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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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RBI extends moratorium on loans for another 3 months till Aug

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday extended the moratorium on payment of loans by another three months till August to provide much-needed relief to borrowers whose income has been hit due to the coronavirus crisis.

In March, the central bank had allowed a three-month moratorium on payment of all term loans due between March 1, 2020, and May 31, 2020.

Accordingly, the re-payment schedule and all subsequent due dates, as also the tenor for such loans, were shifted across the board by three months.

As a result of this moratorium, individuals' EMI repayments of loans taken were not deducted from their bank accounts, providing much-needed liquidity.

The EMI payments will restart only once the moratorium time period expires on August 31.

TN not for resumption of flight service from May 25

CHENNAI, MAY 22 (PTI): With the spike in Coronavirus cases weighing heavily upon it, the Tamil Nadu government is not in favour of restarting domestic air services connecting cities in the state till this month-end and might take up the matter with the Centre, an official said on Friday.

As the union civil aviation ministry gears up to resume the services from Monday, Tamil Nadu wants the plans deferred for now.

Officials in the State Secretariat said that the stand taken by Chief Minister K Palaniswami against resumption of regular air services till May 31 remains.

"The government may take up the issue with the Centre," an official told PTI.

The immediate concern of the government is to screen all the passengers arriving to the state and keep track of the infected, if any.

The sheer volume of passengers at the airports would make the health machinery concentrate more on the inbound visitors, officials said.

Since the last ten days, the state health department detected 66 positive cases among returnees from abroad by flights and other states by trains. They were all quarantined.

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Govt announces partial reopening of schools and colleges

ALL COLLEGES AND SENIOR CLASSES IN SCHOOLS TO GET BACK ON TRACK STARTING 15 JUNE

SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

Educational institutions across the State were shut down on 17 March, and now, finally, the State Government has decided to begin the process of returning students to classrooms. The reopening is going to be partial, and on 15 June next month, a full 90 days since they were closed, school will resume for senior students – classes IX to XII – as well as all colleges and universities here.

Addressing the press conference here this afternoon, Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha mentioned that the department has been



working hard to repair the setback suffered by education sector due to the lockdown.

The Minister announced today that the State government has decided to reopen educational institutions in the State from 15 June onwards.

This was decided at a meeting with the CM and evaluating the COVID-19 situation.

The department has decided to start with classes IX to XII in schools and colleges.

He informed that there

will no morning assembly in schools and classes will follow strict social distancing norms. He mentioned that classes from kindergarten to class VIII will still remain suspended till further notice and continue with the online mode of education.

Mr Lepcha added that colleges will run in two shifts so that classrooms are less crowded.

The Minister added that while regular classes will resume in colleges, students

will be encouraged to attend classes physically only if the online mode, which will continue, was not proving adequate for them.

While students requiring to use the laboratories have no alternatives, others, the Minister said, could consider coming to college only to clarify doubts with their teachers and otherwise stay with the online classes.

He stressed that online teaching will continue to be

a regular feature in schools and colleges and added that the department also plans to start community radio in the more remote areas with poor telecom network to reach stu-

lockdown and was still in the process of finding more devices and digital mediums to reach all students.

The Education Department and educational insti-

KEY POINTS OF REOPENING PLAN

- Schools will reopen only for classes 9 till 12.
- All colleges will resume regular classes.
- No morning assembly will be held in schools.
- Classes will be held following social distancing norms.
- No holiday on Saturday.
- Final exams to be held in Feb 2021.
- Masks compulsory for students and staff.
- Strict social distancing norms and standard operating procedures to be followed.
- CBSE board exam of remaining subjects will be held from 01 to 13 July in the state and exams will be held in schools and not centres.

dents through digital education. Community radio will also help during emergencies and not only in education, he said.

The Minister stated that the department has used all resources and mediums to reach out to students through digital platforms during the

tutions in the State now have a big responsibility on their shoulders to help students cover-up for learning lost to the lockdown.

Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, GP Upadhyaya, in turn mentioned

turn to pg 02

Special train for Sikkimese leaves from Chandigarh

NEW DELHI, 22 MAY (IPR):

The special train for Sikkimese people from Chandigarh has started its journey in its scheduled time. The train will make stoppages at Ghaziabad, Moradabad and Lucknow before reaching New Delhi at 9pm tonight, and will finally make its journey towards NJP.

The office of the Resident Commissioner, Sikkim House, New Delhi, has made all necessary correspondence and arrangements to ensure that all the people stranded in Delhi and adjoining areas are accommodated in the special train, duly following all the required formalities.

As per information received from the office of the RC, 507 people reported for screening at New Delhi out of the expected 921. Special buses were arranged to ferry the



people to the railway station.

The screening started at 8 am and closed at 5.30 pm. Sikkim House provided lunch and snack pack. The coordinating team which was assigned lent all the necessary assistance to the people and seven coordinators will be travelling

with the returnees. All the people have been advised to keep the doors locked. Railway authorities have been requested for ensuring safety of the train. UP govt has been requested for smooth boarding at Ghaziabad, Moradabad and Lucknow stations.

COVID-19 death toll climbs to 3,583 in India



NEW DELHI, MAY 22 (PTI): The death toll due to COVID-19 rose to 3,583, while the number of cases climbed to 1,18,447 in the country, registering an increase of 148 deaths and 6,088 cases since Thursday 8 am, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The number of active COVID-19 cases stood

at 66,330, while 48,533 people have recovered and one patient has migrated, it said.

"Thus, around 40.97 per cent patients have recovered so far," a senior health ministry official said. The total confirmed cases includes foreigners.

Of the 148 deaths reported since Thurs-

day morning, 64 were in Maharashtra, 24 in Gujarat, 18 from Delhi, 11 from Uttar Pradesh, seven from Tamil Nadu, six from West Bengal, five from Telangana, four from Rajasthan, three from Madhya Pradesh, two from Jammu and Kashmir and one each from Bihar, Odisha, Haryana and Punjab.

RBI ramps up economic support; cuts interest rates, extends loan moratorium

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI):

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday slashed interest rates, extended moratorium on loan repayments and allowed banks to lend more to corporates in an effort to support the economy which is likely to contract for the first time in over four decades.

The benchmark repurchase (repo) rate was cut by 40 basis points to 4 per cent, Governor Shaktikanta Das said announcing the decisions taken by the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) that met ahead of its scheduled meeting in early June.

Consequently, the reverse repo rate was reduced to 3.35 per cent from 3.75 per cent.

He said the MPC had voted to maintain its accommodative stance, implying more rate cuts in the future if need arises.

The RBI supplement-



ed the interest rate cut by extending by three months the permission given to all banks to give a three-month moratorium on payment of monthly instalments on all outstanding loans, providing relief to home and auto buyers as well as real estate sector where construction activities are already at a standstill.

The moratorium on interest on working cap-

ital was also extended by three months.

Also, interest accumulated for the six-month moratorium period can be converted into a term loan, Das said.

Further, bank exposure to corporates has been raised to 30 per cent of the group's networth from the current limit of 25 per cent, a move that will allow lenders to give larger loans to companies.

In its first official forecast for economic growth, the central bank has said the gross domestic product (GDP) is likely to contract in FY21 (April 2020 to March 2021).

Das said the inflation outlook is highly uncertain due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed concern over elevated prices of pulses.

turn to pg 02

Mizoram cabinet grants industry status to sports

AIZAWL, MAY 22 (PTI): To give a boost to the sports sector in the state, the Mizoram Cabinet on Friday granted industry status to sports.

Speaking to PTI after the cabinet meeting, state Sports minister Robert Romawia Royte said the cabinet has cleared the proposal of the Sports and Youth Service department to grant sports an industry status.

He said it was a significant move to take forwards the segment in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

He hailed the decision as "historic" and "unprecedented" development in the history of Mizoram, which will usher in rapid as well as large scale development in various fields of sports.

"This is a clear show of the

states commitment towards holistic development of sports. We hope to attract more private companies to invest in sporting activities as Mizoram has evolved conducive sports eco-system," Royte said.

He claimed that Mizoram was the first state to grant industry status to sports.

He said that the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and other big industrial bodies have been demanding industry status to sports since a long time.

Royte, who also holds Tourism portfolio, said that the state government had last year recognised tourism as an industry so as to include investors in the field.

According to an official, the

meeting of the council of ministers chaired by chief minister Zoramthanga also approved the "proposal on economy measures to be adopted by the government of Mizoram in the wake of COVID-19," which focuses mainly on austerity measure to fight back economic slowdown caused by the outbreak of novel coronavirus.

Among others, the cabinet also approved "Draft Mizoram government employees (Counting of Past Service) Rules, 2020," "Mizoram Goods & Services Tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020" and "Proposal for allotment of land for construction of Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP) at Khawzawl by carving out an area from land allotted to the power and electricity department," he said.

My take on Economic Package

PERMINDER JEET KAUR

Coronavirus, also called COVID-19, has caused a crisis for the global economy and markets. As innumerable lives are lost across the globe, the uncertainties of future are mounting. From developed nation to developing nations the social and economic impact of the pandemic is immense. Economies of several countries' were slowing before the pandemic, and now COVID-19 threatens to push them into a steep recession. One such name is Japan, a leading globally economy, that is reporting recession owing to the global scenario.

In response to this crisis, various governments and central banks across the continents have enacted sweeping and sizable fiscal and monetary stimulus measures to counteract the disruption caused by coronavirus. To combat the disruption and to reduce the impact, United States, the world's largest economy, announced broad range of steps as US Congress passed trillions of dollars in fiscal programs, while the U.S. central bank, added trillions of dollars in monetary stimulus. Among European nations, Germany extended aggressive fiscal stimulus and relief measures and is believed to be the largest of any country in Europe in overall size and as a percent of the country's overall GDP.

India Inc too had its demand of support to improve the business confidence; and a stimulus was demanded to enable the industry and trade prepare self to face the global pandemic and minimise the damage.

India initiated its support mechanism on 27 Mar, 2020, as the Reserve

Bank of India lowered its repo rate. The bank injected \$49 billion into the financial system by a combination of loosening capital restrictions and reserve ratios, as well as launching a "targeted long term repo operation," (TLTRO). This was followed by series of measures to support states, funds for smaller financial institutions, moratorium for banks. A day prior to RBI, its on March 26, 2020, India announced a \$22.5 billion spending plan to help the nation's poor better cope with the pandemic, that included free grains and other staples for three months, insurance for healthcare workers, onetime cash payment to 30 million senior citizens and much more.

Covid 19 had its impact on the economic activities in India and all sectors of Indian industry took the hit. Responding to Industry demand and the need of the hour Govt of India announced a 20-lakh crore economic package, equivalent to 10% of GDP; the same was announced in five tranches. The 1st Tranche of Rs 5,94,550 crore encompassed special liquidity scheme for NBFCs, HFCs & MGIS worth Rs 30,000 crore to an emergency working capital facility for businesses of Rs 3 lakh crore with a subordinate debt for stressed MSMEs of Rs 20,000 crore and a fund of fund for MSMEs of Rs 50,000 crore. This is expected to provide much-needed relief to the MSMEs, micro finance institutions, housing finance companies, stressed real estate and construction sectors to mitigate the impact. By assuring 100 per cent government guarantee on Rs 3 lakh crore collateral-free loans to the MSMEs for a four-year term and one-year

moratorium is a major step towards reviving the MSME sector which creates 11 crore jobs and accounts for 30 per cent of the country's GDP. The Rs 3 lakh crore collateral free loans for the MSMEs on guarantee from the government would have a big time multiplier impact and would generate economic activity of at least up to Rs 10 lakh crore, not only retaining the jobs but also creating additional employment.

Second Tranche of Rs 3,10,000 crore, aimed at providing additional credit through Kisan Credit Credit with Rs 2 lakh crore, arrangement of additional emergency WCF through NABARD, Rs 30,000 crore with free food grain supply for migrant workers for 2 months and special credit facility for street vendors worth Rs 5,000 crore and much more. The third tranche of Rs 1,50,000 crore laid its focus on rural sector empowerment as focus was on beekeeping, Promotion of herbal cultivation, animal husbandry infrastructure fund, Micro food enterprises and allocated fund towards PM Matsya Sampada Yojana with additional agri infrastructure of Rs 1 lakh crore. The fourth and the fifth trench focused on PM Garib Kalyan Package with Rs 1,70,000 crore and RBI measures, Rs 8,01,603 crore to provide relief to various segments of the country.

The mega package announced is all-encompassing, going well beyond the fiscal stimulus. The aim of the reforms leads to the 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan' (Self-Reliant India). There is something for almost everyone from marginal farmers to street vendors. The measures are aimed at providing

both the immediate relief in the form of free food grains supply to those with or without ration cards and the short to medium term support. The 'One Nation One Card' PDS portability for migrant workers, would greatly dissuade the workers seeking to migrate to their home towns. Working capital under Mudra loan and promotion of digital payment amongst the informal workers would empower the informal but critical sector of the economy. It would prove to be catalyst step for formalising the informal sections of the society into the economy. Extension of the credit linked subsidy scheme up to 31 Mar, 2021 for the middle income group would not only provide relief to them but also be a great demand booster for a host of industries related to real estate. Increased credit availability to the farm and allied rural sectors through extension of PM Kisan card would also play a critical role in reviving the country's economic growth.

The vision laid by Prime Minister is highly praise worthy in order to fulfil the dream of making the 21st century and way forward that the country to become Self-Reliant (AtmaNirbhar Bharat) and time to become "vocal for our local" products and make them global. This is very bold step to encourage domestic however, there is a need to do more, as AtmaNirbhar will mean moving from just 'Made in India' to 'Made by India'. For North East of India this is an opportunity to take advantage of and lead the way forward for rest of India.

[The writer is Director, East and North East, ASSOCHAM]

Sanitization drive at Yangang



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

BAC Yangang under the guidance of BDO Yangang, Kishor Thapa, initiated a sanitization drive in various areas under Yangang sub-division today, a press release informs.

The team comprising

of staff of Yangang BAC, representatives from all GPUs and Panchayat President conducted the drive at various public places, offices and GPUs under Yangang sub-division. The team also distributed hand sanitizers and masks to the public of these GPUs.

Tributes paid to victims of 2010 air crash in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, MAY 22 (PTI): Tributes were paid on Friday to the victims of the 2010 crash which claimed the lives of 158 people on board an Air India aircraft after it overshot the runway at the international airport here.

Karnataka Fisheries Minister Kota Srinivas, who is Dakshina Kannada district-in-charge, placed a wreath and offered floral tributes at the memorial for the victims, named '22/5' at Tannirbavi here on the tenth anniversary of the one of the worst air crashes in the country.

Dakshina Kannada

Deputy Commissioner Sindhu B Rupesh, Member of Parliament Nalin Kumar Kateel and city police Commissioner PS Harsha were among the others who offered floral tributes at the memorial.

In one of the worst disasters in the country's aviation history, Air India Express IX 812 flight from Dubai overshot the runway, crashed into the gorge bordering the airport and burst into flames in the early hours of May 22, 2010, killing 152 passengers and all the six crew members while eight passengers had a miraculous escape.

RBI ramps...

He also said there is a need to review import duties to moderate prices.

Headline inflation may remain firm in the first half of the year and may ease in the second half. Inflation may fall below 4 per cent in the third or fourth quarter of the current fiscal, according to the Governor.

This is the second straight cut in interest rates in two months. On March 27, RBI had cut interest rates by 75 basis points.

"After extensive discussions, the MPC voted unanimously for a reduction in policy repo rate and for maintaining the accommodative stance of the monetary policy as long as necessary to revive growth and to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 while ensuring that inflation remains within the target," Das said.

The central bank will remain vigilant and in battle readiness to address dynamics of unknown future arising from COVID-19 outbreak, he added.

ISKCON provides meals to returnees



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

ISKCON Gangtok continues to provide food to those in need and since 05 May it has started serving 300 packets of lunch to returnees at

Rangpo entrance, a press release informs.

It is also serving hot packed lunch to frontline workers like doctors, nurses, medical staff, police, government officials and STNM transport staff as well. ISK-

CON Gangtok had started its service on 30 March.

Even though there is no support coming in, we are continuing our project to serve those returning home, the release mentions.

Mount Distilleries sanitizes Majhitar quarantine centre



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

The new quarantine centre, Majhitar Secondary School was sanitized by Mount Distilleries Limited, Maji-

tar, East Sikkim, today, a press release informs. The Mount Distilleries Limited team has been providing these services from the beginning of the lockdown and today

they sanitized Majhitar Sec School. The school head, TT Bhutia, teacher, Hari Sharma and some staff members are volunteering at the quarantine centre.

UP govt invokes ESMA for 6 months

LUCKNOW, MAY 22 (PTI): The Uttar Pradesh government has invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) banning strikes in all departments and corporations under it for a period of six months.

The ESMA, as it is commonly known, gives the police right to arrest without a warrant anybody violating the Act's provisions. It has been invoked after taking permission from Governor Anandiben Patel and a notification in this regard has been issued by Mukul Singh, Additional Chief Secretary, a senior official said on Friday. "The Governor is

pleased to prohibit, for a period of six months from the date of publication of this notification in the Gazette, strikes in any public service in connection with the affairs of the state of Uttar Pradesh and any service under a corporation owned or controlled by state Government and any service under a local authority", it said.

Under ESMA, employees in a long list of "essential services" like post and telegraph, railway, airport and port operations are prohibited from going on strike.

The Act mandates imprisonment for a term which may ex-

tend to one year, or fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both, to any person who instigates a strike which is illegal under this Act.

Toeing the Centre's line, the Uttar Pradesh government had last month decided to put on hold dearness allowance (DA) increase for its 16 lakh employees. The DA increase was due from January 1, 2020.

The state government also decided not to pay the DA instalments which will be due from July 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021, a government order issued here said.

TN not for...

As per the government guidelines on COVID-19 prevention and management, all entering the state should be scanned for the virus and if found to have symptoms, would be taken to government facilities for treatment.

Those who don't show symptoms would be home quarantined.

During his interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi through video conferencing on May 11, Palaniswami had pitched against restarting air and rail services in Tamil Nadu till May end.

He had cited the increase in COVID-19 cases in the state to back his demand that both rail and air services should not be resumed till May 31, 2020. Tamil Nadu has so far reported 13,967 cases of COVID 19, one of the highest in the country.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had on Wednesday said domestic passenger flight services will resume from May 25 in a calibrated manner.

All scheduled commercial passenger flights have been suspended in the country since March 25, when the Modi government imposed a lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Meanwhile, an official at the airport here said the schedule of passenger flights that will arrive here after resumption of domestic air services was yet to be received.

Officials are gearing up for operations at the airport here which has only handled cargo services since the lockdown was enforced on March 25, he said.

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Govt announces...

that education was also an essential service so the department was putting forth its best efforts to reach out to students through online classes and every other possible medium during the lockdown.

However, he admitted that despite its best efforts, not every student who would otherwise have been in a classroom can be reached.

He informed that the department has also sent pre-loaded e-content in laptops and pen-drives to different areas in the State where students do not have access to stable net-connectivity or devices.

Mr Upadhyaya mentioned that the department has also arranged online counselling sessions for students to help them cope with the psychological stress of having to stay indoors for such an extended duration.

Responding to media queries, the Minister mentioned that the department has requested District Collectors to handover all schools to the department by 10 June as many schools are currently being used as facility quarantine centres.

He added that all returnees from different parts of the country will reach Sikkim by 31 May so the campuses being so used will be free by 10 June.

He mentioned that after handing over of the schools, the campuses will be sanitized and disinfected and made ready for students.

He informed that the first 10 days of the reopening will be used to evaluate how the online module worked for the students and whether they required extra-classes to catch up.

He informed that there will be no morning assembly in schools and no holidays on Saturday.

He added that the department has decided to conduct annual examination in February 2021 instead of Dec 2020 and that winter vacations were also likely to be shortened.

"We are making the announcement about the reopening of educational institutions in advance so that students of universities who are presently outside can return in time as they will have to go for quarantine and testing process upon their return," he said.

The Minister mentioned that online classes will continue for classes VI to VIII and mentioned that the department was also in the process for upgrading its cloud-based app to make it more like a virtual classroom for students.

It is informed that CBSE board examination of remaining subjects will be held from 01 to 13 July in the state and students will take their examinations in their respective schools and not centres.

~ SummitTIMES ~
CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

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3 donate blood after hearing of shortage in blood bank

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

After seeing a social media post by Gaurav

Rai informing about the lack of blood at STNM Hospital blood bank, three persons came forward to donate blood today.

Gopal Prasad of Rangpo, Dipesh Rai of Rhenock and Uttam Khawas of Kalimpong donated blood at STNM Hospital today.

Contribution towards CM's Relief Fund



GANGTOK, 22 MAY (IPR): Chairperson, Sikkim State Co-operative Supply and Marketing Federation Limited (SIM-FED) and MLA Salghari Zoom Constituency, Sunita Gajmer contributed Rs 1,66,821 towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund on behalf of the following:-

1. Jorethang Sr Secondary School.
2. South West Taxi Drivers Association.
3. Naya Bazar Secondary School.
4. Zoom GPU and
5. Laxmi Chettri.

She handed over the cheque formally to the Secretary to Chief Minister, SD Dhakal in his office at Tashiling Secretariat this afternoon.

The MLA is taking all necessary steps to fight against the COVID-19 and the people of her constituency are generously contributing to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

The Secretary expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards all the contributors for showing their generosity in the hour of need.

Six prominent Indian-Americans named to Biden-Sanders unity task forces

BY LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, MAY 22 (PTI):

Six prominent Indian-Americans from diverse fields have been named to the Biden-Sanders unity task forces announced by former vice president Joe Biden, who is the presumptive presidential nominee of the opposition Democratic Party.

Congresswoman from Seattle Pramila Jayapal and former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy have been named co-chairs of the Health Care Task Force. The unity task force is a result of Senator Bernie Sanders' endorsement of the Biden campaign.

Climate change activist Varshini Prakash, 26, from Boston is the youngest member of these task forces alongside Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 30, and environmental justice advocate Catherine Flowers, 58.

Executive director of the Sunrise Movement, a leading organisation focused on climate change among young people, Prakash will serve on the Climate Change group. Former Secretary of State John Kerry is co-chair of this task force. Legal luminary Chirag Bains has been named a co-chairs Criminal Justice Reform Task Force. Former acting assistant attorney general Vanita Gupta, according to a statement issued by the Biden campaign.

Eminent Indian-American economist and former lobbyist Sonal Shah has been named to the Economy Task Force. "Honoured to be serving on the unity task forces. Look forward to winning in Nov!" she said.

Biden, 77, is the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party. He is set to be formally nominated by the Democratic National Convention in Wisconsin in August. Once nominated, Biden will vie for the White House against 73-year-old Donald Trump, the incumbent President who is seeking re-election in the November 3 poll. Biden and Sanders have named a diverse group of respected leaders and experts to Biden-Sanders unity task forces to explore possible policy initiatives in six areas covering: climate change, criminal justice reform, economy, education, health care, and immigration, a media statement said.

The task forces will meet in advance of the Democratic National Convention to make recommendations to the

DNC Platform Committee and to Biden directly, it said.

Building upon the work of the Democratic campaigns to date, the ultimate goal of the unity task forces is to develop the most successful possible agenda for Democrats in 2020, it added.

In a blog post, Prakash attributed her being named to the Climate Crisis Task Force to Senator Sanders.

I am grateful for Bernie Sanders believing in me, I trust his political leadership, and believe this is an opportunity for our movement to continue to advance our fight for a Green New Deal, she said.

"Our nomination on this task force shows Joe Biden and his campaign are beginning to take seriously that power and the significance of young people within the party if we want to defeat Trump this November, Prakash said. We cannot afford another four years of Donald Trump pushing us backward, and I believe in our movement's ability to begin winning a Green New Deal under a President Biden, she added.

Meanwhile, according to a new Fox News poll on the presidential race, former vice president Biden leads incumbent President Trump by eight percentage points.

The Republican-leaning Fox News in its latest presidential poll survey found that in the 2020 ballot test, Biden leads Trump by 48-40 per cent.

"Biden's eight-point advantage is outside the poll's margin of error: However, given that 11 per cent are undecided or plan to vote for someone else, neither candidate hits 50 per cent support. The race could go either way, Fox concluded. According to the poll, among voters who are extremely motivated about voting this fall, Biden has a 12-point advantage (53-41 per cent). More Biden supporters (69 per cent) than Trump supporters (63 per cent) feel extremely motivated to vote.

Trump leads by seven points among men and by 30 among rural whites. He won both groups by larger margins in 2016 (11 and 37 points respectively). Biden leads by 20 points among women and 64 points among blacks, it said, adding that the survey of 1,207 registered voters nationwide was conducted between May 17 and 20 and has a 2.5 point margin of error.

Student body meets Minister seeking assistance for students

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

Members of All Sikkim Democratic Students' Organisation called on Education Minister, KN Lepcha, today and apprised him about problems being faced by students in continuing their education because of the lockdown and the online mode adopted in lieu of classroom learning.

The distress is especially acute among students living in remote areas and belonging to economically weaker families, an ASDSO press release underlines.

The organization submitted a memorandum to the Minister demanding that electronic

gadgets be provided to students in need, directions be passed to ensure that there were no power cuts, better internet coverage be ensured across the State, and financial aid for students living in rented accommodations to pursue education.

An ASDSO press release informs that the Minister agreed to fulfill all the demands from his office except the one seeking financial assistance for students to be able to pay rent. This demand, he however, assured, will be taken up with the Chief Minister on Saturday itself.

The meeting also discussed upgradation of colleges and universities

in Sikkim to absorb all the students of state since the option of going outside has been curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Minister said the process for this has already been initiated.

Regarding online classes and examinations, the Minister informed that students who couldn't attend the online classes and examinations will be considered after reopening of institutions and will be provided a platform for offline mode of examination.

The Minister also assured that the Department will be looking closer into the condition of students at the ground level.

20 new COVID-19 cases in Assam; total rises to 230



GUWAHATI, MAY 22 (PTI):

Twenty more people tested positive for COVID-19 in Assam, taking the total number of cases to 230, state Health and Family Welfare Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

All the new COVID-19 patients were already lodged at different quarantine centres in Guwahati, Tezpur, Jorhat and Silchar, he said in a series of tweets.

Of the total 230 COVID-19 cases in the state, 169 are active cases, Sarma said in a tweet.

While four patients have died due to the deadly virus, 54 have been cured and were discharged from hospitals, he added.

Besides, three more have migrated to other states, the minister said.

"Alert ~ Eight cases

of #COVID19 confirmed... Total count 230; active cases are at 169," he said.

Of these cases, six from Cachar district have travel history from outside the state and they were already under quarantine, Sarma said.

Of the remaining two, one each are patients of Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital (MMCH) in Guwahati and Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH), he added.

Earlier, the minister informed that six people, who are lodged at Tezpur quarantine centre, from Sonitpur district tested positive for COVID-19.

Sarma also said two people from Silchar quarantine centre, one each from Cachar and Hailakandi districts, while another two are from Sivasagar and staying at Jorhat quarantine centre

also tested positive.

In a separate tweet, he said, "Two persons at Zonal Quarantine Centre at Tezpur Univ test #COVID19 +. 1 each from Dhakuakhana & Udalguri."

During the day, Sarma inaugurated an intensive care unit (ICU) dedicated for COVID-19 patients at Nagaon Civil Hospital.

To screen all the people coming from outside the state, the government has set up five zonal screening camps, besides those already existing at the district headquarters and local levels.

Kokrajhar has zonal screening camp for Lower Assam districts, Tezpur for North Assam districts, Jorhat for Upper Assam districts, Guwahati for Central Assam districts and Silchar for Barak Valley districts.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

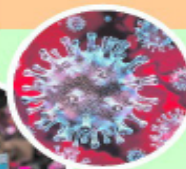
- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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



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

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

Trump lashes out at scientists whose findings contradict him

WASHINGTON, MAY 22 (AP): "A Trump enemy statement, he said of one study.

A political hit job, he said of another.

As President Donald Trump pushes to reopen the country despite warnings from doctors about the consequences of moving too quickly during the coronavirus crisis, he has been lashing out at scientists whose conclusions he doesn't like.

Twice this week, Trump has not only dismissed the findings of studies, but suggested without evidence that their authors were motivated by politics and out to undermine his efforts to roll back coronavirus restrictions.

First it was a study funded in part by his own government's National Institutes of Health that raised alarms about the use of hydroxychloroquine, finding higher overall mortality in coronavirus patients who took the drug while in Veterans Administration hospitals.

Trump and many of his allies had been trumpeting the drug as a miracle cure and Trump this week revealed that he has been taking it to try to ward off the virus despite an FDA warning last month that it should only be used in hospital settings or clinical trials because of the risk of serious side effects, including life-threatening heart problems.

If you look at the one survey, the only bad survey, they were giving it to people that were in very bad shape. They were very old, almost dead," Trump told reporters Tuesday.

It was a Trump enemy statement." He offered similar pushback Thursday to a new study from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

It found that more than 61 per cent of COVID-19 infections and 55 per cent of reported deaths nearly 36,000 people could have been prevented had social distancing measures been put in place one week sooner. Trump has repeatedly defended his administration's handling of the virus in the face of persistent criticism that he acted too slowly.

Columbia's an institution that's very

liberal," Trump told reporters Thursday. "I think it's just a political hit job, you want to know the truth.

Trump has long been skeptical of mainstream science dismissing man-made climate change as a hoax, suggesting that noise from wind turbines causes cancer, and claiming that exercise can deplete a body's finite amount of energy. It's part of a larger skepticism of expertise and backlash against elites that has become increasingly popular among Trump's conservative base.

But undermining Americans' trust in the integrity and objectivity of scientists is especially dangerous during a pandemic when the public is relying on its leaders to develop policies based on the best available information, said Larry Gostin, a Georgetown University law professor who is an expert in public health.

If the president is politicizing science, then, if he's discounting health experts, then the public is going to be fearful and confused," Gostin said, calling it dismaying. The White House rejected that thinking, noting that Trump has followed his administration's public health officials' recommendations through much of the crisis.

Any suggestion that the president does not value scientific data or the important work of scientists is patently false as evidenced by the many data-driven decision he has made to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including cutting off travel early from highly-infected populations, expediting vaccine development, issuing the 15-day and later 30-day guidance to 'slow the spread,' and providing governors with a clear, safe road map to opening up America again," said White House spokesman Judd Deere.

Yet Trump has made clear that, at least when it comes to hydroxychloroquine, he has prioritized anecdotal evidence, including a letter he told reporters he'd received from a doctor in Westchester, New York, claiming success with the drug.

Cultures Live

...provided we don't stifle them

Because some things need reiteration from time to time, we return here to arguments that have been tabled often and worries that have been raised frequently because the deliberations continue remain open, and will for some more time.

Turn to any corner of the world and one comes across voices of protest or groans of concern from a culture under threat, a way of life nearing extinction, a lifestyle on the brink. While there are always external elements like the influence of globalisation and the pressure to homogenise which eat away at the edifice of cultural uniqueness, the biggest threat comes from those who refuse to let cultures breathe - those who view it as a relic which needs to be preserved in the purest form as imagined or decided by them. Unfortunately for such groups, cultures are living systems which need to be nurtured, not pickled. But 'preserving' is easier since nurturing would entail allowing a culture to grow and that would go against ill-informed beliefs that cultures are perfect on which any growth is a blemish. Such mindsets refuse to accept that culture is not something that can be pickled and preserved as a museum piece for posterity. Culture, because it is about a people, is vibrant, alive and contemporary. It is spontaneous, almost instinctive, and not something that is learnt; it is imbibed. Since culture forms a part of evolution, it is also subject to fresh interpretations, nuances and relevance.

Because culture is about people, it cannot survive on state patronage alone - that would be relegating it to the status of a museum display. Some years ago, members of the Museums Association of India conferred in Gangtok. The focus of that conference was "Intangible Heritage - Preservation & Portrayal." In layman's terms, they were speaking of ecomuseology, the science, or rather the attempt, to allow cultures to breathe and thrive unencumbered in their natural habitats. But even this comes with its pitfalls. In the Journal of Indian Museums released at the conference, the editorial spoke of the "very amateurish and vulgar commercialisation" of culture that one sees in the tourism sector of Rajasthan. What was true of Rajasthan is true for Sikkim as well. The message - preservation of cultures should not come at the cost of reducing vibrant lifestyles into caricatures. This can happen only if the people to whom the culture belongs want to nurture it. For the same reason, if a people reject their Culture as ripe for extinction, no amount of preservation helps. Yet, a culture should not be dismissed even before one has understood it. It is important that the repository of culture is passed on to the next generation to nurture and craft as it feels right. And yes, people can discard a culture if they want to, but only after they have understood it and decided that it does not serve their purpose any more. What the current holders of culture can do is pass it on to the next generation in an as unadulterated a form as possible. What the younger generation, equipped with its better education, can do is research deeper into their roots. Then, even if the physical form of cultures dwindles away, at least the records will survive for future generations, if it feels so inclined, to revive.

What is required of the establishment is to provide the support which allows these aspirations to manifest.

Megacity slums are incubators of disease – but coronavirus response isn't helping the billion people who live in them

ROBERT MUGGAH & RICHARD FLORIDA
theconversation.com

Having ravaged some of the world's wealthiest cities, the coronavirus pandemic is now spreading into the megacities of developing countries. Sprawling urban areas in Brazil, Nigeria and Bangladesh are all seeing COVID-19 infections rise rapidly.

We study the fragility and resilience of such cities and their urban peripheries, with the aim of encouraging data-driven policy decisions. Given its deadly trajectory in marginalized communities of hard-hit New York and London, coronavirus may well devastate much poorer cities.

Particularly concerning are the slum areas that are home to roughly a billion people – one in seven people on Earth. Characterized by insecure property rights, low-quality housing, limited basic services and poor sanitation, these informal settlements aggregate risk factors that accelerate the spread of infection.

Yet, our research finds, many residents of slums and squatter settlements are not getting the help they need to survive the coronavirus pandemic.

DENSITY AND POVERTY

Overcrowding is one reason slums are known incubators of disease. Informal settlements are typically 10 times denser than neighboring areas of the same city.

The Dharavi slum in central Mumbai, for example, has some 97,000 residents per square mile, compared to 11,500 people per square mile elsewhere in the city. It is far harder to practice physical distancing, at home or on the street, in such close quarters.

Most of the world's poorest urban neighborhoods additionally lack clean potable water and a private bathroom, making lifesaving practices like hand-washing a challenge.

To get to work – a necessity for those with very low incomes and no savings – many people in slums travel jammed together in vans and buses over long distances that are perfect vectors for disease.

For several reasons – among them little access to health care – people living in informal settlements also suffer disproportionately from underlying health conditions such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension, according to a 2016 special edition of the Lancet on slums. All of these problems can exacerbate respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19.

RIO DE JANEIRO

In Brazil, which is fast becoming a global COVID-19 epicenter, at least 1.5 million of Rio de Janeiro's 6.7 million residents live in the city's 1,000 "favelas," or slum settlements.

Many favela residents lack piped water or the resources even to buy soap. But Brazil's national government, which denies the severity of its outbreak, is offering very little pandemic aid. That's left community organizations to deliver food and hygiene products to Rio's poorest.

Hundreds of favela residents have already tested positive for COVID-19. But with 90% of intensive care beds occupied, those experiencing severe illness have little chance of getting proper emergency care.

The economic fallout of COVID-19 is also devastating for poorer people. In Rio's favelas, where residents typically make less than US\$5 a day, over

70% of households report an income decline since the coronavirus outbreak, according to a survey supported by the Locomotiva Institute and the Unified Center for Favelas.

LAGOS AND DHAKA

Fighting coronavirus is proving difficult in Lagos, the largest city in Nigeria and its COVID-19 epicenter. The city, Africa's biggest, is home to an estimated 26 million people. Nearly three-quarters of them live in one of Lagos's 100 slums.



A large proportion of those in slums subsist hand-to-mouth, working in the informal sector as street vendors, waste recyclers, artisans and the like. Such jobs offer no health insurance or pensions – no basic social safety net.

As in Rio, many informal workers in Lagos have been deprived of even this meager income during the capital's intermittent coronavirus lockdowns. Staying home to survive a pandemic is only an option if you can afford it.

Similar crises are playing out in many poor megacities worldwide. In Bangladesh, for example, COVID-19 is spreading quickly through the capital of Dhaka, home to almost 9 million people, 40% of whom live in slums.

The Bangladeshi capital has about 80 public intensive care units, far fewer than required. Nationwide, just over 190 ICUs serve Bangladesh's population of 161 million – 47 times less per capita than New York City after it surged its ICU capacity.

LOCKDOWNS AND CURFEWS

Some developing countries acted early to prevent outbreaks and appear to have dodged the first wave of COVID-19. With memory of past pandemics fresh, governments, businesses and civil societies in Sierra Leone, Uganda and Vietnam conducted extensive testing and contact tracing and to bolster their primary health care systems, combined them with targeted education campaigns.

Yet, our research finds many governments are responding to coronavirus outbreaks in slums in one of two ways: with a heavy fist or with neglect.

In city after city, we see strict lockdowns imposed on poor populations without regard to the factors that could impede compliance. Where food handouts are provided, supplies are generally insufficient.

People who violate quarantine – by trying to work, say – risk police violence. Conflicts have erupted over curfew enforcement in cities across Kenya, India and South Africa.

Such tactics risk undermining residents' already low faith in government, just when public

trust is most needed to ensure compliance with health guidance.

State neglect also allows the criminal groups to consolidate their influence in slum areas. From Brazil to Mexico, cartels, gangs and organized crime are handing out food and medical supplies, deepening their grip on power.

A BETTER WAY

A new Journal of Urban Health study recommends that developing countries facing infectious disease outbreaks prioritize getting water, food and sanitation materials to their poorest residents.

Development economists also advise making cash payments to the poorest households and halting evictions, both measures taken to ease the coronavirus crisis in advanced countries.

To work in areas where trust in government is low, all these measures must be underpinned by a strong communications program involving credible neighborhood leaders, radio, social media, TV ads and phone messages. Groups like UN-Habitat and Slum Dwellers International are working with local organizations in slum communities to reach people in places where assistance is most needed.

Global pandemics require global responses. But places like Rio, Lagos and Dhaka face different challenges in the coronavirus fight than, say, New York City. The public health response must look different, too.

[Robert Muggah is Lecturer, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio); Richard Florida is Professor, University of Toronto]

How lingering fears from the pandemic could change the way we watch and play sports

JOSH WOODS
theconversation.com

Taiwan's pro baseball league rebooted operations in mid-April with robot spectators filling the bleachers. A month later, Major League Baseball dropped a 67-page document outlining a plan for bringing back the game. No hugs. No high-fives. No spitting. No showering. No fans. And lots of testing.

But the creative ways that leagues are trying to defibrillate their fanbases and keep money flowing in can't mask the fact that the sports industry is in a tailspin. Only about half of all sporting events that were originally scheduled for 2020 will likely take place.

And while play for some sports may resume in the foreseeable future, their long-term outlook remains unclear.

To what extent will residual concerns about COVID-19 shrink participation and fandom in the months to come? Will some moms and dads think twice before sending their sons and daughters off to soccer camp? When the gates finally open, how many fans will prefer watching from the safety of their couch?

As a social psychologist, I wonder if this might lead to a shift in the sports we watch and participate in, with high-contact sports taking a back seat to athletic activities more conducive to social distancing.

FEARS CAN LINGER LONG AFTER A CRISIS

Even under the best-case scenario – a vaccine emerging by early next year – many have been conditioned to worry about germs lingering on just about everything involved with the once-ordinary experiences of playing sports and going to live sporting events. Bathroom doors.

Bleacher seats. Ketchup dispensers. Bar-bells. Locker-room air. People.

Concerns may persist even after coronavirus headlines fade.

I reached a similar conclusion after studying the fear of terrorism for more than a decade in the wake of 9/11. When people worry about something long



enough, new institutions and cultural patterns form, making it easier and more likely for them to worry about the same thing in the future.

Before 9/11, 24% of Americans were very or somewhat worried about being harmed by terrorists; that percentage increased to 58% after 9/11. Over the next two decades, though the U.S. experienced relatively few deaths due to terrorism, the level of worry never receded to its pre-9/11 levels. In late 2019, the percentage of Americans who were very or somewhat worried about terrorism stood at 46%.

If the COVID-19 crisis persists or even surges again at a later date, it's easy to see

how heightened concerns about disease spread could calcify into American culture, customs and institutions.

YOU DON'T NEED AN ARENA OR TEAMS

But not all sports are the same; some can be played without constantly coming into close contact with others. Outdoor

activities like trail running, hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, birding, fishing, kayaking, traditional golf and disc golf are perfect for social distancing.

After years of decline, will participation rates in these sports and activities see a spike?

Many of them also depend on volunteers, grassroots groups, and public lands, parks and waterways, which may make them more resistant to the economic fallout from COVID-19 than heavily commercialized sports.

For instance, disc golf – a no-contact, individual, outdoor sport that involves throwing plastic discs into metal baskets

from varying distances – is played predominantly in public parks, and many of the courses have been funded, constructed and maintained by local enthusiasts. The sport's physical infrastructure is surely more recession proof than a high-end, unused, private sports facility.

And some disc golf businesses appear to be prospering, despite the pandemic.

On May 7, Jussi Meresmaa, CEO of Discmania, an international disc golf equipment company, told Ultiworld Disc Golf that they were "pretty much selling every disc on the shelf" Alan Barker, president of Infinite Discs, a large online disc golf equipment store, noted that online sales were at all-time highs.

SIGNS THAT THE CONVERSATION IS SHIFTING

The sports industry isn't going to fall apart; it's not like the NBA will fold. But there is already some evidence of a shift.

In an academic paper published last year, I showed how the growth of small, emerging sports movements is reflected in traditional news coverage and social media use. A similar analysis reveals how the discussion of many sports has changed over the last four months.

I recently searched for mentions of more than a dozen sports and outdoor activities in America's News, one of the largest online news archives in the world. For each sport, I compared the number of article mentions from January 2019 to April 2019 with the number of mentions from January 2020 to April 2020.

Newspaper coverage of baseball increased uniformly in the first four months of 2019. As spring training got going in late February, America's pastime filled the sports pages of newspapers across the

country. Press coverage of baseball typically doubles from January to April.

But with gates locked and fields empty in 2020, coverage of baseball dropped off. The number of articles about baseball in April 2020 – 64,338 – was roughly half the number published in April 2019.

I collected the same data for several other team sports and found roughly the same results. This isn't really a surprise; the NHL playoffs and NBA playoffs have been postponed, while college sports were canceled.

But this trend was not universal across all sports and recreational activities. Press coverage of disc golf in 2019 was like the coverage in 2020. In both years, as the weather got nicer in March and April, disc golf started cropping up more in the news. Despite the implementation of stay-at-home orders across the country, disc golf actually appeared in more articles April 2020 than in April 2019.

I found similar trends for other social-distance friendly sports and activities. Press coverage of running, biking, hiking, kayaking and fishing in April 2020 was higher or roughly equivalent to coverage in April 2019.

To me, this is a sign that athletic activities that can be performed at a distance – and outside – could be making a comeback. In fact, the number of articles mentioning "outdoors" was significantly greater in April 2020 – 31,361 – than in April 2019, which had 21,354 mentions.

Of course, a proper interpretation of these findings demands further research. Yet, it seems plausible that these preliminary findings could be a sign of what's to come.

[The writer is Professor of Sociology, West Virginia University]

People in Kolkata stage protests, seeking restoration of power, water supply

KOLKATA, MAY 22 (PTI): People in various parts of Kolkata staged protests on Friday demanding immediate resumption of power and water supply, two days after cyclone 'Amphan' ravaged West Bengal, snapping cables, uprooting trees and leaving behind a trail of destruction.

Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim, on his part, gave assurances that normalcy would be restored in a week, as government officials were working round the clock to improve the situation.

Attacking the TMC government, state BJP president Dilip Ghosh said the protests were a proof that the ruling dispensation has failed to live up to people's expectations.

At Behala area in south Kolkata, agitators took to the streets and shouted slogans against the government, claim-

ing that residents had been reeling under power and water crisis for over 48 hours, with no respite in sight.

"We have been living without mobile connectivity, electricity and proper drinking water for the last 48 hours.

Is this a joke? We can do without mobile connectivity, but what about electricity and clean drinking water? We are asking for basic facilities," said Amit Dutta, a resident of Behala.

Similar protests were also reported from other parts of the state capital.

Pooja Saha, a techie who lives in central Kolkata, said he had called the Kolkata Municipal Corporation helpline number at least 50 times but got no response.

"It's stinking everywhere! I have called the KMC helpline more than 50 times, but received no response. If the clogged

drains are not cleared anytime soon, people in the locality might fall ill," she said.

Hakim, who is also a TMC minister, said he had asked the city's private power supply provider to take necessary measures and ensure that supply was restored at the earliest.

"No one had imagined that the cyclone would cause such devastation. More than 5,000 trees have been uprooted. We have already cleared several roads. I can assure the people of Kolkata that normalcy would be restored within a week. We are in touch with the private power supply provider and had asked them to restore supply as early as possible," he said.

The Kolkata mayor also said the relief teams were working on a war footing, and life has returned to normal in

many parts of the city.

Responding to Ghosh's criticism, Hakim said, "He should learn to speak less when the chief minister and the prime minister are interacting with each other (on the issue of improving the situation)."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew down to the state capital on Friday, and undertook an aerial survey of the cyclone-hit areas in Bengal, along with CM Mamata Banerjee.

Lauding the efforts of the state government in combating the crisis, Modi announced an advance assistance of Rs 1,000 crore for cyclone-ravaged Bengal.

In Namkhana area of South 24 Parganas district, people complained that they were not given enough tarpaulin sheets to cover the roofs of houses damaged by the cyclone. In North 24 Par-

ganas, distressed people claimed they were running out of food, as shops in the vicinity were yet to lift shutters in the aftermath of the calamity.

Sunderbans affairs minister Manturam Pakhira said officials concerned have been asked to immediately address the problems of local people.

Cyclone 'Amphan', which made a landfall near Sunderbans in South 24 Parganas, had rampaged through several parts of the state on May 20, dumping heavy rain, swamping homes and farmland, and leaving at least 80 people dead.

The CM, following her review meeting with Modi, said Bengal has suffered losses of more than Rs 1 lakh crore.

She also said that the cyclone has adversely impacted 60 per cent of the state's population.

Maha fixes price cap on pvt hospitals treating COVID-19 cases



MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): The Maharashtra government has come out with three slabs on per day charges on treatment of COVID-19 patients in private and charitable hospitals and also decided to regulate rates for 80 per cent of the operational bed capacity in these medical facilities.

Non-government health care providers in Maharashtra have been asked to accommodate maximum number of patients with 80 per cent of the operational bed capacity to be regulated by rates sanctioned by the government.

Fresh guidelines issued by the state government on Thursday

said the fee regulation decision applies to both isolation and non-isolation beds in private and charitable hospitals.

This means 80 per cent of beds in isolation and non-isolation wards available with any healthcare provider will be regulated by the state government/municipal commissioner/ district collector.

Healthcare providers may charge their own rates to the remaining 20 per cent beds, according to a government notification.

There will be no difference in quality of treatment in 80 per cent and 20 per cent categories, it said. For COVID-19 pa-

tients, there will be three rate slabs on per day basis - Rs 4,000, Rs7,500 and Rs 9,000 - based on the category of wards they have been admitted in, said the notification.

For non-COVID patients, hospitals which have agreements with insurance companies will follow the rate of lowest slab irrespective of the category of beds occupied by the patient, it said.

If there is no agreement between the two sides, hospitals will follow slab-wise rates depending on beds in hospitals, the notification said.

The guidelines will be in force till August 31.

Reliance strikes 5th deal, sells 2.32 pc in Jio Platforms for Rs 11,367 cr to KKR



NEW DELHI, MAY 22 (PTI): Reliance Industries on Friday announced the sale of a 2.32 per cent stake in its digital unit to US private equity giant KKR for Rs 11,367 crore, the fifth deal in four weeks that will inject a combined Rs 78,562 crore in the oil-to-telecom conglomerate to help it pare debt.

This is KKR's largest investment in Asia.

"This transaction values Jio Platforms at an equity value of Rs 4.91 lakh crore and an enterprise value of Rs 5.16 lakh crore. This is KKR's largest investment in Asia and will translate into a 2.32 per cent equity stake in Jio Platforms on a fully diluted basis," the company said in a statement.

The deal follows Facebook picking up a 9.99 per cent stake in the firm, housing India's youngest but largest telecom company, on April 22 for Rs 43,574 crore.

Within days of that deal, Silver Lake - the world's largest tech investor - bought a 1.15 per cent stake in Jio Platforms for Rs 5,665.75 crore.

On May 8, US-based Vista Equity Partners bought 2.32 per cent stake in Jio Platforms for Rs 11,367 crore. On May 17 global equity firm General Atlantic picked up 1.34 per cent stake in Jio Platforms for Rs 6,598.38 crore.

"Over the last month, leading technology investors, such as, Facebook, Silver Lake, Vista, General Atlantic and KKR have announced aggregate investments of Rs 78,562 crore into Jio Platforms," it said.

Diverse marquee investors are becoming long-term shareholders of Jio Platforms Ltd (JPL)

because of a unique set of technologies and platforms under one entity. There are no similar opportunities available anywhere else globally. And an endorsement of the quality of the management.

Investments by leading global growth investors will enable Jio to scale its ecosystem and reaffirm the firm as a next generation software product and platform company.

"Jio Platforms, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reliance Industries, is a next-generation technology platform focused on providing high-quality and affordable digital services across India, with more than 388 million subscribers," the statement said.

Founded in 1976, KKR has a long history of building leading global enterprises and successfully investing in businesses in the technology sector, including BMC Software, ByteDance and Gojek, through its private equity and technology growth funds.

Since inception, the firm has invested over USD 30 billion (total enterprise value) in tech companies, and its technology portfolio currently has more than 20 companies across the technology, media and telecom sectors.

In addition, India has been a key strategic market for KKR with a history of investing in the country since 2006.

Mukesh Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries, said, "I am delighted to welcome KKR, one of the world's most respected financial investors, as a valued partner in our onward march to growing and transforming the Indian

digital ecosystem for the benefit of all Indians."

KKR, he said, has a proven track record of being a valuable partner to industry-leading franchises and has been committed to India for many years.

"We are looking forward to leveraging KKR's global platform, industry knowledge and operational expertise to further grow Jio."

Henry Kravis, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of KKR, said, "Few companies have the potential to transform a country's digital ecosystem in the way that Jio Platforms is doing in India, and potentially worldwide. Jio Platforms is a true homegrown next generation technology leader in India that is unmatched in its ability to deliver technology solutions and services to a country that is experiencing a digital revolution." "We are investing behind Jio Platforms' impressive momentum, world-class innovation and strong leadership team, and we view this landmark investment as a strong indicator of KKR's commitment to supporting leading technology companies in India and Asia Pacific," he said.

KKR is making the investment from its Asia private equity and growth technology funds.

The transaction is subject to regulatory and other customary approvals.

Morgan Stanley acted as financial advisor to Reliance Industries, and AZB & Partners and Davis Polk & Wardwell acted as legal counsel. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP acted as financial advisor to KKR. Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co. and Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP acted as legal counsel to KKR.

2 police stations sealed in Bengaluru after COVID-19 infects cop

BENGALURU, MAY 22 (PTI): Two police stations here have been sealed partially after a head constable was tested positive for COVID-19.

According to police, the infected head constable was overseeing the arrangements to quarantine people who came from Mumbai.

"Yes," Superintendent of Police of Mandya district Parashurama K told PTI when asked about

the head constable being tested positive for COVID-19.

He said the two police stations have been sealed to disinfect them.

"We are disinfecting the two police stations. At the time of infection, the police officers were working at the neighbouring police station. Some of our officers and men are quarantined till further reports are received," Parashurama added.

SpiceJet opens booking for domestic flights

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): No-frills carrier SpiceJet on Friday announced the opening of booking for its domestic flights as it resumes operations with a little over 200 daily flights to 41 destinations after a hiatus of almost two months. Operations of commercial passenger flights were suspended from March 25 in the wake of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown.

The government on Thursday allowed airlines to operate passenger flights from May 25.

SpiceJet in a release said that to start with, the airline will operate flights to 41 domestic destinations operating an average 204 daily and 1,431 weekly flights with a slew of in-flight and on-ground modifications in line with the global best practices and government SOPs to minimise human contact and ensure safe travel for its passengers.

"I am happy to announce the resumption of our passenger operations from May 25 after a two month-long lockdown-imposed hiatus. We will strictly adhere to social distancing norms and SOPs laid down by the Government. Flying was and remains the safest mode of public transport," said Ajay Singh, Chairman and Managing Director, SpiceJet.

Prior to the suspension of all commercial passenger service on March 25, SpiceJet had been operating over 600 daily flights to 54 do-

mestic and nine overseas destinations.

These flights included 49 daily services on the Udan routes.

The airline said it has implemented cleaning procedures on all its aircraft in addition to disinfecting customer touch points and surfaces before every flight.

Stating that all of its aircraft now have synthetic leather seats, it claimed these non-porous seats don't allow the virus (COVID-19) to penetrate inside them and can be easily wiped off compared to standard fabric seats. It also said that crew members and ground services personnel will undergo a detailed health check-up and will be wearing protective gears, adding the airline has decided to temporarily suspend food and beverage services on all its flights.

SpiceJet will reduce the number of people in its airport coaches by 50 per cent and has made web check-in mandatory thereby avoiding queues at airports as part of the social distancing norms, it said. Besides, passengers will be allowed only one hand baggage and one check-in luggage (not more than 20 kg) which will have to be added during the web check-in process.

Passengers will be encouraged to self-scan boarding passes and can also travel with their mobile boarding passes, SpiceJet added.

Meghalaya govt donates 5,000 VTMs to Assam



SHILLONG, MAY 22 (PTI): Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Friday said his government has donated 5,000 Viral Transport Media (VTMs) to Assam as COVID-19 positive cases are increasing by the day in the neighbouring state.

The VTM is used for collecting blood samples of persons with suspected coronavirus infection.

"We are glad to assist Assam in their fight

against COVID-19 by supporting them with 5,000 viral test [sic] media.

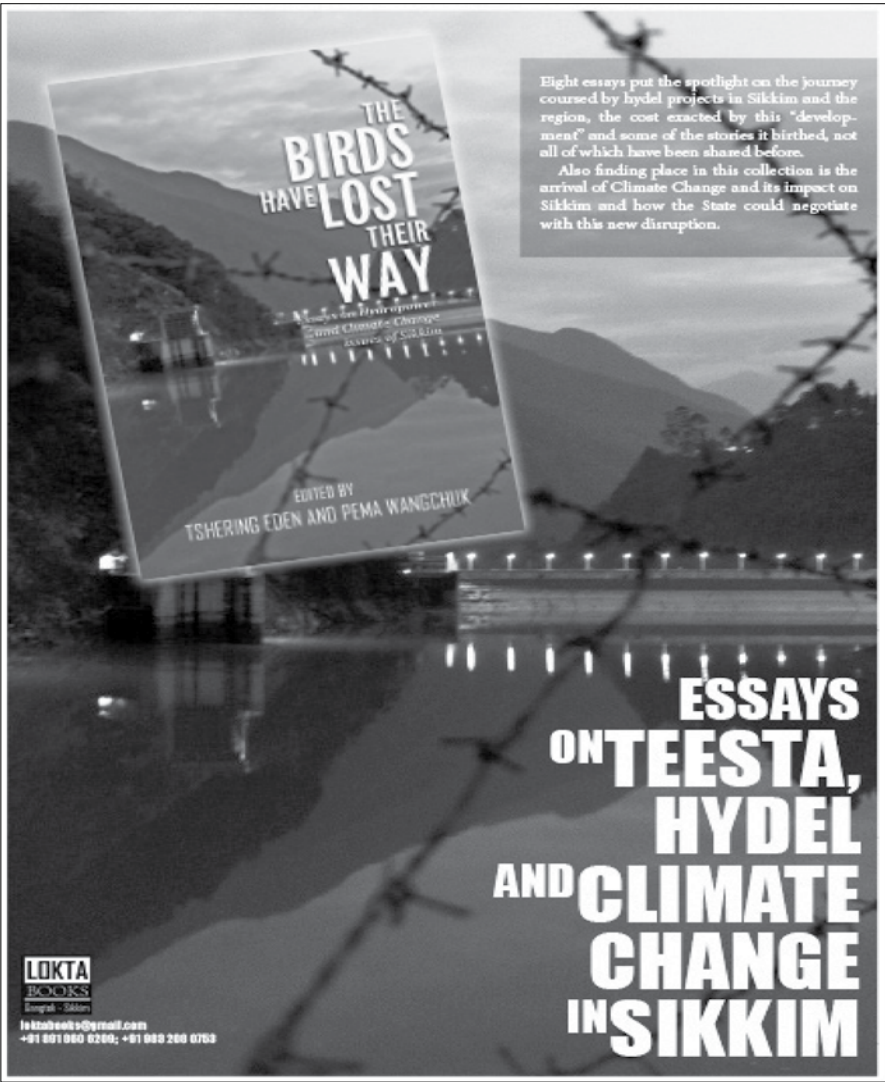
We have enough VTMs in our stock to test all those coming from outside NE. Together we can...," Sangma tweeted.

Meghalaya has only one active COVID-19 case, while 12 patients have recovered and one person died of the disease till date.

Meanwhile, the testing capacity of Megha-

laya has increased to 400 a day.

"Because of the hard work and commitments of Dr Anil Phukan, Head of Microbiology at North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences, his team and the new RT-PCR machine that has been set up at the institute, the testing capacity has now increased to 400 tests per day," Conrad said.



Bryant items fetch premium prices, Trout card sets record

NEW YORK, MAY 22 (AFP): A Hollywood moment for NBA legend Kobe Bryant proved a big draw in a Beverly Hills auction of sport memorabilia, his handprints in concrete selling for 75,000.

Julien's Auctions said the handprints were tests that were made by Bryant in 2011, when he became the first athlete to leave his prints alongside those of some of Hollywood's biggest stars in the forecourt of the Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard.

The item fetched more than 18 times its presale estimate of 4,000-6,000.

Other highlights of the Julien's auction included a full uniform worn by Bryant during the 1999-2000 NBA Finals and embroidered with an official NBA logo under a black band worn in remembrance of Wilt Chamberlain that sold for 43,750 -- more than four times its estimate of 10,000.

Bryant, who won five NBA titles in a 20-year career with the Lakers, died in a helicopter crash in January that also claimed the life of his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven others.

Memorabilia of his career is fetching jaw-dropping auction prices, with a Lakers championship ring that he gave his mother selling for 201,250 at an auction run by New Jersey-based Goldin Auctions this week.

One of Bryant's rookie cards sold for 110,400 in the Goldin sale.

Bryant-related items realized 202,590 at the Julien's auction, where one 2006-07 season game-worn jersey sold for 22,400.

While collectors are clearly hungry for something to remember Bryant by, the ESPN documentary "The Last Dance" has also fueled desire for items related former Chicago Bulls great Michael Jordan.

A Jordan 1986-87 Fleece rookie trading card sold in the Goldin auction for 99,630.

But the highest price in the opening session of the Goldin auction was for a signed rookie card for three-time American League Most Valuable Player Mike Trout, which fetched an astonishing 922,500 on Wednesday.

The 2009 Trout card features the Los Angeles Angels superstar outfielder's first autograph in a Major League Baseball uniform and is one of only five in existence.

26 all out: the nightmare that still haunts New Zealand cricket

WELLINGTON, MAY 22 (AFP): It has been described as New Zealand cricket's darkest day, the 1955 Test against England when the Black Caps were skittled for just 26, a record low that still stands today.

Even 65 years later, the embarrassing score still rankles with New Zealand fans, who are always on alert during a major Test collapse and death-ride the batting team hoping the record falls.

"Frankly, as a New Zealand fan we'd be grateful for anyone to take this record away from us," Paul Ford, co-founder of Kiwi cricket supporters' group The Beige Brigade, told AFP.

"It's ignominious, it's shameful. It would be great if someone came along and scored 25 or fewer." The Test cricket landscape in 1955 was vastly different to today.

India had recorded their first Test victory only three years before, Pakistan debuted in the five-day game barely two years previously and Sri Lanka were still 27 years away from gaining Test status. Australia and England were the undisputed heavyweights of the era with South



Africa, the West Indies and New Zealand, who had not yet won a Test, in supporting roles.

England arrived in New Zealand for two Tests full of confidence after their first Ashes series win in Australia for 22 years.

The New Zealand Test team had been out of action for more than a year and had been unsettled by inconsistent selection.

Even so, they made En-

gland toil for an eight-wicket victory in the opening Test in Dunedin and were reasonably placed midway through the second match in Auckland, having conceded a first-innings deficit of 46 runs.

- 'ROCK UNDER THE TOWEL' -

But the gulf in class proved telling on a deteriorating pitch in the second

innings when only one batsman, Bert Sutcliffe, reached double figures. Five players ended

the session with ducks and Sutcliffe lamented: "It seemed hardly fair that we should have been so humiliated after putting up so stout-hearted a performance for two-and-a-half days."

Reaction in New Zealand was ferocious, although captain Geoff Rabone continued to defend his side.

"It was many things, that batting display, but it was never disgraceful," he later wrote.

"Everyone gave their all

and we were outgunned on the day. Everyone tried as hard as they could -- how could that be seen as disgraceful?"

The setback was only temporary. The Black Caps recorded their maiden win, in their 45th Test, a year later against the West Indies.

Since 1955, New Zealand's unwanted record has almost fallen on several occasions.

Ford said the most tantalising was in 2018, when New Zealand in a day-night Test

had the chance to bundle out England in Auckland, offering a rare opportunity for sporting symmetry at the scene of the Black Caps' 1955 humbling. England were teetering on the brink at 23-8 when Moeen Ali was bowled by Tim Southee for one of five ducks in the innings.

But Craig Overton's unbeaten 33 took England to 58 all out as the tourists avoided the record books but fell to an innings and 49-run defeat.

"We were watching every ball and hoping that maybe that record could be consigned elsewhere, so it could be a rock under someone else's towel," Ford said.

"But it just wasn't to be."

Ford said the result was now part of the tapestry of cricket in New Zealand.

"It's such a fundamental part of New Zealand cricket history that if it wasn't there the game here would be poorer for it.

"People who follow cricket in New Zealand are generally not there for the winning, they're there to enjoy the game and sometimes results like that are part of it, painful though that may be.

Baseball players respond to MLB on virus protocols

NEW YORK, MAY 22 (AP): The baseball players' association gave management a wide-ranging response to a 67-page proposed set of protocols for a season to be played during the coronavirus pandemic.

Management had presented the union and the 30 teams the proposed draft last Friday. The union said Thursday it addressed: protections

for high-risk players, access to pre- and post-game therapies, testing frequency, protocols for positive tests, in-stadium medical personnel and sanitization procedures.

Players viewed many of the concepts in the original draft as over-the-top, such as arriving in uniform at the ballparks, a prohibition on them leaving without team permission and a

ban on guests other than immediate family members. Players also objected to a ban on the use of showers and hydrotherapy. The union wants more frequent testing than management's proposed multiple times per week."

MLB is expected to make an economic proposal to the union within a few days. MLB hopes to start the season by early July.

Manchester United warn of long-term economic effect of virus to clubs

ANDY HUNTER

LONDON, 22 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: The Premier League will suffer an economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic for "years to come", with clubs facing a broadcasting bill of at least £20m even if the season is completed, Manchester United have warned.

United underlined the gravity of the financial crisis afflicting the wealthiest league in the world as they posted their financial results for the three-month period to the end of March. The club recorded a pre-tax loss of £28.55m between 1 January and 31 March, compared with a £11.117m pre-tax profit in the same period last year, as a result of the pandemic and the adverse change in the exchange rate with the US dollar.

The latest accounting period covers only 18 days of football's lockdown but provides the first insight into the impact on the Premier League. Despite being one of the clubs best positioned to withstand the crisis because of their commercial and sponsorship deals, United's third-quarter revenue fell by £28.4m to £123.7m. This was down to the pandemic's impact on broadcasting and matchday revenues, which fell by £27.8m and £2.6m respectively. Commercial revenue increased by £2m to £68.6m because of new sponsorship deals. Year on year, United's net debt soared by £127.4m to £429.1m.

United's latest broadcasting figures -- a 51.7% decrease on last year's £53.8m -- include a £15m rebate owed to broadcasters following the delay and changes to the schedule for the 2019-20 season. The club expect the rebate to reach £20m after 38 games, although that figure is likely to rise depending on when the season ends.

Ed Woodward, United's executive vice-chairman, admitted the latest financial results "reflect a partial impact that the pandemic has had on the club,

while the greater impact will be in the current quarter and likely beyond". He added: "There are still profound challenges ahead, and for football as a whole, and it is safe to say it will not be 'business as usual' for some time.

"We remain one of the most popular teams in the most followed global sport and have created a strong financial base with diverse revenue streams. However, the repercussions of the pandemic are now being felt widely across the football community, not just by clubs but also by players, supporters, broadcasters, sponsors and many other stakeholders. We must recognise that this crisis will not disappear overnight and that the world that emerges will be different from how it was before.

"We remain firmly optimistic about the long-term prospects for the club and for our exciting young team once we have worked our way through what is undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary and testing periods in the 142-year history of Manchester United."

Woodward confirmed he expected domestic football to resume next month, European football to return in August and, despite the inevitable delay to the start of next season, the 2020-21 campaign to end on schedule in May 2021. Questioned on a conference call with investors about players being tested for Covid-19, he said: "If something stops us going back, I don't expect it to be this."

Cliff Baty, United's chief financial officer, estimated the lockdown cost United £23m in the final two weeks of March because of the postponement of one Premier League away fixture (worth £4m at Tottenham), a home Europa League last-16 tie against Lask, the FA Cup quarter-final at Norwich, broadcasting reductions plus the closure of the Old Trafford megastore, Red Cafe and United Events.

Funding for women's cricket in England to be protected



LONDON, MAY 21 (AP): Plans for investing heavily in women's cricket "will be protected" despite the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a top official at the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Clare Connor, managing director of women's cricket at the ECB, said there are no guarantees but that there is a commitment at the highest level to protect a strategy to spend tens of millions of pounds on expanding women's and girls' cricket.

"I remain really confident that the momentum we've built behind the women's and girls' game will be protected to the absolute best of our endeavors," Connor told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

"There is a very strong desire to protect the investment into the women's and girls' game."

The ECB on Thursday unveiled its Together Through This Test campaign highlighting the cricket community's volunteer efforts during the lockdown.

Cricketers and clubs have rallied to support their neighbors in more than 200 initiatives ranging from charity runs to food deliveries.

The virus has killed

more than 35,000 people in Britain and has brought sport to a halt.

"We are a very small piece of an enormous, difficult jigsaw," said Connor, who captained England in her playing days.

"If we can make some contribution to boosting morale or keeping people hopeful of better times, then that will have been a job well done." The campaign offers online resources to support the game and volunteers.

fundraising auction Friday offers opportunities to participate in training sessions and Zoom calls with England internationals.

Cricket was set for a big year in England. The Hundred tournament was scheduled for July and August with the aim of capitalizing on England's men winning the 2019 Cricket World Cup and inspiring a new generation of fans through a shorter, 100-ball format.

Now postponed to 2021, The Hundred is a key part of the ECB's five-year plan dubbed "Inspiring Generations."

The plan called for hundreds of millions of pounds in spending through 2024 on investments in the county network, facilities, programs for youth and women, and in-

ner-city centers.

Boosting participation among women and girls is "the game's biggest growth opportunity," according to the Inspiring Generations strategy document.

The original plan, announced last year, was to invest 61 million (50 million pounds) over five years to provide more opportunities for women and girls and to identify and develop elite players.

No segment would be spared, however, if the cricket seasons are wiped out. The men's County Championship is postponed until at least July 1. A new women's semi-pro league is scheduled to debut in September. Potential losses could reach 400 million pounds (490 million), Connor said.

"If we were to suffer the worst-case scenario, in terms of nearly 400 million pounds of losses this year, then we are going to have to revise most of our plans for the coming years, and that would be across the game," she said.

Still, Connor said it's a good sign that the ECB recently committed to monthly payments for 24 female players in advance of the new league. The goal is to pay full professional salaries to 40 women. Connor, who

grew up playing on boys' teams, said the system should offer equal pathways for boys and girls.

"That's the utopia we're after, and that obviously doesn't happen overnight because we're a game built on foundations and structures that have been about catering for men and boys for decades," she said.

Other sports are under pressure, as well. The international soccer players' union, FIFPro, warned in April that COVID-19's impact may present an almost existential threat to the women's game if no specific considerations are given to protect the women's football industry."

Postponement of The Hundred was a blow to the women's game in particular, Connor said. The tournament was set to feature eight new men's and women's, city-based teams a departure from the traditional county system and featuring some of the world's biggest cricket stars.

For the women's game, that meant strong revenue and marketing on par with the men's side, along with television exposure.

"That was going to be an enormous step forward for professional women's cricket," Connor said.

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Pakistan passenger plane with 98 on board crashes on homes

A Pakistani passenger plane with nearly 100 people on board crashed into a residential area of the southern city of Karachi on Friday.

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane was close to landing when it came down among houses, sending plumes of smoke into the air that could be seen from some distance away.

Rescue workers and local residents pulled people from the debris, as firefighters tried to put out the flames.

"I heard a big bang and woke up to people calling for the fire brigade," said Karachi resident Mudassar Ali.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez said there were 91 passengers and seven crew on board the flight, which lost contact with air traffic control just after 2.30pm (0930 GMT). "It is too early to comment on the cause of the crash," he said.

Abdul Sattar Khokhar, of the country's aviation authority, said the Airbus A320 was travelling from Lahore to Karachi.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "shocked and saddened" by the crash, tweeting that he was in touch with the state airline's chief executive.

"Prayers & condolences go to families of the deceased," said Khan.

Foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said the plane crashed into a residential area minutes before it was due to land.

The disaster comes as Pakistanis across the country are preparing to celebrate the end of Ramadan and the beginning of Eid al-Fitr, with many travelling back to their homes in cities and villages. The Pakistan military said security forces had been deployed to the area and helicopters were being used to survey the damage and help ongoing rescue operations, while offering condolences over the "loss of precious lives" in the incident.

Commercial flights resumed only days ago, after planes were grounded during a lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic. Pakistan has a chequered military and civilian aviation safety record, with frequent plane and helicopter crashes over the years.

In 2016, a Pakistan International Airlines plane burst into flames after one of its two turbo-prop engines failed while flying from the remote north to Islamabad, killing more than 40 people.

The deadliest air disaster on Pakistani soil was in 2010, when an Airbus A321 operated by private airline Airblue and flying from Karachi crashed into the hills outside Islamabad as it came into land, killing all 152 people on board. An official report blamed the accident on a confused captain and a hostile cockpit atmosphere.

PIA, one of the world's leading airlines until the 1970s, now suffers from a sinking reputation due to frequent cancellations, delays and financial troubles. It has been involved in numerous controversies over the years, including the jailing of a drunk pilot in Britain in 2013.

China introduces new security bill in parliament to tighten controls over Hong Kong

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, MAY 22 (PTI): China on Friday introduced the draft of a controversial national security law in Hong Kong in its parliament to tighten Beijing's control over the former British colony, in what could be the biggest blow to the territory's autonomy and personal freedoms since 1997 when it came under the Chinese rule.

The draft bill on establishing and improving the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to safeguard national security was submitted to the National People's Congress (NPC) which began its week-long session here.

The new law would proscribe secessionist and subversive activity as well as foreign interference and terrorism in the city - all developments that had been troubling Beijing for some time, but most pressingly over the past year of increasingly violent anti-government protests, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

The move is also significant in that China's central government appears to have all but given up hope that Hong Kong's administration will succeed at passing local legislation on such a law, amid



a hostile political environment and deeply divided city, the report said.

Pro-democracy activists had said they feared "the end of Hong Kong" if China brought the new security law.

The bill which is set to be approved by the NPC, regarded as the rubber-stamp parliament for its routine approval of proposals by the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), comes in the backdrop of relentless agitation by the local Hong Kong people demanding political and administrative autonomy agreed by China when it took possession

of the former British colony on July 1, 1997. While the seven-month-long agitation last year in which millions took part subsided during the coronavirus crisis from January to April, protestors returned to streets this month, with the pro-autonomy and pro-freedom legislators grappling with the security officials in local legislature protesting against the curbs.

Wang Chen, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC, said since the return of Hong Kong, China has been firmly implementing the principles of "one country, two

systems," "the people of Hong Kong governing Hong Kong," and a high degree of autonomy. The practice of "one country, two systems" has achieved unprecedented success in Hong Kong, according to an explanatory document delivered by Wang, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

But the increasingly notable national security risks in the HKSAR have become a prominent problem, the document says, citing activities that have seriously challenged the bottom line of the "one country, two systems" principle, harmed the rule of

law, and threatened national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Law-based and forceful measures must be taken to prevent, stop and punish such activities, the document said.

A number of pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong, including Democratic Party leader Wu Chi-wai, said the announcement was the death of "one country, two systems".

Civic Party lawmaker Dennis Kwok said, "if this move takes place, 'one country, two systems' will be officially erased. This is the end of Hong Kong." His colleague

Tanya Chan added that this was the "saddest day in Hong Kong history". Student activist and politician Joshua Wong tweeted that the move was an attempt by Beijing to "silence Hong Kongers' critical voices with force and fear".

What makes the situation so incendiary is that Beijing can simply bypass Hong Kong's elected legislators and impose the changes, a BBC report said.

China can place them into Annex III of the Basic Law, which covers national laws that must then be implemented in Hong Kong - either by legislation, or decree.

Pro-democracy activists fear the law will be used to muzzle protests in defiance of the freedoms enshrined in the Basic Law, as similar laws in China are used to silence opposition to the Communist Party. Meanwhile, the US state department said that "any effort to impose national security legislation that does not reflect the will of the people of Hong Kong would be highly destabilising, and would be met with strong condemnation".

President Donald Trump has said the US would react strongly if China followed through with its proposals, without giving details, the BBC reported.

Outrage in Hong Kong as China pushes security law



Pro-democracy campaigners in Hong Kong vowed Friday to take to the streets in protest over what they said was China's fiercest assault on the city's treasured autonomy with its move to impose a security law.

The proposal for the legislation -- expected to ban treason, subversion and sedition -- was introduced into China's rubber-stamp parliament at the opening of its annual session on Friday morning.

It followed repeated warnings from China's communist leaders they would no longer tolerate dissent in Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous city that endured seven months of massive pro-democracy protests last year.

"This is the largest nuclear weapon the Chinese Communist Party has used in its mutual destruction of Hong Kong," Jimmy Sham, leader of the Civil Human Rights Front, which organised the million-person rally that kicked off last year's unrest.

Sham appealed for millions to again take to the streets, while other activists used internet threads and chat apps to call for protests on Sunday.

Prominent democracy activist Joshua Wong said China's message to protesters was clear.

"Beijing is attempting to silence Hongkongers' critical voices with force and fear," Wong said on Twitter, while also expressing defiance.

"HKers will not scare off in the face of wolf warrior policy."

Amnesty International warned

the legislation posed "a quasi-existential threat to the rule of law in Hong Kong", and said it was "an ominous moment for human rights in the city".

While China put forward its proposal as vital to reinforcing stability in the global financial hub, Hong Kong's share market plunged on Friday with a drop of more than five percent in afternoon trade.

- Eroding freedoms -

Hong Kong has been allowed a limited form of autonomy since returning from British to Chinese rule in 1997, with those unique freedoms enshrined under a "One Country, Two Systems" handover agreement. However, a huge pro-democracy movement has built in the face of fears China has been steadily eroding those freedoms. The Communist Party made clear Friday the planned law was aimed at quashing the democracy movement.

"We must take powerful measures to lawfully prevent, stop and punish them," vice chairman of the National People's Congress's (NPC) Standing Committee Wang Chen said, referring to "anti-China" forces.

Article 23 of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, says the city must enact a law to prohibit "treason, secession, sedition (and) subversion" against the Chinese government.

But the clause has never been implemented due to opposition from the Hong Kong people fearful it would destroy their cherished civil rights.

An attempt to have Article 23 pass through Hong Kong's legislature in 2003 was shelved after half a million people took to the streets in protest against it.

China's move would circumvent Hong Kong's legislature by having it imposed by the national parliament.

Wang said Hong Kong's delays in implementing the security law had forced the Chinese leadership to take action.

"More than 20 years after Hong Kong's return, however, relevant laws are yet to materialise due to the sabotage and obstruction by those trying to sow trouble in Hong Kong and China at large, as well as external hostile forces," Wang said.

Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam vowed Friday to "fully cooperate" with Beijing, saying the government would "complete the legislation as soon as possible".

- US warnings -

The United States reacted swiftly to China's announcement, with State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus warning that imposing such a law would be "highly destabilising, and would be met with strong condemnation from the United States and the international community".

President Donald Trump gave a vague initial response that nevertheless warned of a stronger reaction.

"I don't know what it is, because nobody knows yet. If it happens, we'll address that issue very strongly," Trump said.

The US Congress late last year angered China by passing a law that would strip Hong Kong's preferential trading status if it is no longer considered autonomous from the mainland.

The State Department warned China's actions could impact its decision on that status.

US senators on Thursday also introduced legislation to impose sanctions on any entity involved in curbing Hong Kong's autonomy.

That could include police cracking down on demonstrators and Chinese officials involved in Hong Kong policy -- as well as banks that conduct transactions with anyone involved in curbing the territory's freedoms.

Olympics official sees 'real problems' in holding Games in 2021



A senior Olympics official has warned that holding the postponed Tokyo Games next year faces "real problems", with even a vaccine unlikely to stave off the threat of the coronavirus.

John Coates, the International Olympic Committee's pointman for Tokyo 2020, indicated that officials would start deciding in October if and how the pandemic-hit Games could go ahead in July 2021.

He told a roundtable organised by Australian media giant News Corp that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been clear the Tokyo Olympics could not be delayed a second time. "We can't postpone it again and we have to assume that there won't be a vaccine or, if there is a vaccine, it won't be sufficient to share around the world," he said.

Without the safety net of a widely available vaccine, there could be enormous challenges in screening tens of

thousands of people from all corners of the world, he said. "We've got real problems because we've got athletes having to come from 206 different nations," said Coates.

"We've got 11,000 athletes coming, 5,000 technical officials and coaches, 20,000 media, we've got 4,000 working on the organising committee there at the moment, there will be 60,000 volunteers coming," he said.

"There's a lot of people."

Coates said if there are signs the pandemic is contained, even if not eradicated, by October, officials will start preparing "the different scenarios by which the sport could take place".

"Do we quarantine the Olympic village? Do all athletes when they get there go into quarantine? Do we restrict having spectators at the venues? Do we separate the athletes from the mixed zone where the media are?"

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'Ghoomketu' reminded me of my struggle days in Bollywood, says Nawazuddin Siddiqui

BY KOMAL PANCHAMATIA

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): Actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui plays a small-town writer who is struggling to get a break in Bollywood in his next "Ghoomketu" and he says the role reminded him of his own time as an aspiring actor in the film industry.

A National School of Drama graduate, the actor hailing from Uttar Pradesh's Budhana started working in films from 1999 in minor roles.

In 2012, the tide turned for him with films like "Kahaani" and "Gangs of Wasseypur" which put him in the mainstream cinema space.

His credits across films and web include "Badlapur", "Kick", "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", "Manto" and "Sacred Games".

"I had also come from a small town to Mumbai and I felt people here are 'to the point'. It took time for me to adjust. Mumbai is advanced, fast paced and for people like us, it takes time to get into this groove.

"One has to struggle a lot initially as I wasn't able to match the way things are here. The kind of struggle the writer has faced in the movie, I have also struggled a lot in the film industry as an actor. There are quite a few similarities between this character and my life," Nawazuddin told PTI in an interview.

The 46-year-old actor believes his upcoming film is about staying true

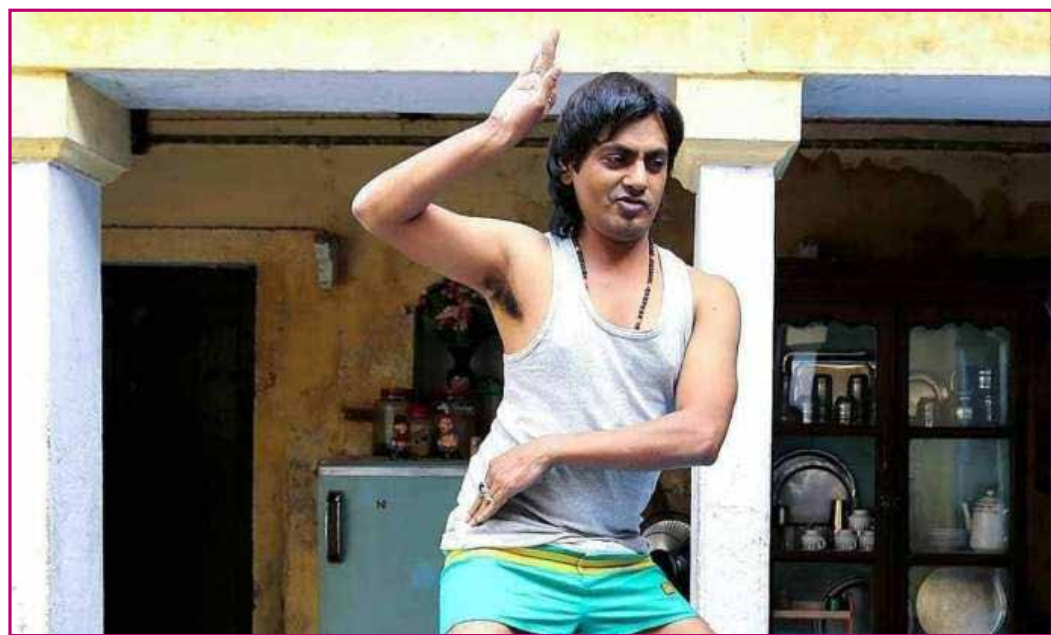
to one's roots.

"It is ok to go to a city for a better life, but we must never forget our roots. This is what 'Ghoomketu' tells us. Lucky are those who realise and go back to their roots.

"When you go back to your home, you understand values, emotions, fami-

"I don't think it matters for actors, it shouldn't. An actor's job is to play their role with utmost honesty and sincerity and then forget about it," he said.

"The time is such that one can't think about theatres. It is important to think about human lives now, their safety is more essential. If they are fit and safe,



ly, and a lot of other things," Nawazuddin, who is currently in Budhana, said.

As cinema halls remain closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, "Ghoomketu" is the first Bollywood film to release directly on an OTT platform.

Sony Pictures Networks and Phantom Films' movie will begin streaming from May 22 on ZEE5.

The actor said whether his films release on OTT or on the big screen it doesn't make a big difference to him.

they will definitely go to the theatre. But as for now OTT is the best platform (for film)," he added.

Pushpendra Nath Mishra, who wrote and directed the Netflix series "Taj Mahal 1989", has directed "Ghoomketu".

The comedy-drama also stars Anurag Kashyap, Raghubir Yadav, Ila Arun, Swanand Kirkire, besides cameo appearances by Amitabh Bachchan, Ranveer Singh, Sonakshi Sinha, Chitrangda Singh and filmmaker Nikkhil Advani.

'Black Widow' a film about self-forgiveness, says Scarlett Johansson

LOS ANGELES, MAY 22 (PTI): Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson says her upcoming film "Black Widow" is a film of depth, a feat the team could not have attempted in the initial days of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. After 10 years and seven films of playing the Russian superspy Avenger Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, Johansson is set to star in a prequel stand-alone in the MCU.

"It's a film very much about self-forgiveness and accepting decisions that were made for you. It's much

deeper than anything we could have done earlier," the actor told Parade.

Directed by Cate Shortland, "Black Widow" also stars David Harbour, Rachel Weisz, and Florence Pugh.

Speaking about the dynamic between the characters, Johansson said, "They're not family, because (Natasha) has no family, but they're assigned familial roles."

The superhero film was scheduled to hit the theatres on May 1 but the release was pushed to November 6 owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

'The Crown' producer doubts filming season five amid social distancing

LONDON, MAY 22 (PTI): "The Crown" executive producer Andy Harries says he is unsure about shooting for the fifth season of the hit period drama with social distancing rules in place.

The upcoming fourth season of the Netflix series, which is set to be Olivia Colman's last as Queen Elizabeth II, managed to finish production early amid the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures. Harries said he doesn't know when things will go back to normal, reported Radio Times.

"I hate to be doomy and gloomy because I am an opti-

mistic guy. Every day is a new challenge and every day you've got to be up for that challenge and you have got to plow on.

"Obviously we are facing challenging times and I don't know when we will return to filming normally. I am not sure if we can film socially distanced. I am sure some productions could do it but I am not sure that the shows we are doing would work, but we are looking at it very closely," he said at a BAFTA masterclass.

Harries said the pandemic will force many broadcasters and producers to cut down on the budget for projects.

Shad Gaspard's wife breaks silence after former WWE superstar is found dead on Venice Beach

(CNN)The wife of former WWE superstar Shad Gaspard broke her silence on Thursday, one day after the wrestler's body was found on a Southern California beach.

"Shad was our whole world and we were his," Siliana Gaspard said in a statement. "There are not enough words to describe what he means to all of us. He was our heart, our soul, our protector, our warrior. He was a bright force of nature, who brought joy to many through his joyous and gracious nature."

She said the "outpouring of love" from friends, colleagues and fans around the world "has meant more to us than you can even imagine."

"Shad was and will always be our real life super hero," she said.

Gaspard, 39, went missing on Sunday after he had been swimming in nearby Marina Del Rey with his 10-year-old son Aryeh. The two had gotten caught in a rip current, lifeguards said.

Aryeh was rescued, but Gaspard's body was unable to be located until it was found on Venice Beach early Wednesday, one week after Los Angeles County reopened its beaches.

The beaches, which now permit physical activities such as running, swimming and walking, had been closed in order to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

A Twitter account for the Los Angeles County Fire Department's lifeguard division said they performed 452 ocean rescues the weekend Gaspard went missing -- marking "a busy weekend at the beach."

Gaspard is best-known for being a member of the wrestling team Cryme Tyme with fellow WWE star JTG, which debuted in 2006. After leaving WWE in 2010, he pursued an acting career and appeared in the films "Think Like a Man Too" and "The Last Sharknado: It's About Time," according to IMDb.

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SO REFRESHING! Model, Ireland Baldwin cooled off with a sip of her drink in a tiny crop top after a grueling workout in Los Angeles.

Facebook: Workers Can Bid Goodbye To Menlo Park And Hello To Midwest – But With A Salary Cut



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Thursday that most Facebook employees can work from home wherever they want. But they should not expect to get Silicon Valley salary levels if they relocate to less-expensive areas.

Speaking at an internal employee town hall meeting livestreamed on Facebook, Zuckerberg said the company will take a "more measured approach to opening permanent remote work for existing employees." Currently, most Facebook workers can opt to work from home through the end of the year, thanks to the pandemic.

Now, Zuckerberg envisions that over the next decade or more, about half of Facebook's workers could be remote. But there's a lot of "ifs," "ands" and "buts" attached – although not butts in the seats.

If you qualify for remote work and move

to cheaper areas, you will have to tell Facebook, and pay will be adjusted accordingly, Zuckerberg said. There will be "severe ramifications" for those discovered to be falsifying addresses.

"We'll adjust salary to your location at that point," said Zuckerberg, who said the adjustment would be necessary for taxes and accounting. "There'll be severe ramifications for people who are not honest about this." He added the system will work on the "honor code," but will "put in some basic precautions" to make sure that the honor system is being honest. Those methods were not detailed.

Facebook has more than 40,000 employees. The company joined Twitter, which has also said its employees can work from home indefinitely.

ARIES:

If there's anything your time away from the matrix has taught you it's that happiness cannot be found outside. Aries, you're in the mood for silence and soulfulness. If you have never meditated before, give it a shot. The thoughts may or may not stop, and that's okay. Become an observer. Focus on your breath as you let the interruptions come and go. A Deepak Chopra quote to inspire you on this journey: "Silence is the great teacher and to learn its lessons you must pay attention to it."

Tip: Your rich, interior life is where the magic is right now.

TAURUS:

Tragic tales are overrated. If you like it and you want it, put a ring on it. Express your undying love and make things work, despite the odds. It's true that some things are predetermined. But don't forget that free will plays an important role in steering our chariot. As such this is a time of peace, love and happiness. You're learning to be more compassionate towards yourself and others. Nobody's perfect, right? That's what makes the journey beautiful.

Tip: You have the power to make things work despite the odds.

GEMINI:

Stop playing tragedy queen, Gemini! If you want it, go get it, and if you're unable to, know that the Universe is protecting you from getting caught in the midst of a storm. Pause. Breathe. Understand the soul lesson you're being asked to learn. Working with, rather than against the flow, is the way forward. Some of you may find yourself pining for the love of somebody who's only half interested in you. It's all in or all out. Tip: It's either in or out.

CANCER:

We're always in a rush to get somewhere, to get something done, to reach a desired destination. Aren't you exhausted by trying to control everything? What if you loosened the grip and let Spirit step in instead? If things are not manifesting in the manner you'd like them to, know that there are certain things that need to play out. Allow the divine plan to unfold.

Tip: Embrace uncertainty instead of trying to control everything in your life.

LEO:

Sometimes, you let your practical side take the wheel. At other times, you get woo-woo in a manner that helps you navigate the challenges thrown at you. But today you're being asked to marry the masculine and the feminine; the logical and intuitive aspects of your being. It is through this cosmic union that you will find the answers you need at the moment. In the realm of love, you may find that your partner is experiencing chaos and commotion. Find a way to hold space for them without getting caught up in the drama.

Tip: Find a balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of your personality.

VIRGO:

If they can't take their eyes (or hands) off you, you've got your stars to blame, Virgo. You're moving away from troubled waters to a shore that speaks of love, harmony, and togetherness. The onset of Gemini season is bringing with it the element of playfulness that had gone missing from your equation. Here are three ways to tap into this untamed energy. 1: Play a board game together tonight. 2: Read each

other excerpts from a book that inspires you. 3: Give role play a shot.

Tip: 'Playfulness' is the magic word.

LIBRA:

Things are about to get hot and heavy, especially if you're in close quarters with your special someone. Separated by time and space from the one you love? Get creative in the ways you communicate with one another. Who says you can't get flirty (and dirty) over text messages?

Tip: Love and intimacy is big in the Libra HQ.

SCORPIO:

Don't you love it when the Universe steps in and sets things right on your behalf? This is a magical time in the Scorpio HQ. You are experiencing the kind of love, harmony, and togetherness that was once a distant dream. Go on, now! Bring the walls down. Let the one you love know exactly how special they are. For some of you, a grand proposal may be on the cards.

Tip: The cards speak of love, harmony, and togetherness.

SAGITTARIUS:

What happens when we resist change instead of accepting what the Universe is pointing us towards? We attract chaos. Pay attention to the structures that are crumbling; the relationships that have moved past their expiration date. The path of least resistance is the best way forward. In the realm of love, become cognisant of the connections that are draining you. What you need to recognise here is that two halves don't make a full.

Tip: Accept things as they are instead of trying to change them.

CAPRICORN:

"A thousand half-loves have to be forsaken to take one whole heart home." Nobody understands the magic woven by Rumi's words like you do. The connection you are experiencing right now and in this moment may not be perfect, but it's beautiful, and that's so much better than perfect can ever be. Say a prayer of gratitude to the divine forces above that are keeping you intoxicated in the right way. Single Capricornians could be pleasantly surprised.

Tip: Here's to love and other intoxicants!

AQUARIUS:

This reading isn't so much about what you are attracting as it is about who you are becoming. Aquarius, you are experiencing deep, inner alchemy, one that is taking your self-love game to a whole new level. Bring forth the gift of forgiveness. Trust yourself to hold the torch of awareness in the so-called dark places.

Tip: You are learning to love yourself for who you are rather than who you were asked to be.

PISCES:

So what if you have lost in love, Pisces? So what if you've had your heart broken over and over? Don't let the old script be the reason you build fortresses where healthy boundaries are enough. The Universe wants you to stay open to miracles. Some of you may have to realise that the other person is not in the mood to commit. Recognise the sorry excuses they have presented to you over a period of time. Knowing that you deserve better will give you the courage to move on.

Tip: The Universe wants you to stay open.