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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**Lt Col, soldier
killed in
avalanche in
north Sikkim**

NEW DELHI, MAY 14

(PTI): A Lt Colonel and a soldier of the Indian Army were killed in an avalanche in the mountainous Lugnak La region of north Sikkim on Thursday, officials said.

The two personnel were part of an 18-member group which came under the avalanche, they said.

"A patrolling-cum-snow clearance party came under avalanche in North Sikkim on 14 May," a senior Army official said.

"In spite of the best efforts of the rescue team and local formation an officer Lt Col Robert TA and sapper Sapala Shanmukha Rao who were trapped under the ice lost their lives," he said.

**Death toll due
to COVID-19
rises to 2,649;
cases climb to
81,970: Health
Ministry**

NEW DELHI, MAY 15 (PTI):

The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 2,649 and the number of cases climbed to 81,970 on Friday, registering an increase of 100 deaths and 3,967 cases in the last 24 hours since Thursday 8 AM, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The number of active cases stood at 51,401 while 27,919 people have recovered and one patient has migrated, it said.

"Thus, around 34.06 per cent patients have recovered so far," a senior health ministry official said.

The total confirmed cases include foreign nationals too.

Of the 100 deaths reported since Thursday morning, 44 were in Maharashtra, 20 in Gujarat, 9 in Delhi, 8 in West Bengal, five each in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, four in Rajasthan, two each in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and one in Andhra Pradesh.

Of the 2,649 fatalities, Maharashtra tops tally with 1,019 deaths, Gujarat comes second with 586 deaths, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 237, West Bengal at 215, Rajasthan at 125, Delhi at 115, Uttar Pradesh at 88, Tamil Nadu at 66 and Andhra Pradesh at 48.

The death toll reached 35 in Karnataka, 34 Telangana and 32 in Punjab.

Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir have reported 11 fatalities each due to the disease while Bihar has registered seven and Kerala has reported four deaths.

Jharkhand, Chandigarh and Odisha have recorded three COVID-19

turn to pg 02

SKM details lockdown 4.0 relaxations

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 15 MAY:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party spokesperson, Jacob Khaling today stated that the State government has decided to give some relaxations to ease the life of people in this lockdown and to revive the economy of the state. He informed that a government notification on the same will be issued on Saturday.

However, he asserted that people should make right use of these relaxations in order to keep Sikkim safe from COVID-19.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Mr Khaling mentioned that a high-level meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, PS Tamang on Thursday took these decisions. He informed that along with taxi vehicles now private vehicles will also be allowed to ply on even and odd basis and inter-district vehicular movement

will also be allowed on even and odd basis. He added that small taxi and private vehicle can carry three commuters and five in big vehicles.

Mr Khaling stated that the government has also decided to provide relief to taxi drivers and urged them to show their driving license, voter card and blue book to their concerned RTO. He informed that all shops will remain open from 8 AM to 5 PM with proper social distancing and fast food and restaurants will also be opened but just for pick-up and home delivery service.

He informed that equipment for RT-PCR lab arrived in the State today and ICMR technicians have also arrived in the state and have been placed under two-day quarantine following which they will undergo testing. After they clear their tests they will be taken to the hospital for installing the equipments.



The present health facility in the state has exposed the earlier government's neglect of the health sector, alleged Mr Khaling. He informed that the government has taken the administrative decision to provide dialysis facility right from the subdivision level in the state.

The CM has decided

to provide fridge to all PHSCs in the state to keep important equipments and equip the hospital with latest facilities and equipment.

"CM has appealed to students of the state to take up technical training to fulfill requirements in different medical areas in the State," Mr Khaling said.

He mentioned that the government plans to reach out to schools and educational institutions with career counselling with the main intention to build its own human resource in the state.

SIMFED vehicle will reach all corners of the State to pick up vegetables to bring to the

market and the government will provide price support to farmers if needed, said Mr Khaling. He urged the people of Sikkim to support the 'Each One Help One' call of the CM.

Mr Khaling mentioned that the state government has decided to evacuate its people

who want to come home from different parts of the country as soon as possible. The government has been working on bringing them on special trains and buses, he added.

He mentioned that people from Delhi and surrounding places would be brought back on a special train from Delhi and two trains from South India and another special train will bring back people from Maharashtra, Bangalore and nearby areas. The government will arrange buses to bring people to the train station from nearby places, he added.

Likewise, he informed that the government will also bring back people from north-eastern region, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and nearby places. For those who do not want to return, the government would provide financial support.

Responding to media

turn to pg 02

Vehicle Disinfecting Bay inaugurated at Melli checkpoint



NAMCHI, 15 MAY (IPR):

Minister for Land Revenue & Disaster Management, Kunga Nima Lepcha and Minister for Transport and Buildings, Sanjeet Kharel jointly inaugurated a Vehicle Disinfectant Bay at Melli checkpoint today.

Present on the occasion were Relief Commissioner cum Secretary LR&DMD, PN Sherpa, Director Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA), GC Khanal, DC South, Ragul K, Senior SP South, Pravin Gurung, SDPO Jorethang, SK Shrestha, SDM Jorethang, RB Bhandari, BDO Sumbuk, Kiran Thatal alongside officials of LR&DMD, Gangtok.

Director SSDMA briefed the dignitaries about the Vehicle Disinfectant Bay and how it has been conceptualized by Bishu Hang Limboo of Bermiok Sumbuk, West

Sikkim with the aim of helping the State government in its fight against the Coronavirus pandemic. He also stated that the Vehicle Disinfectant Bay has been funded by LR&DMD and technically supported by Mines and Geology Department. It was also informed that Sodium Hypochlorite solution is being used in the device as a disinfectant agent according to the standards lay down by WHO and will be sprayed over the passing vehicles through 4 nozzles for a duration of 20 seconds.

Minister, KN Lepcha congratulated and commended the organizing department and Bishu Hang Subba for the disinfectant set-up and stated that the disinfectant gate would prove to be of huge help in curbing any transmissible disease entering South and West Sikkim via Melli through the medium

of vehicles including the tires of the vehicles. He also implicated the installation and useage of such disinfectant bays at various public places all over the district as a robust medium to fight COVID-19.

Minister Sanjeet Kharel also highlighted the role and contribution of youth towards the state in fighting the global pandemic through such innovative ideas such as the one carried out by Bishu Subba. He also issued thorough directives to be followed by the Melli workforce in order to ensure disinfection of all vehicles passing through Melli Checkpost.

During the course of the program, Minister KN Lepcha also handed over gloves, masks, sanitizers and face guards to Nodal Officer cum BDO Sumbuk, Kiran Thatal for distribution to the front line workers.

Over 1,000 Indians stuck in Nepal handed over to India

BAHRAICH (UP) MAY 15

(PTI): Over 1,000 Indians stranded in Banke and Bardiya districts of Nepal because of the lockdown were handed over to Indian authorities at Rupaideeh on the Indo-Nepal border here, a senior official said on Friday.

As many as 723 Nepalese, who were in

different shelter homes for quarantine on this side of the border, were also handed over to Nepalese authorities, Bahraich District Magistrate Shambhu Kumar said.

The exchange of Indian and Nepalese citizens took place on Thursday night in the presence of SP Vipin Mishra and se-

nior officers of the Sashastra Seema Bal along with Nepalese officials, the DM said.

Most of these Indians belong to Bahraich and other districts of Uttar Pradesh and other states, the DM said, adding those coming from Nepal have been kept in shelter homes in Bahraich and are being screened.

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800 people arriving in Assam; govt drafts SOP

GUWAHATI, MAY 14 (PTI): The Assam Government on Thursday drafted a Standard Operating Procedures for return of residents of the state from other parts of the country by trains, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

More than 800 passengers are arriving from New Delhi and Chennai on Thursday and Friday in Assam and “this will be a major challenge for us”, the minister said at a press conference here.

The New Delhi-Dibrugarh AC train is bringing 219 passengers to Assam while the first Krishak Shramik Express to the North East with Vairengte in Mizoram as the final destination will have 625 passengers for Assam, he said.

“We will have to handle more than 800 passengers, and tonight will be very challenging for us”, he said.

All train passengers to Assam, irrespective of their boarding stations, will be first put in institutional quarantine.

Symptomatic passengers will undergo detailed medical examination at the de-boarding station, and, if necessary, they will undergo isolated institutional quarantine facility at the de-boarding station. Otherwise, they will proceed for the institutional quarantine facility arranged by the Deputy Commissioner of destination district, according to the SOP.

Asymptomatic passengers will be handed over to representatives of destination districts for onward journey in officially provided vehicles to the district headquarters and then onwards to the institutional quarantine facilities.

However, pregnant women, citizens above 75, families with children below 10, disabled persons and those who have to attend funerals will be allowed home quarantine, provided they are asymptomatic.

Assam has reported 22 positive cases during the last 24 hours-15 on Wednesday and seven on Thursday, the minister said. “I appeal to all not to panic but exercise caution and self-restraint, particularly those who had gone to the areas from where positive cases have been reported”, Sarma said.

The total number of positive cases in the state has risen to 86 with 43 active cases, one migrated out of the state, two deaths and 40 cured and discharged from the hospitals. Seven people, including cancer patients and their attendants, who had come from Mumbai in a bus along with 136 others, tested positive on Thursday.

“Among the positive is a 13-year-old girl who underwent heart surgery and in a first such case, permission has been given to her mother who tested negative to stay with her as an attendant in the hospital room,” Sarma said. The 15 people who tested positive on Wednesday were among the 32 contacts of a migrant worker from Uttar Pradesh, he said.

Governor’s message on State Day

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 MAY:

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad has extended warm greetings and good wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of State Day 2020, a Raj Bhavan communiqué informs.

In his message to the people of Sikkim, the Governor has said, “My heartiest greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of 46 State Day. The day reminds us of the vision and purpose of our founding fathers of democracy when they took lead in shaping people’s democratic aspiration and charted the course of journey of Sikkim to be-

come 22 State of Indian Union. The journey so far has been indeed fulfilling and worthy. The unprecedented growth and transformation that the State has witnessed in the last four and half decades has remained the hallmark of this democratic transition. Today, Sikkim stands tall among the States and is working in synergy with Union Government to chart its journey to greater heights of progress and prosperity.

Numerous national awards and recognition conferred upon Sikkim for its achievements in various sectors along its developmental journey vindicates our develop-

mental strategy which holds greater promise for future.

My Dear Fellow Sikkimese,

Stay Day is also an occasion for introspection as to what we have achieved so far and what remains to be achieved. It gives us the opportunity to look back and take pride in the progress we have made which can always be attributed to the whole hearted participation of Sikkimese people in the developmental process.

Today, we have to foresee the future needs and chart the course of action compatible to the changing dynamics of the economy and soci-

etal priorities. It should be an outline that helps the people of Sikkim to constructively and positively contribute to the growth and development of this beautiful Himalayan State simultaneously contributing to the process of Nation building. Sikkim has all along exemplified national unity, integrity and patriotism.

I appeal to the students, youth, women, farmers and all working population of the State to be creative and open to the new opportunities provided by the Government. Presently, the world is changing rapidly and we are witnessing unprecedented challenges and crisis cur-

rently in the wake of COVID 19 pandemic which has dented our aspirations and growth forecast. However, it also has brought opportunities in the hindsight which needs to be harnessed for achieving our collective goal of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

On this historic day, let us join hands to work in unison and take Sikkim to the greater heights of progress and prosperity. People’s participation is vital for the progress of any democratic society. Let us work hard to sustain the momentum of development utilising our natural and human capital in more conscious and judicious manner.”

Organizations come forward to feed stranded migrant workers



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 MAY:

Following Summit Times’ report on migrant workers stranded at Mining Ground, Rangpo on 14 May, various associations and organizations have come forward to provide food to the workers.

Arya Kalyan Samaj GK Line is providing food in the lower bazaar while the Sikkim Krantikari

Morcha Trade Cell president, Sajjan Agarwal with the support of Bijay Prasad and the businessmen of Mandi Bazaar is providing khichdi at Mandi Bazaar, Mining ITI and surroundings.

Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, BJP MLA, YT Lepcha, and some government officials visited Rangpo and met the workers today.

A total of 645 migrant workers left Sikkim from the border at Rangpo today. As per details released by the DC-East, while 550 of the workers had arranged their own vehicles, 95 left for Siliguri on board SNT buses. Since the process began on 01 May, at total of 2,435 stranded migrant workers have left the State.

Ministers and area MLA inspect Melli Screening Centre

NAMCHI, 15 MAY (IPR): Ministers Kunga Nima Lepcha and Sanjeet Kharel along with area MLA [Zoom Salghari], Sunita Gajmer, visited and inspected the newly setup pre-fabricated structure at Melli Screening Centre today.

It may be mentioned here that the earlier screening structure which was temporarily set up was replaced by the pre-fabricated structure and has been made functional from today onwards.

The dignitaries thoroughly took stock of the Melli Screening Centre and inquired about the basic facilities in place at the centre. They also lauded the hard work and relentless efforts of all the front line workers who are stationed at the centre and provided words of motivation for them to carry on with their responsibilities with utmost sincerity and dedication.

During the inspection DC South, Ragul K, briefed the dignitaries about the systematic functioning of the



Screening Centre since its inception on 05 May. He also mentioned that the stranded returnees were screened and examined following all safety norms in the screening centre. Similarly, the visitors were also categorically informed about the features of the screening centre which comprises of contactless hand-wash units, mobile bio-toilets with solar lights, waiting sheds, changing rooms, administrative set up and a refreshment corner for the front line workers. He also apprised the Ministers that various departments of South District are sponsoring a day’s meal as an act of goodwill to all the front line workers deployed at the screening centre.

Furthermore, as informed by CMO South, Dr DC Sharma, the pre-fabri-

cated structure is a contactless screening setup which has a total number of 3 screening units. He also informed about the existence of an intercom facility to facilitate contactless communication between the frontline workers and returnees as and when required. Additionally, he also threw light on how a thorough assessment and examination of the stranded people of South and West Districts is being undertaken at the centre.

In the course of inspection, SSP South, Pravin Gurung, SDM Jorethang cum Nodal Officer (Screening Centre), RB Bhandari, SDPO Jorethang, SK Shreshtha, MO Melli PHC, Dr Deepika Gurung, a host of medical and administrative officials and staff were also present.

Department provides laptops with preloaded educational content to ensure students in remote areas continue learning

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 MAY:

The Samagra Shiksha Project of the Education has started reaching out to students in remote parts of the State through direct interaction maintaining proper social distancing protocol.

Responding to queries from parents and stakeholders about students in remote places being deprived and worried because of online education, Education Department started sending laptops to such remote places where internet facilities are not available, State Project Director, Bhim Thatal, informs.

Such laptops with pre-loaded educational content, together with the content already broadcast and telecast from radio and TV are being sent to all the BACs to help students learn where smartphones, internet, TV or radio are not available.

So far, the Department has identified about 130 such centres in the entire state and laptops have already been sent to these places.

Block Resource Centre Coordinators, Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators, AEOs and ADs of the concerned BACs will help the teachers of such schools and areas download the learning contents and help the students learn.

The teachers residing nearby areas would come to such centres and take classes with the help of laptops preloaded with the teaching materials supplied by the Samagra Shiksha, Education Department duly maintaining COVID-19 protocol.

Advising the BRCCs, CRCCs, all officers of the District levels and Sa-

magra Shiksha employees of the entire state to reach out to the students and teachers as well during the lockdown, SPD Mr Thatal also requested to give feedbacks and suggestions to improve upon the initiatives being taken.

This may be noted here that the Samagra Shiksha of the Education Department has initiated Sikkim Edutech App, a proprietary app of the Department as the online mode of teaching learning process during the lockdown. Apart from this, learning programmes from Samvaad Television and All India Radio, Gangtok are other regular features being in practice. Apart from such programmes to reach out to the students, the Department through SCERT has also been imparting orientation programme for the primary teachers, BRCCs, CRCCs, Headmasters, ADs, DDs through radio on the use of newly developed textbooks for Classes 1 to 3.

The SPD has further mentioned that Education is a way to eliminate all kinds of discriminations and drifts in the society and that all efforts are made by the Department to reach out to the remotest places. Having understood the fact that all may not have smartphones, or may not be able to afford internet, such pre-loaded laptops are the most useful option utilized by the Department. He also mentioned that in the days to come, digital learning system will become a part of education system and therefore the Education Department is prepared to materialise digital learning as a part of education under various interventions.

Contribution towards CM’s Relief Fund



GANGTOK, 15 MAY (IPR): Justice AP Subba, retired Judge, High Court of Sikkim and currently Chairman of the Law Commission of Sikkim called on the Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang at Samman Bhawan this afternoon and handed over a cheque

of Rs. 2 Lakh for Chief Minister’s Relief Fund to help Government’s effort to fight the global pandemic COVID-19.

The Chief Minister expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards him for his kind gesture and generous contribution.

Death toll ...

fatalities each while Himachal Pradesh and Assam have reported two deaths each.

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

More than 70 per cent of the deaths are due to comorbidities (existence of multiple disorders), according to the ministry.

The data updated this morning showed the highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 27,524, followed by Tamil Nadu at 9,674, Gujarat at 9,591, Delhi at 8,470 Rajasthan at 4,534, Madhya Pradesh at 4,426 and Uttar Pradesh at 3,902.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 2,377 in West Bengal, 2,205 in Andhra Pradesh and 1,935 in Punjab.

It has risen to 1,414 in Telangana, 994 in Bihar, 987 in Karnataka, 983 in Jammu and Kashmir and 818 in Haryana.

Odisha has reported 611 coronavirus infection cases so far while Kerala has 560 cases. A total of 197 people have been infected with the virus in Jharkhand and 191 in Chandigarh.

Tripura has reported 156 cases, Assam has 87 cases, Uttarakhand has 78, Himachal Pradesh has 74 cases, Chhattisgarh has 60 and Ladakh has registered 43 cases so far.

Thirty-three COVID-19 cases have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Goa reported 14 COVID-19 cases while Meghalaya and Puducherry registered 13 cases each.

Manipur has three cases. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Dadar and Nagar Haveli reported a case each till now.

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

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

SKM details...

queries, Mr Khaling mentioned that the state cannot send migrant workers outside the state without proper coordination with the coordinator of their respective state. He mentioned that after coordination the government has already sent many workers safely outside the state.

He also informed that area MLAs have been directed to ensure strict monitoring of the people in home quarantine in their respective area by using all available mechanism and people.

On MR and adhoc employees’ salaries, he informed that the government has already passed salaries of adhoc and MR employees in the Assembly but release of salaries has been delayed due to limited employees in government offices due to the lockdown norms.

However, he added that now the government has decided to run offices with 30% of employees and salaries will be released as soon as offices start functioning.

On extension of service of adhoc teachers, he clarified that as the educational institutions are closed so the service extension of teachers has been kept on hold and the decision will be reviewed accordingly when schools reopen.

KUTSE SHEGU

The kutse Shegu of Late Bhaichung Bhutia of Upper Chandmari below Enchey Monastery

TV. Tower “Vinakay Mission Hostel” who left for his heavenly abode on 2nd April 2020 falls on 20th May 2020. Due to the current COVID 19 situation and social distancing norms, the bereaved family would like to request all the family, friends and well wishers to pray for the departed soul in their own homes.



Chungden Bhutia (Wife)

6294475441

N.T Bhutia (Father-in-law)

9775821266

Tashi Tshering Bhutia (Brother)

9609850653/8918590228

Laden Bhutia (Sister in law)

9593785714/8918059921

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Resilience and National Spirit

DURGA SHANKER MISHRA

Our delegation for 11th India-Japan Joint Working Group Meeting on Urban Development reached Japan on 15 Oct, 2019 just 3 days after super Typhoon Hagibis, one of the most powerful in the last six decades, hit Japan and claimed 74 lives. We were astonished by the warmth with which the delegation was greeted by Japanese counterparts. Quite remarkably, the travel itinerary and official engagements over 5 days visit remained unchanged and executed by our hosts as planned. Further, we were overwhelmed by the preparations for the visit of around 2,000 dignitaries from around 200 countries for the Coronation Ceremony of Emperor Naruhito of Japan the week after, which was unwavering by the wrath of super Typhoon Hagibis. We visited Roppongi Grand Tower, a 231 metre tall building in heart of Tokyo, developed by Sumitomo Realty & Development Company. On our enquiry whether super Typhoon had any impact on the Grand Tower, the CEO seemed as unmoved as the gleaming skyscraper, standing out in the Roppongi skyline.

Japan is not new to disasters- the most devastating being Great Hanshin earthquake 1995, Great East Japan earthquake 2011 and Tsunami which triggered the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Over the course of time, Japan's national spirit has been synonymous with utmost resilience, reinforced by Japan's ability to handle natural disasters in a well prepared and timely manner. Japan's political and economic commitment to disaster risk reduction and resilience has been a leading example for the whole world to see.

In India as well, natural disasters are a common phenomenon. Cyclone Fani wreaked havoc in Odisha. The preparedness of disaster management authorities was well appreciated across the world, when the coastal authorities in Odisha moved more than a million people from the

area within Cyclone Fani's projected path onto higher ground, significantly reducing the death toll to 89. India's preparedness for natural disasters has increased a lot in recent times, but there is still a long way to emulate the Japanese spirit.

During the visit to Tokyo Tower, we saw a movie depicting the series of events in World War II, culminating in atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 when the whole nation came to a standstill. The movie recounted the carpet "Bombing of Tokyo", when the entire city was ravaged by a series of firebomb assaults, leaving an estimated 100,000 civilians dead and over 1 million homeless. Significant city monuments like Tokyo station were also destroyed. In the 1950s, Japan, still ravaged by the war, aimed to become modern, peaceful and part of the world's economic elite. One of the key elements in the construction of this renewed Japanese society was building of a monument to symbolize Japan's ascendancy as a global economic powerhouse. This led to the planning of Tokyo Tower by Hisekichi Maeda, to be taller than Empire State Building and Eiffel Tower, among the tallest structures in the world. The building of Tokyo Tower attracted thousands of Japanese construction workers and instilled a greater sense of nationalism in the hearts of Japanese people, at a time when it was needed the most. Tokyo Tower glorified their engineering and technical prowess and showed the world that it was way ahead of its time. By the end of 1958, the Tokyo Tower was finished and presented to the public as the world's tallest free-standing tower at the time, taller than Eiffel Tower. During the same period, the Japanese economy resurged and the tower signified the post-war recovery phase and the Japanese spirit.

In 1964, Japan became the center of attention for the world when they hosted the Tokyo Olympics with immense aplomb and success, announcing their comeback to the global stage. It was a massive un-



dertaking at the national level, with some estimates suggesting that Tokyo spent the equivalent of its national budget at that time on a major integrated development program which transformed the city's infrastructure. Simultaneously, completion of many large-scale infrastructure projects was timed to coincide with the 1964 Olympics, including the launch of the globally famous Shinkansen bullet train. Tokyo Station was rebuilt as a heritage building by innovative selling of air rights to enable an integrated development of the entire area. The collective effort of the entire nation driving the resurgence of the nation's economy, is what impressed us the most.

India too has a rich history and culture. Over the course of the colonial rule, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, popularly remembered as Iron Man of India, successfully imbibed the spirit of solidarity within the citizens of the country. To realize his vision, 'Statue of Unity' was unveiled as world's tallest statue in 2018, taller than the Statue of Liberty. Many people initially expressed discontent at the expenditure on the statue being exorbitantly high. Lately, the monument has witnessed high tourist footfalls, making it one of the most visited destinations across the country. Like Tokyo Tower of Japan, the 'Statue of Unity' of India will serve as a symbol to imbibe a sense of national purpose in hearts of 130 crore Indians, immensely essential to embark on building a strong, prosperous and inclusive India and to ensure that the fruits of development reach the bottom of pyramid.

India is working towards the holistic

achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals, taking unprecedented leaps under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Running world's biggest health assurance scheme covering 500 million citizens, world's biggest financial inclusion scheme opening over 370 million bank accounts for the poor, India draws inspiration from 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas'. The efforts are ours, but their fruits are for global humanity. In 2014, India was lagging behind in sanitation and an Open Defecation Free (ODF) India seemed a far-fetched dream, with less than 50% of households in the country having access to sanitation facilities. Yet, India has been able to successfully implement the world's largest sanitation programme under Swachh Bharat Mission, building 110 million toilets in just 5 years, a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th Birth Anniversary on 2nd October, 2019. Swachh Bharat Mission has turned into a Jan Andolan, catalyzed by behavioral transformation led by 130 crore Indians. On one hand, India is committed to achieving the target of 450 GW of renewable energy and on the other hand India is leading the initiatives like International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, shining examples of her ever-growing global influence.

India is one of the fastest growing nations, with an annual average economic growth of 7.5% over the last 5 years, coupled with low inflation and low fiscal deficits. In the last 4 years, India has jumped 79 positions in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) rankings, currently

ranked at 63, being the only large country in the world to witness such monumental progress. The jump of 25 places in EODB in Construction Permits is unprecedented, considering last year's jump was 129 places. Recently, reforms and policy measures in the country have ensured commitment towards a "one nation one belief" approach, charting its way towards realizing the vision of a USD 5 trillion dollar economy.

India needs to address the challenge of engaging with modernity and economic development with cultural preservation, learning from Japan. With focus on modernization, Japan has always aspired to achieve their development goals through state-led encouragement of a nation-wide and collective effort. Japanese people have always leaned on their own unique culture, despite the global wave of westernization. Their united effort at improving themselves, focusing on their internal strengths and competencies is commendable. Japanese spirit of embracing challenge with spirit and camaraderie has synergies with Indian ethos. The advanced, precision manufacturing and kaizen quality control principles are leading examples for the rest of the world. Thus, a lot of lessons can be taken from the Japanese national spirit of collectivism and unity. Similarly, our country can realize its vision for equitable growth by incorporating a sense of national pride amongst its citizens through projects of national integration, ensuring that each one of us contributes towards the natural goal of meeting the aspirations of New India.

Financial assistance for artisans under DHH



GANGTOK, 15 MAY (IPR): The officials and staff of Directorate of Handicrafts & Handloom (DHH) have expressed deep appreciation and profound gratitude to the Chief Minister for extending financial assistance of Rs. 3000 each to 89 paid workers whose livelihood depends on the sales of the products made by them.

This is a welcome relief when they are facing economic hardship as the sales of handicrafts and handlooms made by them are completely stopped due to lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The DHH has also appealed to the people of Sikkim to support local artisans by buying hand woven face masks at DHH, Zero Pint Gangtok.

VBDAS donates blood at CRH



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 MAY:

Members of Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim [VBDAS] donated nine units of blood here at the Central Referral Hospital on Friday.

The initiative was taken on learning of scarcity of blood in blood

banks in the State during the lockdown.

Ajay Gautam, Ujjwal Bhattarai, Santosh Suji, Kausal Adhikari, Bikram Rai, Jeewan Niroula, Krishna Prasad Dahal, Deepak Dhakal and Somraj Rai donated blood at the camp coordinated by Deepen Rai, Bikram Mukhia and Srijana Chettri.

Security forces arrest wanted NSCN (IM) militant

ITANAGAR, MAY 15 (PTI): An NSCN(IM) militant wanted in connection with the killing of a former MLA and 10 others in Arunachal Pradesh was arrested by security forces from Longding district, an official said.

Personnel of the Indian Army in a joint operation with district police apprehended the rebel identified as self-styled 'Sergeant Major' Puman Wangsu from a forest near Longphong village in the district, Kohima-based Defence spokesman Lt Col Sumit Kumar Sharma informed. Based on a specific intelligence input, the joint team launched an operation in the forest located close to the village.

During search operation on Tuesday last, the troops apprehended the cadre while trying to flee from the location, the spokesman said.

The apprehended cadre was handed over to Longding police station for further investigations, the spokesman added.

Forty-two-year-old Tirong Aboh, the MLA representing Khonsa West assembly constituency along with his 20-year-old son Loggem Aboh and Wangngoi Hakhun and eight others were killed in an ambush near Bogapani, around 20-km from Khonsa, the headquarters of Tirap district on May 21 last year. The MLA along with oth-

ers was on his way to Khonsa from Dirbrugarh in Assam in four vehicles when suspected NSCN (IM) militants stopped the convoy and fired upon.

The National Investigating Agency (NIA) had registered a case on June 10 after the state government handed over the case to the agency.

The NIA first arrested a self-styled 'Lieutenant' of the NSCN (IM) Yangte Josaham from Dimapur in August last year. Josaham is the area commander of the outfit for Longding.

In another breakthrough, security forces arrested self-styled Corporal of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Khaplang-Kitovi) from Changlang district in Arunachal Pradesh on May 12 last.

The militant, who was apprehended during a joint operation near Sankha Havi on the district by Assam Rifles and Changlang district police, has been identified as Tonlang Pangtha, the spokesman said.

Security forces also recovered a 9 mm pistol with magazine, nine rounds of live ammunition and one mobile phone from the arrested rebel.

The apprehended cadre along with the recovered items has been handed over to Changlang police station for further investigations, the spokesman added.

South African Conway fast-tracked into New Zealand squad

WELLINGTON, MAY 15 (AFP): South African-born Devon Conway has been rushed on to the New Zealand cricket payroll before completing the required three-years residency because his form was "impossible to ignore", chief selector Gavin Larsen said Friday.

The 28-year-old batting maestro, who does not become eligible for selection until August, was one of three new players named in the 20-strong Black Caps

contracted squad.

Imposing all-rounder Kyle Jamieson, who burst on to the international scene during the recent India series and spinner Ajaz Patel have also been promoted to the elite group while Colin Munro and Jeet Raval have been dropped and Todd Astle confirmed his retirement in January.

Conway, a left-handed batsman, has topped the domestic batting charts across all three formats since emigrating in 2017 and his eligi-

bility when international cricket resumes left no room for Test opener Raval and limited-over batsman Munro.

"Devon's form with the bat across all three formats these past two seasons made him impossible to ignore and he's going to be a great option to add to the batting mix," Larsen said.


"Kyle's performances against the might of India were nothing short of outstanding and at 25 years of age he's certainly got a big future.

SHUTTER SHOT

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<h3>Treatment</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">    </div> <p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7029372100</p> <p>WEST : 9593297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9641957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p>
<p>DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM</p>	

State DayWell Done, Sikkim

A race to the bottom even as the virus stays away

Ironies abound when, on the same day, one is confronted with sights of zealous policing embarrassing people in public for ill-fitting face-masks because the virus has to be kept at bay and a clearly unkempt government bus pulling up to ferry returning students to a quarantine facility. No one has bothered to inform the “frontline warriors” in khaki [there is always time for some sarcasm] that the virus is thankfully not airborne so it is okay for people to pull down their masks occasionally to catch their breath. Similarly, no one has bothered telling anyone that even if a bus cannot be disinfected/ sanitized after every trip, it can at least be hosed down to appear clean. Everyone is clearly scared, and everyone has been consuming gigabytes of COVID information and knows that the virus infects from surfaces. And yet, when returning students complained that the SNT bus waiting for them in Siliguri was “dirty” and shared a video of them cleaning it themselves, they were greeted with not only vicious criticism online but also actual threats on the phone. The former, one can accept as the right of ill-informed and uncaring individuals, but the latter demands condemnation. It does not matter whether the “threats” were credible and it should be enough that the students were scared enough to request that the video be taken down. There were already too many who held ignorant fears that returning Sikkimese were bringing Corona to Sikkim, but the fact that there are also many who will pounce on children expecting better is just plain disgusting.

At a time when authorities should be underlining their initiatives with heightened empathy, we have continuing superficiality. Every stranded Sikkimese returning home has spent nearly two months in uncertainty and stress, made tiring road journeys and needs extra efforts to make them feel welcome and safe. Instead of coordinating efforts with their parents to greet them in Siliguri with home-cooked food, you provide them transport which has not even been wiped down! And you run them down when they complain or expect their State to do better by them? This attitude explains why a busload of scholarship students were mobbed out of Assam Lingzey by angry villagers who were convinced that it was not safe to have them quarantined in a “standalone” government facility in their midst or why a lady who spoke about the fears of overlooked stranded Sikkimese was targeted with personal attacks in response to a public issue she had raised. An uncaring government would not have bothered. Thankfully, that has not been Sikkim’s experience. A caring and efficient government would have added a human touch to the evacuation process apart from delivering on the essentials. A government by the numbers will grudgingly do the bare minimum and its minions will shower exaggerated praise. Is it wrong for Sikkim’s children to expect the best from its government?

Sikkim’s agencies are not burdened with outbreaks, the stress of segregating containment zones or attending to lakhs of desperately destitute, hence, instead of getting obsessed with enforcement it could deploy the faculties of its officers to ensure that the urgent issues are resolved and people get treated like human beings. One did not see that when hundreds of migrant workers provided only incomplete information by officers preoccupied with routine and protocol dismissed their desperation to return home as something not deserving of their time and coordination. As a result, migrant workers poured into the border town of Rangpo only to discover that the border was not open for them just yet. As night fell, they were herded away from the town area and left at a ground. Provided no information or updates, they became, like the lakhs of such migrant workers across the country, a people made invisible, their condition ignored. With media highlighting their condition, the administration as well as organizations swung into action as is often the case but must media draw attention to every incident for the state to wake up and take notice?

It would also help to accept that no government or society is perfect and that it is through occasional holding up of the mirror that course corrections happen and things improve, not through the applause or understanding of sycophants.

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Coronavirus: How times of crisis reveal our emotional connection with strangers

ANDY LEVY
theconversation.com

As well as attacking immune systems, COVID-19 has severely disrupted every aspect of society. It has altered the way we work, play, learn, exercise, shop, worship and socialise. The official response in many countries has been an urgent message that to do societal good, we need to adjust how we live.

So how are people dealing with these lifestyle changes? After all, human beings are generally not well disposed to radical departures from their routines. Surely there is a limit to how long people will accept unprecedented behavioural restrictions for the good of society ahead of their personal needs. Psychology can offer some insights into what’s likely going on.

Of course, not everyone has complied with the government’s instructions so far. Sunbathers, drinkers, barbecue cooks and football players have all attracted attention from the police and media.

But these instances should come as no surprise. As the proverb goes, “birds of a feather flock together” – people have a strong urge to spend time in physical proximity with each other.

They are also naturally hesitant to break social bonds because they are a fundamental human motivation, and research tells us that people desperately cling on to these bonds and the group memberships that underpin them because they benefit our psychological health.

MENTAL CONFLICT

So resisting the temptation to engage in face to face social connection is not as easy as some might think. Breaking ties with our social groups can make us feel lonely, which can in turn increase the likelihood of depression, high blood pressure and

death from heart disease.

As a result, many in lockdown are now experiencing what psychologists refer to as “cognitive dissonance” which occurs in situations when people experience mental discomfort for having opposing thoughts and feelings.

At the moment, nobody really wants to be locked down because it can make use feel isolated. The psychological dissonance between what we might think (that lockdown compliance is a good idea) and feel (loneliness) is a stark reality. We know that people will naturally attempt to reduce dissonance in order to maintain their mental wellbeing.

For instance, we have seen people striving to cope with psychological dissonance in different ways. There have been mass protests in the US, and elsewhere denials of the pandemic and countries claiming to be virus-free.

But mostly, people have coped by adjusting to new ways of living – much of it aided by modern technology. We have seen a vast range of virtual social events including pub quizzes, dance classes and breastfeeding support groups, shared exercise workouts and even the use of robots to help the vulnerable connect with others.

COHESION AND TOGETHERNESS

History tells us that society can be socially cohesive in times of crisis, and coronavirus is presenting society with a formidable common enemy that does not distinguish between the reds and the blues. And research suggests that when faced with a common threat, a shared sense of togetherness can lead people to look past their differences and collectively respond to the challenges they face.

The rhetoric from some political leaders has sought to harness this power of togetherness by encouraging us to think less about our own inter-

ests and more about the interests of others. The British chancellor Rishi Sunak commented: “We want to look back on this time and remember how, in the face of a generation-defining moment, we undertook a collective national effort, and we stood together.”

Similarly, the Queen spoke of her hope that “in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge”.

We know that leaders who invoke a sense of shared vision and togetherness are better able to unite people for a collective purpose, particularly in the face of adversity. Martin Luther King Jr’s “I have a dream” speech is a famous example.

My current research explores why people are collectively motivated to co-operate in supportive ways. Right now, societal motivation for helping, sharing, donating and volunteering has never been so important.

In moments of crisis, studies suggests that a shared sense of “we-feeling”, or a mutual emotional connection with others, is paramount for motivating mass pro-social action. Feelings of closeness can lead to a shared affinity and concern for the welfare of others. Thus people who feel a part of a cohesive community can form a powerful shared identity with each other by serving those in need.

Despite the struggles, many of us have found ways to (partly) fulfil our human need for social and emotional connection. We have found innovative ways to communicate with other people at distance, and witnessed an encouraging sense of community and a new emphasis on the collective need. In our attempts to cope with a new way of living, perhaps we are unknowingly changing the blueprint for how we live our lives in the future.

[the writer is Reader in Psychology, Edge Hill University]

Archaeology shows how ancient African societies managed pandemics

SHADRECK CHIRIKURE
theconversation.com

Every so often, a pandemic emerges that dramatically alters human society. The Black Death (1347 - 1351) was one; the Spanish flu of 1918 was another. Now there’s COVID-19.

Archaeologists have long studied diseases in past populations. To do so, they consider a wide array of evidence: settlement layout, burials, funerary remains, and human skeletons.

For example, because of archaeologists we know that the damaging impact of epidemics prompted the abandonment of settlements at Akrokrowa in Ghana during the early 14th century AD. About 76 infant burial sites at an abandoned settlement that now forms part of the Mapungubwe World Heritage site in the Limpopo Valley of South Africa suggest a pandemic hit the people living there after 1000 AD.

Archaeological and historical insights also expose some of the strategies that societies adopted to deal with pandemics. These included burning settlements as a disinfectant and shifting settlements to new locations. Social distancing was practised by dispersing settlements. Archaeologists’ findings at Mwenezi in southern Zimbabwe also show that it was a taboo to touch or interfere with remains of the dead, lest diseases be transmitted in this way. In the late 1960s, some members of an archaeological dig excavating 13th century house floors in Phalaborwa, South Africa, refused to keep working after encountering burials they believed were sacred. They also worried that the burials were related to a disease outbreak.

Social distancing and isolation

have become watchwords during the COVID-19 pandemic. From archaeology, we know that the same practices formed a critical part of managing pandemics in historical African societies. In what is Zimbabwe today, the Shona people in the 17th and 18th centuries isolated those suffering from infectious diseases - such as leprosy - in temporary residential structures. This meant that very few people could come into contact with the sick. In some cases, corpses were burnt to avoid spreading the contagion.

Humans have a propensity to relax and shift priorities once calamities are over. Data collected by archaeologists, that show how indigenous knowledge systems helped ancient societies in Africa deal with the shock of illness and pandemics, can help remind policy makers of different ways to prepare modern societies for the same issues.

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND ISOLATION

Research at the early urban settlement of K2, part of the Mapungubwe World Heritage site, has thrown significant light on ancient pandemics.

The inhabitants of K2 (which dates back to between AD1000 and AD1200) thrived on crop agriculture, cattle raising, metallurgy, hunting and collecting food from the forest. They had well developed local and regional economies that fed into international networks of exchange with the Indian Ocean rim. Swahili towns of East Africa acted as conduits.

Archaeological work at K2 uncovered an unusually high number of burials (94), 76 of which belonged to infants in the 0-4 age category. This translated into a mortality rate of 5%. The evidence from the site shows

that the settlement was abruptly abandoned around the same time as these burials. That means a pandemic prompted the community’s decision to shift to another settlement.

Shifting to another region of Africa, archaeological work at early urban settlements in central and southern Ghana identified the impact of pandemics at places such as Akrokrowa (AD950 - 1300) and Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa in the central district of Ghana.

These settlements, like others in the Birim Valley of southern Ghana, were bounded by intricate systems of trenches and banks of earth. Evidence shows that after a couple of centuries of continuous and stable occupation, settlements were abruptly abandoned. The period of abandonment appears to coincide with the devastation of the Black Death in Europe.

Post-pandemic, houses were not rebuilt; nor did any rubbish accumulate from daily activities. Instead, the disrupted communities went to live elsewhere. Because there are no signs of long term effects - in the form of long periods of hardship, deaths or drastic socioeconomic or political changes - archaeologists believe that these communities were able to manage and adapt to the pandemic.

Analysis of archaeological evidence reveals that these ancient African communities adopted various strategies to manage pandemics. These include burning settlements as a disinfectant before either re-occupying them or shifting homesteads to new locations. African indigenous knowledge systems make it clear that burning settlements or forests was an established way of managing diseases.

The layout of settlements was

also important. In areas such as Zimbabwe and parts of Mozambique, for instance, settlements were dispersed to house one or two families in a space. This allowed people to stay at a distance from each other - but not too far apart to engage in daily care, support and cooperation. While social coherence was the glue that held society together, social distancing was inbuilt, in a supportive way. Communities knew that outbreaks were unpredictable but possible, so they built their settlements in a dispersed fashion to plan ahead.

These behaviours were also augmented by diversified diets that included fruits, roots, and other things that provided nutrients and strengthened the immune system.

AFRICA’S PAST AND THE FUTURE OF PANDEMICS

There were multiple long-term implications of pandemics in these communities. Perhaps the most important was that people organised themselves in ways that made it easier to live with diseases, managing them and at the same time sticking to the basics such as good hygiene, sanitation and environmental control. Life did not stop because of pandemics: populations made decisions and choices to live with them.

Some of these lessons may be applied to COVID-19, guiding decisions and choices to buffer the vulnerable from the pandemic while allowing economic activity and other aspects of life to continue. As evidence from the past shows, social behaviour is the first line of defence against pandemics: it’s essential this be considered when planning for the latest post-pandemic future.

[the writer is Professor in Archaeology, University of Cape Town]

870 people detained in Manipur for violating lockdown

IMPHAL, MAY 15 (PTI): Manipur Police has detained 870 persons and seized 696 vehicles for violating lockdown norms in the state, a senior officer said.

All the detained persons were produced before courts and a total fine of Rs 1.03 lakh was imposed on them, a statement issued by Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) L Kailun said on Thursday.

The ADGP said police will continue to take legal action against lockdown violators under the National Disaster Management Act 2005.

4 killed, 3 injured in lightning strike in West Bengal

SURI (WB), MAY 14 (PTI): Four persons were killed and three others injured after they were struck by lightning during a thunderstorm in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Thursday, police said.

The four men were working at a field in the Mallarpur area during heavy rain when the lightning struck.

They were declared dead when taken to a healthcare centre, a police officer said.

The deceased were all aged between 23-30 years.

Three others, who were nearby, were injured in the lightning strike and admitted to the Rampurhat hospital, the police officer said. Heavy rain, accompanied by thunderstorm, lashed different parts of the district, including Bolpur.

Pune slum fights COVID-19 with self-discipline, awareness

PUNE, MAY 15 (PTI): Even as several congested areas in Maharashtra's Pune city turned into COVID-19 hotspots, slum pocket of Janata Vasahat has managed to fight the virus with coordinated efforts of its residents and authorities.

Situated along Sinhgad Road, Janata Vasahat is spread over 2 to 3 km area and has a total population of 60,000.

The locality has only reported two cases of COVID-19 so far, and the Pune Municipal Corporation plans to keep it that way.

Pune municipal commissioner Shekhar Gaikwad attributed the success of controlling the spread to containment measures undertaken by the civic body and the geographical location of the slum.

"Nestled between a hillock called Parvati and a water body off Sinhgad Road, Janata Vasahat only has one entry and exit point, restricting people's movement in the area," the senior official said.

Shramik Special: Mamata says 105 trains to take people back to Bengal, Goyal counters

Kolkata/New Delhi, May 14 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Railway Minister Piyush Goyal locked horns on Thursday over the return of stranded workers, with the CM announcing 105 trains to bring them home and the BJP leader accusing the state government of not taking adequate measures.

Bringing back migrant labourers and stranded people to Bengal has snowballed into a major political issue, with the opposition BJP and the Union government rapping the state for not doing enough and the Trinamool Congress denying it.

"Towards our commitment to helping all our people stuck in different parts of the country and who want to return to Bengal, I am pleased to announce that we have arranged 105 additional special trains. Over the coming days, these special trains will embark from different states for various destinations across Bengal bringing our people back home," Banerjee tweeted on Thursday morning.

In the evening, Goyal said the West Bengal government was not providing facilities to the migrants to return home



and has allowed only seven 'Shramik Special' trains. Despite his appeal to the state government to allow more 'Shramik Special' trains, there has been no response from it, he added. The ruling Trinamool Congress of West Bengal hit back and accused Goyal of being absent during this monumental crisis.

Earlier, the government had given nod for 10 trains to facilitate the return of labourers, patients, tourists and students stranded in other states owing to the lockdown. Three of these 10 trains have reached the state so far.

In her tweet, Banerjee shared a list of 105 trains which would leave from Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka and Rajasthan among others over the next few weeks.

The list suggested that three trains would commence their journey from New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore Urban on May 16 and reach New Coochbehar, Howrah and Malda Town respectively the following day. The government's initiative

to ferry stranded people home in trains would continue till June 14.

Later, in a series of tweets, Goyal said, "After my statement yesterday, the West Bengal government has woken up from its deep sleep. The government has yet allowed only seven trains for migrant workers... The workers of Bengal are far from their homes, so I had appealed to allow them to run more trains."

West Bengal needs to run 105 'Shramik Special' trains daily to take stranded migrants back home, but "there is unconfirmed news that for the next 30 days they have prepared a list of just 105 trains", he said.

"It is a cruel joke with the migrant workers of West Bengal that the government there is not giving them the facility to go to their houses," Goyal said.

The railway minister said, "So far, the government of West Bengal has not allowed eight trains to run, as per its announcement last week."

"This is a petty attempt to trick West Bengal's migrant workers,

The state should allow the Railways to run more special trains as soon as possible to take stranded migrants home, he said.

The railway minister's statement did not go down well with the TMC, which dubbed it as "cheap politics and an attempt to score political brownie points at the time of crisis".

"The minister has been all but absent during this monumental crisis when millions of poor migrant workers have been abandoned. They've been left to fend for themselves, stuck all over the country waiting for some help from government to safely return to their homes and families," TMC Rajya Sabha party leader Derek O'Brien said.

Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, however, welcomed the move by the state government and said it should have taken the steps several days earlier.

Last week Union Home Minister Amit Shah had flagged the issue of non-cooperation by the West Bengal government in bringing back stranded labourers.

The Centre had also rapped the state government over its handling of the COVID crisis in the state.

and the government is running away from its responsibility to take the poor labourers home. Uttar Pradesh cleared 400 trains in less than 15 days and brought its migrant workers home. Instead of showing this kind of alacrity, the West Bengal government is preventing the labourers from getting assistance," he said.

Goyal urged the West Bengal government to think about the interests of the workers who have to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Odisha readies for possible cyclone

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 15 (PTI): In the midst of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, Odisha braced for a possible cyclone by putting 12 coastal districts on alert on Friday and asking collectors to arrange for alternative shelter homes for the people there, a top government official said.

A well-marked low-pressure over the Bay of Bengal is all set to intensify into a depression and a cyclonic storm. Odisha Special Relief Commissioner P K Jena said he reviewed the situation and the possible impact on the state with Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy.

According to preliminary information from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) the possible depression will re-curve from its path to north-northeast direction and move in the Bay of Bengal, Jena said.

The speed of the depression's movement is yet to be ascertained and the IMD is yet to predict the place of the landfall of the possible cyclone. It may be in north Odisha, south Bengal or even in Bangladesh, he said, adding fishermen are advised not to venture into deep sea from Friday.

Though the IMD is yet to give an exact forecast on the system, the weather department has made it clear that the well-marked low pressure will take the shape of depression on Friday evening and intensify into a cyclonic storm later.

"We cannot predict the trajectory of the system now as the depression is yet to be formed. However, it may have some impact on the districts located in the northern region of Odisha and southern parts of West Bengal. As a result, heavy rainfall is likely in coastal areas from May 19," IMD Director General Mrutunjay Mohapatra said. He said the IMD will be able to share the exact track and impact of the cyclonic storm after it intensifies into a depression.

In view of the impending situation, the Odisha government has put on alert 12 coastal districts, particularly the northern districts of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore, Jena said.

He said plans have been made for pre-positioning of the ODRF, NDRF and fire service personnel if the situation arises. They will rescue people likely to be affected by the probable calamity and clear roads if they get blocked.

The situation will be managed properly as Odisha has vast experience in dealing with such situations in the past, the special relief commissioner said, adding, "We are well prepared to deal with any situation. However, the district administrations will have the double task to manage COVID-19 situation



along with the possible cyclone." Chief Secretary Tripathy told collectors, "I request you to prepare for the worst irrespective of what the IMD predicts. I know you are fighting the pandemic... Now we require people for the possible cyclone situation. Prepare for the worst... prepare for the ultimate eventuality."

Referring to Odisha's successful handling of natural calamities in the past, he said, "Our cyclone and flood preparedness is acclaimed not only nationally but internationally also. We must maintain that."

Jena told reporters, that as most of the cyclone and flood shelters and schools are now being used as temporary medical centres to lodge returnees from different states in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the collectors will keep ready other concrete buildings in their jurisdiction for housing people in areas likely to be affected by the cyclone.

The district collectors have been told to ensure that temporary medical centres located within three km from the sea be shifted if required.

"We have spoken to

the district collectors of northern districts through video conference and apprised them of the situation. They were directed to keep the machinery ready for the impending situation," Jena said. "If required, evacuation of people will be undertaken keeping the situation in view."

To a question, the special relief commissioner said the collectors were told to conduct health screening and tests those lodged in temporary medical centres in the coastal districts and allow those testing COVID-19 negative to be in home quarantine.

The state health and family welfare department will soon issue a notification in this regard, he said. Jena said all line departments have been alerted.

While the housing and urban development and panchayati raj departments have been told to ensure supply of drinking water, the energy department has been asked to be prepared for resuming power supply quickly if there is any damage due to the possible cyclone. The health department is also been asked to be ready, he said.

Amid lockdown, Bhowmick back to coaching -- online

KOLKATA, MAY 15 (PTI): Amid the nationwide lockdown, Subhash Bhowmick on Friday was back in ding what he knows best -- coaching, albeit on an online platform.

The revered Indian football coach, who spearheaded East Bengal's ASEAN Cup triumph in 2003, was seen training the coaches in a six-session module concluding on Saturday.

"I've goosebumps, whenever there's a talk about football. I can talk hours on football, it's

my passion," Bhowmick, who coached East Bengal to successive National league titles and replicated the success with Churchill Brothers, told PTI. "So the idea (of online coaching) really touched me and I thought this is the way forward in this challenging times."

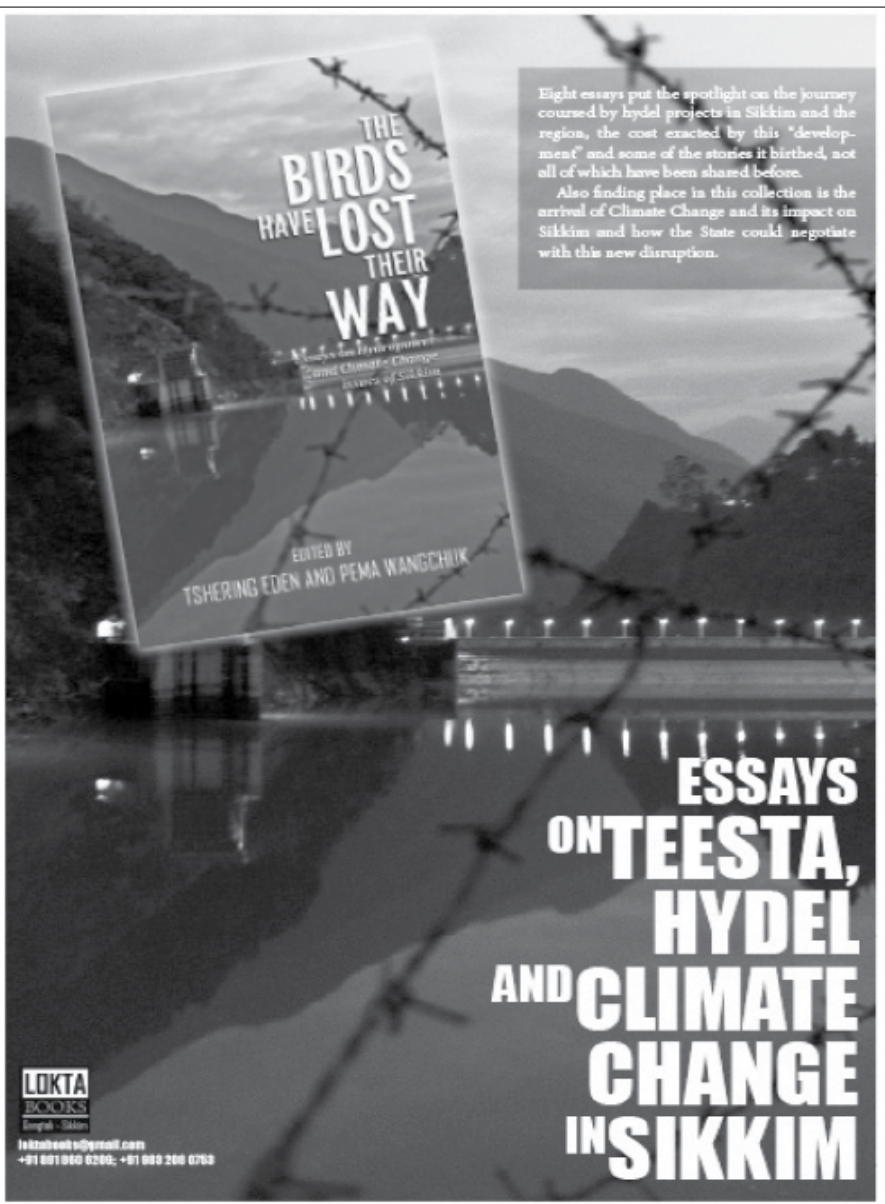
Budding coaches from across the districts and the city had applied for the coaching and each class had a strength of 30 participants.

"In our country, most of the coaching camps

stress on running, running and running. They are preparing runners. They rarely teaching ball skills. I shared whatever material I had on how to dribble and football passing," Bhowmick has already taken five classes so far.

"I've taken five classes already. Tomorrow will be the last class. We will see whether they will continue or not," the veteran added.

The streaming is being done by XtraTime's online platform.



Chess: Magnus Carlsen announces \$1m online series as viewer numbers surge

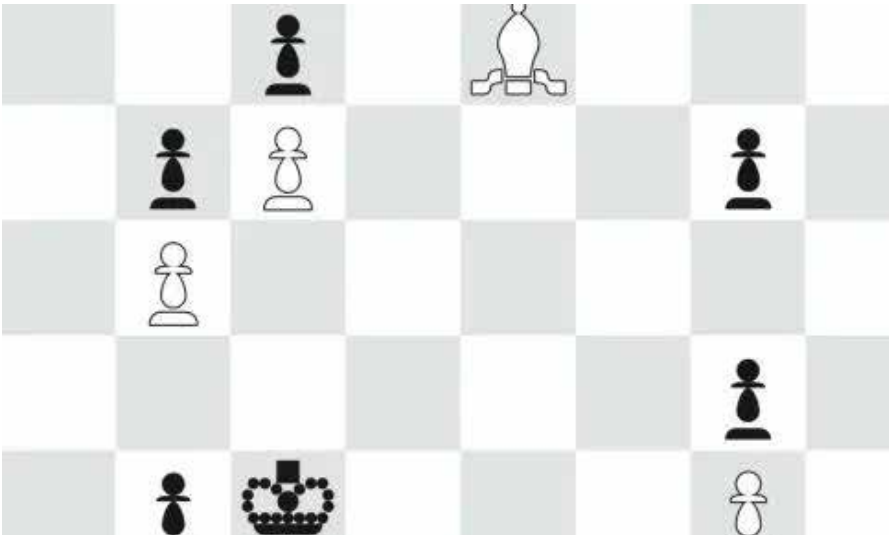
Leonard Barden
London, 15 May [the-Guardian]: Magnus Carlsen has announced a new \$1m series of major online events in which he will compete, lasting all summer with a final in August. The Carlsen Tour effectively replaces the over-the-board Grand Tour organised from St Louis in the US, which was halted by coronavirus. The Carlsen series could even open up the possibility, if coronavirus continues for a long time, of moving the world championship match itself to an internet setting.

The first Carlsen Tour event has already happened. The Carlsen Invitational, where the No 1 defeated the US champion, Hikaru Nakamura, in a tense final, was watched by an online audience calculated at 114,000.

The next tournament, from 19 May to 3 June, is the Lindores Abbey Challenge, a version of last summer's over-the-board rapidplay in Scotland. Carlsen's opponents will include Nakamura, China's world No 3, Ding Liren, and the prodigy Alireza Firouzja.

That competition starts on Tuesday, but before then the Norwegian will be in action again, this time in a blitz tournament, the Fide Steinitz Memorial, to commemorate the first world champion's birth date.

The choice may seem tenuous, for chess clocks came into general use only in the mid-1880s, and there is no record



of Steinitz ever playing blitz. Games are live on chess24, starting at 5.30pm on Friday when Carlsen meets the eight-time Russian champion Peter Svidler.

Carlsen and/or Carlsen events will be on your internet screen for at least 60 days from now until August. It should be a great feast of free entertainment and grandmaster commentary for chess fans, but the sheer quantity of games in a short period sparks the question whether at some stage viewer fatigue will creep in. The over-the-board Grand Tour promoted by Rex Sinquefield and Garry Kasparov from St Louis ran for five years from 2015-2019, though with longer intervals between tournaments, and interest seemed to wane towards the end.

If that ennui occurs at some stage to the Carlsen Tour at a time when there is still no visible prospect of over-the-board chess resuming in a significant way, then

pressure may develop to play the second half of the abandoned candidates tournament and even the world championship match itself as internet competitions. That would be a radical plan and would be fiercely resisted by traditionalists, but normal over-the-board chess, with opponents seated opposite each other for an extended period, may yet come to be viewed as an enduring health risk.

China narrowly edged out the US in last weekend's online Nations Cup final, halving the final match 2-2 but winning the trophy because of their superior performance in the previous rounds.

The powerhouses for the winning teams were China's Yu Yangyi, who totalled 7.5/10, and America's world No 2, Fabiano Caruana, who did even better with an unbeaten 7.5/9. Both scored with attacks against the king in direct encounters with their rivals. It was interesting

that Caruana, confronted with the solid Petroff 2 Nf3 Nf6, chose the well worn attacking system with a knight exchange at c3 and castling long which sometimes peters out to a draw but sparked a crushing assault.

Yu's win over Wesley So effectively decided the final match, and was of high quality as he stopped Black's queen's side army getting out of the box then sacrificed three pieces for his mating attack.

The final rounds also featured two impressive victories by Firouzja, who had struggled against the big names at the Carlsen Invitational. The 16-year-old won in fine style against Levon Aronian and Sergey Karjakin at a much slower time rate than the blitz where he is so deadly.

Firouzja's choice of the Vienna 2 Nc3 and its follow-up against Aronian showed that he was ready to take on the bizarrely named Frankenstein-Dracula variation with all its obscure complexity. His surprised

opponent dodged the bullet by 5...Be7 (instead of Nc6) giving White a small edge without risk which Firouzja converted. Firouzja's all-court attack against Karjakin, the 2016 world title challenger, makes a powerful impression, helped by the loser's odd choice of h1 for his queen.

Possibly the most significant Nations Cup game for its potential future influence was Hou Yifan's win over Aleksandra Goryachkina in the China v Russia match. Hou is the all-time women's No 2 after the retired Judit Polgar, and despite taking two years off for academic studies as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford she showed that she is still close to her peak strength. Goryachkina is 21, five years younger than her opponent, and the flagbearer for a new generation following her crushing win in the women's Candidates, so this was a pairing of unusual significance.

Hou got in first with her opening prep after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 (Winawer French) 4 Qd3? She had used the queen move in a 2015 game, and the database prefers 4...Ne7 rather than dxe4 and chasing the white queen to h4. Goryachkina's decisive error was 18...Nb4? instead of Nf6, as Black's resulting weak b4 pawn soon fell leading to a lost rook endgame.

3671: 1...Ra3+! 2 Kb4 Ra7! when if 3 Rxd2 Rxe7 or 3 Bf8 Rd7! with a winning ending.

MLB commissioner 'hopeful' virus-hit season will begin

LOS ANGELES, MAY 15 (AFP): Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred said he's "hopeful" that concerns over the coronavirus pandemic and financial considerations can be overcome and allow a 2020 season to go ahead.

Speaking on CNN in a "Global Town Hall," Manfred insisted he was optimistic that MLB and players would come to terms and open a season that was due to start on March 26.

MLB has pitched a reopening plan to the MLB Players Association that would see play begin in July, with strict protocols in place to screen for COVID-19 and prevent spread of the deadly virus.

The union has reportedly balked at the suggestion that players take a further pay cut from the pro-rated salary rates they already agreed upon in April for a season expected to be shortened to about 82 games per club.

Tampa Bay Rays pitcher Blake Snell said Wednesday that he was concerned about potential long-term health damage if he contracted COVID-19, and said he wasn't interested in as-

suming that risk for a lesser amount of money.

"It's not worth it," Snell said.

"I love baseball and that, but it's just not worth it." But Manfred said he believed clubs and players would come to terms.

"Whenever there's a discussion about economics, publicly people tend to characterize it as a fight," Manfred said.

"Me, personally, I have great confidence that we'll reach an agreement with the players association both that it's safe to come back to work and work out the economic issues that need to be resolved." Manfred said loss of the entire season would be "devastating" for MLB clubs.

"We're a big business, but we're a seasonal business," Manfred said.

"Unfortunately, this crisis began at kind of the low point for us in terms of revenue. We hadn't quite started our season yet, and if we don't play a season the losses for the owners could approach 4 billion."

Manfred confirmed that MLB has suggested a return to play in empty stadiums in July. Players and others involved in

the games would be subject to multiple COVID-19 tests with supplemental tests for virus antibodies.

He said MLB expects test results to be available in 24 hours in partnership with the lab that conducts baseball's drug testing. Those testing positive would be removed from their teams and contact tracing instituted.

Daily temperature and symptom checks would also be in place, he said.

"Nothing is risk-free in this undertaking," Manfred acknowledged.

"We're trying to mitigate that risk with the repeated point-of-care testing to make sure that people who have had contact have not been exposed, and by obviously removing those individuals that have a positive test, they will be quarantined until they have two negative tests over a 24-hour period."

Any players who aren't comfortable with the measures would not be forced to come back, Manfred said.

"We hope that we will be able to convince the vast majority of our players that it's safe to return to work," he said.

Premier League ordered to show free-to-air games and share money to restart

PAUL MacINNES
London, 15 May [the-Guardian]: The Premier League has been told by the government it must show some matches on free-to-air TV and put more money into the Football League and grassroots game as a condition for restarting this season.

The demands were made by the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, at a meeting on Thursday at which he gave the go-ahead for matches to resume provided it is safe to do so.

"The government is opening the door for competitive football to return safely in June," Dowden said. "This should include widening access for fans to view live coverage and ensure finances from the game's resumption supports the wider football family."

"It is now up to the football authorities to agree and finalise the detail of their plans, and there is combined goodwill to achieve this for their fans, the football community and the nation as a whole. The government and our medical experts will continue to offer guidance and support to the game ahead of any final decision which would put these plans into action."

The Premier League is in negotiations with its broadcast partners Sky and BT over finding a way of showing some matches free-to-air if and when the season resumes. The government's preferred solution is that the remaining 45 matches not already covered under the terms of existing TV deals are shown either on freely accessible TV channels or via a streaming platform such as YouTube.

The government

has also instructed the league to factor "solidarity payments" into any final reckoning should the season be completed. Broadcasters have demanded a rebate from the Premier League even if they are able to screen their full complement of matches, because of subscribers lost owing to the current postponement of the season and because the league has not been able to deliver the product as promised. The DCMS has asked, however, that a tranche of any remaining TV money received should in part be shared with the rest of the football pyramid.

The precise amount of any sum is yet to be determined and although the government has asked football to find a solution, this may not prove straightforward. The EFL is understood to expect an extra one-off payment, a contribution towards filling the potential £200m black hole in club finances it faces by September. Sources at the Premier League, meanwhile, suggest they see the government's request as being about ensuring that funds owed under current solidarity arrangements are made available.

Rows over broadcast revenue are hardly new and other concerns are taking precedence. The immediate hurdle, well before any matches can be played, is enabling players to return to training after two months away from the field. The EFL and Premier League have devised medical protocols that conform with new government advice on training for elite athletes. The Premier League hopes to convince its 20 shareholder clubs to give their assent in a vote on Monday.

The outcome of the vote is not guaranteed, following a series of meetings on Wednesday between players, club managers and officials. Some of the players – the influential Watford captain, Troy Deeney, among them – are understood to have left the meeting feeling concerns over safety had not been resolved, and managers are believed to have asked for any pre-resumption training period to be longer than the three weeks budgeted for in the Premier League's Project Restart plans. Managers and players will this week feed their thoughts back to clubs before the vote.

If the protocols are passed, players would be allowed to train in groups while observing physical distancing. Any contact training, a vital component in preparing for matches, would be allowed only following new protocols and further government advice.

Tottenham's manager, José Mourinho, said: "I want to train and I am desperate for the Premier League to return as soon as it's safe to do so, particularly now as we are seeing other leagues preparing to return to action."

Speaking at the daily coronavirus briefing the government's deputy chief medical officer, Jonathan van Tam, who was directly involved in drawing up government sporting guidance and spoke with top-flight players via video link on Wednesday, suggested that any further steps would not be immediate.

"The overall approach with easing social distancing has been one that has been tentative, measured, slow and step-wise," he said.

Austrian league leaders investigated for breaking training rules

VIENNA, MAY 15 (AFP): Austrian league leaders LASK Linz faces possible punishment for violating health regulations by resuming full training, a move which incurred the wrath of their rivals.

The league investigation was triggered by a video tape of the training sessions, which was filmed without the club's knowledge and which allegedly showed a breach Austrian regulations for fighting with coronavirus pandemic.

Since April 20, clubs in Austria have only been allowed to train in groups of up to six players. Full training will only be allowed from Friday. The championship is scheduled to resume on 2 June.

LASK has filed a burglary complaint claiming that a camera was smuggled in to spy on training sessions and that the perpetrators were themselves filmed.

LASK, coached by Frenchman Valerien Ismael, did not deny the accusations, acknowledging in a statement that "as shown by a camera illegally introduced during a night-time break-in, the rules of distancing were not strictly observed".

The case will be examined by the league's disciplinary bodies and the club could face sanctions. Other top-flight clubs have reacted angrily.

Formula One grid in 2021: What we know so far

PARIS, MAY 15 (AFP): With Carlos Sainz moving to Ferrari and Daniel Ricciardo heading for McLaren, AFP looks at how the grid in the 2021 Formula One world championship is shaping up.

MERCEDES
Six-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is under contract until the end of 2020 and has made no secret of his intention to stay with the sport's top team as he targets Michael Schumacher's record of seven titles.

His teammate Valtteri Bottas is also signed up until the end of this year. However, the 30-year-old Finn is believed to be under pressure from highly-rated Williams driver George Russell, a product of the Mercedes young drivers scheme. Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff has said he wants to keep Hamilton and Bottas together.

But he also admitted that he cannot "ignore" the fact that four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel has already announced he is leaving Ferrari at the end of this season.

FERRARI
Monaco's Charles Leclerc, just 22, has a deal with the Italian giants until 2024 and with Vettel on his way out, will expect to see the team built around him. In 2021, his new teammate will be Spain's Carlos Sainz, three years his senior, who will leave McLaren.

RED BULL (HONDA ENGINE)
Max Verstappen, 22, is on the books until 2023. Teammate Alexander Albon has a contract until the end of this season having been promoted from the Red Bull sister team. He needs to keep making an impression, especially with Vettel, a former Red Bull star, a free agent
RENAULT



French driver Esteban Ocon has a deal until the end of 2021 with an option for 2022. But who will be the 22-year-old's teammate after the departure of Ricciardo to McLaren? There is widespread speculation that 38-year-old Fernando Alonso, who won his two world titles with Renault in 2005 and 2006, could be poised for a sensational return to F1 having retired in 2018.

MCLAREN (MERCEDES ENGINE FROM 2021)

30-year-old Ricciardo has penned a "multi-year" deal with McLaren from 2021 where he will race alongside Britain's Lando Norris, 10 years the Australian's junior.

RACING POINT (MERCEDES ENGINE; WILL BECOME ASTON MARTIN 2021)

Mexican Sergio Perez is under contract until the end of 2022. Canadian teammate Lance Stroll should be hopeful of a longer deal as his father is one of the owners of the team as well as Aston Martin.

ALPHATAURI (HONDA ENGINE; FORMERLY TORO ROSSO)

Russian driver Daniil Kvyat's deal expires at the end of 2020 as does the contract of teammate Pierre Gasly of France. Gasly was

unceremoniously relegated by Red Bull to its sister team in 2019.

ALFA ROMEO (FERRARI ENGINE)

Former world champion Kimi Raikkonen, 40, and Italian teammate Antonio Giovinazzi both have confirmed drives until the end of 2020.

HAAS (FERRARI ENGINE)

Denmark's Kevin Magnussen and Frenchman Romain Grosjean have deals until the end of this year. However, their futures are on the line following a string of disappointing results and clashes between the two on the track.

WILLIAMS (MERCEDES ENGINE)

Russell's deal runs to the end of 2021 but he has been heavily linked with a move to Mercedes. His teammate for 2020 is Canada's Nicholas Latifi, who will be the only rookie on the grid when the season finally begins.

FREE AGENTS

Apart from Vettel and Alonso, Germany's Nico Hulkenberg is keen to return after a year's absence. Hulkenberg has driven for Williams, Force India, Sauber and Renault but has never climbed on the podium. He said he "would not decline a good offer".

Hong Kong shop offers ‘tear gas’ flavor ice cream

HONG KONG, MAY 15 (AP): Tear gas is among the new flavors at a Hong Kong ice cream shop.

The main ingredient is black peppercorns, a reminder of the pungent, peppery rounds fired by police on the streets of the semi-autonomous Chinese city during months of demonstrations last year.

It tastes like tear gas. It feels difficult to breathe at first, and it's really pungent and irritating. It makes me want to drink a lot of water immediately, said customer Anita Wong, who experienced tear gas at a protest.

I think it's a flashback that reminds me of how painful I felt in the movement, and that I shouldn't forget.

The flavor is a sign of support for the pro-democracy movement, which is seeking to regain its momentum during the coronavirus pandemic, the shop's owner said. He spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid repercussions from the pro-Beijing government.

We would like to make a flavor that reminds people that they still have to persist in the



protest movement and don't lose their passion, he said.

He tried different ingredients, including wasabi and mustard, in an effort to replicate the taste of tear gas. Black pepper, he said, came closest to tear gas with its throat-irritating effects.

We roast and then grind whole black peppercorns and make them into gelato, the Italian style. It's a bit hot, but we emphasize its aftertaste, which is a sensation of irritation in the throat. It just feels like breathing in tear gas, the 31-year-old owner said. More than

16,000 rounds of tear gas were fired during the protests, according to Hong Kong authorities, many in densely populated districts where narrow streets are filled with small restaurants and apartment blocks.

The protests began over proposed legislation that would have allowed criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China to face charges. While the bills were withdrawn, demonstrations continued over concerns Beijing is eroding the civil liberties granted to the former British colony when it

was returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The ice cream shop also provides a space for people to express their views about the movement, including the use of sticky notes that featured in the Lennon walls that appeared throughout the territory at the height of the demonstrations.

Such expressions date back to the 2014 Occupy Central protests, when a major stairway leading to the Hong Kong government headquarters was plastered with thousands of notes carrying messages of support. At about 5 a serv-

ing, tear gas ice cream has been a hit. Prior to social distancing regulations over the coronavirus outbreak, the shop's owner said he was selling 20-30 scoops per day.

The demonstration have mostly died away as the city fights the coronavirus, but there are widespread expectations that larger actions may emerge during the summer.

Already, police have been out in force to deter large gatherings and the government is pressing ahead with legislation that would make it a crime to mock the Chinese national anthem.

Afghan hospital attackers ‘came to kill mothers’: MSF

Gunmen who stormed a hospital in the Afghan capital this week had come to “kill the mothers” at the maternity ward, medical charity Doctors Without Borders has said.

At least 24 people were killed -- including newborns, mothers and nurses -- when three armed men rampaged through the maternity ward of the hospital in Kabul on Tuesday, in an attack that sparked international outrage.

The United States later said the deadly assault was carried out by the Islamic State group.

“What I saw in the maternity hospital demonstrates it was a systematic shooting of the mothers,” said Frederic Bonnot on Thursday, the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) head in Afghanistan, who visited the facility a day after the attack.

“They went through the rooms in the maternity, shooting women in their beds. It was methodical.

“Walls sprayed with bullets, blood on the floors in the rooms, vehicles burnt out and windows shot through,” he said in a statement.

MSF, which runs the maternity ward, said at the time of the attack 26 mothers were being cared for at the Barchi National Hospital in west Kabul.

Eleven were killed, including three in the delivery room with their newborn babies while five others were wounded. Ten others found

shelter in safe rooms.

The assailants who entered the facility through the main gate moved straight to the maternity ward, MSF said.

When the attack began, shooting and explosions could be heard from the safe room where several had taken refuge, said Bonnot.

“They came to kill the mothers,” he said.

“This country is sadly used to seeing horrific events. But what happened Tuesday is beyond words.”

Officials said there were three attackers who were eventually killed in a lengthy clearance operation.

Heavily armed security forces were seen carrying infants -- at least one wrapped in a blood-soaked blanket.

IS has not claimed the attack but US Special Representative to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said it was carried out by the Islamic State in Khorasan, the Afghan branch of IS.

The Islamic State group “opposes a peace agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban, and seeks to encourage sectarian war as in Iraq and Syria,” Khalilzad wrote on Twitter.

The Taliban has denied any involvement in the onslaught.

In another attack on Tuesday in the country's east, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a funeral, killing at least 32 mourners, with IS later claiming responsibility.

India-US collaboration needed more than ever: Senior diplomat

BY LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, MAY 15 (PTI): The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of strong India-US collaboration, India's Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu has said.

Noting that India's partnership with the US in health sciences and technologies is longstanding, the senior diplomat said research and innovation institutions of both the countries have been engaged in understanding important chronic and infectious diseases and in developing therapeutics and diagnostics.

“COVID-19 has made us recognise the need for collaborations more than ever before. Our Prime Minister has emphasised a global coordinated response to deal with the challenges even as we work to strengthen our domestic capacities to deal with this crisis,” Sandhu said during a virtual interaction with eminent Indian-American scientists on Thursday.

India and the United States have closely collaborated in combating diseases such as tuberculosis; cancer; HIV; eye diseases and environmental health research, he said.

There are over 200 ongoing NIH-funded projects in India, involving 20 Institutes from the NIH network and several eminent institutions in India.

“A recent successful example of our co-operation is the development of the ROTAVAC against rota virus. Such collaborations will be critical in the fight against COVID-19,” Sandhu said.

“From the initial days of the outbreak, our scientists and institutions have been actively engaged in exchange of information. Even as both our countries are focused on combating the disease domestically, NIH and Indian Council for Medical Research have come together and announced a call to support collaborative research and training through India-US partnership to understand the disease,” he said.

The India-US Science and Technology Endowment Fund has called for proposals that would enable scientists to carry out joint research and work towards development of new technologies, tools, safety, outreach and also support public-private virtual networks to fight COVID-19, he added.

Indian pharmaceutical companies are global leaders in producing affordable low-cost medicines and vaccines and will play an important role in the fight against this pandemic, Sandhu said.

“As I speak here today, there are at least three ongoing collaborations between Indian vaccine companies with US-based institutions. These collaborations would be beneficial not just to us, but for the billions who would need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 across the world,” Sandhu said.

Asserting that innovation will be the key driver in pandemic response and recovery, the Indian diplomat said that the tech-companies and start-ups have already begun to take the lead in this direction. Telemedicine and telehealth will

evolve as will other digital platforms across sectors, he noted.

India, he said, takes immense pride in the contribution of doctors, scientists, academicians of Indian-origin, who came to the United States in the pursuit of academic excellence and have distinguished themselves in diverse fields.

Your contributions are widely acknowledged and deeply appreciated by the political leadership in the United States, he added.

The online interaction was attended by Dr Chandan K, Sen J Stanley Battersby Chair and Professor of Surgery and Director of the Indiana Center for Regenerative Medicine and Engineering, Pawan Sinha, professor of vision and computational neuroscience in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor Shivaji Sondhi, professor of physics at Princeton University, known for contributions to the field of quantum condensed matter, Professor Aseem Chair of the Department of Chemical Biology and Therapeutics, St. Jude Children's Hospital and Dr Sanjay Kumar Jain, Professor of Pediatrics, Radiology and Radiological Science.

The scientific community has a critical role to play in the unprecedented circumstances that we face today. As doctors, you are at the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19, as scientists and biotech experts, you are at the forefront of global efforts to find a cure for COVID-19, Sandhu said in his remarks.

Quarter of a billion Africans at risk, as virus toll tops 300,000

The coronavirus could infect a quarter of a billion Africans and put intolerable pressure on the continent's fragile health system, a new report said Friday, as the pandemic's global death toll topped 300,000.

Despite fears of a second wave of infections, borders began opening up in Europe and lockdowns continued to ease as governments try to get stalled economies moving again, with experts warning world output could shrink by 10 percent.

And Donald Trump ramped up his war of words with Beijing over responsibility for what he has dubbed the “Plague from China”, threatening to cut ties between the two countries.

But it was the very human cost of the disease that was thrown into sharp relief with the discovery of infections in the world's biggest refugee camp, where upwards of a million Rohingya live in squalor.

“We are looking at the very real prospect that thousands of people may die from COVID-19” in these camps, Save The Children's Bangladesh health director Shamim Jahan said.

“There are no intensive care beds at this moment” in the camps at Cox's Bazaar, Jahan said.

Track and trace teams were fanning out Friday to follow up on two positive tests.

- Vaccine -

Epidemiologists have long warned that the virus could race through the cramped, sewage-soaked alleys of the camps, where the persecuted Muslim minority have lived since fleeing a military offensive in neighboring Myanmar nearly three years ago.

The nexus of poverty and risk was also laid bare by a World Health Organization report that warned Africa is a hotspot waiting to happen, despite so far having escaped the worst of the disease.

Researchers say frangible health systems on the world's poorest continent could quickly be overwhelmed, with modeling suggesting 231 million people could become infected.

Up to 190,000 of them could die, the study published in the journal BMJ Global

Health suggested.

With large populations living in slums, social distancing is all but impossible for many on the continent, and health experts say only a vaccine will prevent widespread infection.

Despite scientists working flat out towards that aim, experts say it could still be many months -- or even years -- away.

And without a robust roll-out plan, even highly developed countries could struggle to take advantage of any breakthrough.

In the US, the man formerly charged with developing a vaccine told lawmakers the government in Washington has no “master plan” to fight the pandemic and is unprepared to distribute enough vaccines to immunize millions of Americans.

“We don't have a single point of leadership right now for this response,” said Rick Bright, who was removed from his job last month.

- ‘Disappointed in China’ -

The United States has registered almost 86,000 deaths linked to COVID-19 -- the highest toll of any nation, with a third of all known global infections.

In an interview aired Thursday, Trump again accused Beijing of concealing the true scale of the problem after the virus emerged in Wuhan late last year.

“I'm very disappointed in China. I will tell you that right now,” he said.

Asked how the United States might choose to retaliate against what he has dubbed the “Plague from China”, Trump said: “We could cut off the whole relationship”.

Beijing played down the spat, saying: “To maintain the steady development of China-US relations is in the fundamental interests of the people in both countries.”

The US and China are the world's two largest economies, doing hundreds of billions of dollars of mutually beneficial trade every year.

Nevertheless, the US president is keen to make Beijing the bogeyman in an election

year when gloomy news has become par for the course.

New figures showed a further three million job losses, taking the newly unemployed to 36.5 million -- more than 10 percent of the US population.

Over a third of them will have trouble paying their bills, a survey has revealed.

States are slashing their budgets because of tax shortfalls caused by the job losses, with California announcing it would have a \$54 billion deficit this year.

Germany's treasury is also expecting a big hole in its budget, with around 100 billion euros wiped off the tax take in 2020.

Europe's biggest economy has already slipped into a recession, with GDP expected to shrink by 6.3 percent this year -- the biggest contraction since 1949.

The Asian Development Bank on Friday doubled its previous estimate of the cost of the pandemic, saying the world economy would shrink by \$8.8 trillion -- almost a tenth of global output.

Up to 242 million jobs will vanish due to the virus, the Manila-based bank said.

- ‘We may need more graves’ -

Much of Europe was back on the road to recovery, with more parts of the continent opening up.

Slovenia opened its borders on Friday after declaring an end to its coronavirus epidemic, despite new infections still being reported.

Austria and Germany were expected to open their shared border, while Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were set to create their own “mini-Schengen on the Baltic”, allowing free movement among the three countries.

But in Latin America, the news was looking increasingly dire.

Thousands of fresh graves are being dug in the Chilean capital's main cemetery, as the infection rate soars and as Santiago enters lockdown from Friday.

“We may need more graves, because we see what's happened in other countries,” cemetery director Rashid Saud told AFP.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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STREET STYLE! The supermodel, Karlie Kloss looks chic in a black turtleneck, jeans, trench coat, and protective gear while walking in NYC.

My films reflect my life lessons, says director Shoojit Sircar

BY RADHIKA SHARMA

NEW DELHI, MAY 14 (PTI): Director Shoojit Sircar says his filmography is a reflection of the lessons he has learnt in life, and his upcoming movie ‘Gulabo Sitabo’ is another such film in his repertoire.

Starring Amitabh Bachchan and Ayushmann Khurrana, the film is the first big ticket feature to directly go for a digital release amid the coronavirus-induced shutdown.

A Rising Sun Production, the Lucknow-set satire will start streaming worldwide on Amazon Prime Video from June 12. “My films, sometimes, have my own reflections of life. They have life lessons I’ve had that I put across in a humorous or satirical way.

“When I made ‘Vicky Donor’, people said it’s not a family drama, it is for youngsters. But families also went and watched the film. Same happened with ‘Piku’ and ‘October,’” Sircar told PTI in an interview.

The director said, like his previous films -- Kashmir in “Yahaan” to New Delhi’s CR Park and Kolkata in “Piku”, the location will play an important role in the story.

“Gulabo Sitabo” is penned by his frequent collaborator Juhi Chaturvedi, who hails from

Lucknow. “Lucknow is going to be a very important character in this film. We have tried to showcase the film taking a lot of inspiration from the ethos and culture of Lucknow,” Sircar added.

Chaturvedi, Bachchan, and Khurrana working with the director on the upcoming film was both a first and a reunion of sorts.

While Sircar previously directed Bachchan in “Piku”, Khurrana debuted in Bollywood with the director’s “Vicky Donor”. Both films were written by Chaturvedi.

“Ayushmann is family, Mr Bachchan has become a dear friend. Juhi is writing again after ‘October’, Ronnie is producing in a row. My cinematographer Abhik Mukhopadhyay is coming back and Shantanu Moitra is returning as music director,” he said. “We understand each other very well, our camaraderie is very good on the sets. That is what makes it most important that you enjoy the process and method. You talk, you debate,” he added.

Sircar said they had barely started the post-production work on his next directorial “Sardar Udham Singh” biopic, starring Vicky Kaushal, when nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24.

your body.

CANCER:

Sometimes you just need to brew yourself a cup of perspective, step away from the drama of your physical reality and journey inwards. It is in this sacred space that you will find the answers you are seeking. You are where you need to be. So, breathe. There are few that need to be realigned behind the scenes in order to propel your plans forward. The grand plan will soon be revealed. Tip: Brew yourself a cup of perspective.

LEO:

It’s a privilege to be loved by you, Leo. But in trying to keep everything together, you may have let your romantic side suffer. Friday, also known as the day of Goddess Venus, is urging you to get in touch with that wild, untamed energy within you. Quarantined away from your partner? Write them a heartfelt note about how they make your heart flutter or make them a playlist of songs that will remind them of times spent together. Under house arrest with the beloved? Tip: Love like nobody’s watching.

VIRGO:

Today, you’re being asked to examine your relationship with pleasure. How do you feel about letting somebody into your space? Does the thought of receiving what makes you feel good induce panic or make you feel safe? With the light of awareness, you will be able to work through the intimacy blocks. On the other hand, if you are in this relationship merely for the ‘benefits’, the allure will start to wear off soon. Virgo, it’s time to make space for a relationship that fulfills you physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Mary-Kate Olsen files for divorce from Olivier Sarkozy, emergency petition denied

(CNN)Mary-Kate Olsen has filed for divorce from her husband of almost five years, Olivier Sarkozy.

But a spokesperson for the New York court system tells CNN that Olsen’s emergency divorce filing earlier this week was denied by a State Supreme Court Judge because the divorce is considered “not essential” due to the coronavirus.

“Only essential/emergency matters are allowed to be filed,” said Lucian Chalfen of the New York Supreme Court. “The original filing was rejected by the New York County (Manhattan) clerk because they did not follow the essential matter procedure. They refiled under the essential matter procedure, and the matter was referred to an ex parte State Supreme Court Judge. He just decided that it is not essential, so they can’t file anything at this point.”

Olsen, half of the Olsen twins from TV’s “Full House,” has yet to comment. She is quarantining with friends in the Hamptons, a source with knowledge of the situation tells CNN.

A representative for Olsen declined to comment Thursday before news of the judge’s decision.

CNN has reached out to Olsen’s and Sarkozy’s attorneys.

Olsen, a designer, and Sarkozy, a French-born banker, raised eyebrows when they were first linked in 2012 because of their 16-year age difference.

He is the half-brother of Nicolas Sar-

kozy, the former President of France.

The couple tied the knot in a small ceremony in 2015 at their New York home -- her first marriage, his second.

They have been extremely private about their relationship. But Olsen, 33,

the ‘80s sitcom “Full House,” where they shared the role of Michelle Tanner.

They went on to star in several films in the early ‘90s including “Double, Double, Toil and Trouble” and “It Takes Two.” Eventually they started their own



made a rare mention of their marriage in a 2017 interview with Net-a-Porter’s The Edit, in which she talked about helming a fashion empire with her twin, Ashley.

“I think we’re lucky [working hard] comes quite naturally for us. We don’t need so much time to sit and think and ponder,” Olsen said. “But then I have a husband, two step-kids and a life; I have to go home and cook dinner.” The Olsen twins reached international stardom on

production company, Dualstar Entertainment Group, and produced and starred in several more films. The last was 2004’s “New York Minute.”

They left show business and currently helm multiple luxury fashion brands, including The Row and Elizabeth and James.

Their sister is Elizabeth Olsen, who plays the Scarlet Witch in the “Avengers” movies.

Put film production on hold after Sonali’s illness: Goldie Behl

MUMBAI, MAY 14 (PTI): Filmmaker Goldie Behl says he put on hold all his big screen ventures after actor-wife Sonali Bendre was diagnosed with cancer in 2018, and now wants to focus telling stories on the digital platforms.

Behl, who made his digital debut with ZEE5’s “RejctX” last year, said going to New York for Sonali’s treatment for six months, was life altering for the family.

“The film slate has not been affected by COVID-19, I have put it on hold for the moment. I am focusing more of my energies, ever since 2018, after I went to New York with Sonali, it was a life altering situation for all of us.

“I have decided to focus more on the digital platform. So the film slate is on pause right now, but because of my own decision and not COVID-19,” Behl told PTI.

The director said under his production house, Rose Audio Visuals, the team is focusing “completely” on the digital platforms and looking at the young-adult space and genre.

“I am enjoying the OTT world. I haven’t given a thought to film direction. I’m not saying I won’t ever make one, but I’m not consciously looking to make a film or seeking a film script,” he added.

While several film and TV shoots came to a grinding halt due to coronavirus, Behl finished the second season of his ZEE5 show “RejctX” just in time.

The director was shooting in Thailand

“right in the middle of the pandemic” but is glad everything wrapped up before the threat of Coronavirus took over.

“Season two was quite challenging because we were trying to amplify thrill, plot and pace. There were a lot of physical challenges as we were shooting. The pandemic grew as we were shooting and a lot of precautions were taken on set.



“Fortunately we were in a country that had dealt with SARS so they were very well equipped to handle even this right at the beginning, when we did start shooting,” he added. With the world coming to a standstill and the rising market of digital streaming platforms, there’s a growing concern if the coronavirus pandemic stands to alter the audience’s habit of viewing a movie in a cinema hall.

Behl said theatrical cinema has battled against several formats and has still emerged stronger.

“Since my childhood I’ve been hearing various formats coming in and destroying the cinema hall experience. But the theatrical experience hasn’t really gone away and I don’t think it ever will.

Joe Rogan Threatens to Move to Texas over California’s Coronavirus Policies

“Texas is buck wild, bro”

On the latest episode of The Joe Rogan Experience, the polemical comedian complained about California’s coronavirus policies and threatened to move to Texas.

The discussion was part of a broader conversation about the decision by LA County officials to extend stay-at-home orders through July. Other counties in California are cleared to reopen, though Rogan isn’t considering a same-state relocation. He said,

“If California continues to be this restrictive, I don’t know if this is a good place to live. First of all, it’s extremely expensive — the taxes are ridiculous. If they really say we can’t do stand-up until 2022 or something, I might jet. I’m not kidding. I don’t need to be here.”

Afterwards, Rogan called MADtv alum Bryan Callen, who quickly advanced a conspiracy theory that stay-at-home orders were an effort by Democrats to steal elections through mail-in votes. There is no evidence that voting by mail favors one party or another, and just days ago Republican Mark Garcia won a California special election that was decided almost entirely by mail-in ballots.

ARIES:

What’s your motivation behind the given action? Do you want to take the fast road to fame without actually putting in the work? The cards are reminding you that shortcuts will only take you this far. Spend some time meditating on your true path. Reflect upon what you want to create in this life. It is through inner alignment that you will be able to pave the way forward. Tip: Realign with your true path.

TAURUS:

Loneliness gets the better of the best of us. Breathe into what’s coming up without attaching a story to it or trying to forge a connection with people who are not good for your mental health. What you want to do instead is lean on your soul crew for support: the people who love you unconditionally through life’s many storms. A virtual pyjama party could be the answer to getting out of your funk. Not in the mood to interact with others? Consider the mantra ‘headphones in, world out’. Tip: Reach out to your soul crew for support.

GEMINI:

We can either marinate in our miseries or move the stagnant energy and bring about a shift. The power to turn the wheel has always been within you. You just have to be willing to tap into it. The cards are also warning you against excesses of all kinds. What does the word ‘addiction’ bring to mind? Do you find yourself turning to unhealthy food or substances when inner turmoil gets the better of you? Remember, consuming is not just about sculpting your body and acquiring enviable abs. It is directly responsible for your mental and emotional state of being. Tip: Be mindful of what you are putting onto your plate and into

Tip: Examine your relationship with pleasure.

LIBRA:

Things are getting lonely around the Libra HQ. As a sociable air sign, you miss putting on your favourite lipstick and painting the town red with your best crew. Instead of focusing on what you can’t do, redirect your energy towards what you can. A FaceTime date with the bestie who lives a thousand miles is a good way to get out of that funk. In the mood to connect with the whole crew? Tip: Connect with your soul crew virtually.

SCORPIO:

The French don’t say I miss you. That’s just too mainstream, you know? They whisper ‘tu me manques’ which translates to ‘you are missing from me’—a mood that accurately describes that dream-like state in which you are existing today. What’s keeping you going: the hope this nightmare will soon be over and that you and your amour will wake up in each other’s arms. Scorpios who are in the early stages of a relationship are being encouraged to let their guard down. There is no time like the present to say the three magic words. Tip: Here’s to hope that keeps us all alive!

SAGITTARIUS:

The world is undergoing a massive shift right now. The rules that applied to us once are slowly loosening their grip on us, making way for a new reality. A new earth. Where are you vibrating at, Sagittarius? Are you welcoming the energy of change or are you unwilling to let go of the old ways? Slow down. Reassess every aspect of your life. This will help you value and appreciate more of what you have instead of chasing the things that are not adding any value to your life.

Tip: Reassess every aspect of your life.

CAPRICORN:

Often, we dismiss our opinions or shy away from standing in our truth for the sake of making peace. But this false sense of calm rests on a shaky foundation, one that will give way eventually. The collateral damage of this catastrophe? Immeasurable. What the cards are urging you to do is pause, breathe, and muster up the courage you need to share your side of the story. Tip: Find the courage you need to stand in your truth.

AQUARIUS:

Dreams, visions, signs, and symbols. Welcome to the new normal, Aquarius! You are never alone. Spirit is always talking to you in mysterious ways, urging you to rediscover your true origins. A newbie in the world of spirituality? The transmissions of a guru or mentor could help you look beyond the veil when your logical mind gets the better of you. As Baba Ram Dass puts it, “Start from where you are—not where you wish you were. The work you’re doing becomes your path.” Tip: You’re in the mood to transcend your physical reality and activate your third eye.

PISCES:

Sometimes we put on a garb of being cool and composed so as to prevent others from seeing how vulnerable we truly feel. Could this be you, Pisces, and what is it that you are protecting yourself from? Start by acknowledging that you have needs—needs that are not being met. This will give you the courage to speak your mind. Their willingness (or unwillingness) to meet you halfway will give you the answer you’re looking for. Tip: Acknowledge that you have needs that are not being met.