and Bihar have reported four deaths each.

Jharkhand has recorded three COVID-19 fatalities. Odisha and Himachal Pradesh have reported two deaths each.

Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Assam and Uttarakhand have reported one fatality each, according to the ministry data.

According to the health ministry data updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 16,758 followed by Gujarat at 6,625, Delhi at 5,532, Tamil Nadu at 4,829, Rajasthan at 3,317, Madhya Pradesh at 3,138 and Uttar Pradesh at 2,998.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 1,777 in Andhra Pradesh and 1,516 in Punjab. It has risen to 1,456 in West Bengal, 1,107 in Telangana, 775 in Jammu and Kashmir, 693 in Karnataka, 594 in Haryana and 542 in Bihar.

What Sikkim...

simply because they can make the best use of the situation to (ab)use their power to the fullest and show to hapless citizens how important they are. I would not be surprised if they even take bribes for some 'favours'.

Thankfully there is a second group which consists of sweet and service minded bureaucrats. Service-minded government servants are characterized by warmth, friendly smiles, humility and a personable and helpful attitude. They go out of their way to help people in need. I cannot imagine living in Sikkim, a society that is so inordinately influenced by bureaucratic power, without such lovely souls. It is they who help us "move the mysteriously immobile files" through the ranks and get things done. Without these sincere hardworking service-minded government servants, government offices are like dens of lions - you never know when a haughty lion will pounce on your 'dignity' and devour it.

At a difficult time like this, I hope

"We were informed at around 5:30-5:45 am and the NDRF personnel were there in half-an-hour," he said.

The NDRF chief said door-to-door search was done by NDRF personnel to help unconscious and semi-conscious people living in nearby areas.

"We will stay back in that area till we are absolutely sure that the situation is under control. We will be at the incident site till it is required.

"The overall situation is under control and I think overall we can say that it is about rehabilitation and treatment of affected people," he said.

Pradhan also said the cause of leakage is being probed by local police and its major effect remains for about 6-7 hours and situations is under watch, being closely monitored. There is nothing to worry about now, he said.

AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria, who also attended the briefing, said evacuated people are being treated and monitored closely.

House-to-house visits are being done to see if any one is facing any medical problem, he said.

Kerala has reported 503 coronavirus cases so far, while Odisha has 185 cases. A total of 127 people have been infected with the virus in Jharkhand and 120 in Chandigarh.

Uttarakhand has reported 61 cases, Chhattisgarh has 59 cases, Assam and Himachal Pradesh have 45 each, Tripura has 43 and Ladakh has registered 41 cases so far.

As many as 33 COVID-19 cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Meghalaya has registered 12 cases, Puducherry has nine, while Goa has seven COVID-19 cases.

Manipur has two cases. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Dadar and Nagar Haveli have reported a case each.

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

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

Fast food shop sealed for violating lockdown



NAMCHI, 07 MAY (IPR): A fast food shop located near MG Marg, opposite to student tailor at Jorethang was sealed

by SHO, Jorethang Police Station, Mahindra Pradhan for flouting lockdown rules on 06 May.

EPFO introduces email mechanism to ease EPF Compliance process for employers

DELHI, 07 MAY (PIB): In the current scenario of lockdown announced by the Government to control the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and other disruptions, the employers are not able to function normally and are facing problems in using their digital signatures or Aadhaar based e-sign on EPFO portal.

Many important tasks like KYC attestation, transfer claim attestation etc are being done online by the authorized persons of employers using their Digital Signatures (DSC) or Aadhaar based e-Signs on EPFO portal. For using DSC/e-Sign, one time approval from Regional Offices is

required. Due to lockdown, many employers are facing difficulties to send the one time registration requests to the Regional Offices.

Keeping in view the above situation and to further ease the compliance procedure, EPFO has decided to accept such requests through email also. Employer can send the scanned copy of duly signed request letter to the concerned Regional Office through mail. Official email addresses of the Regional Offices are available at www.epfindia.gov.in.

Further, such establishments, whose authorized officers have approved digital signatures

but are not able to locate the dongle, can login to the employer portal and register their e-sign through the link for registration of already registered authorized signatories. If their name against the approved digital signature is same as that in their Aadhar, the registration of e-sign will not require any further approval. Other authorized signatories can register their e-signs and send the request letters approved by the employers and seek approval of the concerned EPFO Offices.

This facility provides further relief to the employers and EPF members adversely impacted by the Pandemic.

Sanitation drive at Namchi



BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 07 MAY: Lossoong Namsong Celebration Committee in association with All Sikkim Bhutia Association [South District] today conducted a sanitation drive at Namchi.

The team sanitized Namchi District Hospital and Bungalow where truck drivers are residing. Also present was Zilla Adhyaksha, Tshering Dem Bhutia, who also sponsored the sanitizing kits.

JEE-Advanced to be held on Aug 23: HRD

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE-Advanced) for admission to IITs will be conducted on August 23, the HRD Ministry announced on Thursday.

The exam was earlier scheduled to be held on May 17, but was de-

ferred due to the coronavirus lockdown.

"JEE-Advanced will be conducted on August 23," HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said.

On Tuesday, the government had announced to hold the JEE-Mains from July 18 to July 23.

NDLI reaches out to students amid lockdown

KOLKATA, MAY 7 (PTI): With educational institutions shut due to the lockdown, the National Digital Library of India (NDLI) has reached out to students with 3.5 crore academic content to enable them to study from home, an NDLI spokesperson said on Thursday.

The NDLI is a project under the Ministry of Human Resource Development and is spearheaded by the IIT Kharagpur.

The content can be accessed on 'Corona Home-break: Study from Home' section in the NDLI's mobile application and its online portal www.ndli.gov.in, the

spokesperson said. Of the 3.5 crore academic content, the Union HRD Ministry has given people free access to 78 lakh content after the imposition of the lockdown while they need to register themselves to get complete access to the remaining content, she said.

The digital content is in the form of e-books, audiobooks, lecture materials, thesis, reports, articles, journals, question papers and their solutions, simulation tools and video lectures in engineering, science, management, humanities and law streams, the spokesperson said.

Lions Club Rangpo spreads awareness on preventing COVID-19



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 MAY: With a slogan of "No Mask No Goods", Lions Club of Rangpo organised an awareness program to highlight the benefits of using mask, maintaining social distance and sanitization, a press release informs.

The program was attended by Lions Club of Rangpo in association

with Civil Defence Rangpo, and All Rangpo Local Taxi Owners and Drivers Association. Members pasted posters in every business establishment, banks, salons, vegetables shops, meat vendors and public places mentioning not to offer their services if any customer comes to their establishment without mask; they also requested to keep a bottle

of sanitizer in every shop and to be serious in maintaining social distance.

They also mentioned that the Government has also mandated the use of mask. 400 face masks and 200 bottles of hand sanitizers were also distributed among the business establishments during the program which was sponsored by Alkem Limited Kumrek.

Areas under PoK now in IMD's forecast

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): The IMD's Regional Meteorological Centre has

started including cities under Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir in its forecasts, a departure from its earlier format, officials said on Thursday.

The IMD has started including Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad, which are parts of PoK, under the Jammu and Kashmir meteorological sub-division since May 5, said Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the Regional Meteorological Department that gives forecast for the northwest meteorological division of the IMD.

IMD Director General M Mohapatra said they have been mentioning areas under PoK under its daily weather bulletin ever since the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir in

the two union territories August last year.

However, officials said it's now being mentioned explicitly under the Jammu and Kashmir subdivision.

These cities of PoK have now found a place in the overall forecast of the northwest division.

The northwest division consists of nine sub-divisions Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi-Chandigarh-Haryana, Punjab, east Uttar Pradesh, east Rajasthan and west Rajasthan.

The development assumes significance as New Delhi has been of a position that the Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir belongs to India.

The inclusion of Muzaffarabad and Gilg-

it-Baltistan in the forecast comes amid Pakistan's Supreme Court allowing elections in Gilgit-Baltistan this week. India had strongly reacted to the development.

Sources added that internally, it was pointed out that since IMD has been mentioning these cities under the PoK in its daily national weather bulletin and also the local bulletins, they should also find a place in the forecasts of the RMC.

Mohapatra said that the IMD, being the World Meteorological Department nominated Regional Meteorological Centre, provides severe weather warnings to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan detailing forecasts for the next five days.

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Education Minister inaugurates students outreach programme at Nandok



GANGTOK, 07 MAY (IPR): Minister for Education, Kunga Nima Lepcha inaugurated the Students Outreach Programme at Nandok BAC today to help students learn during this lockdown period.

The Minister addressed the Education Department and BAC officials present in the BAC maintaining the social distance protocol and encouraged the Education officials to work with full dedication. He also applauded the initiatives taken by the teachers during the lockdown.

While interacting with the limited people present in the BAC, the

Minister also informed all that the Department has started an interactive radio programme from All India Radio called 'Stay Home Study at Home' and another programme called 'Shikshan Samvaad' through Samvaad Television. The Minister also mentioned that the system of e-education and reaching out to the students through technology will now be made a regular feature post lockdown also.

State Project Director (SPD) Samagra Shiksha, Bhim Thatal, informed the gathering about the different media and methods utilized by the Department to reach out

to the students during the lockdown.

He emphasised upon the use of Sikkim Edu-tech App by all the school heads and students as it has the feature of pushing educational contents, assigning students with activities, evaluating such activities and exchanging many more such learning materials without consuming the storage space of the mobile phone.

The SPD also informed that AIR Gangtok is broadcasting interactive programme for students from Monday to Saturday at 1.00 pm and Samvaad TV is telecasting teaching session at 6 pm every evening with

repeat in the morning. Another programme on orientation of Primary Teachers in the use of newly developed primary textbooks for Classes 1 to 3 is also being broadcast from AIR, Gangtok every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 12.00 pm. Apart from this, social media including Sikkim Chronicle and Sikkim Varta are also telecasting such programmes.

He further informed that laptops with pre-loaded educational contents together with the contents already broadcast and telecast from radio and TV are being sent to all the BACs to help students learn

where smartphones, internet, TV or radio are not available.

In total 130 such centres have been identified by the department which would function in supervision of the BRCCs, CRCCs, AEOs and ADs of the concerned BACs. The teachers residing nearby area would come to such centres and take classes with the help of laptops preloaded with the teaching materials supplied by the Samagra Shiksha, Education Department duly maintaining COVID-19 protocol.

While thanking the BRCCs, CRCCs, all officers of the District levels and Samagra Shiksha employees of the entire state in reaching out to the students and teachers as well during the lockdown, SPD Sri Thatal also requested to give feedbacks and suggestions to improve upon the initiatives being taken.

Present in the meeting were BDO Nandok, AD Education Nandok, in-charge Nandok SS, CRCC Nandok, teachers and local gentries.



Singtam cops keep watch on vehicles

SINGTAM, 07 MAY: Strict checking of vehicles plying in and around Singtam by SHO, SB Gurung, SI Sonam Thendup Bhutia along with Sing-

tam Police Station personnel, Home Guards and IRBn personnel during the lockdown period. [from YOGEN THATAL]

Anganwadi workers remain diligently at work on the field in South Sikkim

NAMCHI, 07 MAY [IPR]: It is very important to eat healthy and nutritious food containing a balanced diet as this will aid in keeping various diseases at bay and boost the immunity of human body. Keeping this information in mind the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) or Anganwadi Centre of South District is providing Take Home Ration (THR) to selected beneficiaries so that they get to consume nutritious meals at the comfort of their house.

According to District Manual of ICDS this scheme was launched in 1975 and is a unique early childhood development programme, aimed at addressing malnutrition, health and also development needs of young children, pregnant and nursing mothers. ICDS consists of four (4) different components, namely:

1. Early Childhood Care Education & Development (ECCED).
2. Care & Nutrition Counselling.
3. Health Services.
4. Community Mobilisation Awareness, Advocacy & Information, Education and Communication.

Similarly, in South District there are a total of three hundred and thirty two (332) ICDS centres where in a number of Anganwadi workers (AWW) and Anganwadi helpers (AWH) are toiling hard in providing the supplementary food to hand-picked individuals.

Amongst, the many AWW is thirty (30) years old Prabina Sharma who has been working at Lower Namphing ICDS since the year 2015. She and her team is currently distributing THR to households consisting of children aged between six months to three years, pregnant and lactating mothers.

Generally, children belonging to age group of three to six years are enrolled in these centre and they

are provided with Hot cooked Meals (HCM) but due to the nationwide lockdown to combat COVID-19 these centres has been closed. So providing HCM is not possible hence the AWW are reaching out to the households of the registered pupils and delivering the foodgrains at their doorstep.

The ration consists of Cereals, Pulses, Groundnut, Skimmed Milk, Sugar and Oil. Children are provided with 3.5 kg and adults with 4.5 kg. Additionally, Prabina when she is out providing the allowances she also highlights about the Aarogya Setu mobile Application which is India's official contact tracing application for corona. When asked how did she come to know about this application Prabina said that as they are registered with Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD), Government of India (GoI) they got a link to download this application.

The AWW were also appraised as to the objective and various functions of Aarogya Setu and its purpose towards fighting COVID-19, now whenever Prabina goes out for work visit she encourages the public to download this application. She has also assisted many people in downloading of this application and taught them to use this application.

The AWW also updates in a brief manner about the guidelines of COVID-19 to the rural population which includes washing hands frequently, use of sanitizer, not to spit in public and maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene. It is highly commendable of the Anganwadi Workers and Anganwadi Helpers of the south district that they keep up with the norms of COVID-19, practice social distance while distributing THR and also continue with their role of checking the basic health and other vital needs of children and women.

Chamling leads SDF delegation to Governor



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 MAY: An eight-member delegation of Sikkim Democratic Front led

by its president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, called on Governor Ganga Prasad at Raj Bhavan today.

The delegation submitted a memorandum to the Governor putting forth issues and suggestions in the interest of State and the people in the wake of current crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, an official press release from Raj Bhavan informs.

The Governor gave a patient hearing to the submissions made by the members of the delegation and assured to take up the matter with State Government for appropriate action and redressal, the release adds.

Medical emergency duty truck caught ferrying cement



NAMCHI, 07 MAY (IPR): A medical emergency duty truck bearing registration number WB 73F 0276 of Siliguri has

been seized for ferrying cement of one hardware at Jorethang today by the Police personnel of Jorethang Police Station.

Clash over migrants' return leaves 9 injured in UP

BAHRAICH (UP), MAY 7 (PTI): Angry over a villager informing the district administration about the return of some migrants from Mumbai amid the coronavirus lockdown, two rival groups clashed in a village here, leaving nine people injured.

Some residents of Hata Revaliya village

had returned from Mumbai without informing the health department and the district administration, but a villager, Wakil Ahmed, informed authorities, following which a health department team reached the village, SP Vipin Mishra said on Thursday.

This infuriated Zaimud-

din and Abdul Kadir who along with 10 others attacked Ahmed on Wednesday, leaving nine people injured.

Cross FIRs have been lodged and the main accused, Abdul Kadir, has been arrested, the SP said, adding that the matter is being investigated and more arrests will be made soon.

Maha CM discusses coronavirus situation with opposition

MUMBAI, MAY 7 (PTI): Interacting with opposition leaders, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday expressed confidence that the coronavirus pandemic in the state will be curbed by the end of this month.

The Union government was cooperating with the state and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was easily available for discussion and guidance, he said in the meeting which he addressed through video conference.

"I have been talking to you over telephone and seeking your views. I am also reading what you say in the media. If they are good suggestions, I ask the administration to look into them," he said.

"The Centre is also cooperating. The prime minister is easily available for guidance on critical issues," Thac-

keray said. "Due to lockdown, the number of patients did not rise (dramatically) in April. We need to take care in May. The number of patients is growing in Mumbai and the government has created adequate isolation centers," he was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office.

"The pandemic shall be curbed by the end of this month," he said.

The opposition leaders who attended the meeting assured that they were with the government during this crisis, the CMO statement said.

The chief minister appealed to people living in containment zones in Malegaon and Aurangabad cities, which are emerging as infection hotspots, to follow rules, and added that local elected representatives should cooperate with the adminis-

tration.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said opposition leaders should help the farmers who haven't got benefit of the farm loan waiver to get crop loans.

The CMO statement said that Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Devendra Fadnavis stressed the need to focus on the situation in Mumbai and to improve the hospital management.

There should be a planning to ensure the safety of medical workers, he said.

The former chief minister also said the state government should demand more trains for ferrying migrant workers to their home states.

Fadnavis also said that steps should be taken to boost the morale of the police force, and recommended formation of zone-wise expert groups for revival of industries.

Mount Distilleries sanitizes Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 MAY:

Mount Distilleries has undertaken a disinfection drive covering different parts of Rangpo Nagar Panchayat area. The drive has been underway for the past three days. The Mount Distilleries team has sanitized Lower Majhitra along with Himalayan Pharmacy Insti-

tute Hostel where a Facility Quarantine Centre has been established. The team has also covered Upper Majhitra, Bank branches, Petrol Pumps and other public places. Today, the team reached Rangpo town area and disinfected the police station, checkpost, fire station, Sikkim Tourism office, Upper Bazar and Lower Market area.

Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Department of Social Justice & Empowerment

Applications are invited for scholarship for pursuing higher education viz. Masters degree and Ph. D abroad under the Central Sector Scheme namely National Overseas Scholarship (NOS) for Scheduled caste etc. candidate being implemented by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. The applications can be submitted through the portal "www.nosmsje.gov.in" only. In order to be eligible, the prospective candidate should belong to Scheduled Caste or De-notified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribe or Landless Agricultural Labourers and Traditional Artisans category. The prospective candidate should be having minimum 60% marks in the qualifying examination. The qualifying examination for Master's degree is Bachelors degree and for Ph. D., it is Masters degree. The total family income of the prospective candidate should not exceed Rs. 8.00 Lakh in previous year. Applications or documents received through any mode other than the NOS portal are not acceptable. For details, refer to the scheme guidelines for selection year 2020-21 available at the NOS Portal.

DAMP 38101/11/0003/2021

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

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**

Cleaning Up, the Singapore Way

And no, we don't mean the Swachh Bharat kind

Sikkim often invokes Singapore when it speaks of its aspirations and plans. That country is taken as a role model more for emulating the "litter and spit free" environs or to underline the growth made possible by stable and unchanged government. Maybe Sikkim should also look towards Singapore to inspire a clean-up drive against corruption. Of course, the other comparison that Sikkim draws - with Switzerland - would also work, because where Singapore is the only country from Asia in the top-10 least corrupt nations (it ranks 7th), Switzerland figures two rungs higher at 5 on the same list. It will not be a bad idea for Sikkim to link similarities with these two countries beyond sharing same first letter. But let's stick to Singapore for today.

Yes, corruption is a shared problem between India and Singapore and was also of the same colonial carryover kind of the privileged few and the omnipresent government. The latter, however, managed to sweep it away after first accepting that wherever there was development underway, the attendant demand of professionals and the importance of projects, there would be corruption as well. In a recent conversation with some officials from Singapore, some interesting tidbits were collected about how their country combated this dishonest mode of profiteering. This Singaporean lesson is worthy of referencing here.

The Singapore government effectively cleaned up a corrupt developing society in a very short time through three clear strategies, we are told. These, broadly, were a "strong-arm theory", a "strong-men theory", and a "strong-wage theory". The format has obviously worked for Singapore and Sikkim could do well to borrow another of its tried system and replicate it here. The strong-arm theory included strict laws and efficient anticorruption agencies. These are already in place in Sikkim as they are elsewhere in the country, although the actual enforcement is far from satisfactory in most cases. The investigations are tacky, the motivations mischievous, convictions rare and the penalties rarely deterrent enough. The strong men theory is interpreted as an unwavering political will from the top leadership. No matter what we might believe about smart bureaucrats corrupting naive politicians, if the public representatives put their foot down and demand transparency and fix accountability, corruption will start faltering. The next step, beyond those forced by groundswells of public opinion, need to be taken as well. For instance, the requirement to file property returns while filing nomination papers during elections was welcome, but now, there should have been an independent body of auditors to check whether what is disclosed is a true reflection of assets. The strong wage theory is high wages for the top leadership. This, on the understanding that corruption at high levels is far more difficult to deal with than petty corruption because the former is better connected and more deeply entrenched. Paying them well is an incentive to remain clean. Also, the stakes are then raised for them every time they get tempted to steal from the cookie jar. For instance, the Singapore Prime Minister, even after a pay-cut taken some years back, earns more than the U.S. President, the Chancellor of Germany, and the British Prime Minister put together! Little reason left for him to be corrupt then. Strong wages are however of no use if the strong arm is not around to complement it.

Sikkim has already tried out this last trick and has among the better paid officials in the country. Sikkim has already tried out one of the other two options as well, but when will it find the political will to get serious about containing the problem? Of course, these options don't work in isolation, they have to come together. If they do, they can't possibly fail. Will Sikkim be interested?

Of late, there has been another option that desperate people have resorted to; the options which have given us Kejriwal in Delhi, and also, even though they hail from completely different ideologies, Modi in the Centre to a large extent, Trump in the US and Duterte in the Philippines. It is now universally accepted that the interplay of corruption and inequality feeds populism, a populism of a very dangerous kind. When traditional politicians fail to tackle corruption, people will grow cynical and seek out options from the opposite end of the spectrum. People around the world, especially in ill-informed or desperately unequal societies, have been turning to wildly populist and alt-Right leaders who promise to break the cycle of corruption and privilege, win them pride and secure them their place in world. Unfortunately, they almost never deliver. What they end up doing is exacerbating the already vexed situations.

The mysterious disappearance of the first SARS virus, and why we need a vaccine for the current one but didn't for the other

MARILYN J. ROOSSINCK
theconversation.com

Some people question why the current coronavirus has brought the world to standstill while a previous deadly coronavirus, SARS, did not.

Others have questioned why a vaccine is so urgently needed now to stop the spread of the current coronavirus when a vaccine was never developed for SARS.

I study viruses and am so fascinated by their complexity that I have written a book about them. The tale of SARS and its new cousin that causes COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, shows just how unpredictable viruses can be, particularly when they jump from animals to humans. Understanding emerging, infectious diseases needs to be a priority. SARS, which killed about one in 10 infected people, turned out to be highly lethal but ultimately, and somewhat mysteriously, disappeared.

A VIRUS TAKES HOLD

SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, was first noted in Guangdong province, China in November of 2002, when doctors there saw an unusual pneumonia. But the disease was not reported to the World Health Organization at that time.

In February of 2003, another outbreak occurred in Hanoi, Vietnam, and a WHO officer, who later died, examined a patient there and reported a large outbreak to the WHO main office on March 10, 2003.

Meanwhile, a doctor from Guangdong province traveled to Hong Kong and stayed at the Metropol Hotel, along with a number of other international travelers. The doctor was infected with what we now know as SARS-CoV-1. The virus was transmitted to at least a dozen other hotel guests. Two returned to Canada and took the virus there. One returned to Ireland, one to the United States. Three went to Singapore, and one to Vietnam. In addition, a few people were hospitalized in Hong Kong, leading to an outbreak in the hospital there.

From that point, SARS spread to much of the world, although most cases remained in Asia. The virus was aggressive and lethal. Patients typically showed symptoms within two to three days. There

were few reports of any infections without symptoms, as there are with COVID-19. The masks came out, temperature scanners were placed in all major public gathering places in China and other parts of Asia, quarantines were implemented, the virus infection peaked in late May of 2003 and then it disappeared. The strict quarantine measures paid off, and by July 2003, the WHO declared the threat over.

In all there were just over 8,000 cases of SARS-CoV-1, and about 700 deaths. In the U.S. there were a total of just 29 confirmed cases, and no deaths. The Hong Kong economy, with a large tourism component, was severely impacted by SARS in 2003, much as the U.S. tourism industry is currently one of the most heavily impacted parts of the economy due to SARS-CoV-2.

KILLING COUSINS?

SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2 are closely related viruses. Scientists believe that both viruses originated in bats. The RNA genomes of the viruses are about 80% identical. What does that mean?

Our own genomes are over 98% identical to those of chimpanzees, so 80% seems a lot less similar. For a virus though, especially one with an RNA genome, this is actually very closely related.

That's because viruses can mutate very rapidly. They make a lot of mistakes when they copy their genomes, and they make thousands of copies in a few hours.

The two viruses have very similar proteins on their exterior and use the same proteins, or receptors, on our cell surfaces to enter the cell. These receptors are found in a lot of different cell types.

Most studies of SARS-CoV-1 focused on the lungs, because that is where the most severe disease occurred, but both viruses can infect a lot of different organs. We won't know how often other organs are infected with SARS-CoV-2 until there is time to do proper autopsies and fully understand the way the virus causes disease.

How are they different, and how is that impacting the course of the pandemic? SARS-CoV-1 was more aggressive and lethal than SARS-CoV-2. However, SARS-CoV-2 spreads faster, sometimes with hidden symptoms, allowing each infected person to infect several others. The current estimate is

about three, but we scientists won't know the real number until we can test a lot more people, and can understand the role of people without symptoms.

The most important difference is that contact tracing - or finding out who was exposed to someone infected with the virus - was relatively easy: Everyone had severe symptoms in two to three days.

With SARS-CoV-2, it takes about two weeks for symptoms to appear, and many people don't have any symptoms at all. Imagine asking someone whom they had contact with for the last two weeks! You can accurately remember most people you had contact with for the past two days, but two weeks? This critical tool for pandemic control is very challenging to implement. This means that the only safe thing to do is to maintain quarantine of everyone until the pandemic is under control.

What about a SARS vaccine? Vaccine studies for SARS-CoV-1 were started and tested in animal models. An inactivated whole virus was used in ferrets, nonhuman primates and mice. All of the vaccines resulted in protective immunity, but there were complications; the vaccines resulted in an immune disease in animals. No human studies were done, nor were the vaccine studies taken further because the virus disappeared. Many factors were involved in the end of SARS-CoV-1, perhaps including summer weather, and certainly strict quarantine of all those who had contact with infected individuals, but we don't really know why the epidemic ended. Viruses are like that, unpredictable!

Many of the vaccines being developed for SARS-CoV-2 are quite different, and many use only small portions of the virus, or the virus RNA. This may circumvent the problems with SARS-CoV-1 vaccines that used more of the virus. Vaccine development has a large experimental component; we just have to make educated guesses and try different things and see what works. Hence, many different avenues for vaccines are being tested by different labs around the world.

[The writer is Professor of Plant Pathology and Environmental Microbiology, Pennsylvania State University]



How to help with school at home: don't talk like a teacher

CATHERINE DOHERTY
theconversation.com

In many countries schools remain closed and the dinner table now serves as the school desk. This crisis has given us all new respect for the work that teachers do, but it has also given us an extraordinary moment to break the strictures of classroom learning.

While there's been much interest in digital tools and resources to help parents support learning, we shouldn't overlook the most flexible and practical precision tool we have at our disposal - talk.

In the classroom, talk is typically used by teachers to marshal a diverse group of students through a sequence of activities in an allotted time. Some students may struggle to keep up with the pace of teaching, while others may find it grindingly slow.

But now we find ourselves in a unique moment. One-to-one conversations can unfold at a pace that reflects your child's needs and interests. This is the magic formula that private tutoring bottles and sells for a hefty price.

TALK THE TALK

Here are some tips on how to help your child learn through talk.

Take your time: There is now no urgency to meet an arbitrary deadline or timetable. Teachers are often

having to hurry students up and shift them on to the next scheduled activity. While we adults often complain that children have limited concentration spans, in fact it's often us who get restless and want to move on to the next thing. Let your child stay on task till they are finished.

Ask questions: Teachers often ask "pseudo" questions they already know the answer to as a way to check student understanding and attention. Once the teacher achieves the desired answer, the whole class can move on with the assumption that everyone else is on the same page. Again, teachers have had to develop this to manage the student-teacher ratio.

But at home these questions can be used to check and explore the understanding of the individual child. Even better, prompts such as "tell me about..." and "think out loud" can invite longer, more thoughtful responses.

Allow them time to think: In class, time pressures can rob students of time to think over their answers. At home, we can give thinking the time it needs. It's very tempting as a restless adult to interrupt thinking time with new more complex versions of the same question, but try to resist this urge. If you need to ask again, don't change the question, just repeat it - then let the thinking happen.

Discuss together: In the pressure of the classroom, students rarely ask questions about curriculum content. You can turn this pattern on its head. If the school materials suggest a topic, then start with a shared discussion about the questions you'd both like to answer about that topic. Make a note of these questions, and then talk about how you might tackle each question.

Do some speculative thinking together - hypothesise or make some guesses together that you can later test. Stop and explore their understanding and application of ideas. Ask genuine questions that you don't know the answer to, and share the process of wondering and enquiring. Diversions and detours are all part of the fun in exploring ideas.

KEEP CHILDREN INVOLVED

Read out loud: We tend to associate school reading with students reading texts out loud. Instead, use this lockdown to read out loud to your child. Take on a book that is a bit beyond their capacity, and stop after each chapter to reflect on what's happened - and what might happen next.

Maybe alternate reading paragraphs out loud to each other, mimicking character voices for fun. Sneak in an occasional nonsensical error to check your co-reader is following closely. When big sister, brother or another carer come in, ask your

co-reader to update them on the story while you get a cup of tea. You can support them with "and what about when...?"

Use your own language: Teachers tend to speak the official language of instruction, but this may be your child's second language, or a dialect that is not used at home. Bilingualism is a valuable asset, not an impediment. This moment is a great opportunity for you and your child to use your shared home language to explore and enrich their school learning.

Encourage children to speak up: Some of us were educated in times when children were expected to be seen and not heard. Nowadays interactive talk is understood to be an indicator of active learning and an important part of building knowledge. Talk is an extraordinary tool for making meaning and building relationships.

Enriched talk doesn't cost anything, and you can start immediately. If schools resume under socially distanced arrangements we can expect that talk in classrooms will become more constrained. Our differently textured interactions at home can continue to provide a contrast to teachers' talk.

[The writer is Professor of Pedagogy and Social Justice, University of Glasgow]

MSME sector on verge of collapse: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector is on the verge of collapse and urged major industries to release the outstanding dues to such companies within a month.

He said the position of MSMEs was "worst" as they were now engaged in a "battle for their survival".

The minister also noted that the pendency of dues owed to MSME units by the central government, state governments, public sector undertakings and major industries was "very high".

"My request to all of you, as members of major industries, if it is possible for you to at any cost release the payment within a month. Don't take more time than that otherwise the situation



is very bad," the MSME minister said in an interaction via video-conference with the members of SIAM Institute.

"But still if anywhere you have a problem, please be positive about this sector, because this is really on the verge of

collapse. Now it is a very important thing if you can help them, within a month if you can give their payment it will be good," Gadkari said.

The minister said he was trying to introduce a scheme envisaging setting up of a "rolling fund"

where the interest cost on the payments due to MSMEs shall be borne either by the supplier or the purchasing industry. Gadkari said the "rolling fund" will be helpful for MSMEs to get their working capital". Last month, the min-

ister had said the government will set up a Rs 1 lakh crore fund to repay outstanding payments to MSMEs owed by the central and state government undertakings as well as major industries.

Gadkari had said he has devised a scheme to set up the fund, and the proposal may be placed before the Cabinet for approval once the finance ministry gives its go-ahead.

"We have decided to set up a fund of Rs 1 lakh crore. We will insure this fund with the government paying the premium. We will come up with a formula for sharing of the interest burden between the paying entity and payment-receiving entity and banks against this fund, for the payments due to MSMEs which are stuck with the PSUs, centre and state governments and major industries, Gadkari had said.

2 BSF personnel die of COVID-19; 41 new cases reported



NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): Two Border Security Force personnel have succumbed to the COVID-19 infection while the force has reported 41 new cases of infection, a senior official said on Thursday.

The total number of infections or active cases in the 2.5 lakh personnel

strong force now stand at 193 now. Two jawans have recovered.

These are the first cases of death in the BSF due to coronavirus infection and the second among paramilitary forces after a 55-year-old sub-inspector of the CRPF had succumbed to the disease last month.

Nagaland govt focuses on agriculture to revive economy



KOHIMA, MAY 7 (PTI): The Nagaland government, which is facing a financial crunch in the wake of the lockdown, has focused on strengthening the agriculture and allied sectors to revive the state's economy, a minister said.

The government will hold a meeting with the representatives of the farming community and entrepreneurs on Friday to discuss various issues to improve these sectors, state planning and coordination minister Neiba Kronu said.

He said the government led by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio is looking to become self-reliant in terms of agricultural production and reduce its dependence on the Centre and other states.

"The present situation arising out of the

COVID-19 outbreak has given us a lesson that we should take farming more seriously to become self-reliant in the food sector as the state has been facing a financial crunch," Kronu said on Wednesday.

He said the state has conducive climatic conditions and fertile land to help the agricultural sector grow.

Accepting that the performance of the agriculture and allied sectors was below par in the past, he said, "Now, we have to change the strategy and all have to be active." He also said that the government is working on a strategy to boost the veterinary and animal husbandry sector in the state.

Speaking on the Nagaland people strand-

ed in different parts of the country due to the lockdown, he said the state government does not encourage them to come back.

At present, the government has a list of around 23,000 people including patients, students and workers, stuck in different parts of the country.

The minister said the government is taking initiatives to make the BSL-3 lab functional for testing samples of people with coronavirus-like symptoms, though no COVID-19 case has been reported in the state.

Home department's principal secretary Abhijit Sinha said the inter-district movement of stranded people would be allowed from Thursday till Saturday.

SBI to extend moratorium to NBFCs

KOLKATA, MAY 7 (PTI): The country's largest lender SBI has decided to extend the RBI-approved moratorium to the cash-strapped NBFC sector to help them tide over the crisis, its MD Dinesh Kumar Khara said on Thursday.

The RBI has allowed banks to extend moratorium to borrowers of term loans of all kinds for three months -- March, April and May.

"SBI has taken a decision to extend the moratorium allowed by RBI to the NBFC sector which is facing severe problem of cashflow," Khara said.

The bank would extend the moratorium to the Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) on a case-to-case basis after assessing their cash budgets and examining the need for extending it, he told PTI.

"Just to ensure that there is no gap in the cashflow and help them tide over the contingency, SBI has taken such a decision," Khara said.

Earlier, the State Bank of India extended 10 per cent emergency COVID response contingency loan to all kinds of borrowers to an extent of Rs 200 crore each, he said.

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday reviewed liquidity position and ways to promote lending to the

MSME sector during a meeting with representatives of NBFCs and mutual funds amid the lockdown induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Operations of NBFCs have commenced from Monday as the government eased restrictions for the lockdown.

Some of the issues discussed during the meeting included availability of liquidity from banks and other financial institutions and post-lockdown strategies for supply of credit, including working capital, to MSMEs, traders and bottom of pyramid customers in semi-urban, rural and urban areas, the RBI said.

Implementation of three months moratorium on repayment of loan instalments announced by the RBI, and strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms were also discussed.

The governor acknowledged the critical role of NBFCs, including micro finance institutions (MFIs), in delivering last mile credit, and the importance of mutual funds in financial intermediation, RBI said in the statement.

The RBI governor on Saturday had met heads of public sector and private sector banks asking them to step up their lending towards the MSME sector.

Nearly 3,500 migrants workers reach UP by trains



BANDA/LUCKNOW (UP) MAY 7 (PTI): Over 3,400 migrant workers arrived in Uttar Pradesh from different parts of the country by Shramik special trains on Thursday, officials said.

As many as 1,220 migrants arrived in Banda district by from Surat in Gujarat, 1,192 arrived in Lucknow from Bengaluru and 1,079 arrived in Barabanki from Hyderabad.

According to Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Banda, Santosh Bahadur Singh, "The Shramik special train from Surat arrived in Banda at 6.40 am.

All the 1,220 labourers after undergoing

thermal scanning, are being sent by roadways buses," he said.

Of these migrant labourers, 1,070 are from Banda and the rest from Fatehpur, Chitrakoot, Mahoba and Hamirpur, the ADM said, adding that they will be kept in 14 days of quarantine before being sent to their home.

In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC), managing director, Rajshankar, said that a bus from Jalandhar arrived in Lucknow on Wednesday at 11.45 pm with migrant labourers.

For them 38 buses were deployed and 1,164

passengers were sent to Bahraich, he said.

Another train from Bengaluru arrived in Lucknow at 6.40 am on Thursday with 1,192 passengers, who were sent in 43 buses to Sonbhadra, Ghazipur, Gonda, Balrampur, Pratapgarh, Amroha, Ambedkar Nagar, Moradabad, Gorakhpur, Khushinagar and Deoria, the managing director said.

Another train from Hyderabad reached Barabanki on Thursday at 6.30 am with 1,079 passengers. They were sent in 40 buses to their destinations, including Barabanki, Hardoi, Lucknow, Sitapur, and Lakhimpur, he said.

20 people test positive for COVID-19 in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 7 (PTI): Odisha on Thursday reported the "highest number of COVID-19 cases" in a day as 20 people, who recently returned from Surat, tested positive for coronavirus, an official said.

With these new cases, the total number of people afflicted with the disease has climbed to 205, he said.

Of the 20 new patients, 17 are from Ganjam district and three from Mayurbhanj, a new one in the list of districts where coronavirus cases have been reported, an

Information and Public Relations department official said.

"These new patients have recently returned from Surat and were in quarantine centres," the official said.

The number of active cases now stands at 142, while 61 people have recovered from the disease. Two persons from Bhubaneswar have died of the infection.

The state government had on Wednesday tested 3,060 samples, the official said.

A total of 50,514 samples have been tested so

far in the state, he said.

Jajpur district has reported the maximum number of cases at 55, followed by Bhubaneswar in Khurda district 47, Balasore 25, Bhadrak and Ganjam 21 each and Sundergarh 12.

Four cases have been reported from Jagatsinghpur while three each from Mayurbhanj and Kendrapara districts.

Two cases each have been detected in Cuttack, Jharsuguda, Bolangir, Keonjhar and Kalahandi, and one each in Puri, Dhenkanal, Deogarh and Koraput districts.

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Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey coursed by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM

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531 Maha cops infected by COVID-19 so far; 39 recovered

MUMBAI, MAY 7 (PTI): As many as 531 Maharashtra police personnel, including 51 officers, have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, an official said on Thursday.

Among these infected police personnel, 480 are constables, who are being treated at various hospitals in the state, the official said.

Out of the 531 coronavirus positive police personnel, 39, including eight officers, have recovered from the disease, he said.

So far, five policemen have died due to the virus, the official said.

Earlier in the day, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said that 487 policemen have tested COVID-19 positive in the state ever since the nationwide lockdown came into force.

The lockdown was imposed on March 24 and has been extended till May 17 to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Taking to Twitter, Deshmukh said, "487 police personnel have tested positive for COVID-19 since the lockdown." Meanwhile, the official said the Maharashtra Police have registered at least 96,231 offences so far under section 188 of the IPC for violation of lockdown-related norms and arrested 18,858 people.

The IPC section 188 deals with disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant.

Since the lockdown, there had been 189 incidents of assault on policemen (till May 7) in which 73 personnel and a home guard sustained injuries, the official said, adding at least 683 persons had been arrested for these attacks.

Around 30 health professionals had been also attacked during this period, the official said.

Police have traced at least 649 people, who violated quarantine norms in the state, excluding the financial capital, the official said. At least 85,309 phone calls were handled by various police control rooms across the state in connection with the virus, he said.

Police have registered 1,281 offences of illegal transport and seized 53,330 vehicles which had come on roads in violation of lockdown rules, the official said.

A fine of Rs 3.56 crore has been collected from violators by the police for various offences during this period, he said.

Earlier, in a series of tweets, Deshmukh said 3,10,694 passes have been issued for essential service providers and those caught in emergencies till now.

The minister said that 2,24,219 people have been isolated in the state for possible exposure to the coronavirus and 649 were found to be violating quarantine norms.

"The state govt's running 4,738 relief camps where 4,35,030 migrant labourers have been given refuge with food & necessities. 1,281 offences have been registered for illegal transport," he said on the micro-blogging site.

Current WI T20 team is better than 2016-WC-winning side: Bravo

NEW DELHI, MAY 7 (PTI): All-rounder Dwayne Bravo is in awe of the current West Indies T20 team's batting depth, saying it is better than the 2016 World Cup-winning side and can intimidate any opposition.

"In the last series in Sri Lanka, we had a team meeting, and coach Phil (Simmons) put the team down, the list, and he put it down in batting order, and he had my name down at No. 9," Bravo told ESPNcricinfo.

"And I said to the guys, I said listen, I don't think I was ever involved in a T20 team when I am down to bat at No. 9.

"I'm just in awe of our batting line-up, and I said to the guys, I said listen, I think this team is actually better than our World-Cup-winning team, and that is no joke, because at the end of the day, you have batting all the way down to No. 10."

Bravo, who returned from international T20 retirement in December last year to strengthen West Indies' title defence, said the batting resources of this "intimidating" team has reduced his role to a



specialist bowler.

"It's an intimidating team, it's a team to intimidate the opposition, and that excites me. So I will just do my part as a bowler, try to control the back end of the innings, especially closing off the innings with death bowling, which has been, in the past, a bit of a concern for us," said Bravo, who made his international comeback in January against Ireland. "You saw how Oshane

Thomas did with his pace in Sri Lanka. Then you have Sheldon Cottrell, now a leader of the attack, Kesrick Williams on the bench, so things starting to look bright again, things starting to look good again."

Bravo also was effusive in his praise for skipper Kieron Pollard, who had taken over the reins of limited over teams last year.

"He loves to win (Pollard). That's the most important

thing, and as a captain, he'll do anything to win, in the right way and the right spirit, and he's very determined to win, to make a difference," he said.

"I remember when they approached him to take over, I said to him, it's going to be a good challenge, a big one, a tough one, but now is the best time. You get both teams at the bottom of the table. There's only one way you can go, which is up, right?" I said

now is the right time, you build a team and you create a dressing-room environment where everyone is on the same page."

Pollard has represented West Indies in 113 ODIs and 73 T20Is, scoring 3619 runs and taken 88 wickets. The 32-year-old all-rounder remains a huge figure in limited over cricket, having played in several leagues across the globe, including the IPL. Bra-

vo described Pollard as a "figurehead" and someone who commands respect across the globe for his achievements.

"I think what Pollard has is his honesty, which is the most important thing. You have leaders in the past sometimes that said, okay, well, I don't get involved in selection, I had no say, you know, they give all types of excuses and stuff, and the system will be able to manoeuvre them and control them, but Pollard, you can't control him," Bravo said.

"... The players also respect him, because of whatever he has done and achieved in the white-ball format, especially in T20 cricket. So if someone like Pollard is speaking in the dressing room about T20 cricket, we all have to listen, because he's played the most games, he's had success, and he's highly respected around the world."

The 36-year-old also had words of appreciation for coach Phil Simmons.

"And that relationship we have with Phil Simmons as well, it's another good thing. Captain, coach - always have to have a good relationship," Bravo said.

CA to start pre-season under new rules from May end: Report



MELBOURNE, MAY 7 (PTI): Cricket Australia is set to begin the team's pre-season later this month under a set of new training protocols devised for the safety of players amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a report in 'The Sydney Morning Herald', CA is churning out strategies for resumption of training under the watchful eyes of its chief medical officer Dr John Orchard and head of sports science and sports medicine Alex Kountouris.

The duo is working closely with counterparts of other cricket playing nations and are part of committees of the Australian government and the ICC which are trying to find ways for the resumption of sports. The report said CA's

immediate priority is to draw up protocols for players' pre-season, which include barring the use of saliva or sweat to shine the ball during training.

CA's head of sports science and sports medicine Kountouris said the coronavirus-forced new normal shouldn't have much impact of teams' training in a sport like cricket.

"There's physical distancing in the nets - there's two or three bowlers in each net. One bowls at a time, the batter is 22 yards away so it's not a big problem," Kountouris said.

"We don't see it as too big a problem to manage, but these are the things we're spelling out. This is what you should do: keep your distance, how you should handle the

ball, these are things easy to manage." Kountouris said with social distancing becoming mandatory in the post-COVID world, teams will have to find out new ways of on-field celebrations.

"You might not see high-fiving after a wicket or people ruffling someone else's hair. It will be a spaced huddle. It will be the new norm. That's one of those things, the physical distancing for the time being, that will definitely be out until a vaccine or some sort of solution like that (comes up).

"I think we'll have to find a different way to celebrate, they'll have to be innovative," he said.

"There are things you won't be able to chop out overnight but people will gradually get used to doing things differently.

Joshua bout may not be behind closed doors: promoter

LONDON, MAY 7 (AFP): Anthony Joshua's promoter says the world champion's next title defence may not be staged behind closed doors despite the coronavirus crisis.

Eddie Hearn is considering moving Joshua's next fight against Kubrat Pulev, which was originally scheduled for the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20.

The London bout has been postponed indefinitely due to the pandemic and Hearn would be willing to move it to the Middle East if an audience is allowed there.

Joshua beat Andy Ruiz to take the WBA, IBF, WBO and IBO heavyweight titles in Saudi Arabia in December.

Hearn has already suggested he might stage the clash between Dillian Whyte and Alexander Povetkin in an empty venue, but the financial implications of doing the same with Joshua make it unworkable. "We're not going to go to AJ and say, mate, there's 10 million pound less in the pot - we've got to get creative," Hearn told Boxing Social on Wednesday.

"These countries are going to be up and run-

ning a lot quicker than our country or America.

"Would Saudi (Arabia) or Dubai or Abu Dhabi be ready to stage an event in September or October? I think 100 per cent. "If you can't get a live gate for the bigger fights we have to look elsewhere and that involves looking at other territories.

"Do I really want AJ to box behind closed doors? No. With what he has produced in terms of that live audience, I will be doing everything I can do make sure AJ doesn't fight behind closed doors."

NBA players can start solo workouts at team sites Friday

NEW YORK, MAY 7 (AFP): NBA team facilities are set to reopen for individual player workouts on Friday in areas where state and local governments have eased coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

It's the first small step on the road to resuming a 2019-20 NBA campaign that was shut down March 12 after Utah's Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19, even though the league has unveiled no timetable to return and says it could change its workout plan based on updated virus news.

About a month of the regular season remains unplayed. Two months of playoff games were to have started almost three weeks ago.

"We're excited... to take that first small step toward returning to play. We miss the competition. We miss the camaraderie," Utah Jazz executive vice president of basketball operations Dennis Lindsey said in a posting on the club website.

"We're going to ramp up systematically. The biggest goal is to have the confidence of the players and the staff that they can enter our facility safely."

Not every team can open facilities for workouts and some clubs might choose not to open given the safety precautions required. California lockdown rules will keep the Los Angeles Lakers



and Clippers from working out at team facilities.

The Utah Jazz don't plan to open on Friday, Lindsey said.

"That could be within a day or two, but my best guess is it will be after May 8," Lindsey said.

"We want to make sure the facility meets all the league specifications, the local and state health officials' protocols, and then we're going to be even more stringent with those standards and create our own."

Another concern for the league is not to provide some clubs a major edge over others because their players are allowed to work out at facilities while others are denied the opportunity, although no solution to that issue has been announced.

Many health safeguards will be in place for the solo workouts, with only four players allowed on the court at

once, each shooting at different hoops with no passing between players and no coaches allowed in the sessions.

According to multiple reports, the NBA will detail extra requirements for clubs and players, including all balls being sterilized after each session and players not being allowed to exercise at any team facility but that of their own club.

Players reportedly must wear face masks except during physical activity and have their temperatures taken before entering the building while staffers who rebound balls for players must wear masks and gloves.

- 'GET PRETTY EXCITED' -

The Phoenix Suns were looking at May 16 return, a day after Arizona stay-at-home regulations are eased.

The Milwaukee Bucks, who had the

NBA's best record at 53-12 when the season went on hiatus, were unsure as of Tuesday about workout timing.

"When you hear reports about things opening up, you get pretty excited," Milwaukee's Pat Connaughton said.

"But we don't have any information about ours yet."

The workouts mark small progress toward a return to games, but safety is a top priority and what the relaxed stay-at-home measures produce in terms of virus spread will be a major factor in any return timetable.

"I do want to play right now, but I feel like everything that's going on right now is to protect everybody as long as we stay home and sort of stay away from each other," said Memphis Grizzlies rookie guard Ja Morant. "I'm doing good, but I definitely want to be out there on the court."

IOC plans to hold cancelled Tokyo session remotely

LAUSANNE, MAY 7 (AFP): The International Olympic Committee revealed plans to hold its next session initially scheduled for Tokyo before the opening of the 2020 Games by video link to be streamed live on July 17.

A statement from the IOC's Lausanne headquarters said a remote session was on the cards after this summer's Games were delayed a year and because of the "measures being implemented

in Switzerland and around the world to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic".

"The IOC Executive Board (EB) will discuss holding the 136th IOC Session remotely through a secure electronic system on Friday 17 July 2020, from 12 to 4 p.m. CEST; and the plan is for it to be live streamed," the statement read.

The agenda and organisation of the IOC Session, including a secure electronic voting system,

will be worked out by the EB who hold their next meeting remotely on May 14.

The Tokyo Games scheduled for July 24 to August 9 were postponed on March 24 for one year due to the virus which has killed over 250,000 around the world.

Last week Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it would be "difficult" to hold the postponed Olympics if the coronavirus pandemic was not contained.

Asian giant hornets spotted for first time in US



A deadly giant insect known as the "murder hornet" has been spotted for the first time in the United States, prompting fears it could decimate the honeybee population and creating a buzz on social media.

Two of the wasps -- the world's largest hornet species -- were discovered late last year in the western state of Washington, and scientists have since been trying to track the invasive insects to eradicate them.

Karla Salp, a spokesperson for the Washington State Department of Agriculture, said it was unclear how the Asian giant hornets -- which have orange and black markings

and are nearly two inches (five centimeters) in length -- arrived in the United States.

"Normally, though, they are unwitting hitchhikers on something (like shipping containers) or someone," Salp told AFP.

Scientists suspect there are probably more of the insects than just the two spotted last year, which is why a public outreach campaign has been launched to help with eradication efforts.

"During this trapping season and with the help of public education and encouragement to report suspected sightings, we hope to have a better idea of where they are as well as to eradicate them

if we can," Salp said.

Scientists warn that unless the insect is eliminated in the next couple years, it could spread in North America and become permanently established.

Salp said the hornets, which are native to East Asia and Japan, don't usually attack people, but they are known for decimating honeybee colonies.

"In general, people do not need to worry," she said. "As long as you don't step in a nest or approach a beehive they have taken over, there is a fairly low risk that you will be stung.

"That being said, if you are stung, their ven-

om is more toxic than that of local bees and wasps, and they have more of it," she added.

In Japan, where the insects are hunted and eaten, some 30 to 50 people die each year from their venomous and excruciating sting.

- Mass slaughter -

But while the giant hornets are typically not harmful to humans, they do pose a great danger to bee populations, which have been declining in many parts of the world.

Chris Looney, an entomologist at the Washington State Department of Agriculture, has explained that hornets slaughter honeybees by literally biting their

heads off.

The hornets then occupy honeybee nests for up to a week or more, feeding on the pupae and larvae.

Paul van Westendorp, an apiculturist in British Columbia, said the only actual nest of hornets found in North America was discovered on Vancouver Island and destroyed.

A specimen was also found in White Rock, British Columbia, last November.

The two hornets spotted in Blaine, Washington, were found in December. One was alive and flew off, Westendorp said, while the second was dead.

News of the "murder hornets" arrival in the United States has set the internet abuzz in recent days, with many lamenting that it couldn't have come at a worse time, referring to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Now I gotta worry about a hornet killing me! the world is ending," said one Twitter user.

"Guys, I think we are going to be okay as long as someone tells the Murder Hornets about the 6ft social distancing rule," quipped another user. "With a name like that, I'm sure they are reasonable."

UK universities reach out to Indian students for COVID-19 support



BY ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MAY 7 (PTI): UK universities have urged distressed Indian students, whether still in Britain or in India, to get in touch with their varsity support services if they need help or guidance during the coronavirus related lockdown.

On Monday, the Indian government announced plans to begin phased repatriation of its citizens stranded abroad from May 7.

Air India will operate 64 flights from May 7 to May 13 to bring back around 15,000 Indian nationals stranded abroad amid the COVID-19-induced lockdown, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in New Delhi on Tuesday.

As the Indian government's first phase of repatriations from the UK to India begins from Thursday, many Indian students in the UK still face a long wait before they can fly home. The UK universities said they wanted them to know that the support continues to be available.

"We are aware that many Indian students are concerned about money and accommodation, are missing their families and are understandably distressed to be far from home during this global pandemic. My message to those students is: please, please speak to your university," said Vivienne Stern, Director of Universities UK international, which represents 143 UK university leaders.

"We may not be able to fix everything, but there are people on hand who will do everything they can to make things easier for you. Universities are providing support in the form of funding, food, accommodation and advice and

guidance. We are in this together, please don't struggle alone," she said.

Universities UK said that support offered by universities includes delivering food to students, providing hardship funds for students in financial difficulty, waiving accommodation fees or moving international students into accommodation where they can look after them by providing cleaning, security and catering. Universities are also providing pastoral and mental health support.

Jaspreet Singh, an Indian student at Birmingham City University (BCU), had some advice for his fellow BCU students: "I know being an international student how worried our parents can be. I send them regular updates and say I'm safe here. Make sure you are in touch with your lecturers and the amazing support team which BCU has got make sure you use them."

Universities UK also highlighted a range of specific steps taken by a snapshot of universities around the UK to support international students who may feel stranded as a result of the coronavirus crisis and need support.

The University of Bath has moved all students in university owned accommodation around the city into campus accommodation and is providing three free meals a day to all students who remain on campus. It has also enhanced the availability of financial assistance to students who find themselves in hardship.

Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland has implemented a dedicated helpline for students, which operates seven days a week, and has introduced a fund

to support students through the COVID-19 crisis as well as waived rent for April and May. Solent University and the University of Bangor have been supporting students stuck in the UK to access hardship funding.

Indians make up one of the largest groups of international students from outside the European Union (EU) studying at universities in Britain, after Chinese students. Thousands of these Indian students have found themselves stranded as India imposed a ban on international flights in the middle of March.

Indian students' representative groups such as the National Indian Students and Alumni Union UK (NISAU-UK) and Indian National Students Association (INSA) have issued advisories and have been organising food deliveries and other assistance through the lockdown.

The UK Home Office had confirmed that any foreign students or professionals on visas that had expired or expiring would be given an extension at least until May 31. Many of the stranded students, from different parts of India including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, expressed their relief at that extension but remain concerned about the limited resources at their disposal.

A ticket on one of the initial seven Air India repatriation flights organised by the Indian government are set to cost around Rs 50,000, which combined with the cost of quarantine to be borne by the passenger on landing in India, is a new cause for worry among this group as they await their turn to be flown back to India.

President Xi warns against complacency as China downgrades COVID-19 risk levels in all regions

BY K J M VARMA BEIJING, MAY 7 (PTI): President Xi Jinping has cautioned people against complacency over the declining trend of coronavirus cases in the country as China on Thursday downgraded COVID-19 risk levels in all regions, signalling its successful containment.

All regions in China have seen their risk level downgraded to the lowest level starting Thursday, state-run China Daily reported.

China has already reduced risk levels in Hubei province and its capital Wuhan -- the epicentres of the virus, while business and factories across the country have resumed operations.

China's National Health Commission (NHC) on Thursday said while no new domestically transmitted coronavirus case was reported on Wednesday, two imported cases were detected.

Hubei province and its capital Wuhan, which were free from new coronavirus cases for the last 33 days, reported six asymptomatic cases on Wednesday, taking the total number of such patients in the province to 626, the local health commission said.

The total number of asymptomatic patients in the country now stands at 880. Asymptomatic cases refer to people who are tested COVID-19 positive but develop no symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat. However, they pose a risk of spreading the disease to others.

No new fatalities were reported on Wednesday

and the death toll in China remained at 4,633, the NHC said. The total number of COVID-19 cases in China now stands at 82,885, it said.

Meanwhile, President Xi in a meeting with the central guiding group for novel coronavirus prevention and control cautioned people against lowering their guard following the declining trend of the coronavirus cases in the country.

Addressing the meeting on Thursday, Xi said the spread of the virus overseas has not been effectively curbed yet and cluster cases were reported in a few areas in China, posing considerable uncertainty to the epidemic control.

The epidemic prevention and control measures in Hubei should not be relaxed, Xi said.

Praising the work of the central guiding group, he said it has spared no effort to curb the spread of the virus and worked hard to build a strong first line of defence, making important contributions to winning the people's war against the epidemic. The group, headed by Premier Li Keqiang, spearheaded the fight against the COVID-19 since January fourth week.

Last month, China had announced to hold its annual parliament session from May 22, signalling that the pandemic which paralysed the country for over three months is finally under control.

The session was earlier scheduled to be held from March 5 and got postponed for the first time due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Hong Kong customs seize 38,500 endangered shark fins



Hong Kong has seized 26 tonnes of smuggled shark fins, sliced from some 38,500 endangered animals, in the largest bust of its kind in the southern Chinese city.

The record haul was discovered in two containers from Ecuador, and highlights the continued demand for shark fin, which is served at wedding banquets in many Chinese communities.

The city's customs department unveiled the haul on Wednesday and said it smashed previous records.

"Each consignment consisting of 13 tonnes broke the previous record seizure of 3.8 tonnes of controlled shark fins made in 2019," customs official Danny Cheung told reporters.

Most of the fins came from thresher and silky sharks, both endangered species. A 57-year-old man was arrested but has been released on bail pending further enquiries.

Some of the ocean's most vital apex preda-

tors, shark populations have been decimated over the last few decades with finning and industrial long line fishing the main culprits.

Fishing fleets often cut the fin from the shark and then and throw the fatally maimed animal back in the sea to maximise profit.

The dried fins sell for considerable sums and are usually served in a glutinous soup at banquets.

The sale and consumption of shark fin is not illegal in Hong Kong, but must be licensed.

Years of campaigning by environmentalists and celebrities like Chinese basketball star Yao Ming have led to the dish becoming less fashionable among younger consumers in China, Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

But it remains stubbornly popular among older generations and many prominent hotels and restaurants still offer it.

A 2018 survey by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) found seven out

of 10 Hong Kongers had eaten shark fin that year.

"There is still strong cultural value placed on consuming shark fin, particularly at weddings, business events and family gatherings like the upcoming Mother's Day," senior conservation officer Gloria Lai Pui-yin told AFP. Some restaurants and hotels had signed WWF's "no shark fin" pledge but many continued to offer the dish, she added.

Wild Aid estimates some 73 million sharks are killed every year for the trade. Their research says consumption has dropped significantly on the Chinese mainland but there is growing appetite for the dish in Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

With its busy port and international connections, Hong Kong has long been a major trafficking route for wildlife and drug smugglers.

Importing endangered species without a licence is illegal and carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in jail and a HK\$10 million (\$1.3 million) fine.

UN appeals for \$6.7 billion to fight virus in poor countries

UNITED NATIONS, MAY 7 (AP): The United Nations announced Thursday it is increasing its appeal to fight the coronavirus pandemic in fragile and vulnerable countries from 2 billion to 6.7 billion.

U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock reiterated that the peak of the pandemic is not expected to hit the world's poorest countries for three to six months.

But he said there is already evidence of incomes plummeting and jobs disappearing, food supplies falling and prices soaring, and children missing vaccinations and meals.

Since the original appeal on March 25, the United Nations said 1 billion has been raised to support efforts across 37 fragile countries to tackle COVID-19.

The updated appeal launched Thursday includes nine additional vulnerable countries: Benin, Djibouti, Liberia, Mozambique, Pakistan,

the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zimbabwe.

Lowcock said in the poorest countries we can already see economies contracting as export earnings, remittances and tourism disappear. Unless we take action now, we should be prepared for a significant rise in conflict, hunger and poverty, he warned.

"The specter of multiple famines looms. World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley said the U.N. food agency helps nearly 100 million people on any given day and unless we can keep those essential operations going, the health pandemic will soon be followed by a hunger pandemic.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization, said the caseload in most of the developing countries targeted for assistance in the U.N. appeal may seem small, but we know that the surveillance, labora-

tory testing and health systems' capacity in these countries are weak.

It is therefore likely that there is undetected community transmission happening, he said.

U.N. refugee chief Filippo Grandi said the impact of the pandemic on people who fled wars and persecution has been devastating. He said the needs of refugees, people displaced in their own countries, stateless people and their hosts are vast but not insurmountable.

Only collective action to curb the threat of the coronavirus can save lives, Grandi said.

Lowcock, the humanitarian chief, said the COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have dealt with in our lifetime. Extraordinary measures are needed, he said.

As we come together to combat this virus, I urge donors to act in both solidarity and in self-interest and make their response proportionate to the scale of the problem we face.



FIT & FAB! The Katy Keene star, Lucy Hale looks chic in cutout leggings, a white t-shirt, Ray-Bans, and a Louis Vuitton bag while out walking her pup in L.A.

'She-Hulk' scripts ready, says writer



LOS ANGELES, MAY 7 (PTI): "She-Hulk" writer Dana Schwartz has revealed that the scripting on the upcoming Disney Plus series is complete.

The new show comes from showrunner Jessica Gao, who won an Emmy for penning "Pickle Rick" episode of animated series "Rick and Morty".

Schwartz shared the update on Twitter on May 5 suggesting that the project would now enter the next stage of pre-production.

"The 'She-Hulk' room ended so if you happen to be a showrunner looking for a writer who makes jokes and writes books and knows a lot of historical fun facts, hit me up!" she wrote.

She-Hulk aka Jennifer Walters was the last major

character to be co-created by Stan Lee for Marvel Comics.

Walters is an attorney and cousin of Bruce Banner (The Hulk). She got her power after an emergency blood transfusion from Banner, but contrary to him she was able to keep her intelligence and personality when she 'Hulked' out.

The character first appeared in comics as a member of the Fantastic Four in the 1980s.

However, it is uncertain how the work on "She-Hulk" will move forward amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Casting for the titular role has yet to be announced, but there have been rumours that "Avengers: Endgame" star Mark Ruffalo will reprise his role as Bruce Banner aka Hulk in the series.

Shailene Woodley wants to work in 'Star Wars' films

LOS ANGELES, MAY 7 (PTI): Actor Shailene Woodley says as a childhood fan of the "Star Wars" films, she would love to star in a lead role in the forthcoming movies of the cult sci-fi franchise.

The "Big Little Lies" star revealed she would go by the name 'Leia' after series veteran Carrie Fisher's iconic character in her kindergarten days.

"I - as a child in kindergarten - refused to go by my name. People had to call me Leia..."

"If the opportunity to be a lead in a 'Star Wars' film came around, listen - I wouldn't say no," Woodley said in a "Conan At Home" episode.

The 28-year-old actor added it would also be "very cool to be an extra" in these films.

Recently, "Jojo Rabbit" director Taika Waititi was tapped to helm and co-write a new "Star Wars" movie.

that help you move energy, create ripples in the Universe, and support your sacred mission in the earthly realm, or woo-woo words invented by a bored teenager? It is your faith in the process that will determine the outcome. Call upon your higher self and reflect upon the area of your life that is in need of re-alignment.

LEO: Nature is medicine, Leo, and your time at home is making you aware of the magical ingredients that have always been available to you. From turmeric to tulsi, the miracles are endless! So whether you're dealing with a sore throat or stomach cramps, turn to the apothecary in front of you. Some of you may be in the mood to appease the beauty Gods. Do your research and understand your skin type before you begin to concoct potions. Have a doubt in mind? Reach out to a skincare expert or aromatherapist.

VIRGO: Change is seldom easy, but it's the only constant, Virgo. The time to shed old skin has come yet again. Let go of the unhealthy attachments. Let go of the idea of who you are supposed to be and allow yourself to transform. A popular quote comes to mind, given your circumstances: "The woman you're becoming will cost you people, relationships, spaces and material things. Choose her over everything."

Let these words show you the light in the darkest of times.

LIBRA: This is a magical time in the Libra HQ, full of ideas and

inspiration. Grounding your energy will help you manifest them in your reality. The stirrings of your heart are a sign that the messages coming through are divinely guided. Some of you may be experiencing a serious case of baby fever. The time is right when you're ready. So get back to the boudoir right now! As for Venusians who are pregnant, tune out the drama and focus on self-care in a way you never have before.

SCORPIO: It's okay to not have your stuff together at all times. It's okay to wake up on the wrong side of the bed or feel like you're having three bad days in a row. What's not okay is isolating yourself from others and receding into a dark space. Remember, your crew won't be able to reach out to you unless you let them. If there's anything this phase of your life is trying to teach you, it's that vulnerability takes colossal strength.

SAGITTARIUS: You didn't think you could go a week without ordering in. Look at you now with your sourdough loaves and homemade granola! You're winning the self-isolation game and your body couldn't be happier. The cards are urging you to adopt mindfulness as a way of life; to become conscious of what you are putting on your plate and where it is coming from. A plant-based diet will keep your vibrations high and your physical vessel in good shape.

CAPRICORN: This is a magical time in the Libra HQ, full of ideas and

"Disheartening That People Still Troll Me Over One Honest Mistake"

Sonakshi Sinha, who frequently finds herself on the receiving end of trolls for largely similar reasons, in a recent online interaction with Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, said that it is "disheartening" that people still troll her over an "honest mistake," reported Hindustan Times. Last year, during an episode of the quiz show Kaun Banega Crorepati, the actress failed to answer a question pertaining to Ramayan, following which she became the target of trolls on several occasions. Reacting to that, Sonakshi said, "I participated with a contestant named Ruma Devi. A question was asked to us on Sanjeevani Booti, and for a moment, both Ruma and I went blank. Honestly, it was a bit embarrassing, since we have grown up reading and watching Ramayana. But it was really long ago, and we all tend to have moments when we go blank. Since then, it has been five to six months, and it's disheartening that people still troll me over one honest mistake."

The question that was asked to Sonakshi on the TV show, was: "According to Ramayana, Hanuman fetched the

Sanjeevani for whom?" Sonakshi, who wasn't quite sure of the right answer, guessed Sita and Ram at first. However, she finally resorted to Ask The Expert helpline to get the right answer

where the question reminded Twitter users of Sonakshi's oopsie on KBC.

After being trolled for the KBC question last year, Sonakshi responded to her trolls and she wrote: "Dear jaage hue



trolls. I don't even remember the Pythagoras theorem (sic), Merchant Of Venice, periodic table, chronology of the Mughal Dynasty. "... I love memes.

On the work front, Sonakshi Sinha was last seen in Dabangg 3, co-starring Salman Khan. She also starred in Mission Mangal, last year. Sonakshi's upcoming project is Bhuj: The Pride Of India.

Emily Blunt, Dwayne Johnson to star in superhero film 'Ball and Chain'

LOS ANGELES, MAY 7 (PTI): Hollywood stars Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson are set to reteam for a superhero film from "The Big Sick" co-scribe Emily V Gordon.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the project is an adaptation of the 1990s comic book "Ball and Chain" from writer Scott Lobdell.

Gordon, best known for co-writing 2017 romantic comedy "The Big Sick" with her husband Kumail Nanjiani, is adapting the script from the comic.

Blunt and Johnson, who are cur-

rently looking forward to the release of their Disney movie "Jungle Cruise", will play a bickering couple who receive super powers that only work if they can learn to put aside their differences and work together. Several studios are aggressively competing for the project with streamer Netflix being the front-runner currently.

The movie will be produced by Johnson through his Seven Bucks banner with Dany and Hiram Garcia.

Blunt and Kevin Misher will also produce.

FX greenlights anthology series from BJ Novak

LOS ANGELES, MAY 7 (PTI): A new anthology series from "The Office" alum BJ Novak has received a series order from FX.

The yet-to-be-titled series uses the issues of the present day as a jumping off point to tell character-driven stories about the world we live in today, according to Variety. The show has so far shot two episodes, each featuring a different set of actors.

The first episode stars Lucas Hedges, Kaitlyn Dever, O'Shea Jackson Jr., George Wallace, Ed Asner and Brendan Francis Scannell, among others.

Jon Bernthal, Boyd Holbrook, Amy Landecker, Beau Bridges and others feature in the second episode.

Novak has penned and directed both the episodes.

"Thrilled, excited, humbled -- these are the words in every press release, and I can't believe how much I actually mean them," the 40-year-old ac-

tor-writer said in a statement. "This is my dream show, and FX is the dream place to make it. When I brought it to



FX, I wondered if it went too far, and they told me, you can go further. I can't wait to get started," he added. Novak also serves as executive producer on the project, which is being produced by FX Productions.

Lady Gaga's sixth album 'Chromatica' to release on May 29

LOS ANGELES, MAY 7 (PTI): Pop star Lady Gaga's much-awaited new album 'Chromatica' will debut on May 29.

The 34-year-old singer-actor made the announcement in a post on Twitter.

"The journey continues. You can officially join me on #Chromatica on May 29," Gaga wrote in the post accompanied by a photo of the singer as a futuristic warrior on desolate lands.

The LP, containing 16 tracks, was earlier scheduled to arrive on April 10 but the singer had to postpone it due to the coronavirus pandemic.

For 'Chromatica', Gaga has collaborated with the likes of veteran music star Elton John, singer Ariana Grande and K-pop group Blackpink.

Gaga has collaborated with Grande for the song "Rain on Me", while she has partnered with her longtime friend John for the track "Sine From Above".

Blackpink, the South Korean girl group, are credited on the track, named Sour Candy".

'Chromatica', which is her sixth album, is Gaga's follow-up to 2015's 'Joanne' and the soundtrack to "A Star Is Born" for which she won her first Oscar in 2019.

Gaga released the first track "Stupid Love" from the LP late February.

ARIES:

Soon-to-be-mothers, this is a time of rest and rejuvenation. Tune out the drama and bring your attention back to yourself. Let self-care become the most important thing on your agenda. Remember, you're getting ready to witness the miracle of life! Others are being asked to stay in yin mode and receive the ideas that Spirit is sending you through your subconscious mind.

Tip: You are getting ready to witness the miracle of life.

TAURUS:

You may feel like your world is falling apart. Is it really, though? You're being asked to trust the divine plan more than ever before. Certain things have to be taken away from you so you can make space for what is truly in alignment with your soul. Let go of the unhealthy attachments and the false beliefs. A new world is opening up for you, one that is based on the principles of freedom and truth.

Tip: Let go of the old way of life.

GEMINI:

Those who truly embody their truth do not feel the need to scream it from the rooftops. Their life is a living, breathing example of their beliefs. They lead by example and command respect every time they step into the room. The dilemma at hand does not require you to relinquish your power or let somebody else make a decision on your behalf. It requires you to stand your ground like never before. How you convey your message will make all the difference, Gemini.

Tip: Assertive, not aggressive.

CANCER:

How would you define affirmations, Cancer? Potent spells