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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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BDO and SDM level transfers in West Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

The State Government today effected a minor reshuffle in West district at the BDO and SDM level.

An office order issued by the Department of Personnel has transferred PGT [Limboo] at Khecheopalri Senior Secondary School, Samarman Limboo, as BDO-Yuksam in place of Mahendra Chettri who proceeds to take charge as BDO-Kaluk.

The present BDO at Kaluk, Deepika Gurung, in turn has been repatriated and posted as Archive Officer, Culture Department.

Similarly, SDM-Yuksom, Jimmy Wangchuk Bhutia, moves to Social Justice & Welfare Department as Deputy Secretary, while Joint Registrar, Cooperation Department, Tshering Thendup Bhutia, has been brought in as SDM-Yuksam.

Uttarakhand suspends visiting hours at hospitals

DEHRADUN, MAR 16 (PTI):

The Uttarakhand government on Monday ordered suspension of visiting hours for friends and relatives of patients at private and government hospitals to prevent crowding as a precaution against the spread of coronavirus.

Secretary in-charge of Medical, Health and Medical Education Department, Pankaj Kumar Pandey wrote to all district magistrates and chief medical officers asking them to suspend the hours earmarked for visitors to meet patients at private and government hospitals in their areas.

It should be done to prevent crowding and large gatherings in public places to contain the spread of coronavirus which is acquiring the proportions of an international public health crisis, Pandey said in the letter.

Coronavirus has already been declared an epidemic in Uttarakhand which reported its first case of the deadly virus on Sunday with a forest officer under training at the FRI testing positive.

COVID-19 scare shuts Sikkim down

GANGTOK, 16 MAR (IPR):

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) chaired a high-level meeting of all Cabinet Ministers, MLAs, State Administration led by the Chief Secretary, and various stakeholders of the hospitality sector to deliberate on immediate measures to be taken by the State to prevent the outbreak of Novel Corona Virus (COVID 19) in the State of Sikkim.

It may be mentioned that Sikkim has not reported a single case of COVID 19 till date, and the Government is taking all possible measures to prevent any outbreak.

At the outset, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, S.C Gupta gave an overview of the current situation, how the Government of Sikkim is managing the situation, and further steps needed to be taken to handle it effectively. He stressed that the rate at which the virus is spreading exponentially; there is no room for any complacency. He however main-



tained that there is no need for any panic either.

The Chief Secretary explained in detail the initiatives being taken by the Government at various levels, starting with the screening of visitors and commuters from the State borders.

He stressed on the need for community surveillance, responsible use of social media, medical training and preparedness of medical staff deputed.

He said that the quarantine wards at old STNM, New STNM, CRH, Ayush Hospital Gyalshing, Namchi District Hospital, Army Hospital, seem adequate for the time being. He however proposed to convert Government establishments in the outskirts or slightly isolated places into isolation wards to cater to a larger population.

He further said that in order to check contamination within a ter-

ritory, several countries and states have called for temporary shutdown of institutions, etc. Keeping this in consideration, he proposed the closing down of educational institutions for a certain time. Likewise, we could put a temporary ban or embargo on entry of any tourist or visitor to the State in public interest, he added.

He suggested for shut down of gyms, cinema halls, **turn to pg 06**

State Univ students launch dharna, demand answers from Govt



SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Students of Sikkim State University [SSU] sat on dharna in front of the SSU building in Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College complex in Tadong today to protest against the lack of facilities in the university. They threatened to continue their dharna until the Education Minister, Additional Chief Secretary of Education Department and SSU Vice-Chancellor come to the venue

to address them.

Speaking to media persons, students on protest stated that they have submitted their grievances and issues verbally and in written repeatedly to the department and other appropriate forums.

"We approached every appropriate forum but have not received any positive assurance from any side so we have now been compelled to protest like this," they said.

Responding to media

queries, they stated that studies have been affected following their movement and no classes have been held in the present session.

"We have not received any mark sheet as the university still does not have a Controller of Examination," they said.

Likewise, SSU Vice-Chancellor, Prof GK Niroula stated that the State University was started in 2018 and even after two years of establishment the university is

not a full-fledged university and this is creating fear among the students about their future.

He mentioned that the government and the concerned department should hear the students' grievances and provide facilities as per the UGC norms. Proper campus, infrastructures and facilities would inculcate a sense of belongingness in students, he added.

Prof Niroula mentioned that he has been approaching the department for one and a half year regarding appointment of teachers but the department has not responded. He even asked the department for final approval for appointment of teachers recently on 25 February but received no response.

Expressing hope that the government and department takes positive action soon on the issue, he urged students to end their protest to continue their classes.

NHPC awards balance civil works for Teesta-VI to Gammon



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Limited (LTH-PL), which is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of NHPC Ltd, has awarded the Lot-II Package of Construction of Balance Civil Works Package for the 500 MW Teesta Stage VI Hydroelectric Project to Gammon Engineers and Contractors Pvt Ltd, an official press communi-

qué from NHPC informs.

Teesta Stage-VI has remained in an abandoned state for some years now ever since the original project developer, Lanco, ran into financial distress. NHPC has since acquired LTHPL and after months of speculations on the fate of the project, news has arrived that it is resuming.

Gammon was awarded the project on 15

March for a contract price of Rs 1,248.44 crore, the release informs, while adding that the package includes works for underground Power House & Transformer Cavern, Part of HRT-I & HRT-II, Surge Shafts, Pressure Shafts & Adits, TRT and other associated structures etc.

NHPC claims that the work has been awarded in

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CONTACT

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BJP wants State Govt to do more to combat COVID-19

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

While welcoming the initiatives already undertaken by the State Government to prevent the coronavirus from entering the State, the Bharatiya Janata Party wants more to be done and today released a set of six points which should be considered.

BJP-Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, in a press release issued today,

has suggested that fresh medical certificates be made mandatory for every visitor to Sikkim, including locals returning from "infected areas."

The party has also suggested that the State Government keep strict vigil against black-marketing of prevention kits and ensure the availability of materials at normal costs.

The State Government and Health Department in collaboration

with NGOs and Panchayats should undertake awareness programs and distribution of masks so that rumors do not create an atmosphere of fear among the people, the party has further recommended.

It is also suggested that the Health Department release a daily status report regarding prevention initiatives in the state and screening at the entry points of the State.

The party also wants arrangements in place for immediate medical treatment of suspected cases by alerting the Panchayats and NGOs throughout the State.

The release adds that all vehicles entering Sikkim should be properly sanitized at the border itself and "markets, public toilets, drains, especially crowded areas" be sanitized by spraying antiseptics.

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Number of coronavirus patients in India rises to 114, Odisha reports its first case

NEW DELHI, MAR 16 (PTI): COVID-19 extended its footprint in India on Monday with the eastern state of Odisha reporting its first coronavirus patient and one new case each in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Kerala, taking the total count to 114. Health Ministry officials said. The Maharashtra government also reported four more patients of the infection, as concerns over the pandemic steered decisions across all sectors and states, including in politically volatile Madhya Pradesh.

The ministry did not immediately add the Maharashtra cases to its national count, covering 15 states and union territories. The tally of 114 includes 17 foreigners. While two people died, 13 people were discharged after they recovered from the infection, which according to the WHO has infected 1,53,517 people in 135 countries and territories and claimed more than 5,700 lives.

With the four new patients, Odisha has a count of one, Kerala 23, Ladakh four and Jammu and Kashmir three, according to the ministry.

As many states virtually shut down to stem the spread of COVID-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the contribution of doctors, nurses and healthcare workers in fighting the virus. He said there was a coordinated response to the outbreak, showing the strong spirit of the nation in such situations.

In a series of tweets with the hashtag 'India Fights Corona', Modi said the encouragement from people highlighting the steps being taken to combat the virus is boosting the morale of all the "remarkable people" at the forefront of the fight. A Maharashtra government official said four patients were detected for the novel coronavirus infection, taking the state tally to 37.

Giving details of the Odisha case, an official in Bhubaneswar said a researcher who recently returned from Italy tested positive for the coronavirus. The 33-year-old patient who reached Delhi from Italy on March 6 and travelled to Bhubaneswar by train on March 12 is being treated at the Capital Hospital in the Odisha capital.

"His condition is stable and he is not showing any other complications," the state government's chief spokesperson on coronavirus cases Subroto Bagchi told reporters.

The man consulted a doctor on March 13, complaining of fever and headache, and was admitted to the hospital's isolation ward the next day. As he travelled by train from Delhi to Bhubaneswar, the state government has launched a "contact tracing exercise", Bagchi said. His family members have been quarantined and kept under observation.

In Madhya Pradesh, where the future of the Congress-led Kamal Nath government hangs in balance, there was no floor test as was being speculated and the assembly was adjourned in view of the state government's concerns over the coronavirus.

SAATHI offsite camp held at Chemchey

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Sixth off-site training camp on life skills was organised by SAATHI (Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India) at IHCAE Chemchey, from 13 to 15 Mar, 2020.

The camp was attended by 132 students from 12 Government Schools of Sikkim, namely Damthang Sec School, Kaluk Sr Sec School, Kitam Sr Sec School, Namchi Girls Sr Sec School, Sumbuk Sr Sec School, Perbing Sr Sec School, Tashiding Sr Sec School, Rateypani Sr Sec School, Namchi boys Sr Sec School, Melli Bazar Sr Sec School, Melli Dara Sr Sec School, and Namthang Sr



Sec School.

The students were taught various life skills such as coping with emotions and stress, interpersonal relationships and team work, decision

making, etc.

Not only were they taught about life skills they were encouraged to come forward and showcase their talent and participate in ad-

venturous activities such as sport climbing and various obstacles activities.

The main objective of these camps is to groom the students and help

them to be able to handle unseen hurdles they will face in their future.

The camp ended with pledging, feedback and sharing session with the students.

Census 2021 training held at Gyalshing

GYALSHING, 16 MAR (IPR): The Enumerator and Supervisor Training 1st phase of 2021 census and NPR (National Population Register) updation was organised by the Directorate of Census Operations, Sikkim at Zilla Bhawan, Gyalshing, today.

The training was chaired by ADC West, Karma L. Lepcha (District Census Officer) along with SDM Gyalshing, Tshering T. Bhutia (Charge Officer of Gyalshing Sub-Division and Rural); Bhumi Pradhan, MEO (GMC); Raju Bhandari, Deputy Director, Education (Additional Charge Officer) and Vimlesh Kumar (Statistical Investigator).

ADC West in his address to the trainers, supervisor and enumerators directed them to take full benefit of the training and learn the modules for the collection of Census report. He further mentioned that their roles are crucial in collection of the census data. Hence their alertness and promptness would be highly appreciated. He then urged them to fulfil their responsibility to make it a successful exercise with minimal errors as possible.

The training was held for the National Population Register (NPR) to Register of usual resident of the country. It is being prepared at the Lo-

cal (village/town), District, Sub District, state and National level under provision of the Citizenship Act 1995 and the citizenship (Registration of citizens and issue of National Identity card) Rules, 2003.

During the training it was also informed that the NPR data will be updated on mobile apps and on paper schedules. The Emulator will opt either mobile Apps or paper schedules for updation of the NPR data.

The 1st phase of training will be held till 19 March, 2020. The resource persons for the training program were Sonam Tshering Dong and Laxmi Prasad Karki.

Training for Census 2021 held in South

NAMCHI, 16 MAR (IPR): The 2nd phase training for enumerators and supervisors for the forthcoming Population Census-2021 and NPR updation organised by Directorate of Census Operation, Sikkim commenced at the conference hall of Green Park, Jorethang, today.

The four-day training is being attended by a total number of 52 trainees under Urban census.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate-cum-Charge officer, RB Bhandari formally inaugurated the training program and



spoke about the importance of census in the state for any developmental project.

He briefed the trainees on the logistics involved for carrying out the census duty and urged them to attend the training in a sincere

and dedicated manner in order to ensure success of the first phase of census-2020-21.

It may be pertinent to add here that the 1st batch training for rural census was held on 11 March and concluded on 14 Mar, 2020.

Loyola College celebrates Consumer Rights Day



SUMMIT REPORT
Gangtok, 16 Mar: Federation of Consumers Association-Sikkim observed World Consumer Rights Day at Loyola College of Education, Namchi, and South Sikkim, a press release informs.

The theme of this year's WCRD 2020 was "The Sustainable Consumer". The campaign will discuss the need for sustainable consumption globally, as well as highlighting the important role that consumer rights and protection can play.

ADC (Namchi), Satyan Pradhan and Prin-

icipal, Rev Father Joseph Sandanasamy SJ attended the program as a chief guest and the guest of honor respectively.

Rev Father Patrick Pradhan, Ladenla Denzongpa from Perbing Senior Secondary School and Dhana Chettri from Phallidara Junior High School were present as special guests.

Resource person, Thupden G Bhutia, Subject Expert and Advocate High Court of Sikkim talked about various consumer related issues along with Court Judgment/Case Laws.

Resource Persons, Srijana Khadka, PGT Economics, Nodal Teacher Consumer Club of Namthang Senior Secondary School and general secretary of FCAS cum Member Judge District Consumer Forum (East), Rohit Pradhan also addressed the participants on Consumer Rights and duties. From the Voice NGO, Adrina Gurung gave a short speech on environment and its importance with the sustainable consumer.

In the meantime, quiz competition was also conducted by FCAS members, Preeti Gupta and Rubina Poudyal Chettri.

The program started with prayer and prayer songs by students of Loyola College, welcome speech delivered by Secretary FCAS, Shekher Khatiwara, Vote of thanks delivered by Member FCAS, Ringzing Tamang. Program was conducted by Chief Coordinator (State) FCAS, Suresh K Lama.

Coronavirus awareness at Tiny Tots School



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Awareness programme on Coronavirus (COVID-19) was held at Tiny Tots School Rangpo for the students of the School today.

A press release informs, Science teacher, Manita Sharma and Shreya Thapa from class VIII in presence of Principal, Staff, Students and Non-Teaching Staff highlighted the precautions to be taken

against Coronavirus.

Manita Sharma highlighted the symptoms and precautions. He advised avoiding close contact with people who are sick, not touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands and to cover one's face while coughing or sneezing.

Principal of the School, Ajeet Sharma said that they are taking all the necessary steps to fight against COVID-19.

Census training begins in Gyalshing

GYALSHING, 16 MAR [IPR]:

First phase of training of enumerators and supervisors for 2021 Census and National Population Register [NPR] updation, organised by the Directorate of Census Operations, Sikkim, began at Zilla Bhawan, Gyalshing, today.

The training was chaired by ADC West, Karma L. Lepcha, who is also the ex-officio District Census Officer, along with SDM Gyalshing, Tshering T. Bhutia (Charge Officer of Gyalshing Sub-Division and Rural); Bhumi Pradhan, MEO (GMC); Deputy Director, Raju Bhandari, Education (Additional Charge Officer) and Statistical Investigator, Vikash Kumar

ADC West stressed to the supervisor and enumerators that their roles were crucial in collection of the census data, hence their alertness and promptness would be highly appreciated.

He then urged them to fulfill their responsibilities to make it a successful exercise with minimal errors.

The training was held for NPR to register usual residents of the country. It is being prepared at the Local (village/town), District, Sub District, state and National level under provisions of the Citizenship Act and the Citizenship (Registration of citizens and issue of National Identity card) Rules, 2003.

During the training, it was also informed that the NPR data will be updated on mobile apps and on paper schedules.

The emulator will opt either mobile Apps or paper schedules for updation of the NPR data.

The training will continue till 19 March. The resource person for the training program was, Sonam Tshering Dong and Laxmi Prasad Karki.

Training for enumerators & supervisors for Census 2021

MANGAN, 16 MAR (IPR):

The North District Administration as 1st phase of forthcoming Population Census-2021 and NPR updation began a 4-day training program for Enumerator & Supervisor of Mangan block at DAC conference hall from 16 March. The programme was organised by the Directorate of Census Operation, Sikkim.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate-cum-Charge officer, Karma Thendup Bhutia formally inaugurated the programme.

In his inaugural speech, the SDM appealed to all trainers, supervisors and enumerators to discharge their duties properly. He informed that a WhatsApp

group has been created for faster communication between the field functionaries and census officers.

Lastly, he urged the all trainees and trainers to work hand in hand in order to achieve 100% error free result.

Over 50 supervisors and enumerators from across the Mangan Block have attended the programme. Master Trainer-cum-N/D Nodal Officer/Statistical Investigator, Praveesh Rai and Field Trainer, Rinchen D Riponpa are imparting the training.

It may be pertinent to mention here that the 1st phase of 2021 census and NPR updation will commence from 07 April to 22 May, 2021.

SDF convenes emergency meeting on COVID-19

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Sikkim Democratic Front president, Pawan Chamling called an emergency meeting today which was attended by several functionaries of the party.

In this meeting held today the members present expressed their views and unanimously expressed their concern and thought it appropriate for the party to take up immediate steps in the interest of the people, an SDF press release informs.

"While observing the ineffective and lackadaisical attitude of the present SKM government, the meeting held that SDF should take immediate appropriate action to provide correct information to the people and to ensure that the Sikkimese society be protected from Corona Virus," the release states.

In the course of his address he also suggested various measures which could be adopted to fight against this glob-

al pandemic; such as to stop entry of outsiders into Sikkim and also to not allow local residents to leave the state, to stop the entry of all staff, labourers, etc. working in the companies, pharmaceuticals, and also all schools, colleges and educational institutes to be closed, to ban all tours outside the state for the officials and students etc., and to control the visit of state dignitaries be it official, religious or otherwise.

Mr Chamling gave specific directions to the party cadre to reach as many individuals as possible and to take up this humanitarian cause above politics. In conclusion, he made it clear that, humanity, Sikkimese interest and Sikkim's future has always been the foundation of the SDF party. He emphasized that this movement of the SDF party should be for the cause of humanity and to ensure that Sikkim remains a Corona Virus Free State.

Hariyo Makha initiative celebrated at Singbel

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

A felicitation program was organized at Adarsh Vidhya Mandir (AVM), Singbel, East Sikkim, to celebrate the success of Hariyo Makha initiative, a press release informs.

Shital Pradhan, teacher and blogger was the chief guest of the day which also saw the presence of B.B. Chettri (Headmaster, Dipudara Primary School), Lomas Dhungel (Founder cum Developer, Hariyo Makha), Bhim Prasad Nepal (1971 Bangladesh war veteran), along with SMCs, SHGs, students and locals.

Hariyo Makha initiative is about upcycling plastics for book covers, a task which was given to Ajambari Self Help Group (Singbel). For the purpose, a small Plastic Collection center was established at Singbel in November last year.

More than 300 volunteers including public, students and teachers from 11 government and 2 private schools from both East and South districts had collected and donated around 30,000 plastic pieces that were up-cycled for making more than 2100 book

covers of AVM.

The schools included Makha SSS, Singtam SSS, Sonamati Memorial SSS, Bermiok Tokal SSS, Lower Samdong SS, Tumin SS, Kamal JHS, Singbel JHS, Bhirkuna JHS, Dipudara PS, Kokaley PS, Adarsh Vidhya Mandir and Bethesda Academy. Lomas Dhungel had won National Award last year for his initiative.

Assuming a weight of 5 gm per plastic, the initiative led to reduction in waste by 150 kg along with countless areas required for their disposal. In addition to cleanliness, the experiment also led to a new type of Seasonal Employment earning a total of Rs. 21,000 out of the works.

A part of the revenue is also expected to be utilized for educating at least two female SHG members, said Lomas Dhungel.

The chief guest of the day, Shital Pradhan appreciated the efforts of the SHGs in completing their goals. He added that such program should be supported and shared to other parts of the state. The student volunteers and SHG members also received certificates.

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

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LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

Workshop on Metal Fabrication at Raj Bhavan postponed



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

As a special initiative from Governor's Secretariat under Governor's village adoption programme, 'A Three Week Workshop on Metal Fabrication' for select youths from Navey Shotak & Amba GPUs in East Sikkim was formally inaugurated at Raj Bha-

van premises near Zero Point, Gangtok, today.

As per a Raj Bhavan press release, the three-week workshop which include theory and practical session, is designed to provide basic skill for production of household metal decorative items, indoor and outdoor furniture, ornamental designs which would en-

hance aesthetic value of homestays and other commercial establishments being operated in the State.

Addl Chief Secretary to Governor, Dr K Jayakumar provided the detailed insight into the aims and objectives of the workshop and the initiative taken by Governor's Secretariat. He

underlined the scope and demand of metal fabrication in the market and stressed on promoting entrepreneurship and creation of employment through capacity building in the sector.

Secretary, Commerce and Industries Department, HK Sharma in his address stressed on the need to capitalise on

the opportunities provided by the State to be a self-sustaining entrepreneur and mentioned various programmes and policies being initiated by the government to facilitate Start Ups in the State. He urged the trainee participants to make best use of the training to kickstart their own ventures.

The officials from Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, MSME, ATDC, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Department also addressed the inaugural function.

However in view of emerging public health scenario following the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus-19 disease and the advisories from the government, the workshop has been postponed for a later date and will commence once the situation normalizes, the release mentions.



Governor performs hawan at Raj Bhavan

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 MAR:

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad today performed hawan and spe-

cial prayer at Raj Bhavan today for peace happiness and prosperity of all Sikkimese. He was accompanied by Arya Samaj Pratinidhis from Bihar during the ritual.

AHRC notice seeks health condition of Akhil Gogoi

GUWAHATI, MAR 16 (PTI): The Assam Human Rights Commission (AHRC) on Monday issued a notice to the Central Jail, Guwahati asking it to submit a report on the health condition of peasant leader Akhil Gogoi who was arrested on December 27 last year for his alleged role in violence during anti-CAA protests.

AHRC member Deva Kumar Saikia issued the notice after taking cognisance of a complaint filed by All Assam Law Student Union Vice-President Debashish Medhi.

The jail superintendent was directed to submit a detailed report on the health condition of Gogoi, adviser of peasant body Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), and the steps taken so far for his treatment within a month of receipt of the notice.

In his complaint, Medhi said Gogi, who is also an RTI activist, was suffering from various ailments but he was not provided with proper food and timely treatment.

He also accused the jail authorities of purposely caused delay in taking the peasant leader to a hospital which amounts to violation of human rights.

Earlier this month, a team of doctors visited Gogoi in the jail following a directive by an NIA court to the jail authorities to furnish a detailed report of his health condition after his wife approached the court praying for his proper treatment.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has registered a case against Gogoi NIA under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. He is currently in judicial custody.

Gogoi was taken to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital when he fell ill a day before he and three other KMSS leaders were scheduled to launch an indefinite fast in the jail from March one against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The stir was subsequently called off.

SICA Ground Opening postponed due to coronavirus fears



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 MAR:

Sikkim Cricket Association [SICA] today announced that the SiCA Ground opening scheduled for 05 April has been cancelled till further notice in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country due to which all functions, including seminars, workshops, conferences and other events of mass gathering, are required to be cancelled.

"The Chief Minister after having considered these factors, as well as the latest development

of the case of the rise of COVID-19 in India, found it appropriate to postpone the event," a SiCA press release details.

The release adds that SiCA had planned a grand event with guests travelling in from various parts of the country and guests from within Sikkim alone numbering in several hundreds.

"Therefore, the advice of the Chief Minister of Sikkim to postpone the event given the current scenario is one that SiCA also full handedly agrees and abides with," the release states.

Given the coronavirus

scenario, SiCA has also postponed the knock out stage of the Two-Tier Club Tournament.

"Not holding a community event such as a ground opening can have cascading effects, it could potentially prevent chances of the introduction of such diseases in Sikkim. Therefore on the advice of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, we are more than happy to act and take necessary precautionary measures to help prevent the spread of the virus," the release quotes SiCA president, Lobzang G Tenzing, as conveying.

DLSA South observes International Women's Week

GANGTOK, 16 MAR (IPR): District Legal Services Authority (South) and Taluk Legal Services Committee (South) in co-ordination with the Sikkim State Legal Services Authority organized International Women's Week and Consumer Rights Day, at Ravangla Bazaar, on 15 Mar, 2020.

The purpose of the program was to spread awareness about welfare legislations various schemes and to strengthen the community's access to the schemes being implemented by the Legal Services Authority and other Departments of the Government for

women and the consumers and several public.

The program aimed at identifying and connecting women to welfare schemes to ensure that fruits of the welfare schemes are passed to them and also to the consumers. The program also looked upon understanding the legal needs of the women and the rights of consumer by addressing their legal problems and giving appropriate legal advice.

The program was launched by the Chairman, DLSA (South), Jiwani Kumar Kharka in presence of the Secretary DLSA (South), Jwala D

Thapa, Learned. Judicial Magistrate, Sub-Division, Jorethang (South), Rohini Rai, Panel Advocates, Bhim S Pradhan, Sushila Thapa, Food & Civil Supplies Department, Dinesh Pradhan (DCSO) Social Welfare Department, Sangay Bhutia, Para-Legal Volunteers, Jairam Gupta and the Students and staff members of the school.

There were around 52 people who attended the program and interacted with the officers and representatives of the Departments present to address their problems and to procure appropriate advice and guidance.

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SUMMIT REPORT MANGAN, 16 MAR:

The forest fire at Dikchu, North Sikkim, on the right bank of Dikchu river which was triggered yesterday by excessive sparking on the high transmission power

supply cables of Teesta Urja and Sneha Kinetic Power Project Ltd was finally doused today.

Although the fire was subdued yesterday itself after a moderate squall of rain, it had flamed again today.

Fire Tenders from Mangan, officials from Forest Department led by DFO Territorial, North, Pempa Dadul Lachenpa, police personnel and SKPPL were pressed into service today and finally doused the fire.

Sikkim Police Passing out Parade

GANGTOK, 16 MAR (IPR): Passing out Parade of 431 personnel of Sikkim Police Recruit Constables of Police Training Center, SAP, Pangthang & Recruit Training Center, IRBn, Pipalay was held at Paljor Stadium, Gangtok, today.

The programme had Chief Minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) as chief guest. The programme had the presence of Cabinet Ministers, dignitaries and members of Sikkim Police and recruits families.

The chief guest while addressing the gathering congratulated all the recruit cadets on successful completion of their one year training and discipline. He reminded to all the passing out cadets that to take an Oath under the Constitution means that in the coming time all the cadets have to keep flag high at all "costs and circumstances".

He said that State is indeed proud of each one of them who will take on the challenges that will require sacrifices, trials and tribulations and reminded them to keep Motto and the Honour Code while dealing with the formidable task.

The Chief Minister stated that after passing out successfully the cadets must have the ability to walk step by step and shoulder to shoulder that will help in achieving goals which will make them strong. He further stressed that the police force is an essential part of the state as they are the ones responsible for maintaining law and order. He expect every passing out recruits to perform their duty diligently and with utmost sincerity to preserve the sanctity of our state. He urged to the recruits to strive for more and work hard and the government will ensure every necessary help such as to resume the children's education allowance and increase the ration allowance as well.

The CM highlighted about the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) to the public that the government is taking every possible step to insure the safety of people which is the top most priority. He requested everyone to refrain from traveling and not to invite guests until the

situation improves and to co-operate at this time of crisis which he sincerely hoped that people of Sikkim will contribute to it.

DGP, A Shankar in his short address thanked Chief Minister on the behalf of Sikkim Police for fostering his time to grace the momentous day to cherish each and every recruits, their family members and all members of Sikkim Police.

He said that it is perhaps a proud day for Sikkim Police as another continent of 431 recruits constables are passing out today after completion of their regular one year training which started in Feb 2019 at four designated centre office.

He informed that the recruits from two centres PTC Yangthang and Mangley have passed out and today here are the recruits from Pangthang and Pipalay. He said that the recruits have been imparted with basic knowledge of Law, Local and Specialised Human Rights, Aspects of Forum Science and the outdoor subjects which included Weapons Training, Field Crafts, Jungle Survival and other related subjects.

He stated that over 35 trainers drawn from various branches of Police Department were being stationed at each of the training institute along with Guest lecturers for the past one year who have been imparting training to these constables on various subjects both outdoors and indoors subjects.

He further congratulated all the recruits for successfully passing out over a rigorous one year training session.

Lastly he mentioned the role of instructors and lectures have been instrumental in imparting training to the recruits that cannot be forgotten who worked tirelessly and assured that each personnel are given the best training at par with National Standards.

Earlier the Chief Guest presented the coveted PURESAR VIJETA trophy to the following:

1. Outdoor Best (PTC Pangthang) RC Albert Lepcha
- 2: Outdoor Best (RTC Pipalay)

- R/WC Suhang Limboo
3. Indoor Best (PTC Pangthang) RC Gyalpo Lepcha
4. Indoor Best (RTC Pipalay) R/CK Albert Rai
5. Best Shooter (PTC Pangthang) RC Bimal Gurung
6. Best Shooter (RTC Pipalay) RC Biren Subba
7. All Round Best (PTC Pangthang) RC Pintso Chopel Bhutia
8. All Round Best (RTC Pipalay) R/WC Lakpa Dorjee Sherpa

PTC Pangthang, Chewang Dorjee Bhutia and Sub Inspector, D Bhutia were awarded certificate by the Chief Guest.

The parade displayed tremendous enthusiasm vigour and zeal with an excellent show marching show with pride under the following Parade Commanders and Platoon Commanders

- PARADE COMMANDERS
1. Parade Commander RC Ugyen Zigdal Bhutia PTC Pangthang
 2. Parade 21/Commander RC Leezer Lepcha PTC Pangthang
- PLATOON COMMANDERS
1. Platoon (no1) RC Nim Tshering Sherpa (PTC Pangthang)
 2. Platoon (no2) RC Krishna Bdr. Pradhan (PTC Pangthang)
 3. Platoon (no3) RC Bhim Raj Tamang (PTC Pangthang)
 4. Platoon (no4) RC Sume Hang Rai (PTC Pangthang)
 5. Platoon (no5) RC Karma Chedup Lepcha (PTC Pangthang)
 6. Platoon (no6) R/WC Basant Tamang (RTC Pipalay)
 7. Platoon (no7) RC/ WC Avin Lepcha (RTC Pipalay)
 8. Platoon (no8) RC Bishan Gurung (RTC Pipalay)

The programme concluded with a demonstration on Self Defence by IIRB and Sikkim Police Ladies Constables under the Coach Tshering Dorjee Lachenpa, Black Belt.

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The Most Profligate Day of the Year!

A rush of expenditure which screams irresponsibility

In these times of climate change, global warming and coronavirus, readers are often informed about weather-related trends like the hottest, coldest or wettest day of the year. Now, Sikkim can add the richest day of the year to this list of extreme conditions. 31 March, 2016 could arguably be such a date for the State because on this one day alone, the State Government incurred an expenditure of Rs 530.87 crore; 11.79 per cent of its total expenditure for the financial year 2015-16! This portion of the annual budget “spent” on the last day of the fiscal. We give the specs for 2016 here to illustrate a fact which most definitely holds true for all years since and before.

In a segment politely titled, “Rush of Expenditure”, the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on State Finances for the year ended March 2016 informs that despite standing rules recommending that rush of expenditure be avoided in the closing month of the financial year, the accounts sections of various government departments continue to do so.

This Report details that contrary to provisions of the Sikkim Finance Rules, the State Government incurred an expenditure of Rs 823.44 crore, 18.29% of its total expenditure for the fiscal, in the month of March 2016 alone. An evenly distributed, properly planned and executed expenditure schedule for the year would have seen an average of 8.33% of the total expenditure spent every month.

But the accounts divisions of the government departments are clearly not bothered by such rules and regulations, and in fact appear resolutely intent on thumbing their noses at such directives. How else can one explain their temerity in not only rushing expenditure in the last month, but also spending nearly 12% of the annual expenditure on the last day of the financial year?

Anyone who has made the rounds of government departments chasing bills will know that government expenditure is slotted under different “Heads of Account” which are earmarked undertakings for which funds are allotted. As per the CAG Report, in the case of 15 “Major Heads” under 13 grants, the departments spent more than 50% of the total expenditure only in March.

Wait, there is more, in six cases, 100% of the provision for the year 2015-16 was incurred in the last month. What did the departments do with these projects through the earlier 11 months? Most probably receive complaints and dodge accountability.

The Finance Department and the Forest Department spent their entire budget set aside for “other taxes and duties on commodities and services” of Rs 18.31 crore and Rs 30.10 crore respectively only in March 2016. Similarly, Home Department used up its entire outlay for the year of Rs 4.18 crore for “administration of justice” only on the last month of the year. The Rs 2 crore allocated for Labour Department for Secretariat Economic Services for 2015-16 was also spent only in March. This list of six departments which used up 100% of funds allocated for specific purposes for the entire year only in the last month also includes Rural Management & Development and Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare Departments.

So what do the Departments do for the rest of the year?

Precious little, if the half-yearly review report for 2016-17 prepared by the Finance Department is to be believed. Expenditure under Capital sector was 26.49% in the first half of the financial year 2016-17. If any planning had been invested, one would have expected this to be as close to 50% as possible, one would guess. The Finance Department admits that many sectors have not met the half-yearly targets for reasons ranging from delay in land acquisition to delay in submission of Utilisation Certificates to non-receipt of State-Share or Central grants. Capital expenditure, it is informed, is usually met from central grants and borrowed sources and used for creating material assets of the State. “Timely implementation of the scheme with planned strategy is of paramount importance,” the Finance Department puts on record in its half-yearly review. Better clearly tell that to whichever department is sitting “Capital Outlay for Education, Sports, Art and Culture” because between April to September 2016, on 2.03% of this fund had been used. But this might be how this fund is always parked and pushed, because in the previous fiscal 2015-16, the HRDD Department rushed 73% of thus allocation to the last month.

The other extremely underperforming Department for the financial year in question when it comes to expenditure is the department which received “Capital Outlay on Welfare of SC, ST & OBC”, because of the Rs 2,434.79 lakh allocated to it under Plan Outlay, in the first six months of the year, only 2.3% had been spent.

The Capital Outlay for Urban Development is also witnessing very stingy usage. Out of the Rs 5,926.57 lakh allocated to this head under Plan fund, only Rs 480.30 lakh, 8.10%, was spent in the first six months. May be this lethargy explains the rash of cosmetic jobs like road-carpeting and vehicle purchases that get press-released as urban development interventions in that favourite phase of Feb-March every year.

Seven factors that turned the DRC’s Ebola outbreak around

JANUSZ PAWESKA
theconversation.com

The last patient receiving treatment for Ebola was recently discharged from an Ebola Treatment Centre in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The current outbreak of Ebola emerged in the northeastern part of the country in August 2018. It spread across three provinces, infecting over 3,300 people with a case fatality rate of 65%. A few cases were also reported in Uganda last year. This is the 10th Ebola outbreak in the DRC. It has been the most severe since the first recognised outbreak in the DRC in 1976.

But those managing the outbreak in the DRC aren’t completely letting their guard down – just yet. Forty-six individuals who had come into contact with the last patient are still being monitored. In addition, all Ebola control and response measures are still in place to ensure that any new cases are detected quickly and treated.

The incubation period for Ebola is 21 days. This is the period from exposure to the development of clinical symptoms. The outbreak can only be considered over when no new cases are diagnosed 42 days (double the incubation period) after the last reported case has tested negative. The last case of Ebola in the DRC was recorded on the 17th of February.

A great number of very useful lessons have come out of the trauma of the past 19 months. In my view there were seven key interventions and developments. These included the development of safe and efficient Ebola vaccines. So too was improving diagnostics that can be used easily in less resourced and remote areas. And, importantly, learning that control of a disease outbreak like Ebola is impossible without community trust and engagement.

BRINGING THE OUTBREAK UNDER CONTROL

There were a number of factors which eventually led to controlling the outbreak. These included:

Diagnostic technology: The implementation of new and relatively easy-to-use diagnostic technology such as the commercial GeneXpert Ebola assay

was a game changer. This technology allowed for faster results and the tests could be done by locally trained staff.

A rapid diagnosis helps to prevent the spread of the disease among family members, communities and at hospitals. The faster a case can be identified, the faster it can be taken care of in terms of isolation and treatment. This also allows for contacts to be vaccinated in time.

EXPERIMENTAL VACCINES: The development of a number of experimental vaccines were key. They saved the lives of many people, prevented wider spread and assisted in rebuilding trust in public health measures.

RESEARCH AT THE SCENE: Locating research on the scene of the outbreak prioritised the experimental testing of various treatments and vaccines to aid science-based responses.

FOLLOW-UP CARE FOR SURVIVORS: Offering survivors a comprehensive programme of follow-up medical care to counter serious post-infection conditions, for example blindness, and providing psychological support.

ENGAGING PEOPLE: Innovative medical technologies (vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics) are not enough to prevent and contain epidemics. What’s needed is the inclusion of social science as an important component of outbreak management. What I mean by this is that communities need to be engaged and empowered as primary partners in preparing and responding to an outbreak. But gaining their trust involves understanding their perception of control measures. For example, why don’t local people trust national governments and the health system? Why don’t they accept health interventions, including vaccination? Why don’t they adopt preventive behaviours, including safe burials? Why do they perceive foreign medical interventions as bio-terrorist experiments at their expense? Social scientists are best able to understand these dynamics, which is why they should be involved.

STABILITY: Stabilisation of political unrest in recent months made access to medical care easier and allowed all the well-known strategies for controlling Ebola to be implemented. This includ-

ed contact tracing, safe burial practices, isolation treatment, surveillance, lab testing, community engagement, as well as public health education.

MASSIVE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT: As with other major Ebola outbreaks in Africa, this one could not have been brought to ground zero and controlled without massive international support. On the people front, this included medical staff, epidemiologists, infection prevention control and risk communication and community engagement specialists, logisticians, diagnosticians and salaries for local staff. It also included medical and diagnostic supplies and equipment, field-operated hospitals, medicines and vaccines.

Those who contributed to these long lists included the World Health Organisation’s Health Emergency Programme and its Global Outbreak and Response Network, Doctors Without Borders, US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, Red Cross, World Bank, individual countries and government as well as public health agencies, institutions and universities.

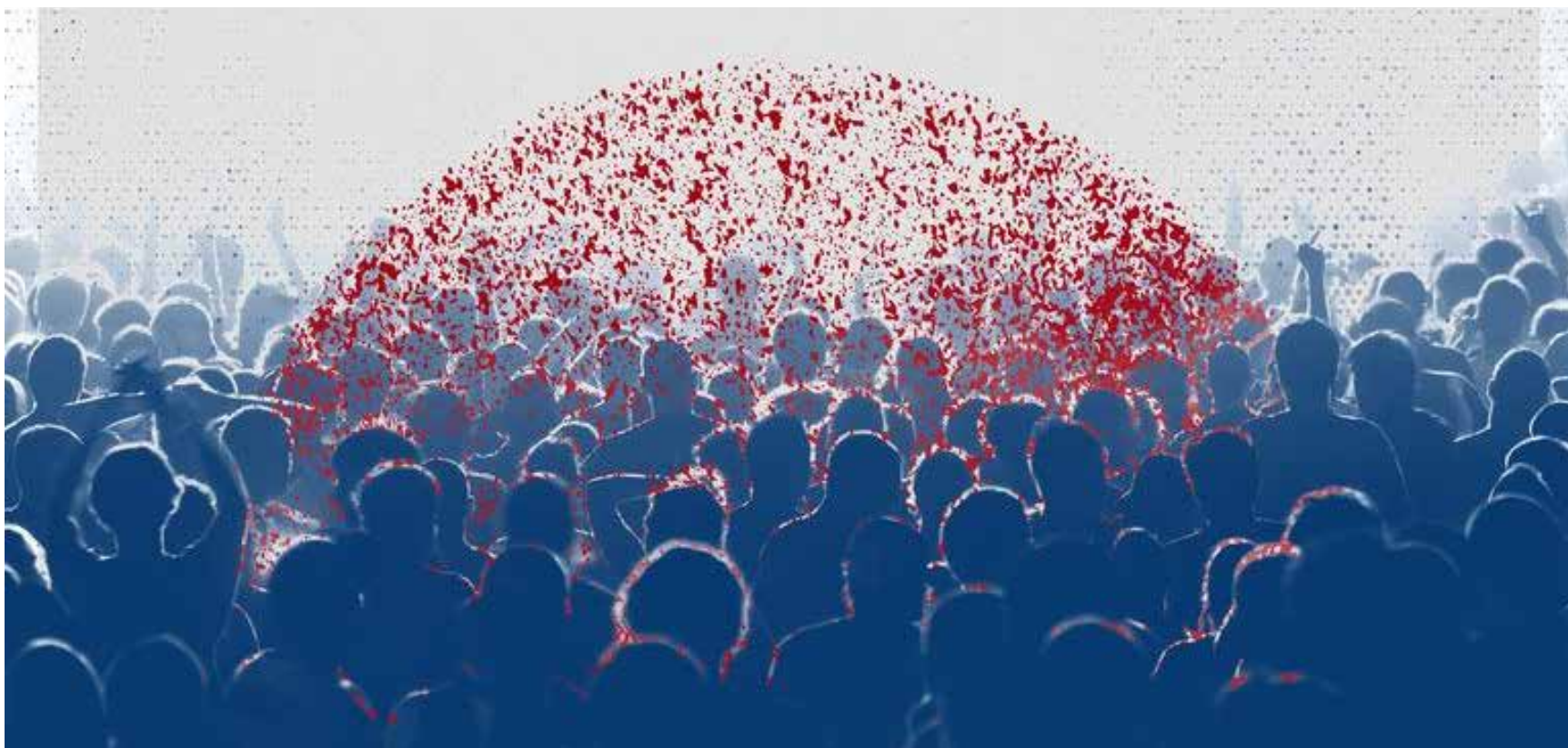
WHAT NEXT

On the longer term horizon, strengthening Africa’s health systems and building citizen trust will be pivotal to responding to increasing numbers of emerging infectious diseases. African health systems can’t depend on donor generosity alone. They also require economic and political commitment from national leaders and the communities they govern.

African scientists also need more support if the continent is going to secure and develop long-term and effective preparedness and response strategies to cope with epidemic prone infectious diseases. They need should have better training opportunities as well as great involvement in scientific programmes. They also need to be provided with access to adequate bio-containment facilities – secure facilities to prevent the accidental release of pathogens during research – to improve regional counter measures against emerging and re-emerging dangerous pathogens.

On these points, there is a lot to be done.

[the writer is Head of the Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, National Institute for Communicable Diseases]



Coronavirus: Can Herd Immunity Really Protect Us?

JEREMY ROSSMAN
theconversation.com

The UK government recently enacted its second phase of response to the COVID-19 pandemic: “delay”. According to ITV journalist Robert Peston, the government’s strategy to minimise the impact of COVID-19 “is to allow the virus to pass through the entire population so that we acquire herd immunity, but at a much delayed speed so that those who suffer the most acute symptoms are able to receive the medical support they need, and such that the health service is not overwhelmed and crushed by the sheer number of cases it has to treat at any one time”. At face value, this seems like a sound strategy, but what exactly is herd immunity and can it be used to combat COVID-19?

Our bodies fight infectious diseases through the actions of our immune systems. When we recover, we often retain an immunological memory of the disease that enables us to fight off that same disease in the future. This is how vaccines work, creating this immune memory without requiring getting sick with the disease.

If you have a new disease, such as COVID-19, that we don’t have a vaccine for and no one in the country

has ever been infected with, the disease will spread through the population. But if enough people develop an immune memory, then the disease will stop spreading, even if some of the population is not immune. This is herd immunity, and it is a very effective way to protect the whole of a population against infectious disease.

But herd immunity is typically only viewed as a preventive strategy in vaccination programmes. If we don’t have a vaccine – as we don’t for COVID-19 – achieving herd immunity would require a significant proportion of the population to be infected and recover from COVID-19. So what would this mean for the spread of the disease in the UK?

The percentage of the population that needs to be immune to enable herd immunity depends on how transmissible a disease is. This is measured by the term R0, which is how many new infections each case will generate. For COVID-19, the R0 is estimated to be 3.28, though studies are still ongoing and this number will probably change. This means that for herd immunity, about 70% of the UK population would need to be immune to COVID-19.

Achieving herd immunity would require well over 47 million people

to be infected in the UK. Current estimates are that COVID-19 has a 2.3% case-fatality rate and a 19% rate of severe disease. This means that achieving herd immunity to COVID-19 in the UK could result in the deaths of more a million people with a further eight million severe infections requiring critical care.

DELAY AS A PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGY

However, it is not clear how much of this discussion of herd immunity – reportedly proposed by David Halpern, chief executive of the Behavioural Insights Team, and later blogged about by Robert Peston – is actual government policy.

Also, the concept as discussed is not simply to let the disease run its course through the population, but to slow its spread and protect those most vulnerable from severe disease.

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 is a promising strategy, especially when combined with enhanced measures to protect the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. By slowing the spread of the disease, the NHS might have more time to prepare, we might be able to develop treatments or vaccines and we will be closer to the summer when we have lower incidences of other diseases

that burden the NHS, such as the flu.

A delay strategy when combined with surveillance and containment, as recommended by the WHO, could be very effective in combating the spread of COVID-19. Yet if we slow the spread of the virus but are relying on herd immunity to protect the most vulnerable people, we would still need 47 million people to be infected.

Even if we manage to protect the most vulnerable people (though no discussion is provided on how this will be done or for how long) the fatality rate for the otherwise healthy portion of the population may still be 0.5% or higher. This means that even in this unlikely “best case” scenario we would still be looking at more than 236,000 deaths.

We can and we must do better than that. China is rapidly controlling the spread of COVID-19 without requiring herd immunity (only 0.0056% of its population has been infected). Waiting for herd immunity to COVID-19 to develop in the UK by letting the virus “pass through the community” is not a good public health strategy.

[the writer is Honorary Senior Lecturer in Virology and President of Research-Aid Networks, University of Kent]

UP district bordering Nepal prepares for COVID-19

BAHRAICH (UP), MAR 16 (PTI): A ten-bed isolation ward has been set up at the district hospital here in view of the novel coronavirus outbreak, officials said on Monday.

The Union Home Ministry had on Sunday announced that all types of passenger movement would be suspended from March 15 midnight through the Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Myanmar borders, barring a few specified border checkposts.

Uttar Pradesh shares a 599.3 km long open border with Nepal touching seven districts - Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Kheri, Bahraich, Sravasti, Balrampur, Sidharthnagar and Maharajganj.

"An isolation ward containing ten beds has been set up in the district hospital in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Efforts are also on to sensitise the locals about the disease," Bahraich District Magistrate Shambhu Kumar said.

"The entry of nationals of other countries including Nepal into the district will be allowed only after proper screening," Foreign tourists will be allowed entry through the Rupiaideh check post," he said.

The entry of those showing symptoms similar to coronavirus will be allowed after proper medical examination, the official said.

Kumar added no COVID-19 case has been reported in this district of Uttar Pradesh so far.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE? email us: news@summittimes.Com

Bengal Assembly budget session cut short over COVID-19



KOLKATA, MAR 16 (PTI): The budget session of the West Bengal Assembly will be cut short over the novel coronavirus pandemic and the House will not meet after Tuesday, Speaker Biman Banerjee said.

At an all-party meeting on Monday on the Assembly premises, attended by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Partha

Chatterjee and floor leaders of Opposition parties, the Speaker said the second part of the session, which commenced on Friday, would be truncated as part of the precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the deadly COVID-19.

Those who attended the meeting said all agenda, except for three bills, including the appropri-

ation bill, would put on the back-burner.

Voting for the Rajya Sabha elections will, however, take place as scheduled on March 26.

After the meeting, Chatterjee said the decision was taken keeping in mind public interest.

Opposition parties -- CPI(M), BJP and the Congress -- said they would welcome any move taken

for the welfare of the state. Left Front legislative party leader Sujan Chakraborty has voiced support for the "pro-people decision".

Earlier in the day, while addressing the Assembly, Chatterjee said the state was on a high alert on account of the rising number of coronavirus cases in the country, urging the Opposition parties to unite and stand by the government in its fight against the outbreak, which has claimed over 6,000 lives worldwide.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country rose to 114, with Odisha reporting its first COVID-19 patient and a new case each in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Kerala, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The Maharashtra government also reported four more patients of the infection, which the Union Health Ministry did not immediately add to its national count.

Bengal civic polls deferred amid coronavirus scare: SEC

KOLKATA, MAR 16 (PTI): Civic polls in West Bengal, including for the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), have been postponed "for the time being" in the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak, a senior official said on Monday. The decision was taken at an all-party meeting called to decide the dates for the elections, State Election Commissioner Sourav Das said.

"We have decided to defer the civic polls for the time being because of the coronavirus outbreak. We will again hold a meeting to take a call on the matter after 15 days," he said. The ruling TMC had appealed to the SEC on Sunday to defer the polls, a demand that also had the backing of opposition parties.

Coronavirus scare: Odisha EC postpones panchayat bypolls



BHUBANESWAR, MAR 16 (PTI): The State Election Commission of Odisha on Monday postponed the March 24 panchayat bypolls after the state reported its first case of novel coronavirus.

The authorities ordered closure of all government and private schools with immediate effect amid the growing coronavirus threat, an official said.

A notification, issued by the SEC, said that the bypolls to two zilla parishad seats, six sarpanch seats, eight panchayat samiti seats and 84 wards have been postponed until further orders.

Another notification by the school and mass education department said that the ongoing annual examination of

class 12 students and the evaluation of the answer sheets of class X students will continue as per schedule.

The housing and urban development department asked authorities of all the local bodies to keep community centres, cyclone shelters or any other buildings ready with electricity and water supply facility to quarantine people.

State commerce and transport minister Padmanabha Behera said advisories have been issued to passengers and drivers and staff of both the government and private buses will have to wear masks.

The government, through public announcement system, asked people not to gath-

er in sea beach and keep the environment clean.

The Puri district administration started frisking vehicles and screening passengers at Pipili entry point.

Popular tourist destinations including Sun Temple in Konark and Shanti Stupa (peace pagoda) at Dhauli in Bhubaneswar were shut for visitors as a precautionary measure.

Restrictions have also been imposed on devotees in Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri, Shree Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar among other places of worship.

This apart, restrictions have been imposed on conduct of festivals like Haripur Dola Ustav, 'Baruni Snaan' and other festivals.

Tiger kills crab-catcher in West Bengal's Sundarbans



CANNING (WB), MAR 16 (PTI): A 52-year-old crab-catcher is suspected to have been killed by a tiger in Sundarbans National Park in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, police said on Monday.

Basudeb Sarkar and two other crab-catchers from Kumirmari village in Sundarban Coastal Police station area had ventured into the national park to catch crabs on Sunday, an officer said.

One of the crab-catchers, Swapan Mondal, said the tiger attacked Sarkar from behind and dragged him deep into the forest, he said.

However, Sarkar's body is yet to be found, the officer said.

"Prima facie, it seems the trio did not possess permits to catch crabs in the forest and had illegally entered it. If that is the case, the kin of the deceased will not be eligible for compensation," a forest official said.

The export of crabs from Sundarbans to China has taken a hit due to novel coronavirus outbreak. However, with crab markets reopening in Singapore and Hong Kong, crab-catching activities have resumed in the region, sources said.

Will Warmer Weather Stop the Spread of Coronavirus?

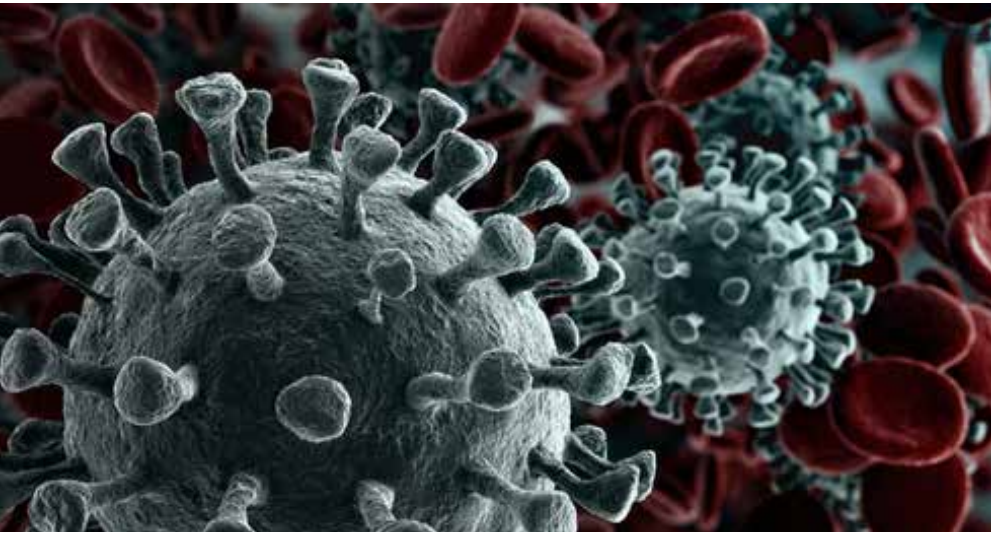
JEREMY ROSSMAN theconversation.com

As the coronavirus death toll continues to rise, some have suggested that the approaching warmer spring weather in the northern hemisphere may slow or even stop the spread of the disease. US president Donald Trump echoed this, saying: "The heat, generally speaking, kills this kind of virus." But is he right?

The idea that the approaching spring may stem the spread of the disease comes largely from a comparison with the flu. In many ways COVID-19 is like the flu - both spread in similar ways (respiratory secretions and contaminated surfaces) and both cause typically mild respiratory diseases that can develop into life-threatening pneumonia. But the transmissibility and severity of COVID-19 are much greater than the flu. And it isn't clear if COVID-19 transmission will be affected by seasonal temperature variation.

For the flu, the start of spring causes a significant drop in the number of cases that persists until the return of colder temperatures in autumn. This seasonality of the flu is thought to be caused by the sensitivity of the virus to different climates and by seasonal changes in the human immune system and in our patterns of behaviour.

First, the flu virus appears to survive



better in cold, dry weather with reduced ultraviolet light. Second, for many of us, the shorter winter days lead to reduced levels of vitamin D and melatonin, which can affect the performance of our immune system. Third, in the winter we spend more time with other people, indoors and in closer proximity, increasing opportunities for the virus to spread.

COMPARING OTHER CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAKS

How then would these factors affect coronavirus transmission? It is not clear what effect temperature and humidity have on the coronavirus itself, nor on its transmission. Some other coronaviruses are seasonal, causing common colds in the winter months.

The 2002-2003 Sars epidemic also began in the northern hemisphere winter and ended in July 2003 with a small resurgence in cases in the following winter. But Sars cases peaked in the warmer month of May, and the end of the epidemic in July may simply reflect the time required for virus containment, rather than an effect of the summer weather on virus transmission. Also, the

related Mers coronavirus is primarily transmitted in hot countries.

Returning to the comparison with the flu, the 2009-2010 influenza virus pandemic began in the spring, increased in strength over the spring and summer and peaked the following winter. This suggests that in a pandemic, the high number of cases in many countries around the world could enable continued transmission of the virus throughout the summer, overcoming any seasonal variability that would be seen in smaller epidemics. While the WHO has not yet declared a COVID-19 pandemic, many experts believe we are rapidly approaching the pandemic stage.

So the approaching warmer weather may reduce viral transmission in the northern hemisphere (while potentially increasing transmission in the coming southern hemisphere winter), but it is highly unlikely that the weather itself will end this growing epidemic.

[the writer is Honorary Senior Lecturer in Virology and President of Research-Aid Networks, University of Kent]

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you seek help, you may call :

- Toll free no. 104
- District surveillance Officer
- EAST : 7029372100
- WEST : 9593297809
- NORTH : 9641957468
- SOUTH : 7407691463
- New STNM
- AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Deprived of football, players try to fill the ‘big void’

PARIS, MAR 16 (AFP): Mowing the lawn, playing football with your dog, turning on the TV... footballers around Europe are struggling to fill the “big void” created by the coronavirus shutdown.

Many are writing about the unfamiliar experience on social media. Some have already come to the conclusion that “there is nothing to do”.

Real Madrid players, forced into quarantine by a case of coronavirus in the club’s basketball squad, have been training at home, where most of them already had facilities and equipment.

Captain Sergio Ramos posted a video on Instagram showing him spinning on a treadmill.

Marco Asensio, who suffered a knee injury last summer, posted a video showing that he was continuing his recovery programme in his garden.

But even for sportsmen used to working out, there is a limit.

“I’m here, in my garden, there’s nothing to do,” French striker Karim Benzema said in a video on social media where he appeared alongside his dog, earning him a comparison with Will Smith in the post-apocalyptic film “I am legend”.



Fabien Causeur, a Real Madrid basketball guard, has launched a live video channel to show his quarantine challenge.

He has been taking on athletes and celebrities in three-minute simultaneous exercise including Thibaut Courtois, the Real Madrid goalkeeper, and NBA star and former Real Madrid teammate Luka Doncic.

At Barcelona, players are following a “specific and personalised” programme set by the club which is monitoring their efforts remotely using biometric tags.

Luis Suarez had been a step ahead of Ramos, posting a video of himself trudging on a tread-

mill last week. In Italy, Juventus midfielder Douglas Costa filmed himself practising his dribbling in his back garden with his dog struggling to fill the role of defender.

- CHOPPED WOOD -

Alexis Sanchez, on loan to Inter Milan, has two golden retrievers and a much bigger garden but he comfortably outplayed them in a video he put up online. He also posted photos of himself topless, gathering chopped wood.

Jessica Melena, the wife of Ciro Immobile posted a cookery video on Instagram, showing the Lazio striker waving a spatula and mixing a cake while she coached

him. Immobile posted his own video in which he juggled furry toys with his feet. Napoli’s Belgian forward Dries Mertens posted pictures of a work out with a huge bottle of red wine.

In France, Strasbourg midfielder Adrien Thomasson, was looking ahead to another empty week.

“We’ll have nothing to do, in the middle of the season, it’s never happened before. Our habits have been turned upside down,” he said.

Thomasson is a ski fan but as other sports are also at a standstill that leaves a “big void” for this ski lover.

“I’m going to watch series, movies, it’s going

to be really limited.”

Television is also the refuge for James Lea Siliki, a Rennes midfielder, who tweeted the times of a couple of French quiz shows. Later he admitted a passion for a French TV karaoke show adding “I’ll spare you my voice”.

Romain Thomas, a defender at Angers, said his daily routine involved jogging, gardening and watching French reality TV.

He said he has talked to team-mates.

“We said to each other: ‘Look, it’s a beautiful day, it’s time to mow’. So I mowed the lawn in the garden, it gives me time to think about something else.

PSG put all sporting activity on hold due to coronavirus

PARIS, MAR 16 (AFP): Paris Saint-Germain have suspended all sporting activities until further notice due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Ligue 1 leaders said on Sunday.

The French top-flight has already been put on hold as has the Champions League since last week due to the deadly spread of COVID-19.

“Sporting activities for all our professional clubs will remain provi-

sionally suspended for a period starting tomorrow March 16 until an undetermined date,” the Ligue 1 champions said.

PSG had announced the freezing of all their sporting sections including football and handball until Sunday and will announce a further update on Wednesday.

Elsewhere in France, which has recorded more than 4,500 cases and 91 deaths from the illness,

fellow Ligue 1 side Nice also stopped their activities and closed their training centre.

Earlier on Sunday, Lyon defended president Jean-Michel Aulas after he had suggested wiping out the French season.

On Friday, Aulas told newspaper Le Monde: “The most logical thing would be to say: we’ll cancel everything and go back to the situation at the start of the season.

NHPC awards...

“record time” well ahead of the scheduled date. NHPC, the release adds, also provided the consultancy works for the same including invitation of bids, tendering and evaluation etc.

NHPC has acquired Teesta-VI through the National Company Law Tribunal after an NCLT, Hyderabad, bench approved the resolution plan of NHPC on 26 Jul, 2019 for the debt-ridden LTHPL.

The project is now projected to be completed at an estimated project cost of Rs 5,748.04 crore [at July 2018 price level], which includes acquisition cost of Rs 897.50 crore.

“NHPC/ LTHPL is committed to complete the project within 5 years. The project is expected to generate 2,400 million units of power in a 90% dependable year,” the release from the NHPC corporate office states.

COVID-19...

other public gatherings, government meetings, melas or religious congregations.

All District Collectors are adequately equipped to issue necessary orders, he added. He added that SDRF funds can be used for procurement of essential commodities and equipments.

Principal Secretary, Health, K. Srinivasulu, briefed about the state of preparedness and measures being taken to contain the situation. He stressed that since COVID 19 has been declared as a global pandemic, there is no other option but to contain and exercise self-quarantine. He also appealed to the people to exercise hygienic practices, especially in poultry farms and slaughterhouses.

DG-cum-Secretary, Health, Dr. P.T Bhutia in his address briefed about the current status of initiatives being taken by the State Health Department. He reiterated that this is a pandemic, and support and cooperation is solicited from all departments and concerned stakeholders to contain the situation.

Speaking about the screening process, he said that we need additional manpower from NGOs. He informed that Civil Defence is already in place. He informed that the Urban PHC (Old STNM) has been designated as quarantine ward, and has adequate space. However he requested the SDRF to take over the place and seal it so that any thoroughfare is avoided. He informed that the State Health Department is technically prepared. He submitted the unavailability of sample testing facility in Sikkim, thus causing delay in confirming the test reports. He stressed that social distancing is the key for the time being. He requested for some mobilization fund for the health staff and officers to carry out the work effectively.

Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism Department, Dr. K. Jayakumar, stated that the preparedness in place and future plans for containment is fully justified considering the exponential spread of the virus globally. He proposed for some moratorium in loans being taken by individuals from the hospitality sector to compensate the economic distress they would be facing.

Supplementing on the points discussed earlier, Dr. Jayakumar said that there should be strict enforcement of any measures in place such as screening, shut down and self-quarantine. He also stressed on the need for extensive awareness at the community level through various modes apart from social media.

He stressed on the need for Quarantine enforcement team, home and community care givers, screening team, control centre, reporting/notification of symptoms, advocacy, educating stakeholders like drivers and service sector people, hospital care, ventilator and ICUs, and temperature measuring machines.

He shared a five-point strategy of strict enforcement - detection, contact tracing, intensive medical care, supplies & disposals, and control room with designated team.

This was followed by an open house

discussion which was participated by officers and stakeholders.

Stakeholders like TAAS, SAATO, SHRA and Driver Associations expressed their support to the decision taken by the Government. They also expressed their readiness to contribute manpower as volunteers at various screening points. They also announced that they would contribute at least two thermal screening equipments to the Health Department.

They urged the Government to ensure that all infrastructures should be established within the period of shut down, so that once the situation comes to normalcy, tourists and visitors should not feel apprehensive about travelling to Sikkim. They unanimously welcomed the Government’s decision to intensify the process for the overall safety of the people of Sikkim, and assured their full support at various stages.

Officers of the State Government also participated in the discussion and made their submissions.

Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Jacob Khaling shared some of the suggestions put forth by the people of Sikkim through various media. He suggested constitution of a State Task Force to monitor the situation on a daily basis.

MLA, Martam Rumtek, Sonam Venchungpa, made some suggestions to ease the process of screening. He also suggested that the Tourism Department and stakeholders come up with effective communication strategies to manage the situation so that the brand value of Sikkim is intact.

Additional Chief Secretary, Finance & Planning, V.B Pathak informed that an amount of Rs. 55 lakh has been contributed by the Future Gaming Group and its MD, S. Martin towards the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund. He handed over the cheque to the Chief Minister.

Mr Pathak also urged the Health Department to expedite the construction of the 100 bedded Infectious Disease Ward at new STNM Hospital which is nearing completion.

Chief Secretary, S.C. Gupta summed up the open house discussion wherein he called for considering legal aspects while taking decision on shut down of educational institutions and other bodies.

After thorough deliberations, Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang made announcements of the State Government to deal with the current situation. These decisions are being made in public interest which is inevitable at this point of time, he said.

He appealed to the people of Sikkim to take these decisions positively, because nothing is more important than public health and life. He said that Sikkim is fortunate to not have a single case of Corona Virus, but we should take all possible precautionary measures:

In conclusion, the Chief Minister appealed to the people of Sikkim to support the decision of the Government. He said that life and health of people of Sikkim come above all else, and urged to everyone to exhibit high level of resilience, coordination and camaraderie to collectively tackle this situation in the best interest of the people of Sikkim.

IOA hopeful of Kho Kho’s inclusion in 2026 Asian Games

NEW DELHI, MAR 16 (PTI): Indian Olympic Association (IOA) secretary general Rajeev Mehta on Monday said he is hopeful that Kho Kho, a traditional Indian sport, will be included in the 2026 Asian Games roster scheduled to be held in Japan.

Kho Kho is currently played by 25 countries across the globe.

“Kho Kho was formally recognised by the Olympic Council of Asia during the 18th Asian Games held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2018.

I hope it gets full status in the 2026 Asian Games,” Mehta, who is also the Asian Kho Kho Federation President, said. “My dream is to see Kho Kho eventually grow to the level of Commonwealth Games and Olympics.” International Kho Kho Federation President Sudhanshu Mittal also exuded confidence that the sport will be included in the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, as a ‘demonstration game’.

A popular tag game invented in Maharashtra, kho kho is played by teams of 12 nominated players out of 15, of which nine enter the field. Six of them on their knees (chasing team), and three extra (defending team) try to avoid being touched by members of the opposing team.

Three Asian Kho Kho championships have been held so far -- India (1996, 2016) and Bangladesh (2000). The fourth edition will again be held in India

in August later this year, a release said.

As part of bilateral promotion, Kho Kho ‘test matches’ have been played between India and England and India and Nepal and the next ‘test match’ is planned between India and Sri Lanka.

Mehta said coaches have been deputed in several countries including South Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, Singapore and Sri Lanka to train players internationally.

He further informed that Kho Kho Federation of India is conducting the first-ever ‘Level 1’ international coaching camps in two phases to give technical support to all the affiliated countries.

The first phase (February 23 to March 20), in which 66 players from 16 countries are being trained on mats, is currently underway at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here.

“Nine countries could not participate in the first phase, currently underway at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium, due to the Coronavirus outbreak,” Mehta said.

“They will be invited to the second phase of coaching to be organised in London in May-June, this year.”

Talking about the ‘Ultimate Kho Kho League’, Mehta said it will be held from November 27 to December 20 this year in Delhi, Pune and Hyderabad.

“Eight teams will make the quorum for the ‘Ultimate Kho Kho League,’” Mehta said.

Brazil suspends football matches over coronavirus



RIO DE JANEIRO, MAR 16 (AFP): The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said Sunday it is suspending all matches until further notice because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The CBF had initially avoided an all-out suspension, instead ordering Friday that matches be played in empty stadiums in the country’s

two largest cities, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. But as fears over the virus’ spread continued to mount, it ultimately followed the lead of the Champions League, Premier League, Bundesliga and a long list of other sporting events worldwide that have suspended their seasons.

“We know and accept the responsibility the football world has in the

fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Brazil,” CBF president Rogerio Caboclo said in a statement.

“The CBF will remain in permanent contact with the health ministry, joining together to help the country and the sport overcome the challenge posed by the pandemic,” it added.

Several key matches were played in empty stadiums this weekend in Brazil, including a Sao Paulo-Santos derby.

The pandemic has led officials to cancel or postpone a slate of top sporting events worldwide, including the top European football leagues, NBA basketball, Formula One racing and the Giro d’Italia.

Commentary to keep Anand busy after COVID-19 restrictions delay return to India from Germany

CHENNAI, MAR 16 (PTI): His return to India on hold due to travel restrictions forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, India’s five-time world champion chess icon Viswanathan Anand will complete his maiden commentary assignment while being in self-isolation in Germany.

The 50-year-old wizard was to return to Chennai on Monday after competing in the Bundesliga Chess League but had to stay back near Frankfurt given the travel restrictions, his wife Aruna said.

Anand, who is set to don the commentator’s hat for the FIDE Candidates tournament that begins in Yekaterinburg, Russia to spot the challenger to world champion Magnus Carlsen, will handle the role from his present location. The event starts on Tuesday.

“He will be commenting for the Candidates tournament for a website. Guess it will also keep him busy,” Aruna told PTI.

The Indian was playing for OSG Baden-Baden in the Bundesliga Chess League.

“...we will have to wait and watch about his return plans,” Aruna said.

“He is near Frankfurt. With all the travel restrictions and advisories, we will have to wait and watch with regards to his return plans. The situation is very fluid,” she added.

Aruna said Anand is practising social distancing given as a precautionary measure.

“He has opted for social distancing as a precautionary measure due to the coronavirus scare,” Aruna said.

She said though these are exceptional

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China reports 14 new coronavirus deaths; imported cases rise to 123

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, MAR 16 (PTI): The coronavirus death toll in China rose to 3,213 with 14 new fatalities, while the imported cases climbed to 123 after 12 new infections were reported, prompting Beijing to make 14-day quarantine in special facilities compulsory for foreigners returning to the country.

As of Sunday, 14 new deaths were reported, taking the death toll due to the deadly virus to 3,213, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said on Monday.

Sixteen new infections of the novel coronavirus on the Chinese mainland were reported in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of infections to 80,860, the health officials said.

Of those new infections, four were in Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei province, the epicentre of the virus, and 12 were imported cases.

With a dozen fresh infections, the total number of imported cases has increased to 123.

Of the 12 imported cases, four were reported in Beijing, four in Guangdong Province, two in Shanghai and one each in Yunnan and Gansu provinces respectively, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Monday.

Beijing's local government has announced to send all international arrivals into the city to designated quarantine facilities from Monday as part of stepped-up measures against COVID-19 cases from abroad. People arriving from abroad were previously allowed to undergo the mandatory two-week quarantine at home, but now only those in "special circumstances" will be exempted from being sent to facilities where they must pay for their stay, it said.

Till now, most of the foreigners, except from Italy and Iran, were asked to strictly follow two-week home quarantine supervised by local communities. But since Monday, Beijing has made all foreigners to undergo quarantine at designated places mostly hotels at their own cost.

The NHC said 41 new suspected cases have been reported on Sunday.

Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan have reported a total of 217 confirmed cases, with four deaths in Hong Kong and one in Taiwan, it said.

In Hubei, the total confirmed cases reached 67,798 by Sunday midnight. Of them, majority were reported in Wuhan.

The province has seen a total of 3,099 fatalities, it said.

A total of 2,975 patients are still in critical condition in the province. As of Sunday, Hubei saw no new confirmed COVID-19 case for 11 consecutive days in its 16 cities and prefectures outside its capital Wuhan.

Wuhan too has seen a single-digit daily increase for five days, indicating that the virus is stabilising in its epicentre.

Asian stock markets, US futures sink after Fed's rate cut

BEIJING, MAR 16 (AP): Asian stock markets and U.S. futures fell Monday after the Federal Reserve slashed its key interest rate to shore up economic growth in the face of mounting global anti-virus controls that are shutting down business and travel.

Sydney's benchmark plunged 7% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 2%. Shanghai was down 0.5% and Tokyo was flat. Brent crude, the international oil standard, fell 3% while gold gained.

On Wall Street, futures for the benchmark S&P 500 index fell 5% on Sunday night and triggered a halt in trading.

The Fed cut its key rate by a full percentage point to a range between zero and 0.25% and said it would stay there until it feels confident the economy can survive a near-shutdown of activity in the United States.

Despite whipping out the big guns, the Fed's action is "falling short of being the decisive backstop for markets, said Vishnu Varathan of Mizuho Bank in a report.

Markets might have perceived the Fed's response as panic, feeding into its own fears.

Japan's central bank was holding a policy meeting, convened several days earlier than planned. Bank of Japan Gov. Haruhiko Kuroda has pledged to do whatever is needed to help buttress slumping economic growth after the economy contracted at a 7.1% annual rate in the last quarter, before the impact of the virus outbreak had even been felt.

Western governments



have shut public facilities and imposed travel curbs, raising the cost of efforts to contain the outbreak that has infected nearly 170,000 people worldwide. China, where the coronavirus emerged in December, accounts for about half of those, but a dozen other countries have more than 1,000 cases each.

Spain followed Italy's lead in imposing nationwide curbs will allow its 46 million people to leave home only to go to work, to buy food and medicine or on errands to care for the young and elderly. In the Philippines, soldiers and police sealed off the crowded capital, Manila, from most

domestic travelers. New York City announced it will shut down the largest U.S. public school system as early as Tuesday, sending more than 1.1 million children home. Governors in California, Illinois and Ohio told all bars and restaurants to close or reduce their number of customers.

In Sydney, the S&P-ASX 200 fell to 5,468.8. The he Shanghai Composite Index retreated to 2,873.07 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng tumbled to 23,597.15.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 was little-changed at 17,726.98.

The Kospi in Seoul declined 0.2% to 1,767.55 and

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 lost 5.3% to 5,246.10. Brent crude lost 1.01 to 32.84 per barrel in London. Benchmark U.S. crude tumbled 1.8%, or 56 cents, to 31.17 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

That followed a dizzying week in which the Dow Jones Industrial Average twice fell by more than 2,000 points and also record its biggest point gain ever 1,985 points on Friday. The bull market that began in 2009 in the depths of the financial crisis came to an end. Europe markets saw similar volatility.

JPMorgan Chase now is forecasting the U.S. economy

will shrink at a 2% annual rate in the current quarter and 3% in the April-June quarter.

The Fed's decision to act before a meeting scheduled for mid-week indicated its policymakers felt they needed to move immediately to shore up investor confidence. Most market watchers expected more volatility ahead because the number of U.S. virus cases is rising and more industries face a downturn.

United Airlines said it needs to cut flying capacity by 50% in April and May and expects the cuts to extend into the summer travel season. American Airlines said it cutting international flying 75%.

Walmart is limiting hours to ensure stores can keep sought-after items such as hand sanitizer in stock. Late Friday, Apple said it was closing all retail stores outside of China.

Besides cutting rates, the Fed will buy at least 500 billion of Treasury securities and at least 200 billion of mortgage-backed securities. This amounts to an effort to ease market disruptions that have made it harder for banks and large investors to sell Treasuries as well as to keep longer-term rates borrowing rates down.

The magnitude of the central bank moves indicated to some analysts that Chair Jerome Powell and other members of the Fed were worried about the health of the financial system. But others noted the Fed was just reacting to signs the situation in Europe and the U.S. was only getting worse.

The Fed's actions were very bold and it does appear to have spooked the markets, said Nate Thooft, head of global asset allocation at Manulife Investment Management.

Markets were going to be spooked anyway due to the scale of the shutdowns across the U.S. and sobering implications of a 20 trillion dollar economy that is about to grind down to a crawl, said Yung-yu Ma, chief investment strategist at BMO Wealth Management.

Also, developments in Europe are raising the prospect that what was just a week ago considered 'worst case' might be closer to 'base case' for the U.S., Ma said. Big picture, the Fed's actions are all positive.

Germany hits back over US virus vaccine interest

BERLIN, MAR 16 (AFP): The German government has promised to defend itself against alleged attempts by US president Donald Trump to buy exclusive rights to a German company's research into a vaccine against the coronavirus.

"Germany is not for sale," economy minister Peter Altmaier told broadcaster ARD, reacting to a front page report in Welt am Sonntag newspaper headlined "Trump vs Berlin".

The newspaper claimed that Trump is trying to secure exclusive rights to a potential vaccine against the global health threat that has now killed some 6,000 people, which is being worked on by biotech firm CureVac.

Citing sources close to the German government, Die Welt reported that Trump had offered "a billion dollars" to secure the vaccine "only for the United States".

At a news conference on Sunday, interior minister Horst Seehofer was asked to confirm the attempts to court the German company.

"I can only say that I have heard several times today from government officials today that this is the case, and we will be discussing it in the crisis



committee tomorrow," he said.

The report prompted fury in Berlin.

"International cooperation is important now, not national self-interest," said Erwin Rueddel, a conservative lawmaker on the German parliament's health committee. Christian Lindner, leader of the liberal FDP party, accused Trump of electioneering.

"Obviously Trump will use any means available in an election campaign," he said.

Yet a US official told AFP on Sunday that the report was "wildly overplayed".

"The US government has spoken with many (more than 25) companies that claim they can help with a vaccine. Most of these companies

already received seed funding from US investors." The official also denied that the US was seeking to keep any potential vaccine for itself.

"We will continue to talk to any company that claims to be able to help. And any solution found would be shared with the world."

CureVac, founded in 2000, is based in the German state of Thuringia, and has other sites in Frankfurt and Boston.

The firm markets itself as specialising in "development of treatments against cancer, antibody-based therapies, treatment of rare illnesses and prophylactic vaccines."

The lab is currently working in tandem with the Paul-Ehrlich Institute, linked to the Ger-

man health ministry.

Last week, the firm mysteriously announced that CEO Daniel Menichella had been replaced by Ingmar Hoerr, just weeks after Menichella met with Trump, his vice-president Mike Pence and representatives of pharma companies in Washington.

"We are very confident that we will be able to develop a potent vaccine candidate within a few months," CureVac quoted Menichella as saying on its website shortly after the visit.

On Sunday, CureVac investors said that they would not sell the vaccine to a single state.

"If we are successful in developing an effective vaccine, then it should help and protect people across the world," said Dietmar Hopp, head of principle investor dievini Hopp Biotech Holding, in a statement.

Economy minister Altmaier welcomed the statement, saying it was a "fantastic decision".

He also pointed out that the government has the power to scrutinise foreign takeovers, saying that "where important infrastructure and national and European interests are concerned, we will take action if we have to."

Iran reports 129 new virus deaths, taking total to 853



TEHRAN, MAR 16 (AFP): Iran said on Monday that the novel coronavirus had killed 129 more people, a new record high for a single day in one of the world's worst-hit countries.

"Our plea is that everyone take this virus seriously and in no way attempt to travel to any province," health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said in a televised news conference.

The latest deaths bring the overall toll to 853 fatalities since February 19, when the government announced Iran's first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease. Jahanpour also reported 1,053 confirmed new cases of infection in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 14,991.

Tehran province had the highest number of new infections with 200 cases, about 50 fewer than the day before.

The central province of Isfahan followed with 118 cases, with Mazandaran in the north of Iran coming next with 96. Khorasan Razavi province, home to the holy Shiite city of Mashhad, was not among the reported provinces with fresh cases. It had recorded 143 the day before.

"If we judge cautiously, it seems that the overall efforts by the people and interventions by the health system... are slowly showing their effects in Qom and Gilan," Jahanpour said.

The holy city of Qom in central Iran, where the virus was first reported, had 19 new cases that took the total to 1,023. And confirmed infections in Gilan reached 858, with 18 new ones. The northern region is a popular tourist spot and among the worst-hit of Iran's 31 provinces.

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GAME ON! The soccer star, David Beckham goes shirtless for a kickaround at the Inter Miami CF Stadium in Florida.

Discovery launches streaming app Discovery Plus, to coronavirus special on March 18

NEW DELHI, MAR 16 (PTI): Discovery Plus, India's first aggregated real-life entertainment streaming app from Discovery, is set to premiere "Coronavirus: The Silent Killer", a special on the deadly virus which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

The COVID-19 outbreak, which originated in China last December, has claimed over 6,500 lives and infected more than 169,000 people over 135 countries and territories.

According to Issac John, business head digital (South Asia), Discovery, along with "Coronavirus: The Silent Killer", the newly launched app will come up with two more originals on the disease in a fortnight besides the new special on March 18.

John said the attempt with these specials was to look at "events that define the world and humanity".

"We believe there is a lot more to it than what meets the eye. This special is just our first attempt at showing the world in terms of what its origins were and what led to its spiralling out of control.

"However, the interesting thing about the way we are looking at coronavirus is that there needs to be information that comes from trusted sources, that's essentially what Discovery brings to the table. Our take is to begin with this and over the next two weeks we will be dropping at least two more Discovery commissioned originals on coronavirus," he told PTI in an interview.

Be it covering the Thai cave rescue in

2018 or the rising coronavirus spread, John said, the network has closely followed "rapidly evolving" events around the world.

"It's really hard for the entire story to be captured in one-moment-of-truth

Megha Tata, managing director South Asia, Discovery, added that there were multiple ways of viewing the current situation around coronavirus.

"This upcoming special and the two others have a viewpoint. Every content



kind of a storytelling narrative... We will continue to weave the narrative with the trust and credibility that Discovery has always had in defining it," he added.

Asked if Wuhan, the Chinese city where the COVID-19 outbreak originated, feature in these specials, John declined to comment.

"Given that the topic is so sensitive, we don't want to say what's in it, what's not. What we are saying is that Discovery, like in the past, will have strong narrative pieces around most hotly searched, contested and concerning topics of this year," he said.

piece has two sides of the story, especially in the infotainment space.

"When people start consuming it, they will know that this is one particular view to the issue," Tata said.

Discovery Plus, a direct-to-consumer streaming app, is now available for download on app stores.

The app will offer never-seen-before premium shows in 40+ genres including science, adventure, food, lifestyle.

Superstar Rajinikanth's TV debut 'Into The Wild With Bear Grylls' will be launched first on Discovery Plus, which is priced at Rs 299 yearly.

Rana Daggubati starrer 'Haathi Mere Saathi' pushed due to Coronavirus

MUMBAI, MAR 16 (PTI): Actor Rana Daggubati's upcoming action spectacle "Haathi Mere Saathi" has been postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak across the country, the makers announced on Monday. Directed by Prabhu Solomon, the movie was scheduled to have a nationwide release on April 2 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.

In a statement released by the producers, Eros International, the makers said the decision was taken in the interest and well being of everyone involved.

"In light of recent developments of COVID-19 Coronavirus, our recent announcement regarding the scheduled release of 'Haathi Mere Saathi', 'Aranya' (Telugu title) and 'Kaadan' (Tamil title) stands changed.

"In solidarity with our partners, exhibitors, distributors and audiences, we pray for health and happiness of all and as we are monitoring the situation, we do hope that we come back with a new release date soon. Sincerely, the entire cast and crew that worked tirelessly to bring this story to you," Eros said in a statement.

The outbreak has led to the shut down of theatre, malls, schools and gyms in Kerala, Delhi, parts of Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhnad and Haryana. Events, film

shootings and awards show have also been cancelled. On Saturday, actor Shahid Kapoor announced that the team of his upcoming film "Jersey" has decided to suspend the shoot of the film to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Yash Raj Films also delayed the release



of Dibakar Banerjee-directed "Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar". Akshay Kumar-starrer "Sooryavanshi" has been pushed indefinitely and Tillotama Shome's film "Sir" has been postponed. The release of Hollywood movies "A Quiet Place 2", "Mulan" and new James Bond film "No Time to Die" has also been delayed.

However, makers of "Angrezi Medium", starring Irrfan, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Radhika Madan and Deepak Dobriyal, went ahead with the scheduled release of the film on Friday.

James Bond actor Olga Kurylenko tests positive for coronavirus

LOS ANGELES, MAR 16 (PTI): Ukrainian-born actor-model Olga Kurylenko has revealed that she has tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

The actor, best known for starring in 2008's James Bond film "Quantum of Solace" and 2013's sci-fi movie "Oblivion", took to Instagram on Sunday to share her diagnosis.

Kurylenko, 40, said she had been ill for "almost a week".

"Locked up at home after having tested positive for Coronavirus," she wrote alongside a photo showing a view through a window.

"I've actually been ill for almost a week now. Fever and fatigue are my main symptoms. Take care of yourself and do take this seriously!" she added.

Kurylenko is the latest name from international entertainment industry to have contracted the COVID-19, which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) last week.

Last week, actor couple Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson previously tested positive for the illness. Universal Music chairman and CEO Lucian Grainge was hospitalised for treatment of the infection over the weekend.

'The Handmaid's Tale' S4 on hold amid coronavirus scare

LOS ANGELES, MAR 16 (PTI): The fourth season of acclaimed dystopian drama "The Handmaid's Tale" is shutting down production over health concerns in the wake of coronavirus outbreak.

Based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel of the same name, the show is set around the dystopian country of Gilead where women are stripped of their rights and forced into sexual slavery.

Series lead Elisabeth Moss on Sunday took to Instagram to share the news.

The actor, who will be making her directorial debut with the new season of the multiple award winning show, said the team was putting the shoot on hold "in order to preserve the health and safety of our cast and crew

and join the world in an attempt to flatten the curve". "This show is my life and this cast and crew is my family. Nothing is more important than making sure they and everyone around them is safe. I hope you'll join us in that effort," she said.

Moss, 37, said they will resume production "as soon as it's safe to do so".

"In the meantime stay safe and healthy and take care of yourselves. So much love from our family to yours," the actor added.

"The Handmaid's Tale", produced by MGM Television, joins the list of projects backed by the studio such as "Fargo" and pilots "thirty-something(else)", "Circe", and season 41 of reality series "Survivor" which were recently postponed amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thom Yorke delays North American tour due to coronavirus

LOS ANGELES, MAR 15 (PTI): Singer Thomas Yorke has postponed his North American tour, which was scheduled to happen from March 28 to April 25, amid coronavirus outbreak.

Yorke announced on Twitter that he has decided to shift his tour to later dates to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

"Due to restrictions put in place to minimize the spread of COVID-19, we regret that the North American leg of the

Tomorrow's Modern Boxes tour is postponed.

"Ticket holders, please stand by for information on a new routing for later this year. Apologies for the inconvenience," Yorke wrote on Twitter. The Radiohead frontman is the latest addition to the list of tours and festivals being postponed due to deadly virus.

Talents like Pearl Jam, Cher, Billie Eilish, the Eagles, the Who, Celine Dion, Jonas Brothers and others have

postponed or cancelled their scheduled gigs, while music festival Coachella, Stagecoach and South by Southwest have been shifted to later dates.

The virus has infected more than 150,000 people worldwide and killed over 5,600.



ARIES: A Murakami quote to reinstate your faith in yourself and your power to transcend the challenges: "Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional." Where are you vibrating at, Aries? Every morning when you wake up, you have the option to choose the energy you want to put out there. You have the power to embrace peace and happiness. Word of warning: you will be tested. Just when you think everything is coming together, the foundation could get shaken. Embrace the process of destruction as you would creation. Learning to become an observer is the only way to transcend.

Tip: Creation and destruction are two sides of the same coin.

TAURUS: Stay committed to your goals, Taurus. Show the Universe how dedicated you are to your path, and trust that the doors that were once closed will open themselves for you. In a world of instant gratification, find a sustainable model that works for you. But that doesn't mean the road ahead is devoid of challenges. Remember, you have navigated trickier territories. The skill and resources required are already within you. Tip: Keep the long-term vision in mind.

GEMINI: Rise, lightworkers, rise! It's time for you to step out of the spiritual closet. It's time to share your gifts with those around. Remember, the world needs your magic more than ever before. Do your bit knowing that no contribution is too big or small. This is also a time massive ascension. While there are so many blessings coming your way, there are things that are being taken away from you. Know when to let go of your resistance. Trust that the divine forces are doing their best to align everything for you. Tip: Healers and lightworkers, the world needs you more than

ever before.

CANCER: There's a lot happening behind-the-scenes that you are unaware of. Protect your interests, Cancer. Be careful of who you share private information with. Now is not the time to move forward. What you want to do instead be still, find your balance, and wait till the storm has past. What you need to know will be revealed to you in due course of time. Given your empath genes, your heart could be aching for the general state of the world. Compassion is one thing. Succumbing to the fears is another. Draw energetic boundaries whenever necessary, which in turn will help you rise above. Tip: Raise your vibrations.

LEO: To quote William Arthur Ward: "If you can envision it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it." This is a powerful time for you, Leo. You are stepping into your power and realising your true potential. Trust that the ideas you are channelling are divinely guided. So act upon them without delay. Trust that the Universe will lead you to the perfect opening. As such this is harvest season in your world. Let the abundance you are manifesting now inspire you to keep putting in the work. Tip: The idea at hand will yield grand results.

VIRGO: That 9-to-5 can get pretty demanding. And let's not even get started on the clients who walk into meetings with temper tantrums and unrealistic expectations as their plus one. What is it that makes going to work somewhat tolerable and gives you a reason to wake up every morning? The work you take on and the people you surround yourself with, of course! Virgo, make a conscious effort to do the things you love and be with those you love. Think collaboration over

competition. Motivate each other to work towards both the individual and collective goals.

Tip: Become the harbinger of positive change.

LIBRA: Manifestation game on fleek, Libra. If you've put in the work, expect nothing less than magnificent returns. For some of you, this could mean major ka-ching and improvement in your financial status. But don't get carried away just yet! Learn to put your coins away for the future. Wealth and money management is where your focus will over the next few days. Despite how well everything is turning out, there are certain things that will disappointment. At times like these, let "don't sweat the small stuff" be your mantra. Tip: Luck and abundance are on your side.

SCORPIO: One step forward, two steps backward. It's getting a little hard to stay motivated. So we're going to refrain from giving you a false sense of positivity. The truth is, things are unlikely to work out the way you want them to. You can either choose to look at this as the end of the world or pause, step away from what you are creating, and gain perspective. There are parts of you that do not fit the narrative you will write in 2020. Be brutal when it comes to the elimination process. Tip: Take a moment to review your life before you move forward.

SAGITTARIUS: What a wonderful time to be you, Sagittarius! Multiple pathways are opening for you. Become aware of them. It is always easier to choose the comfortable one, the familiar one, the one that allows your expertise to shine through. However, if you motivate yourself to look beyond what you think you are capable of, the doorway to greatness will open. Stop playing small, wild one! This is your chance to hone your skills and share your

gifts with the rest of the world.

Tip: Realise your highest potential.

CAPRICORN: Sometimes things fit together beautifully. At other times, they lead to chaos. What is your outer reality mirroring? Are you trying to hold on when the Universe is asking you to let go? Today, you're being asked to assess the relationships in your life that are now past their expiration date. The things that have outlived their purpose. Annual spring cleaning is in order, Capricorn. Trust that this cosmic soul cleanse will set the stage for a positive shift. Tip: Let go.

AQUARIUS: Rules are rules. They form structures that in turn support our dreams and allow us to spread our wings and fly. Yes, they are integral to our growth, but what happens when the same rules become the reason for oppression? Understand how and where you are being draconian, Aquarius. There's a good chance you're siding with rigidity when you should be opening yourself to change. So loosen the grip, be receptive to what other people are telling you, and look at the situation from a different perspective. Tip: Let go of the rigidity and allow yourself to flow.

PISCES: What's your sacred place, magical one? Is it a holy shrine in your ancestral town or a sanctuary you've created in your home? When things get too much, retreat. Find your moments of zen in this sacred place. Your faith will help you realign. The pursuit of knowledge is also likely to be big on your agenda. You like big books and you cannot lie, Pisces. See how you can up the game by delving deeper into a subject of your choice. Tip: Traverse to your sacred space.