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Summit **T**IMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sumbuk youth engineers low-cost vehicle disinfecting device

MINISTERS IMPRESSED ENOUGH TO EXPLORE COMMISSIONING IT FOR CHECKPOSTS

**AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 16 APR:**

With hand-sanitizers having become the norm in these COVID-19 times, and big companies showcasing sanitization tunnels for people, trust the ingenious mind of 22-year-old Bishu Hang Limboo to come up with a local jugaad to disinfect vehicles.

Bishu gave a demonstration of his vehicle disinfecting device here on Thursday to an impressed audience of Ministers and senior government engineers at VIP Colony.

Crafted from locally-available materials and low-cost technology, the device has impressed Ministers enough to explore the option of adopting it at the State's



check-posts and other locations.

Hailing from Sumbuk under Gyalshing-Bermiok constituency in West Sikkim, Bishu gave the demonstration in the presence of Minister for Land Revenue and

Disaster Management KN Lepcha, Minister for Agriculture & Horticulture, Lok Nath Sharma [Bishu's area MLA who also supported the earlier prototypes], Minister for Energy and Power MN Sherpa,

Minister Public Health Engineering Bhim Hang Limboo, Namcheyong area MLA Em Prasad Sharma, Member of Parliament Lok Sabha Indra Hang Subba, Political Secretary to the CM Jacob Khaling and other dignitaries.

Bishu explained that the device was still in an experimental phase and if approved by the State government, could be further refined and installed at the two main check-posts of Melli and Rangpo to

begin with.

Bishu expressed gratitude towards his area MLA for having supported his project and providing the required resources in assembling the device.

The Minister for Land Revenue & Disaster Management Department stated that the department, in consultation with the State government and other line departments, will push forward the project after evaluating the effectiveness of the device in sanitizing vehicles.

He added that the State government will extend full support in providing a structured and well-planned set-up for modification of the device.

Rs 30,000 for patients stranded outside

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

The State Government has decided to give Rs 30,000 to every patient undergoing treatment outside the state and stranded there due to the lockdown. The amount will be provided from the CM's Relief Fund.

A notification issued by the Home Department today states that the amount will be provided to patients on submission of Referral Certificate issued by Health Department or medical certificate/papers issued by the treating doctor/hospital supported by Certificate of Identification/Voter I-Card and Bank Pass Book of the patient to the designated Officer-in-charge appointed vide Office Memorandum No.591/CS/SKM dated 14/04/2020.

The Officer-in-charge shall thereafter verify and endorse the data collected and forward the same to the Public Relations Officer, Chief Minister's Office [email address - cmo.help@icmr.gov.in] for necessary action.

Samples sent after 3 days as NBMCH ran short of RNA extraction kits

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Health Secretary, Dr PT Bhutia said on Thursday that North Bengal Medical College and Hospital had run out of RNA extraction kits due to which testing had been halted since Sunday. The Health Department had been told that testing would resume after three days after fresh stock of RNA extraction kits arrived. Subsequently, after a gap of three days, Sikkim sent 8 samples for testing to the North Bengal Medical College today.

"We had offered to procure the kits ourselves but were told that only Indian Council of Medical Research can provide the testing kits to hospitals and labs," Dr Bhutia had said on Thursday while speaking to SummitTimes.

ICMR is the nodal agency that is spearheading India's defence against the novel coronavirus outbreak.

It may be mentioned that the main diagnostic test to detect COVID-19 is carried out using RT-PCR kits. The test involves looking for the virus's RNA in patient samples. To do that, the tests rely on a technique called reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), in which the viral RNA gets copied into DNA and then amplified many times for detection. But to isolate RNA from a patient sample, technicians must first use an RNA extraction kit.

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Teaching Issues During Covid-19 - Are We Doing Enough?

VIEWPOINT

JIWAN RAI

It's the topic of government policy. It's the headline of every newspaper. The main topic of every newscast. It's discussed over the dinner table. Among friends. Among relatives. No prizes for guessing what I'm talking about. Covid-19 has literally taken over the world, the media and our lives in general. We look at the stats. We discuss the research. We make predictions about the future. We criticize and complement the government by turn. We salute our health force. We mourn the lives lost.

But at times it has seemed as if two topics have dominated the headlines when it comes to covid-19. The impact on health and the economy. Now this is not to minimize the two - they are, for very good reasons, first and foremost in people's minds. But we need to be conscious at the same time of those in society without a voice.

What about the children - our future generation who have had every routine swept away from them in recent weeks? What about kids who are struggling with their own fears in this new world we seem to have entered? What about kids who had bright futures mapped out for them - and are now left wondering what's going to happen to their education, their college applications, their exams? How much time is the government giving to plan for their needs during this crisis? Yes, we need isolation wards, public health policies around contract tracing, case monitoring, etc. We need to continually monitor borders and monitor the lockdown for failures. But let's not forget the children and the impact this is having on education. Let's not forget the teachers who are doing their best to keep in touch with students and maintain some form of schooling at this

time. Let's give them support and the resources they need to get through this crisis time.

It's hard to say where things are going to go in Sikkim as far as the lockdown goes. It may be that the government is hopeful that schools will be opened here relatively quicker than they will be in other parts of the country. But the fact remains that kids are going to be out of school for a minimum of weeks and potentially a lot longer. Some estimates suggest that social distancing and lockdowns are going to be our future off and on until 2022. So any thinking that Sikkim is going to entirely avoid this issue and somehow remain a 'green spot' forever is highly irrational and short-sighted. Covid-19 is here and it's not going away any time soon. So it's high time we started making long term plans when it comes to education.

First of all, what can the government be doing? Well, for starters, they need to be assessing the issues around poverty and access to internet/devices for online learning. Education must be for all. Every child has the right and the need to study. So the government needs to be assessing what can be done in this situation. Some governments are mobilizing resources to ensure devices for every student in their region. Before we go that route, we must first assess what the need is. Surveying needs to be done to determine what regions are lacking in resources, internet access. If the lockdown is reopened, school-wide databases of children's up to date contact numbers, available devices, etc. are an absolute must.

The government should also be giving direction to schools as to how to go about online education. A haphazard approach may fill in time for a few weeks and keep kids somewhat busy but it's not going to result in a solid education. Direction needs to be

given about timetables, which subjects to focus on, how to teach online, what online tools that can be used (Zoom classes, WhatsApp, YouTube videos, etc.), etc. Teachers need to be given ideas for assessment, how to reach out to students who are struggling, how to motivate in an online situation.

And what about teachers themselves? First of all, hats off to all those teachers who are making efforts daily to keep in touch with students with very little direction from those higher up. If nothing else, Covid-19 has revealed which teachers have a heart for teaching and which ones are just fulfilling a post. In my conversations with various students, I have noticed one common theme. Some teachers are regularly posting lessons, giving assignments, checking work and being involved - and other teachers seem to be enjoying a prolonged Covid-19 holiday. What is being done to ensure that every teacher is on top of their subjects? This is a question for administrators. The days are gone where teachers can plead ignorance - if you don't know how to teach online, then you'd better find another job. But I have a sneaking suspicion that those who can't seem to figure out how to teach online are whizzes when it comes to online shopping, online games, online movies, etc. The problem isn't lack of skill - it's lack of desire, motivation and passion.

A few other suggestions for teachers based on what I have heard from various students. If you are sending out lessons/PowerPoint presentations/videos/etc. why not try and send them out at night so they can be downloading overnight when internet connections are often faster? With so many on the internet during the day, I don't know about you, but I am finding internet is

moving pretty slow. It would be great to see coordination as well between teachers in the school - maybe timings can be given for submission of assignments throughout the day so that children can be encouraged to follow a rough timetable. What about focusing on one subject each day? A major assignment with that particular subject and minor readings with other subjects. There's no question that good online lessons may be more time consuming to prepare. So why not focus on one subject/day so that teachers have time to really develop that lesson and communicate it clearly with a PowerPoint presentation/YouTube resources/etc. Then other days they can give simple portions to study and questions and answers. I hope teachers are communicating with one another and sharing phone lists. It would be a shame for students to come back to school at the end of this and discover that there were lessons being sent out and they missed them. Another issue that has been pointed out to me is the issue of work being submitted on groups. Not only is there an issue of lazy students cheating and copying but one student I spoke to said she has 150 messages to sort through every morning. It would be better for work to be submitted directly to the teacher to avoid these issues.

These are just a few humble suggestions. Let's hope that the government will look at these issues seriously and come out with more guidelines in the near future. Our teachers need help to make these days as effective as possible. And our kids, the future of our society, need help as well. Let's look back on these days when we finally emerge from this Covid-19 cloud and be able to say, "We did everything we could to make these days as profitable as we could".

Mizoram students launch no exam campaign

AIZAWL, APR 16

(PTI): A day after Mizoram Education minister Lalthandama Ralte announced the resumption of class-12 board examination, a group of students on Thursday launched a campaign on social media demanding the postponement of the re-scheduled exams till normalcy returns.

Many students took to Instagram under the hashtag "mbse no exam no risk" blaming the state government for its decision to resume the board exams amid the lockdown.

The students also showed placard demanding the state government to postpone the re-scheduled exams till normalcy returns in the state.

"Our demand is not that we should not write the exam forever, but our exam should not come at this time of crisis. What will happen to those students, who already left Mizoram and those who live in villages as the MHA new guidelines states that not only all education institutions should be suspended, but

also prohibits inter-district and inter-state movement till May 3," Francis Laltlankima, a class-12 student of St Paul Higher Secondary school told PTI.

He said that the Mizoram Board School Education (MBSE) had earlier said that the suspended examination will be resumed only after the lockdown and once normalcy returned in the state. Although the board asked students to appear in nearest or their choice of centre, the risk remains as many students have to travel as exam centres are not available in their villages. "Why are we conducting exams in this tiny state when even the CBSE exams are yet to be finished? The government ought to listen to the voice of students, who are the future leaders," he said. Francis said that a group of students have launched a campaign on Instagram and other social media platform demanding the state government to postpone the re-scheduled exams till the world is back to normalcy.

The saga of lockdown: Solidarity, forbearance and leadership

RAJNATH SINGH

Facing the exceptional challenge of stopping COVID-19 from spreading further, the nation has shown tremendous solidarity and patience. When it started, the lockdown seemed an impossible notion, more so in this country. Now, even after an extension, people remain steadfast in their resolve to protect themselves and their fellow citizens from the virus. The way 1.30 billion Indians have joined hands against the pandemic is unprecedented in world history. Generations to come will wonder how it was made possible in a country like India. I am convinced that this would not have been possible but for extraordinary leadership.

The infection is, of course, spreading and the battle is far from won. Yet, we have reasons to feel confident, because the magnitude of the outbreak has been very limited in India, compared to the numbers in other parts of the world. This should be surprising, because India is not only a developing nation with limitations in public healthcare infrastructure and resources; it is also a vast country with high population density.

If the only way to stop the virus from claiming human lives was to keep a safe distance from fellow human beings, then the battle might have been as good as lost even before it began. How do you get the

message across to a vast population, with different levels of literacy and access to the news media? What about cultural barriers? It would be physically impossible for any authority to enforce such a ban across the length and breadth of the nation if it failed to persuade people.

Yet, the impossible has happened. There were aberrations, yes, but they were aberrations; they were the exceptions that proved the rule. The Tableeghi Jamaat event in the capital in March and the exodus of migrant labourers from some cities to their homes at the beginning of the lockdown were unfortunate, and yet they illustrate nothing more than stray cases of human frailties against a vast canvass of the whole population refraining from movement. From Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast to Kachchh at the other end, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Indians have united for a common cause.

How shall we explain this miraculous show of self-restraint? The Indian psyche is part of the answer. So are our cultural traditions. There may be many more factors. Yet, the most crucial factor that brought them all together was the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The nation is fortunate, at such a critical juncture, in having a prime minister whose several qualities again came together in the right combination at this juncture.

The PM decided to impose the lockdown at a time when the number of infected patients was quite low. This shows his concern but also boldness – something we have seen before in other circumstances. Brining the whole country to a halt and jamming the economy in order to save citizens' lives is an extremely hard call to take, as we know from the global response to Covid-19. Modi's popularity ensured that the difficult decision was not opposed but welcomed, and people at large enthusiastically turned it into their own movement. As we saw in the curtain-raiser to the lockdown, the Janta curfew meant the people on their own followed restrictions on movement. I can't think of any other leader, in India or abroad, who could have successfully modified public behaviour literally within hours.

His appeals to people – first, about banging thalis as a gesture of gratitude towards doctors and others and later to light lamps as a symbol of solidarity and positivity – should also be evaluated in terms of the results they achieved. I can recount many anecdotes of villagers in far-flung places to whom the vibes of positivity would not have reached except through such innovative ways. Such measures from the PM have spread the good word about awareness among them. When I get a chance to speak over

phone with old colleagues and other fellow citizens from small towns and villages, I am amazed at the level of their awareness, their readiness to take precautions in spite of hardships, and their positive attitude. They themselves credit "Modi-ji" for this dramatic transformation. It is this trust of people in the Prime Minister that has ensured the lockdown is so supremely successful.

This is not to belittle the contributions made by the state chief ministers, district magistrates/collectors and health officials. There indeed are several CMs who have done wonderful work. A number of mayors and municipal commissioners have gone way beyond the call of duty to ensure the well-being of citizens. In this new kind of battle, our armed forces, police and paramilitary forces have also risen to the occasion in ensuring order as well as in helping local authorities in providing succour to those in need. Yet, without coordination from above, such efforts were likely to remain localized, not delivering the overall results that we have before us.

Moreover, what is heartening to note is that the PM has given priority to the marginalized, the daily wagers, labourers, and farmers. With the special package along with a slew of measures, the Government is making best efforts to ensure that they do not have to bear a disproportionate part of

the economic burden of the lockdown.

I wonder what prepared the PM for this role. Modi indeed does have some experience of crisis management. I recall that he was among the first to reach Morbi after a dam burst washed away the whole town in Gujarat in 1979. Though still in his 20s, he was by then an acknowledged leader within and outside the RSS, after his participation in the anti-Emergency movement. In Morbi, he led an RSS team for relief work. Later, his career in electoral politics began with the chief ministership of Gujarat in 2001, when the state was emerging from the aftermath of the earthquake. I recall how he made weekly visits to Kachchh and how he energised the bureaucracy to beat deadlines and reconstruct full towns and cities ahead of schedule. The state government won kudos from international organisations.

Of course, nobody has had any experience of managing a crisis of this order that the world is facing now. More than experience, it must be his basic values and dedication to the job – he often describes himself as 'pradhan sevak' – that has delivered what I humbly believe is a minor miracle: a united India, with inspired forbearance, slowly gaining an upper hand over the Novel Coronavirus, and emerging stronger every day.

-courtesy: PIB
[The writer is the Defence Minister of India]

ASHA workers to get Rs 5000 each as financial support

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

The cabinet meeting held on 14 April decided to provide financial assistance of Rs 5000 to each ASHA worker of the state. This would benefit 676 ASHA workers working under

State Health and Family Welfare Department.

As per the State Government data, in East Sikkim there are 199 [rural] and 35 [urban], in West district there are 205, in North 84 and in South 153 ASHA workers are working as of now.

SPCC thanks State Govt and frontline workers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee [SPCC] has thanked the Centre, state government and frontline workers to keep Sikkim free from COVID-19. The party has said that the lockdown has proved very beneficial for the prevention of coronavirus infection and the Indian National Congress president, Sonia Gandhi has also extended full support in fighting the pandemic.

An SPCC press release has thanked the Centre and State Government as well as health workers, police, army and other frontline workers for keeping Sikkim free

from COVID-19. The release adds that the entire credit for keeping Sikkim free from this pandemic goes to the government and the people of Sikkim.

However, to ignore this pandemic would be foolishness so it is mandatory for the people to maintain social distancing and to follow the direction of the State government.

The release adds that the government should provide seeds, seedlings and chicks free of cost to support farmers of the State from 21 April onwards after some relaxation if offered. The concerned department should take appropriate action to support local farmers in this time of crisis, the party has said.

CRH requests public to limit social visits

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Central Referral Hospital (CRH), 5th Mile, Tadong, East Sikkim has requested the public to limit visitors to the hospital.

"All are requested to limit social hospital visits to see the In-patients patients and also ensure only one attendant is available in hospital premises per patient admitted in various wards," the hospital management has said.

Those suffering from cough, runny nose and fever and other flu-like

symptoms or other respiratory problems are to report to the Triage Desk at the entrance of Hospital before going to the various departments.

The hospital is determined to provide healthcare services to all, but due to the need of Social Distancing the crowding of the hospital premises should be kept to the minimum in compliance with the current Lockdown guidelines. The hospital requests the public at large to understand the present urgency which is for the benefit of one and all.

Rangit Power Station distributes PPEs

SUMMIT REPORT

GYALSHING, 16 APR:

NHPC Rangit Power Station in the second phase has again distributed Personal Protective Equipments like Masks and Hand Sanitizers, etc., to the locals of Nardang Ward of 44 Hingdam,

Legship GPU.

Also, sanitization of adjoining areas like Legship, Kewzing, etc. and announcement for awareness of the general public through Public Address System is also being carried out by the Power Station.

Britisher stuck in Tirupati makes his way back

TIRUPATI, APR 16 (PTI):

A British traveller, who was stuck in Tirupati due to the lockdown after offering worship at Lord Venkateswara temple near here, was sent back to Hyderabad by road to catch a flight to Ahmedabad and from there to London, a government official said

here today.

The 56-year-old Culley Clive Bryant had arrived in the temple city and visited the Hill shrine at Tirumala on March 21 and was stranded here following the COVID-19 shutdown, the official told PTI.

He was shifted to a quarantine facility in Tiruchanur and was

tested for the coronavirus. He tested negative, he said.

During his stay in the quarantine facility, Bryant contacted the British embassy in the country and got all necessary documents, including departure tickets to London from Ahmedabad, through mail, the official said.

1,578 COVID-19 cases in Delhi; govt to use plasma enrichment technique to treat severe cases

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI):

The Delhi government on Wednesday decided to use the plasma enrichment technique to treat severely-ill coronavirus patients on a trial basis as the total number of COVID-19 positive cases in the national capital reached 1,578.

The clinical trial of the plasma enrichment technique will be conducted at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS), according to an official.

In the technique, antibodies from blood

of patients, who have recovered from coronavirus, are used to treat severely infected patients. It is aimed at assessing the efficacy of convalescent plasma to limit complications in COVID-19 patients.

Convalescent plasma is an experimental procedure for coronavirus patients. The total number of COVID-19 cases increased to 1578, with 17 fresh cases and two deaths being reported in a day, according to Delhi government authorities. With two more fatalities reported, the death toll from COVID-19 in Delhi

has jumped to 32.

The total number of COVID-19 containment zones has also increased to 56.

In a tweet, Lt Governor Anil Baijal said that the officials concerned have been advised to strictly adhere to guidelines and protocols issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare while dealing with coronavirus patients.

"Delhi to use plasma technique for treatment on trial basis to save life of critical COVID-19 patients. Advised all to strictly adhere to SOPs/guidelines & protocols

issued by MoHFW while dealing with COVID-19 patients," the LG tweeted.

The official said a five-member committee headed by ILBS Director S K Sarin had recommended use of this therapy to treat severely-ill coronavirus patients.

"The Delhi government has received approval from the Union Health Ministry to use convalescent plasma technique on trial basis to save the life of severely-ill COVID-19 patients," the official said.

Earlier this month, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

sought participation in a randomised controlled study to assess the safety and efficacy of convalescent plasma to limit complications associated with coronavirus.

To deal with issues related to stranded migrant workers, the Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Dev appointed 10 bureaucrats as nodal officers for coordination with resident commissioners to address the concerns of migrant workers in the city amid the on-going lockdown.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on

Tuesday had announced extension of the lockdown until May 3.

The move by Dev comes a day after a large number of migrant workers gathered in Mumbai and Surat despite the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19.

According to an official, the 10 IAS officers will coordinate with resident commissioners of states and union territories to address issues being faced by migrants in Delhi, be it food, shelter, essential supplies, payment of wages or other livelihood issues.

Death toll due to COVID-19 touches 414; cases climb to 12,380

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI):

The death toll due to coronavirus rose to 414 and the number of cases to 12,380 in the country on Thursday, according to the Union Health Ministry. While the number of active COVID-19 cases is 10,477, as many as 1,488 people have been cured and discharged and one had migrated, it said.

Twenty-two deaths were reported since Wednesday evening, the ministry said in its updated data.

Nine fatalities were reported from

Maharashtra, five from Andhra Pradesh, three from Gujarat, two each from Delhi and Tamil Nadu and one from Karnataka, it added.

Of the total 414 deaths, Maharashtra tops the tally with 187 fatalities, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 53, Gujarat at 33, Delhi at 32 and Telangana at 18.

Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have reported 14 fatalities each.

Punjab has reported 13 deaths while Karnataka have reported 12 deaths and Uttar Pradesh has 11 deaths. West Bengal has registered seven deaths

Four persons have lost their lives in Jammu and Kashmir while Kerala, Haryana and Rajasthan have recorded three deaths each. Jharkhand has reported two deaths.

Meghalaya, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Assam reported one fatality each, according to the health ministry data.

However, a PTI tally of figures reported by various states as on Wednesday evening showed at least 12,220 COVID-19 cases and 417 deaths.

There has been a lag in the Union Health Ministry figures,

compared to the number of deaths announced by different states, which officials attribute to procedural delays in assigning the cases to individual states.

According to the ministry's data updated in the morning, the highest number of confirmed cases in the country is from Maharashtra at 2,916, followed by Delhi at 1,578 and Tamil Nadu at 1,242.

COVID-19 cases have gone up to 1,023 in Rajasthan, followed by 987 in Madhya Pradesh, 766 in Gujarat and 735 in Uttar Pradesh. Telangana has 647

cases, Andhra Pradesh 525 and Kerala 388.

The number of novel coronavirus cases has risen to 300 in Jammu and Kashmir, 279 in Karnataka, 231 in West Bengal and 205 in Haryana. Punjab has reported 186 infections so far.

Bihar has reported 70 cases, while Odisha has 60 coronavirus cases. Thirty-seven people were infected with the virus in Uttarakhand, while Himachal Pradesh has 35 cases. Assam and Chhattisgarh have registered 33 cases each. Jharkhand has 28 cases, Chandigarh 21

cases and Ladakh 17.

Eleven cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Meghalaya, Goa and Puducherry have reported seven COVID-19 infections each. Manipur and Tripura have two cases each, while Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have reported a case each.

"State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation," the ministry said on its website.

The website also said a COVID-19 patient from Nagaland has been shifted to Assam.

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Machetes of misunderstanding amidst the knowledge of novel coronavirus



YUGAL BHATTARAI

WHAT IS CORONAVIRUS? Coronaviruses is positive since RNA virus having an extensive and promiscuous wide range of natural host and affect multiple systems. It can cause clinical disease in humans that may extent from the common cold to more severe respiratory disease like SARS and MARS.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS? People may be sick within the virus for 1 to 14 days before developing the symptoms, which are fever tiredness and dry cough. About 80% recover from the disease without needing special treatment rarely the disease can be fatal for older people and people with associated medical conditions.

STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVT: Govt. of Sikkim is doing their best in order to stop the novel corona virus from entering our state. We should respect them and should be grateful towards them, because of their effort till now we don't have even a single case of corona virus in our state. Only 1 state out of 29 in our country does not have even a single case of corona virus i.e. our own state Sikkim. This is possible because of Government and the front line workers working everyday in our state for the purpose to safeguard our people from getting infected.

In Rangpo check post they are giving a quarantine form to all those people who are coming from outside the state and the doctors deputed in the station are advising people to get home quarantined even if they do not have any such symptoms. People who are coming from largely affected areas, cities are sending for isolation for 14 days by Govt. itself where they are providing all the necessities to them. This in a whole is great initiative done by the govt.

Despite of all the steps taken by the govt. to safe guard us, some people of our state are taking this as very casually. Despite the govt. announced lockdown for 15 days, I see a person going out of their house without even wearing facemask and sanitizer which seems

to be very risky. Some people who are told to be home quarantined are just roaming outside and getting involved with the family members.

The future of our state lies in the hand of all the people who are coming from outside the state which includes workers and students.

P E O P L E MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISBELIEF: Now there is a high chance that people will misunderstand and misbelieve about the virus. So the question arises, Can the misunderstanding be innovative? Can anything negative come from a communication failure? Yes of course it can. What kind of misbelieve and misunderstanding are going around in our state Sikkim?

People of our state still believe that the novel corona virus is never going to enter in our state, but why? Because they think that in Rangpo strict checking is going on and not a single person having the virus can enter our state. People here are sitting at their home and relaxing and getting out of their house instead of getting them quarantined. But the hard truth is in Rangpo they are simply checking the temperature and cough and on that basis they are deciding whether the person has to be isolated or not. People coming from outside the state may have cough but they try to control it because no one wants to get isolated as everyone wants to go to their respective houses. So the best option we have to control this novel corona virus is to stay at home quarantine.

Let us all be responsible and cooperate with the Government, Policies and all health workers to fight the disease and mainly to prevent the entry in our state.

Let us all stay in our house until the further announcement by the government about the lockdown.

Lastly let's be thankful to all the people who are helping and sacrificing their lives to safeguards.

Let's stand together for our state and above all with our country India. #GOCORONA

West Sikkim drivers assoc steps up for members under lockdown stress

RUDRA KAUSHIK GYALSHING, 16 APR:

Braving the Thursday thunderstorm, the Local Taxi Drivers' Association [LTDA] of Gyalshing came forward to help families of fellow drivers in need.

LTDA today delivered foodgrains and other essential supplies to around 100 families of LTDA members. The provisions included rice, oil, sugar and other essential commodities.

The association managed these essential

commodities for the drivers on its own funds.

In the first phase of relief distribution initiative, drivers of Langang, Tikjek, Chumjong, Tikjek, Salley and Lingchom, Kabirthang, Sakyong, Bhaluthang and Yangtey of Yangthang constituency were provided these materials.

The second phase of distribution is scheduled for Byadung ward on Friday.

Owner-drivers have been left out

from the government's beneficiaries' list for relief packages, it is informed. LTDA reached out to the drivers' families and provided them 20 kgs of rice, oil and other items and the drivers who had received relief materials from the government earlier were given flour and other essential items.

LTDA president, Buddha Rai, informed that relief materials were provided to

families residing in rural areas as a support during the ongoing lockdown on humanitarian grounds.

He pointed out that drivers have been very severely hit by the lockdown as they have been left without any earnings throughout this time and the stress on their families must be hard.

Mr Rai also said that it was unfair to leave owner-drivers out of the list of beneficiaries since they have been



severely affected by the lockdown and under extreme economic stress at present.

"How can they make both ends meet when

their earnings have come to a complete halt. Reaching out to them with relief materials in these testing times was necessary," Mr Rai said.

Suk Raj Rai, a member of LTDA, added that the association would like to make sure that drivers did not suffer unduly during the ongoing lockdown. He stressed that LTDA will always be there for the welfare of drivers and their families.

CM apprises Governor on lockdown extension plan COVID-19 Transmission Chain Prevention System launched

GANGTOK, 16 APR (IPR): Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang called on Governor, Ganga Prasad at Raj Bhawan this morning to brief him about the decisions taken by the State Government after the announcement of lockdown extension by the Prime Minister on 14 April, 2020.

The Chief Minister informed the Governor about his recent visit to Rangpo and Melli check posts to take stock of the precautionary measures in place.

During the meeting, it was also informed that the State government has decided to provide one-time medical relief

amounting to Rs 30,000 to the patients from Sikkim stranded in different parts of the country.

In addition to this, the government has also decided to provide all ASHA workers with an honorarium of Rs 5,000 in view of their role in the ongoing efforts to contain

the spread of the COVID-19

He also briefed the Governor about the steps taken to distribute the relief material which has been carried out successfully. An additional list of 29000 beneficiaries will be provided the relief material by Sunday, he added.

On the day, a portal COVID-19 Transmission Chain Prevention System of Health & Family Welfare Department developed by NIC was launched jointly.

The portal has a self reporting module wherein people who have returned to the State can register

themselves. Those people will be observed for 14 days with constant monitoring.

The Governor also handed over the cheque of Rs. 11 lakh as a contribution made by Mahashay, DharampalGulati, CEO of MDH spices for the Chief Minister's Relief fund.

Press and Media: The 4th Pillar of Democracy

NAWIN KIRAN

Freedom of speech is a principle that supports the freedom of an individual or a community to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal sanction. The term "freedom of expression" is sometimes used synonymously but includes any act of seeking, receiving, and imparting information or ideas, regardless of the medium used. The freedom of speech and expression is said to have emerged from the Roman ages but the first documentation of this greatest fundamental right of an individual was documented in England's Bill of Rights 1689 which legally established the constitutional right of freedom of speech in British Parliament which is still in effect. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, adopted during the French Revolution in 1789, specifically affirmed freedom of speech as an inalienable right and freedom.

When we talk of the greatest of all rights "The right to Freedom and Expression", the most important role and responsibility of protecting it is bestowed to none other than the groups and individuals who are engaged in "Press and Media". No need to add, if democracy is to survive, Press and Media have to be very pro-active and most importantly, INDEPENDENT! And yes, freedom of press, media and the freedom of speech and expression must be protected at all cost. That is why we say, Press and Media is the fourth pillar of democracy.

If we see the history of press and media, it simultaneously began with the emergence of great thoughts and ideas in the age of in Renaissance Europe. These handwritten newsletters contained news about wars, economic conditions, and social customs and were circulated among merchants. The first printed news appeared by the late 1400s in German pamphlets that contained content that was often highly sensationalized. The first newspaper written in English was The Weekly News, published in London in 1621. Several papers followed in the 1640s and 1650s. In 1690, the first American newspaper was published by Richard Pierce and Benjamin Harris in Boston and thereafter, newspaper and pamphlets like "Common Sense" published by Thomas Paine encouraged the Americans to be independent and soon thereafter, the great French Revolution introduced tripartite motto of "liberty, equality and fraternity".

Now, coming to India, the print media started in India as early as 1780. Radio broadcasting began in 1927. The press and media played the most vital role in evolving the feeling of unity and nationalism among the masses in British India. Without newspaper and journals like Amrita Bazar Patrika, Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq, Hindu, Kesari and its founders like Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Motilal Ghosh, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, VirRaghavacharya, G.S. Aiyar and B.G. Tilak, India wouldn't have achieved its

Independence.

Post-Independence, the founding fathers of our constitution has guaranteed the Freedom of Speech and Expression as the Fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) and this right is equally guaranteed to the press and media as well. In Bennett Coleman v. Union of India, AIR 1973 SC 106 the Supreme Court held "The freedom of expression of Press cannot be abridged on the ground of conferring benefit upon the public or any section thereof." In India at present, there are more than 100,000 publications registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) and has the second-largest newspaper market in the world, with daily newspapers reporting a combined circulation of over 240 million copies as of 2018 and more than 1600 Satellite channels. Further, with the boom in Information Technology post Y2k, India have witnessed tremendous rise in online and digital publishing and at present, social media news portal is the trend.

Talking of laws regulating press and media in India, media are mostly self-regulated. However, there are statutes and guidelines for the proper governing of the press. Some of the important Acts and guidelines are; the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, the Press Council Act, 1978, the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955, the Working Journalists (Fixation of Rates of Wages) Act, 1958, the Cinematograph Act, 1952, the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and the Information Technology Act, 2000. The existing bodies for regulation of media such as the Press Council of India which is a statutory body and the News Broadcasting Standards Authority, a self-regulatory organization, issue standards which are more in the nature of guidelines. Certain standards have been prescribed for content accessible over the internet under the IT Rules 2011. The News Broadcasters Association has devised a Code of Ethics to regulate television content.

Talking of the booming social media news network, the world is witnessing a transnational phase at present stage. In India, websites and social media news feeds like Scroll, Catch, Wire, Janta Reporter, The Quint, Newslandry and Lalantop are giving tough competition to the conventional news media. It is beyond all doubt that the present trend of news at the mobile handset is here to stay. In Sikkim, Sikkim Chronicles, Voice of Sikkim, SK Live, Summit Times, Express, Talk Sikkim and many others are doing phenomenal job. But however, the negativity of the present trend is everyone who owns a mobile phone is a self proclaimed "Press". And to add, every person today owns a mobile phone. Negative effect of the social media news feed have many times resulted in unrestricted and unfettered news. Many a time media trials have also led to miscarriage of justice. If we talk of

the regulation of this present trend, till date there are no norms or guidelines to regulate online media in India.

In this issue, in one of the recent hearings before the Supreme Court, the Union Government has asserted that social media regulation will be done by 2020. In this regard, the Ministry Information and Broadcasting has appointed a 10-member committee comprising of HsOD of different departments of Union Government and also representatives from Press Council of India, News Broadcasters Association and Indian Broadcasters Federation formulate a policy for digital broadcasting and news portals.

Now talking of freedom of press and media in India, India ranked 140 in 2019 according to World Press Freedom Index. A year before, it was 138. And these figures are not very encouraging. In most cases the independency of media is compromised and inclined towards the ruling party in the centre or in the state. In Indian Express Newspapers ... v. Union Of India & Ors., the Supreme Court held, "If the press ceases to be independent the healthy influence of the press and public opinion will soon be substituted by the traditional influences of landlordism and feudalism. The press lords should endeavor to see that their interest do not come into conflict with their duties."

In one another matter while dealing with the defamation matter, the Madras High Court ruled, "India is a vibrant democracy and the fourth estate is indubitably an indispensable part of it. If the voice of the fourth estate is stifled ... India will become a Nazi State and the hard labour of our freedom fighters and makers of our Constitution will go down the drain".... "India is a vibrant democracy and the fourth estate is indubitably an indispensable part of it. If the voice of the fourth estate is stifled ... India will become a Nazi State and the hard labour of our freedom fighters and makers of our Constitution will go down the drain."

In Printers (Mysore) Ltd. v. CTO11 the Supreme Court has reiterated that though freedom of the press is not expressly guaranteed as a fundamental right, it is implicit in the freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of the press has always been a cherished right in all democratic countries and the press has rightly been described as the fourth chamber of democracy. At the same time, In Romesh Thapervs State of Madras and Brijbhushanvs State of Delhi, the Supreme Court stated "....the freedom of the press is not absolute, just as the freedom of expression is not. Public Interest has to be safeguard by article 19(1)(2) which lays down reasonable limitations to the freedom of expression in matters affecting". Meaning; Press cannot infringe the right of privacy and must uphold reasonable restrictions mentioned under Article 19(2) of the Constitution and those

are: Sovereignty and integrity of the State, Security of the State, Friendly relations with foreign countries, Public order, Decency and morality, Contempt of court, Defamation and Incitement to an offence.

In democracy, the Government cannot function unless the people are well informed and free to participate in public issues by having the widest choice of alternative solutions of the problems that arise. Articles and news are published in the press from time to time to expose the weaknesses of the governments. The daily newspaper and the daily news on electronic media are practically the only material which most people read and watch. The people can, therefore, be given the full scope for thought and discussion on public matter, if only the newspapers and electronic media are freely allowed to represent different points of views, including those of the opposition, without any control from the Government. And these views have been time and again articulated even by the apex court.

In one of the most important case with regard to "Free Press" before the Supreme Court, in S. Sudin v. Union of India and Ors. WP(C).NO. 32529 OF 2007 (S) the Court first addressed the question whether the print and electronic media can be prohibited from broadcasting or publishing any news that call for hartal or strike by political parties or organizations. In its Order, the Apex stated;

"Any prohibition on press and media from publishing any call for bandh or hartal shall be violative of the right of the people to know and receive information. Court, in exercise of writ jurisdiction, cannot issue any writ restraining from publishing/broadcasting any information regarding call of hartal/ strike. The High Court observed that in the context of hartal and forced hartal/ strike, information and details collected by press and media can be shared with administration and Courts for purpose of identifying wrong doers, so that people, who suffer any kind of injury of life and property, should get an early justice. The media has also to enforce self regulation and restraint on itself in publishing/broadcasting information and news, which may not advance the interest of the society. The act of violence and destruction of the public property has to be strongly condemned and those who indulge any such act have to be brought before the law".

Lastly, I again reiterate "Press and Media" is indeed the 4th pillar of Democracy. Press and Media must be "Critical" and "Independent" and it is also the duty of the society to acknowledge all the hard-work done by the Press fraternity for the society.

"Our freedom depends in large part, on the continuation of a free press, which is the strongest guarantee of a free society." - Richard M. Schmidt

[The writer is Vice Convenor, Sikkim Subject Committee]

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Resource-Rich, People-Poor The rent-seeking mentality needs to end

An economist, while commenting on the reasons which hold back entrepreneurial success in these parts, blamed it on the rent-seeking mentality of the people. "Locals" of the region, he pointed out, might have inherited substantial largesse, earn well, even invest intelligently, but leverage very poorly, he explained. They will build a top-class hotel, but are more likely to give it out on lease rather operate it themselves and grow in the industry. This also explains why the "security" of government service is more aspired for than the independence, possibly better money and more job satisfaction, that private enterprise or the private sector might have to offer. This attitude continues even into government service where they prefer to remain anonymous pens pushing files when they could leverage their education and understanding of the land to set higher standards of governance.

In a sense then, they reflect the irony of their geography. The Himalaya is a belt that is rich in resources, but peopled by a population that is poor, a literal reality for a majority. As a mountain range, it is the Himalayas that shelter the subcontinent, bring it rain and mark its frontiers. As for resources, the mountains abound in glaciers which feed not only the rivers which have sustained successive civilizations through the ages, and are now the only alternative energy source available for mainstream India to power its development. The nation desperately requires more power and the only viable option as of now, definitely less ruinous than the fossil fuel option, is the hydel potential of the Himalayas. But look at the ground realities - the entire Himalayan belt from Kashmir to the northeast is debilitated either by strife or poverty or both. Sikkim remains an oasis of peace, but is also untouched by an economic boom in the real sense. Delhi controls the purse-strings and thus by extension, also, unfortunately, the aspirations of the people. The promoters of hydel power offered it up as the great deliverer of all economic woes. They promised infrastructure, employment and earnings from sale of surplus power as the channels which will usher economic boom. This might be true on paper, but the real picture often differs. Infrastructural development in these parts is almost always limited to certain pockets, and are themselves mired in corruption. Rarely do the roads outlast the commissioning of the projects for which they were primarily expanded. Jobs, real jobs, not the low-paying ones, remain scarce for locals and the hydro-earnings are yet to be quantified. Because most of the areas that possess the rivers with hydel potential don't possess a strong enough voice in New Delhi, they cannot strike a good enough bargain for themselves and the street-smart organizations that 'develop' the projects magnify the fine print the moment they have inked the deal. The attrition between affected people and already commissioned hydel projects is just one such example.

The resources could have been better harnessed than the leasing out approach that is common to the region. Commissioned projects could have been studied in closer detail and better benefits and deals struck. Human resource could have been, still can be, groomed to meet the future requirements. CSR regulations could have been studied better to ensure more than hand-washing awareness camps or another free health camp. And it is not just about hydel resources; Sikkim could pause, take stock and then marshal its other resources - from tourism to agriculture, the organic variant of it, better on its own, and by "own" one means the people and not government agencies alone.

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Coronavirus: three misconceptions about how wildlife transmit diseases debunked

OLIVIER RESTIF
THECONVERSATION.COM

As global COVID-19 cases top 2 million, it's humbling to remember that it all started when one person got infected by one wild animal. We may never find out precisely where or when it occurred, nor the animal which was responsible. But we do know that these "spillover events" are the starting points of many outbreaks, from influenza to HIV and from SARS to COVID-19.

Zoonotic diseases are caused by pathogens which originate in other animal species. Some diseases, such as rabies, cause sporadic outbreaks, often self-contained but deadly and traumatising for the communities they infect. Others manage to spread worldwide and become pandemic, circulating in the global population. Some are repeat offenders that re-emerge from animal hosts in a mutated form every few decades - think influenza, plague and cholera.

Many others are now part of our burden of endemic diseases, such as measles, mumps or HIV. The coronavirus causing COVID-19 is closely related to those that caused the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) pandemic in 2003. Despite speculation from some virologists, it's too early to tell whether COVID-19 will disappear within a year or stay with us permanently like the flu.

Either way, we can expect new strains of coronavirus to spill over from wildlife in the future. Countless pathogens jump across animal species on a daily basis - most of the

time with no visible effect. But increasingly, these pathogens are taking advantage of the new opportunities that humans have created as they reshape the natural environment. In this fraught atmosphere, it's natural for misconceptions to circulate, so here's what we know about how new diseases jump from animals to people.

1. BUSH MEAT AND WET MARKETS

It's often assumed that close contact with wild animals is necessary for zoonotic outbreaks like Ebola or COVID-19 to occur. Activities like hunting, butchering and trading wild animal meat for human consumption carry a high risk of exposure to pathogens, but we don't know how often they actually cause diseases. Bats are popular game in several African and Asian countries, where some species weigh over 300g and roost in their thousands in trees. As a result, bat hunters are at particular risk of infection, although there is little evidence to suggest hunters themselves may have been the source of past Ebola outbreaks.

In some countries, live animals destined for human consumption are traditionally sold in wet markets, potentially bringing zoonotic viruses from the forest into towns. But footage of exotic wild animals, sometimes endangered, sold live on overcrowded market stalls, misrepresent a niche trade as mainstream activity.

Surveys in China and Vietnam have shown that wild meat is mainly eaten in

restaurants, mostly from wild pigs, goats, deer and birds, all of which are commonly farmed - not unlike what happens in Europe. As for bats, which are sold in their tens of thousands in Ghana, they are already dead, eviscerated and smoked by the time they reach market stalls, hence posing a very low risk of infection to consumers.

2. VECTORS

More common routes of spillover do not require direct contact with animals at all. Many emerging diseases are transmitted by biting insects that act as vectors between animal host species. For example, Lyme disease, caused by bacteria found in wild mammals and transmitted to humans by ticks, has been increasing in North America and Europe in the last 30 years. Although this increase is often thought to be driven by deer hunting, studies suggest that the growing abundance of small mammals may be spreading the disease as their natural predators decline.

Other pathogens are excreted in the urine or faeces of their animal host, contaminating drinking water or crops for humans and farm animals. This has been seen in Bangladesh, where bats drink from and urinate into vessels collecting palm sap, causing outbreaks of Nipah virus in local communities.

3. DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Although wild animals transmit zoonotic viruses, people are much more frequently in contact with domestic animals, creating ample opportunities for disease spillover. Poultry can spread bird flu, and there have been sporadic (and often

deadly) outbreaks of H5N1 or H7N9 strains in the last 20 years, leading to mass culls in farms.

Although less lethal, bacteria such as salmonella and campylobacter, commonly found in farm animals, cause thousands of cases of food poisoning in the UK alone. Even normally harmless bacteria may acquire antibiotic resistance genes in farms that use lots of antibiotics. Outside Europe, antibiotics are often added to animal feed as growth promoters, potentially helping to incubate multidrug-resistant bacteria in livestock.

HOW TO PREVENT ZOOONOTIC DISEASE OUTBREAKS

There are no simple solutions to prevent zoonotic outbreaks, but researchers in our Bat-One-Health consortium are studying how to reinforce three particular lines of defence.

Preserving ecosystems and restoring natural habitats can ensure animals don't need to forage near where humans live. Risky behaviours that expose people to pathogens can be reduced - not by imposing harmful bans on wild meat - but through community engagement that's respectful of different livelihoods and cultural practices. Most importantly, governments must invest in public health and surveillance where they are needed most.

Understanding how new viruses make the jump from animals to humans can help lower the risk of future pandemics, but it will mean dispelling misconceptions about where most transmission occurs and avoiding knee jerk reactions.

[the writer is Alborada
Lecturer in Epidemiology,
University of Cambridge]

7 ways you can help the coronavirus response

SCOTT LEAR
THECONVERSATION.COM

When a major earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean on Dec. 26, 2004, resulted in a devastating tsunami, people from all parts of the world contributed to one of the largest relief efforts ever.

It's part of human nature to want to help. Even before being able to talk, infants can recognize a non-related adult in need and offer help. In adults, areas of the brain associated with stress relief and reward have a greater response to giving than they do when receiving something.

Spending money on others also appears to have a unique role in increasing happiness. Even small acts of kindness such as mowing a neighbour's lawn or washing a roommate's dishes can reduce anxiety.

The coronavirus pandemic represents a generational crisis with many people in need. From those who are sick with the virus to people self-quarantining to people suffering through financial difficulties. As a result, people are looking for ways to help. But being house-bound and social distancing makes helping a challenge, so here are seven ways you can help those in need:

1. STAY AT HOME

It might not seem like much, but until a vaccine is available, staying at home is the best defence against the spread of coronavirus. As British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said regarding the United Kingdom's Mother's Day, "...the single best present that we can give ... is to spare them the risk of catching a very dangerous disease. The sad news is that means staying away."

2. CALL FAMILY OR A FRIEND

While staying at home is our best defence, it can be socially isolating, especially for those who live alone. But being physically apart doesn't mean you have to be socially apart. Hearing a familiar voice can relieve stress and anxiety by releasing oxytocin. And with phone apps and online programs, you can get real face time and share a smile, which activates areas in the brain associated with happiness.

3. SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

The retail areas of our cities have turned into ghost towns. Many businesses are without daily income to pay rent and salaries. Local restaurants and stores may not survive. And with that, their staff will be out of work. However, many places sell products online and offer gift certificates, which can provide an immediate injection of money.

4. DONATE TO YOUR LOCAL FOOD BANK

Even with support for local businesses and government funds being poured into society, a lot of people are struggling financially. Some people will need to turn to their local food bank for emergency food. At the same time, food banks are experiencing a decrease in donations. You can donate money online to food banks, which goes further than non-perishable food donations due to bulk purchases.

5. IF YOU CAN GO OUT, LEND A HAND

If you're not in quarantine or at high risk (over 65 years of age or have a pre-existing medical condition), you can always lend a hand to a neighbour. You may know someone who can't or shouldn't go out for daily essentials such as food and hygiene products.

Consider making extra purchases on your next grocery store run and drop off the items at their door. If you don't personally know anyone in need, but still want to lend a hand, there are websites such as VancouverSupport.ca that allow you to post offers of help. There is also Nextdoor, an app that lets people view what help their neighbours need. And if you need help yourself, you can also post your needs there as well.

6. DONATE BLOOD

There is a greater need for blood donors right now. Not because treating the coronavirus requires blood transfusions, but because the pandemic has reduced the number of people who are donating.

In addition, the requirements of social distancing have resulted in donor clinics reducing appointments. These clinics have also put in stringent measures to ensure the safety of donors and have stopped accepting walk-ins, so you will need to book an appointment to donate.

7. GIVE THANKS

Saying thank you is probably one of the easiest but most heartfelt things we can do. People in cities around the world have been participating in signs of gratitude to health-care workers such as collectively clapping and making noise at 7 p.m. each night.

There are also many other people still working to keep our communities going, from the grocery store clerk to the letter carrier to those collecting the garbage each week. A simple note of thanks, or a wave out the window can go a long way.

[the writer is Professor of Health
Sciences, Simon Fraser University]

5 crore families who depend on roadside vending awaiting 'financial epidemic', says hawkers' body

KOLKATA, APR 16 (PTI): The 40-day country-wide lockdown may prevent the spread of coronavirus, but the measure would bring a "financial epidemic" on five crore families of hawkers and those who supply them with products, an official of the national hawkers' body said.

The lockdown was imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 25 to break the chain of coronavirus transmission and it was scheduled to be lifted on April 15.

The 21-day measure was on Tuesday extended for 19 more days - till May 3.

"There are four crore hawkers across the country and at least one crore families run tiny and small industrial units that feed these vendors. They don't know how to make both ends meet as their businesses have come to a complete halt," National Hawker Federation general secretary Shaktiman Ghosh told PTI on Thursday.

The economy

revolving around street vending is estimated at Rs 8,000 crore a day.

"Financial epidemic is knocking at the door. Business capital is like a child to hawkers and they protect it at any cost. But they are now surviving on this capital, they live hand to mouth," he said.

"Unless they are supported, the situation could lead them to anti-social activities to feed their families or suicide," Ghosh said.

More people will die due to financial constraints than the coronavirus infection unless state governments and the Centre take some steps quickly to keep them afloat for the next few months, the National Hawker Federation official said.

A total of 1,188 unions and 11 central trade unions in 28 states are affiliated to the National Hawker Federation.

The Federation has demanded that the government recognise street vending as an essential service.

The Centre must ensure Rs 50,000 under Mudra loan scheme to

each hawker and Rs 5 lakh to the manufacturers, Ghosh said.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme launched in 2015 for providing loans up to Rs 10 lakh to non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises.

"Even after the lockdown is lifted, I would not have any money left to restart the business. We are nothing more than daily wage earners. If the situation prevails, we will face starvation. Now, we are totally dependent on the state governments ration and aids given by hawkers' unions," a hawker in Kolkata said.

Ghosh claimed that the West Bengal government is yet to provide its 16 lakh hawker community with any direct financial support, whereas Odisha has offered Rs 3,000, while Rajasthan, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have given to these people Rs 1,000 each.

Identifying hawkers would not pose a challenge if the government decides to offer financial support to them, he said.

Six Indian companies working on vaccine for COVID-19

SHAKOOR RATHER

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Six Indian companies are working on a vaccine for COVID-19, joining global efforts to find a quick preventive for the deadly infection spreading rapidly across the world, says a top Indian scientist.

Nearly 70 vaccine candidates' are being tested and at least three have moved to the human clinical trial stage, but a vaccine for the novel coronavirus is unlikely to be ready for mass use before 2021.

As COVID-19 infects more than 1.9 million in the world and claims 1,26,000 lives, Indian scientists are also part of the global fight against the disease.

While Zydus Cadila is working on two vaccines, Serum Institute, Biological E, Bharat Biotech, Indian Immunologicals, and Mynvax are developing one vaccine each, Gagandeep Kang, executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad, told PTI.

Kang is also vice chair of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), which noted in a recent study that the global vaccine R&D effort in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in terms of scale and speed.

But it is a

complicated process with many stages of testing and many challenges, explained experts. A vaccine for the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, may not take 10 years that other vaccines do but it could be at least a year before it is proven safe, effective, and made widely available, they said.

Vaccine development is a lengthy process which often takes years, with many challenges, said E. Sreekumar, chief scientific officer at the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology (RGCB) in Kerala.

Generally, vaccines take several months to pass the different stages of testing, and then approvals also take time. For COVID-19, we don't expect a vaccine to come in this year, agreed Rakesh Mishra, director of the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad.

Vaccine testing typically begins with animal and lab testing before going on to different stages of human testing.

The human testing phase is composed of many phases, Sreekumar told PTI.

Phase one trials are small-scale, usually involving few participants, to assess whether the vaccine is safe for humans.

Phase two trials often involve several hundred

subjects, and mainly evaluate the efficacy of the vaccine against the disease, he said.

The final phase involves thousands of people to further assess the efficacy of the vaccine over a defined period of time, and can last several months, Sreekumar said.

That is why we don't see a vaccine coming in at least a year from now.

Even after the vaccine is ready, he explained, there are a lot of challenges, including whether the vaccine is effective in all populations, and if it can be used for different strains of the novel coronavirus, which might start mutating as time passes.

There are lots of vaccines which are being tested for COVID-19, some of which are in the stage 1 clinical trial, Mishra added.

But we still don't know how fast they will proceed towards a vaccine and they can take several months to reach any point, he said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), three vaccine candidates are in the clinical testing phase, meaning they are able to be tested on humans, while nearly 70 are in the preclinical phase -- either in lab testing, or animal studies.

Though Kang named six companies, the WHO has listed

only Zydus Cadila and Serum Institute from India as among the global firms working on a COVID-19 vaccine.

As of April 8, 2020, said CEPI, the global COVID-19 vaccine R&D landscape includes 115 vaccine candidates, of which 78 are confirmed as active and 37 are unconfirmed.

Of the 78 confirmed active projects, 73 are currently at exploratory or preclinical stages, noted the CEPI team in an analysis published in the journal Nature reviews Drug Discovery last week.

The most advanced candidates have recently moved into clinical development, including mRNA-1273 from US-based biotechnology company Moderna, Ad5-nCoV from Chinese biopharma company CanSino Biologicals, and INO-4800 from American pharmaceuticals company Inovio.

Others in this list include LV-SMENP-DC and pathogen-specific aAPC from Shenzhen Geno-Immune Medical Institute in China.

Numerous other vaccine developers have indicated plans to initiate human testing in 2020, the CEPI scientists said.

Experts believe the genome sequencing of the new coronavirus provided by scientists

in China shows it shares 79 per cent of the same genetic material as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and 50 per cent of the same material as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), a species of coronavirus which infects humans, bats, and camels.

This allows developers to use groundwork already created in research for vaccines for those viruses.

Australia's national science agency CSIRO announced earlier this month that it has begun preclinical tests of a vaccine developed by Oxford University in the UK.

A striking feature of the vaccine development landscape for COVID-19 is the range of technology platforms being evaluated, including nucleic acid (DNA and RNA), virus-like particle, live weakened virus, and inactivated virus approaches.

The CEPI noted that many of these platforms are not currently the basis for licensed vaccines, but experience in fields such as oncology is encouraging developers to exploit the opportunities that next-generation approaches offer for increased speed of development and manufacture.

I-League cancellation call on Saturday: AIFF official

KOLKATA, APR 16 (PTI): The All India Football Federation office-bearers will meet via a video-conference on Saturday afternoon to take a call on the fate of the suspended I-League, a top AIFF official said on Thursday.

The I-League had been suspended with 28 matches left in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with Mohun Bagan already having sealed their second title.

"There is no time left for us to conduct the I-League. It is certain

to be cancelled. The meeting will be held via a video-conference," the AIFF official told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

Mohun Bagan will be crowned champions officially and the meeting will discuss about splitting the prize money for the second and third placed teams and relegation.

There is a three-way race between East Bengal, Punjab FC (both with 23 points from 16 matches) and Real Kashmir (22 points from

15 matches) for the runners-up slot.

With cancellation of remaining matches on the cards, AIFF will have to take a call on splitting the prize money among the teams placed second and third.

Aizawl FC are occupying the relegation spot with four of their remaining five matches left.

The northeastern team had travelled to Punjab for a closed-door match on March 14 before the league was suspended.

MHA warns govt officials against holding Zoom meetings

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Zoom meeting platform is not safe and it is not to be used for official purposes by government officials, the Home Ministry said on Thursday.

The warning, earlier issued by Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In), was reiterated by the Cyber Coordination Centre (CyCord) of the Home Ministry in an advisory.

"This advisory states that the platform is not for use by government

officers/officials for official purposes," a statement from the ministry said.

Zoom became a popular application for executives conducting meetings while working from home during the nationwide lockdown announced by the central government to contain coronavirus pandemic in the country.

"The document makes reference to earlier advisories of the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-

In) and states that Zoom is not a safe platform. The guidelines have been issued to safeguard private individuals who would still like to use the platform for private purposes," the ministry said.

It said the advisory has been issued to prevent any unauthorized entry into a Zoom conference room and to prevent unauthorized participants to carry out malicious attacks on the terminals of other users in the conference.

Three COVID-19 patients in Assam recover

GUWAHATI, APR 16 (PTI): Three COVID-19 patients in Assam recovered and were discharged from the Goalpara Civil Hospital on Thursday, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

They were released after two successive tests turned out to be negative, he said.

According to the

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) protocol on COVID-19 they have been sent to 14-day home quarantine, Sarma said.

Two persons were released on Wednesday evening from the Sonapur District Hospital and they have been kept in isolation at the Hindustan Paper

Corporation guest house in Jagiroad.

Sarma and Minister of State for Health Pijush Hazarika were present on both occasions to monitor the discharge of the COVID-19 patients from the hospitals.

Assam now has 26 out of 32 COVID-19 patients undergoing treatments, while one person has died.



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Moses Swaibu: 'I realised I was someone who could make a difference'

ED AARONS

LONDON, 16 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Moses Swaibu remembers the first time he was offered a bribe like it was yesterday. A tall and elegant central defender who had come through Crystal Palace's youth system, the 19-year-old was taking the first steps of his senior career in League Two with Lincoln when he and two teammates were summoned to another player's hotel room at close to midnight on an away trip.

"He put money in front of us and said: 'I want you guys to lose and that's how much I'm willing to pay,'" Swaibu says. "It was a wad of cash worth €60,000 but we all said we weren't interested. The next day no one who had been in the room said anything on our morning walk and it turns out we were all on the bench anyway. That was the last I heard of it."

"It was my introduction to that world," he adds, more than 10 years on. "I will always remember seeing that amount of money in front of me and knowing

I couldn't say anything because of loyalty to my teammates and him being the type of person that he was ... I'd been playing street football just a few years ago so I was thinking to myself: 'Is this normal?' There was no form of education to help you. I was put in a situation with a teammate who I trusted and believed in."

In 2015 Swaibu served four months of a 16-month sentence after being found guilty of conspiracy to commit bribery following an investigation into match-fixing and an alleged betting syndicate. After being released by Lincoln in January 2011, he dropped out of the league and admits he has only himself to blame for the way things unravelled. He was playing for Bromley during the period of his offences.

In prison Swaibu formulated an idea to run workshops to ensure other young players do not make the same mistakes. Since 2019 he has used these to advise young players on how to deal with potential pitfalls, including betting, match-fixing and spot-

fixing.

"Being in the cell for 23 hours a day made me realise how important it is to be humble but also how privileged I had been. It was probably one of the best lessons that could have ever happened to me. In my childhood I had a tough and difficult upbringing and I was involved in things I'm not proud of. When I came out I thought to myself: 'How am I going to be a better person for myself, for my family and obviously for my kids?'"

"I realised I was someone who could make a difference, so I started writing down ideas for when I came out to see how we could stop this happening to other young players. A lot of the public don't know what goes on behind the scenes."

"Within two days of my release I was contacted by Gordon Taylor and Simon Barker from the PFA and when I told them my idea they said: 'We're here to help.' It took a while - you have to realise if someone is in my position and has been convicted then other people are going to



be like: 'Woah, hold on a minute.' But I've always been determined to make this happen."

The workshops - instigated jointly by the PFA, Football Association and Premier League as part of the FA's integrity programme - are compulsory for top-flight academies. Swaibu initially featured in a short film telling his story but now he attends and answers questions.

"Players that engage in our sessions are made well aware of the rules and that is why the change has been so significant. In my day there wasn't any education around - who

could I turn to? Not my teammates or even my manager."

"I didn't realise the impact it had until I got feedback from some of the players. I was surprised at some of the questions they were asking given they were at such a big club. They were asking what were the right things to do in certain situations and asking me about my career and why it went wrong."

"I was expecting them all to be slouching back in their seats like I was when I was 16 but they were really engaged. I may not have played top-level football but I can relate to them because

we all have come from the streets and hearing what I have been through can help them to make the right decisions."

Swaibu is also heavily involved in his local community having established a mentorship programme designed to provide disadvantaged young players with support and training equipment. He has not played since November 2013 when he was with non-league Whitehawk, after a lifetime FA ban. "I was done with football anyway. At 24 I'd had enough."

Enthusiastic and passionate about his new calling, Swaibu is willing to talk openly

about the mistakes he has made. At Lincoln he achieved notoriety after being arrested for stealing a cooked chicken from Tesco before being arrested at the same store for allegedly stealing a newspaper. The charges were dropped but Swaibu believes he was targeted by police because of some of the company he had been keeping.

"There were quite a few things happening. A close friend was arrested for some other charges and the police thought I was involved in that. There was one time when we were about to play an FA Cup tie and I was called by the chairman and told my house was going to be raided by the police."

"I'm happy to admit my life off the pitch wasn't as professional as it should have been. You can dictate who is around you and who isn't. You may have grown up with people and they have the best intentions but it's your career not theirs."

Swaibu believes his departure from Lincoln began his rapid decline. He

met two men posing as agents when he joined Bromley. "That was when the whole conspiracy started. The people who were claiming to be agents were actually match-fixers. We knew that, they knew that and we all got arrested. It was naivety. But if I hadn't seen what I saw when I was 19 I would have just ignored it."

"There is no real form of governance in non-league football and it will always be a much bigger threat. If you have clubs that pay wages under the table or sometimes struggle to pay salaries then if you are offered the chance to make some quick money you are more likely to do it."

"Only 1% of players at academies make it to the Football League and the other 99% trickle down through the system so there is an obvious danger some could be targeted. Football is a bubble and if you've been wrapped up in that since a young age then you are going to think you are owed specific things, even if you drop out of the league."

Sports can come back but without fans: Fauci

LOS ANGELES, APR 16 (AFP): The top US health and infectious disease specialist says the key to reopening professional sports leagues in America is to have the athletes play games in front of empty stadiums.

Anthony Fauci, who is helping coordinate the US response to the global coronavirus pandemic, said reliable antibody testing and fast results are also crucial to the return of sports.

"There's a way of doing that," Fauci told US Snapchat show "Good Luck America." "Nobody comes to the stadiums. Put (athletes) in big hotels, wherever you want to play."

"Keep them very well-surveilled, but have them tested like every week and make sure they don't wind up infecting each other or their families, and just let them play the season out."

Professional sports leagues are in gridlock due to the pandemic that has so far killed nearly 28,000 Americans.

The National Basketball Association is pondering a similar model for getting their 2019-20 season restarted in either Las Vegas or the Bahamas.

The NBA shut down on March 11 after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for the virus, and the National

Hockey League, Major League Soccer and the Professional Golfers' Association Tour quickly followed suit.

The PGA is reportedly considering a return on June 11 without fans in attendance, starting with a tournament in Fort Worth, Texas, which was originally scheduled for the weekend of May 21-24.

The matches would not be played in front of fans, and the PGA may have to play on gallery-free courses for at least the months of June and July.

Eight Tour events were postponed on March 17. The PGA Championship and Masters were rescheduled for later in the season.

Major League Baseball's 2020 season, which was due to start March 26, is on hold, as is the LPGA tour and motor racing, while the National Football League is just hoping it will be able to start its season on time in September.

New York mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday he doesn't want to see large-scale sporting events and concerts with fans come back for a long time.

"Those big events should be one of the last things we should bring back online. The last thing we should do is

gather 10,000, 20,000, 50,000 people in one place," de Blasio told CNN.

"That is the opposite of social distancing, so I think it could take quite a while." Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Monday that his California city might not host large gatherings, such as sporting events and concerts, before 2021.

- MORE WILL DIE -
"It would be very difficult to see that," Garcetti said when asked if events would resume in this calendar year.

Also, Jeffrey Smith, the chief executive for Santa Clara County in northern California, told ESPN that more people will die if events are staged too early and that only a "major miracle" could lead to the 2020 NFL season starting on time.

"It puts the entire country at risk," said Smith, who oversees the area that includes the NFL's San Francisco 49ers and the NHL's San Jose Sharks as well as several US college teams.

"The fundamental thing is sports is not a local event. If you have people travelling from all over and you have no way of knowing whether they're infected or not -- I mean, 50,000 of them in a stadium is not a good idea."

Athletes, teams, celebs are 'All In' to feed hungry

WASHINGTON, APR 16 (AP): With factories closed, tens of millions out of work and a recession looming because of the coronavirus pandemic, athletes, teams, entertainers and business leaders are donating prized possessions in response to a challenge to feed families suddenly in need.

The "All In Challenge" was started by Philadelphia 76ers partner Michael Rubin on Tuesday, and some of the biggest names in sports and entertainment have answered the call.

After 24 hours, there was already an impressive roster of A-listers offering prizes.

They include quarterbacks Tom Brady and Peyton Manning; musicians Justin Bieber, Meek Mill and Robin Thicke; actors Robert De Niro, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kevin Hart and Matthew McConaughey; director Martin Scorsese; TV hosts Ellen DeGeneres and Ryan Seacrest; TikTok stars Charli and Dixie D'Amelio; basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson; Chicago Cubs infielder Anthony Rizzo and retired baseball star

Alex Rodriguez; and several NFL, NHL and NBA teams.

This list is growing, said Rubin, who came up with the idea two weeks ago.

"I had two goals from the second this popped in my mind," Rubin told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

"The first was to feed as many people as possible. It was such an important cause and need. The second thing was, I love a good come together ... to have every athlete and actor come together, the sports and entertainment worlds coming together. To me, that is incredibly special."

Rubin said all the money raised will go directly to one of four organizations that feed the hungry: Feeding America, Meals On Wheels, World Central Kitchen and No Kid Hungry.

A billionaire who made his money with an e-commerce company he started in 2011, Rubin has donated what might be the biggest prize. The winner of a digital raffle will receive a Super Bowl experience with 20 friends, along with tickets to the NBA Finals, Stanley Cup Final, World Series,

Premier League clubs to discuss ending season by 30 June at Friday meeting

NICK AMES LONDON, 16 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: A commitment to completing the season before the start of July is among the options being considered by Premier League clubs, the Guardian understands.

The clubs are due to meet on Friday in the latest attempt to pick a way through the Covid-19 crisis. A resolution to consign the 2019-20 campaign

to history by 30 June, whether or not the entire schedule of games has been completed, will be among the proposals put to the league.

According to some reports, one of the most significant factors driving the idea to finish by that point - favoured by a large number of the league's members - is the expiry of numerous player and staff contracts by the end of June. One executive from a leading



Masters, Final Four, tennis' U.S. Open, the Daytona 500 and the Olympic opening ceremonies.

Entries for Rubin's prize can be purchased in amounts of 10, 25, 50 and 100. The winning ticket will be selected randomly by computer.

Other prizes are being auctioned. Those who answered the challenge were required to post a video about their donation and explain why they chose their prize.

Rubin said donations topped 4 million by midday Wednesday. His goal is to collect donations in the tens of millions of dollars, and his dream objective is 100 million.

club told the Guardian he was relatively relaxed, with Fifa having issued guidelines last week stating contracts can be extended until such time as the season ends. But he admitted the subject was on the table, with other clubs worried that English contractual law would render the governing body's stipulations irrelevant. That would lead to hundreds of potentially unresolved situations should fixtures

be honoured into July. In theory, an out-of-contract player could then stand himself down from action even if still relied upon by his club for its remaining games.

If the proposal to settle the season by 30 June is put to a vote, the Premier League would require a 14-club majority to approve any decision. Should it go through, the chances of completing a 38-game schedule would appear distinctly remote.

Brady, who left New England to sign with Tampa Bay after winning six Super Bowls with the Patriots, offered tickets to the Buccaneers' home opener, his game jersey and shoes, and dinner with him. That package is in the auction with the opening bid at 50,000.

Peyton Manning plans to play a round of golf with the winner and two guests, and then go to a restaurant for dinner with the winner and 10 guests. His recently retired brother, Eli, offered the Corvette he received as the MVP of the New York Giants' Super Bowl win over the Patriots in February 2012.

Meek Mill is auctioning his 2018 Rolls-Royce Phantom. Bidding starts at 200,000.

Mill was the person Rubin ran his idea past and his response was, "I'm in." Rubin asked him if he was serious.

"He said: 'I don't need the car. I need to do what helps people eat,'" said Rubin, whose job brings him in contact with people in the sports and entertainment industries on a daily basis.

Hart is offering a speaking role in his next movie. DeGeneres and Seacrest plan to have their winners as co-hosts on their shows.

Longhorns superfan McConaughey is offering a sideline experience at a University of Texas football game. Most teams have nine games left to play while four - Manchester City, Sheffield United, Arsenal and Aston Villa - must play 10. While clubs in Germany have returned to training, that scenario is still some way off in England. Then there would be the issue of getting players match-fit ahead of what, even if the league was cleared to resume behind closed doors at the start of June, would be an intense schedule.

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WHO welcomes joint efforts with India to fight COVID-19

By YOSHITA SINGH
UNITED NATIONS, APR 16 (PTI): WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has welcomed the world health body's cooperation with India to leverage strategies that helped the country win its war against polio into the response to COVID-19 outbreak, saying such joint efforts will help defeat the pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said it will work with India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to leverage the strategies that helped the country eradicate polio to fight the pandemic.

The WHO's national polio surveillance network will be engaged to strengthen COVID-19 surveillance and its field staff will continue to support immunization and elimination of tuberculosis and other diseases.

Great news: @MoHFW_INDIA & @WHOSEARO initiated a systematic engagement of @WHO's national polio surveillance network, and other field staff, for India's #COVID19 response, tapping into the best practices & resources that helped win its war against polio, the WHO director-general tweeted, referring to India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia.

According to the Johns Hopkins University data, over 2 million people are infected by the virus and more than 136,000 people

have died of the disease globally.

Ghebreyesus expressed gratitude to Health and Family Welfare Minister Harsh Vardhan for his leadership and collaboration with WHO. Through these joint efforts we can defeat the #coronavirus and save lives. Together!

India eliminated polio in 2014.

According to a WHO press release, Vardhan said in New Delhi that time and again the Government of India and WHO together have shown our ability, competence and prowess to the whole world. With our combined meticulous work, done with full sincerity and dedication, we were able to get rid of polio.

All of you in the field IDSP (Integrated Disease Surveillance Project), state rapid response teams and WHO - are our surveillance corona warriors'. With your joint efforts we can defeat the coronavirus and save lives, Vardhan added.

WHO South-East Asia Regional Director Poonam Khetrpal Singh said the National Polio Surveillance Project (WHO-NPSP) played a critical role in strengthening surveillance for polio that generated useful, timely and accurate data to guide policies, strategies and interventions until transmission of the poliovirus was interrupted in the country, adding that the other WHO field staff involved with elimination of tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases and

hypertension control initiative were also significant resources.

Singh added that it is now time to use all your experience, knowledge and skills, with the same rigor and discipline that you showed while monitoring polio activities, to support districts with surveillance, contact tracing and containment activities.

The WHO release said strengths of the NPSP team surveillance, data management, monitoring and supervision, and responding to local situations and challenges will be utilized to supplement efforts of National Centre for Disease Control, IDSP and Indian Council of Medical Research to strengthen COVID-19 surveillance.

The NPSP team will also support in sharing information and best practices and help states and districts calibrate their response based on transmission scenarios and local capacities.

The WHO field staff will continue to support immunization and surveillance and elimination of Tuberculosis and Neglected Tropical Diseases, Singh said, adding, disease outbreaks can negatively impact progress in a range of areas, from maternal and child mortality to vaccine-preventable diseases and other treatable conditions. India had been making stupendous progress in these areas and we cannot afford for India's remarkable progress to be set back or reversed.

US has 'passed the peak' on new coronavirus cases, says Trump

By LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APR 16 (PTI): The US has "passed the peak" on new coronavirus cases, President Donald Trump has said and predicted that some states would reopen this month. The US has over 637,000 confirmed Covid-19 cases and over 30,826 deaths, the highest for any country in the world.

At the daily White House coronavirus briefing on Wednesday, Trump said new guidelines to reopen the country would be announced on Thursday after he speaks to governors.

"We'll be the comeback kids, all of us," he said. "We want to get our country back."

The Trump administration has previously fixed May 1 as a possible date to reopen the world's largest economy, but the president said some states may be able to return to normalcy earlier than that.

"The battle continues, but the data suggest that nationwide we have passed the peak on new cases. Hopefully, that will continue, and we will continue to make great progress," Trump said.

These encouraging

developments, he said, has put the US in a very strong position to finalise the guidelines for states on reopening the country.

"Hopefully that will continue, and we will continue to make great progress," Trump said.

Dr Deborah Brix, a member of the White House Task Force on Coronavirus, said that over the last five or six days there has been decline in new cases across the country.

"This has been very reassuring for us. At the same time, we know that mortality and the fatalities that we are facing across the United States continue," she said.

Nine states have less than 1000 cases and less than 30 new cases per day. Some states like California and Washington State, Oregon never really had a peak because of so much work that their populations did to decrease and keep the new cases down, she said.

Two states, Rhode Island and Providence are in a unique situation, she said.

First, they had increasing cases from the New York City area and now they have new increasing cases from the Boston area. They are caught between two incredible hotspots in the country, she said.

Reiterating that this is a highly contagious virus, Brix said in social gatherings and coming together there is always a chance that asymptomatic person can spread the virus unknowingly.

No one is intending to spread the virus. We know if you are sick you will stay home. But to all of you that are out there that would like to join together and just have that dinner party for 20 don't do it yet. Continue to follow the presidential guidelines. We really appreciate the work of the American people," Brix said.

Asked why the US accounted for such a significant proportion of the global death toll of 136,908, Trump accused other countries of lying about their mortality rate.

"Does anybody really believe the numbers of some of these countries?" he said, in an apparent reference to China where the pandemic originated and spread across the world.

Noting that this has been a horrible time to see such death and destruction in the country, the President said the medical and healthcare advances the US has made are critical to the

continued progress. The US has rapidly developed the most expansive and accurate testing system anywhere in the world and have completed more than 3.3 million tests.

"To date, we have authorised 48 separate coronavirus tests and the FDA is working with 300 companies and labs to widen our capacity still further," Trump said.

The Abbott Labs on Wednesday announced that it is has developed an antibody test that will determine if someone has been previously infected with the coronavirus and potentially developed immunity.

"It is a great test. The company says these tests could be available to screen up to 20 million people in a matter of weeks," he added.

The administration, he said, is also distributing vast amounts of medical supplies to states across the country. Through project air bridge, which has been an amazing success they have completed 44 flights, and an additional 56 like scheduled in the near future, he said.

In total, through all channels, the

federal government has developed and delivered 39.4 million N95 masks, 431 million gloves, 57 million surgical masks and 10.2 million gowns. It ordered 500 million masks and they will be coming shortly and have distributed 100 million masks, he said.

Trump said his administration is using every available authority to accelerate the development, study and develop therapies and treatments.

"Ultimately, what we want to come up with is a safe vaccine, but frankly, the therapies to me are the most important because it takes care of people right now," he said.

"The vaccines have to be tested because it takes a longer period of time, but we have some great potential therapies already, and we will see how they are working. We will be able to report on that over the next week or two," he said, adding that at least 35 clinical trials of promising therapies are now underway.

Wuhan's 'wet markets' struggle after virus lockdown

At a large food market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, signs forbid the selling of wild animals and live fowl, while announcements calling for "victory" over COVID-19 play on a loop from speakers.

China's "wet markets" have been slammed internationally as the coronavirus roils the world, with the disease having seemingly emerged from stalls selling live game in Wuhan late last year.

The government has since banned the sale of wildlife for food, but the reopening of markets has drawn criticism from around the world as the death toll from the pandemic continues to mount.

Shut down during the lengthy quarantine that sealed off Wuhan until April 8, the city's markets are now fighting for survival as customers have not been rushing back.

"There's no question, we're doomed this year," spice seller Yang, who runs a stall at the massive Baishazhou wholesale market, told AFP. "There have never been so few people at our market."

Yang, whose sales have fallen by a third from before the lockdown, dismissed criticism of markets as virus hotbeds as "unnecessary panic".

One market remains closed: The Huanan Seafood Market that sold a range of exotic wildlife and is suspected to be the cradle of the virus that jumped from animals to humans.

Wet markets are popular venues to buy fresh meat, vegetables and fish across Asia -- most selling common, everyday produce to locals at affordable prices.

Most don't sell live animals, although some do.

During visits to three Wuhan markets this week, AFP saw live turtles, frogs, fish and crustaceans for sale, but no fowl or mammals blamed for past diseases.

Workers at Baishazhou said they were now required to disinfect their stalls several times a day. Yang keeps multiple bottles of disinfectant in her small office, alongside a box of masks.

Nevertheless, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said this week the decision to reopen wet markets was "unfathomable".

"We need to protect the world against potential sources of outbreaks of these types of viruses," he told Australian TV.

The top medical

specialist for the US government, Anthony Fauci, told Fox News earlier this month that wet markets should be shut down "right away."

"Doomed" - The nationalistic state-run Global Times launched a strident defence of China's wet markets on Tuesday, attacking "preconceived ideas" and "ridiculous requests" to close them.

While the World Health Organization has said governments must ban the sale of exotic wildlife and enforce food safety regulations, it has not called for any wet markets to be closed.

Vendors at Wuhan's markets say unaffordable rents and the lingering effects of the citywide shutdown are more immediate concerns than the threat of contagion.

"Business is very bad," said Zhang Zhizhen, a duck meat seller at Lanling market. "It's because of the epidemic -- there are still very few people on the streets."

Most Wuhan market sellers who spoke to AFP said they never sold wild animals.

But at the city's Tiansheng market, two freshwater produce sellers who declined to give their names said they had to stop selling certain types of frogs and turtles because of

the new rules.

"This definitely affects our income, but we have to overcome this. It can't be helped," one seller said.

Low foot traffic at the market, which has locked all but one entrance and only allows customers in after a temperature check, remains their main concern.

"We don't know if we can survive," the other seller said. "Do you see anyone here?"

- Supermarket

competition - Shoppers on the streets of Wuhan appeared unperturbed by criticisms of the city's wet markets as dirty and dangerous, instead citing convenience as the reason for choosing supermarkets instead.

One 40-year-old supermarket shopper surnamed Chen told AFP that she thinks the food at wet markets is "good and cheap."

She rejected criticism that China's markets are unhygienic, saying it "just isn't true."

"Their stuff is always fresh," she said.

People in China traditionally prefer buying fresh food -- as opposed to frozen or packaged food -- although supermarkets have been vying to steal away consumers in recent years.

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Wow. Okay. Tobey Maguire Could Totally Return as 'Spider-Man' All the Sudden



Sam Raimi — the director who brought Spidey to the big screen back in 2002 — is back for 'Doctor Strange 2.'

Are the Marvel movies about to go apeshit bananas? The director of the new Doctor Strange flick is suddenly superhero impresario Sam Raimi, and because of all the crazy crossover stuff that's happened with Spider-Man in the past few years, it feels like the Marvel movies are poised to bring back all sorts of retro Spider-Man stuff. But, now that Raimi is back directing Marvel movies (after a 13-year break) does that mean Tobey Maguire could return too?

This week, in an interview with ComicBook.com, Sam Raimi confirmed that, yes, he is taking the place of Scott Derrickson, who was previously going to direct an in-development Marvel movie called Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness. Effectively, the Multiverse of Madness is "Doctor Strange Part 2," but because Benedict

Cumberbatch's goateed Sorcerer Supreme was such a big deal in Avengers: Infinity War and Avengers: Endgame, this movie will very likely be a confluence of a bunch of different Marvel stuff. The clue is right there in the title: Multiverse of Madness. "Multiverse" implies a ton of crossovers and alternate realities, and "Madness" means it's going to be fucking nuts.

From a legal perspective, the character of Spider-Man (and Tom Holland in particular) is kind of "on loan" from Sony to Marvel Studios, for a finite number of films before both studios will have to renegotiate. Now, it's not a foregone conclusion that Spider-Man will appear in Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness, but if you're going to hire Sam "Spider-Man" Raimi to direct the movie, it seems like an insane waste of time to not have Spidey (or multiple Spideys) swing into the film. Thor: Ragnarok

heavily relied on some buddy comedy action with the Hulk, and even Spider-Man: Homecoming found Spidey teaming up with Iron Man. If Doctor Strange is lost in the multiverse, seems like running into Spidey is a good bet. And that probably means Tom Holland. But if it's a multiverse, it could mean Tobey Maguire too.

But there's more. In case you forgot (or aren't in your mid-to-late 30s) Sam Raimi is the guy who directed three Spider-Man movies in the early aughts. Two of those movies are good, and by all accounts, 2004's Spider-Man 2 (co-written by cool dad Michael Chabon) is a certified classic. There's also a great and hilarious scene in Spider-Man 2 in which crooked newspaperman J. Jonah Jameson tries to come up with a name for "Doc Ock" and one of his assistants (Ted Raimi) suggests "Dr. Strange." Jameson says, "Pretty good. But it's taken."

'God Friend Me' cancelled after season two

LOS ANGELES, APR 16 (PTI): CBS is not renewing the drama "God Friend Me" for another season.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the show, which was in its second year, will end with a two-hour finale on April 26.

"God Friend Me" features Brandon Micheal Hall as Miles an outspoken atheist who receives a social-media friend request from 'God' and unwittingly becomes an agent of change for the people around him.

The series comes from Warner Bros TV and CBS Television Studios.

The producers said they were proud of the "unique concept and uplifting stories" the show has told over the its short run.

"We thank the brilliant cast, writers, production team and crew for a show that stirred thoughtful conversation about faith, life and happiness, and made viewers feel good at the end of each episode.

"The creative team behind the show has one last 'friend suggestion' in mind, as well as an ending we hope brings a satisfying conclusion to Miles' journey in search of the God Account," CBS and Warner Bros. TV said Tuesday in a statement.

The cast also includes Violet Beane, Suraj Sharma, Javicia Leslie, Joe Morton and Erica Gimpel.

Steven Lilien and Bryan Wynbrandt were the show's creators, with the likes of Greg Berlanti among its executive producers.

Chris Cuomo Reveals His Wife Has Coronavirus: 'It Just Breaks My Heart'

CNN anchor Chris Cuomo, who was diagnosed with coronavirus last month, revealed that his wife Cristina Greeven Cuomo has tested positive for the disease.

Cuomo made the announcement on his show "Cuomo Prime Time" on Wednesday night while speaking with his brother, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

"It's very rare for a family to be one-and-done," he said. "Cristina now has COVID. She is now positive and it just breaks my heart. It is the one thing I was hoping wouldn't happen, and now it has."

Cuomo revealed on March 31 that he had contracted COVID-19, and had quarantined himself at home while continuing his on-air duties. He had said on Twitter after announcing his diagnosis, "I just hope I didn't give it to the kids and

Cristina. That would make me feel worse than this illness!"

The host and his brother talked about how quickly the virus can spread and how other families should keep taking precautions.

"Obviously, I've been a little bit of a mess about it today so I've been talking to Andrew about it a lot. The person who's not upset is Cristina. Cristina takes everything in stride and so far we're hoping — and a lot of this anecdotal because we don't know that much — she lost her sense of smell and taste. This is not science, but anecdotally the cases that I hear about that are more mild tend to have that. I didn't have that," Cuomo said.

Cuomo has used his on-air platform to inform the public about his symptoms and the mental and physical challenges he faced.



SUNNY STROLL! The actress and singer, Mandy Moore enjoys some outdoor time with her husband and dog.

Tom Hardy to read bedtime stories on BBC CHILDREN'S CHANNEL

LONDON, APR 16 (PTI): To spread some cheer in the times of the coronavirus outbreak, actor Tom Hardy is returning to narrate bedtime stories to children through BBC Children's channel.

Long-running series "Bedtime Stories" on the channel CBeebies will see the "Venom" star read books to kids from April 27-May 1.

According to the BBC Press Office, Hardy was filmed in his garden in accordance with social distancing guidelines.

Hardy, who first appeared on the programme in 2016, will begin with Simone Ciraolo's picture book "Hug Me", followed by Robert Vescio and Nicky Johnston's "Under the Same Sky" and Lizzy Stewart's "There's a Tiger in the Garden".

Later in the week, the actor will read "Don't Worry, Little Crab" by Chris Haughton and "The Problem With Problems" by Rachel Rooney and Zehra Hicks.

Cheryl Taylor, head of content at BBC Children's, said the team is thrilled to have Hardy back.

"It's during challenging times like this

that the BBC serves its purpose to entertain the whole of the UK and these new stories are guaranteed to do just that with their themes of long-distance friendship, sharing problems and true courage in overcoming seemingly impossible challenges," Taylor said in statement.

"Bedtime Stories" will air on weekdays at 6.50 pm (local time) on the CBeebies channel, which is also available on the BBC iPlayer.



Aries: There are no coincidences, Aries. Everything that is taking place is a part of the divine plan written in the stars. If you're lost or confused about which way to go, simply close your eyes and ask for a sign. Trust that it will come to you in the most unexpected of ways, like a conversation you overhear or a vision you have as you sit down to meditate. Your task today is to stay in awareness and be cognisant of what's coming through from the unseen realms.
Tip: Ask (for a sign) and you shall receive.

Taurus: Your time away from the matrix has been full of epiphanies. Through the course of this quarantine, you've had deeper revelations about who you are not, than who you are. Let this be a turning point, Taurus. Take a deep breath, centre yourself, and prepare to traverse within. As you do, ask your angels and guides to come through and reveal your true path to you. You are now in the process of transcending the world of illusions.
Tip: You are creating a new reality for yourself by transcending illusions.

Gemini: Albert Einstein once said, "We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." This holds

true for the situation you are faced with, Gemini. The only reason you're facing a roadblock is because you are closing yourself to possibilities. So redirect your gaze. Analyse the situation with a beginner's mindset. Creative solutions will help you breakthrough and mark the starting point of a brand new journey.
Tip: Your answer lies in adopting a beginner's mindset.

Cancer: "It is not your job to make something happen— Universal Forces are in place for all of that. Your work is to simply determine what you want." Let this classic Esther Hicks quote remind you of the importance of single-minded focus. This is a period of inner transformation in the Cancer HQ. You are realising your true worth and stepping into your light. No, your dreams are not too big! Surrender this limiting belief to the Universe as you get ready to co-create miracles.
Tip: This is the time to make your dreams real.

Leo: Aren't you tired of micromanaging the Universe? Aren't you tired of trying to control every aspect of your life only to realise that this is what you have been giving into an illusion? Breathe. Let go. Repeat. This is an opportune moment to let go of the reins and

let the mysterious forces above intervene. Trust that everything that will transpire now is in alignment with your highest good.
Tip: Surrender. Let go.

Virgo: You've known what to do for a while now. What's keeping you from taking the desired action? Spirit needs you to step up, Virgo. The virtues of courage and fearlessness will take you a long way. Growth and evolution are also in focus today. Everybody grows differently. The frequency you're on may not match the frequency of the people around you, and that's okay. Dare to sing a different tune. Dare to speak your truth despite the resistance you may receive in the bargain.
Tip: Your power words are courage and fearlessness.

Libra: Don't take yourself so seriously, Libra. Maybe you are not who you used to be. So, what? Allow yourself to play, to explore, to have fun. Energy is forever shapeshifting. As you do, let go of your attachment to the old story and let Spirit lead you to a brand new territory. Oh, the things you will discover about yourself and the world around you in the process!
Tip: This and that are true.

Scorpio: There are times in your life when you begin to

think you are lost and confused, that there is nowhere to go and no place to call home. This is a limitation of the three dimensional mind. Open yourself up to divine guidance, Scorpio. Let go of the idea of separation as you embrace the idea of oneness. The answers you need right now will come to you, and in the most mysterious ways.
Tip: Open yourself to divine guidance.

Sagittarius: There are times in our lives when we hold onto the old stories for the fear of what the new might entail. What if this is a limitation created by your three dimensional mind, Sagittarius? Open yourself to the truth... to your truth. Let the guidance and master come through with important messages that will help you cross the bridge and get to the other side. A whole new world of possibilities awaits you, if only you dare to transcend the illusion.
Tip: Face your true north.

Capricorn: There is a lack of clarity about how things will pan out in the future, which is making you anxious. No hasty decisions, Capricorn. Take your time to do your research. Gather the facts and figures. Turn to a trusted friend or mentor, if need be. This will help you make practical decisions that will serve you in the long run. Once again, the cards

are warning you against foes dressed in the garb of friends. Be mindful of who you share sensitive information with.

Tip: Find ways to gain clarity.
Aquarius: There are no good or bad experiences, Aquarius. It is the lens through which we look at them that colours our reality. So let go of the filters. See the truth for what it is. Honour and acknowledge the lesson you're being asked to learn. This is the key to transcending your demons. As for the ache in your heart, trust that it will go to. Healing is a process—and not a linear one.
Tip: Be grateful for every experience that brought you to this point in your existence.

Pisces: There are days you wake up feeling like the most glorious version of yourself, and then there are days when waking up in itself is a task. Such is the nature of life, Pisces. The constant and continuous dance of shadow and light. What Spirit wants you to focus on is acknowledging the lows rather than running away from them. Hold space for your healing. Interject with a word of affirmation every now and then. Trust that you will find a way out of your funk soon enough.
Tip: Be generous with your words or affirmations.