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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SIKKIM STANDS STRONG AGAINST NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

CM announces special relief package for the underprivileged

MONETARY INCENTIVE FOR FRONTLINE WARRIORS KEEPING SIKKIM SAFE AND CARE FOR

GANGTOK, 27 MAR [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] chaired a high-level meeting of the State Task Force for Covid-19 prevention here at Samman Bhawan today. The meeting was convened to take stock of the preparedness of the State and to come up with immediate measures to provide relief to the people in the wake of the 21-day lockdown underway throughout the country.

After thorough deliberations, the Chief Minister announced a special economic package to provide immediate relief to the economically weaker section of the Sikkimese population:

Families with three or more members and not entitled to a government job will be provided relief by the State government in the form of: Rice, 20 kg; Dal, 5 kg; Cooking Oil, 5L; Salt, 1 kg; Potato, 7 kg; Onions, 2 kg.

Similarly, for families of two or fewer members and not entitled to a government job will be provided: Rice, 10 kg; Dal, 2 kg; Cooking Oil, 2L; Salt: 1 kg; Potato, 5 kg; Onion, 2 kg.

Meanwhile, the State Government has also decided that a daily wage of Rs 300 will be provided to labourers working at all Pharmaceutical units in the State throughout the period of the lockdown.

The State government also announced a one-time lump-sum monetary incentive of Rs 3000 each for Sikkim Police personnel actively engaged in screening and maintaining law and order for the prevention of Covid-19; All workers under Health Department posted in hospitals and check posts and engaged in screening and prevention of Covid-19; All truck drivers under Transport Department engaged in emergency duty for transportation of essential commodities during the lockdown period; and Safai Karamcharis under Urban Development Department on duty during the lockdown period.

The State government has also decided to provide insurance cover to all these frontline warriors.

Further, the State government has permitted the State Bank of Sikkim to extend a three-month moratorium on all its loans.

The Chief Minister has appealed to the people of Sikkim not to panic with regard to food



supplies during the lockdown and assured that the State government has maintained ample stocks to last the next two months.

In case of any requirement of food and essential commodities, people have been requested to approach their respective BDOs or other designated officials.

The Chief Minister also called for strict compliance of all the orders and circulars issued by the government in view of the 21-day lockdown and urged

for cooperation from the public in order to successfully contain the local transmission of Covid-19 in the State. He requested all to abide by the lockdown protocol and stay home.

He reassured the people that the Government is fully prepared to tackle the situation and lauded the efforts being made by frontline workers who are risking their lives to ensure the safety of the people of Sikkim, and appealed to the people not to let their efforts go in vain.

Three suspected cases test negative for nCoV

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Sikkimese can take a sigh of relief for now as blood samples of three persons suspected to have contracted

the Novel Coronavirus which were sent for testing have come back negative.

According to a video report by Sikkim Chronicle, the DC East has informed

that the three samples tested negative in results received today.

Meanwhile, four people have completed their 14-day home quarantine period in

East Sikkim while two have completed home quarantine in South Sikkim, as per information released by the District Administrations.

There have been no up-

date from the other two districts. No one has been put under isolation in the entire state so far while the number of people under home or self quarantine in the State till

Thursday was 3,269.

In South Sikkim, there are 645 persons in quarantine which includes 624 in self quarantine, 14 in home quarantine and 07

in facility quarantine.

In East, there are 1850 under self quarantine, 250 in home quarantine and 61 in facility quarantine. There are 3 persons in triage facility.



Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India



Help us to help you

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

COVID-19 testing - when and how?

All individuals need not be tested, because

Disease is primarily reported in Individuals with travel history to the affected countries or close contacts of positive cases

WHOM TO TEST

ALL symptomatic people who

- Have history of international travel in last 14 days
- Had come in contact of confirmed cases
- Are healthcare workers
- Are hospitalized patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) or Influenza Like Illness (ILI) or severe pneumonia.

Asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of confirmed cases should be tested once between day 5 and day 14 of coming in his/her contact. Direct and high-risk contact include:

- Those living in same household with a confirmed case
- Healthcare workers who examined a confirmed case without adequate protection as per WHO recommendations

List of labs (Govt. & Private) can be accessed at: icmr.nic.in

For further information:

Call the State helpline numbers or Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India's 24x7 helpline numbers

1075 (Toll Free) | 011-23978046

Email to: ncov2019@gov.in , ncov2019@gmail.com



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No shortage of medicines, Health Minister reassures

"ADEQUATE FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE TO HEALTH DEPT TO PREPARE FOR nCoV SITUATION"

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Health Minister, Dr Mani Kumar Sharma, today reassured that there was no shortage of medicines or required protective equipment.

Making these comments in light of the Novel Coronavirus pandemic coursing through the country, he stressed that the State Government was addressing the situation deploying all-possible scientific

methods available to it and will continue to do so even after the 21-day lockdown got over.

Responding to complaints from some section of the society that there was shortage of required medicines at medical stores in the State, Dr Sharma said that this could have resulted from some miscommunication because transporters carrying medicines are allowed to move freely with-

out any hassles across country.

He added that if any case comes to the notice of the Government, it would pass the necessary directions as and when required.

"The State Government has already allocated Rs 2 crore to the Health Department from Chief Minister's Relief Fund to deal with COVID-19," he informed while adding that the said fund has already been dis-

bursed to all the hospitals and PHCs in the State of Sikkim.

All the PHSCs have been given Rs 50,000, PHCs Rs 1 lakh, CHCs Rs 10 Lakh, District Hospitals Rs 15 lakh, STNM Hospital have been given Rs 75 lakh, Rs 25 lakh to Central Referral Hospital, Dr Sharma detailed.

He further stressed that these funds were part of preparedness efforts and doctors authorized to buy the require equipment as

when required.

Health Department Principal Secretary, K Sreenivasulu, adds that the State Government has already directed all the Pharmaceuticals companies operating here to supply adequate medicines and also handed over a list of required medicines to them.

"So, the people of Sikkim don't have to panic as the State Government has taken all aspects into consideration and acted in a

timely fashion to address the issues," he said.

The Principal Secretary further informed that all the Chief Medical Officers have been directed to pick required medicines and ensure that they reach down to the PHSC level. The Chief Minister, he said, has directed the Health Minister and the Department to ensure that there was no shortage of medicines in rural areas.

PM interacts with Radio Jockeys

Attitude of togetherness combined with positivity is the key to facing the challenge posed by COVID-19: PM

RJs are like members of families of millions of Indian households - they must spread the message of positivity: PM

Need to constantly celebrate the contribution of local heroes at national level and boost their morale: PM

RJs say PM is a member of the fraternity since he has been hosting MKB since 2014; pledge to be the nation's voice in the battle against COVID-19

Posted On: 27 MAR 2020 6:43PM by PIB Delhi
Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today interacted with Radio Jockeys (RJs) via video conference.

Prime Minister appreciated the role played by the RJs in spreading awareness about COVID-19. He said it is praiseworthy that even in lockdown, RJs are discharging their responsibility and recording programmes from home.

Prime Minister said that through the reach of the programmes, RJs are like members of families of millions of Indian households. People not only hear but also follow them. RJs have a great responsibility not just to disseminate and disabuse superstitions but also motivate people.

Apart from spreading information about the views of experts and steps taken by the government, PM also requested RJs to provide feedback about the difficulties and challenges faced by the people so that the government can proactively resolve them.

Prime Minister exhorted the RJs to disseminate positive stories and case studies, particularly of those patients that have fully recovered from coronavirus infection, and also inter-play such stories in different parts of the country, thus bringing the entire country together. He also asked them to showcase and constantly celebrate the contributions of the local heroes like police officers, doctors, nurses, ward boys etc. at national level.

Underlining the importance of empathy, Prime Minister said that it is important to tell the stories of misbehavior with doctors, health care workers and airline staff due to societal fears of them being infect-

ed by the virus, so that such challenges are overcome. He also underlined the importance of educating the public about the dedication of police personnel who are working continuously to assist the public. He said that the public should cooperate with police, adding that while police should avoid usage of strong arm tactics, it is also necessary to enforce discipline. 130 crore Indians should act as national volunteers in fighting the pandemic.

Prime Minister said that the government has announced a number of measures to assist the poor and under-privileged in this difficult time. It is important that information about these announcements reaches the intended beneficiaries swiftly and in a timely fashion. Prime Minister said that as mass communicators, the RJs can play a proactive role in informing their listeners about the announcements, along with educating them about social distancing and the importance of self-quarantine.

In their response, the RJs called the Prime Minister as a part of the RJ fraternity since he has been hosting the widely successful Mann ki Baat on radio since 2014. Pointing out the unprecedented response to Prime Minister's call of 'Janta Curfew' and his innovative idea of thanking the front line warriors, the RJs praised the leadership of the Prime Minister and said they would be happy to play the role of the voice of the nation in the battle against the pandemic.

Prime Minister observed that public broadcaster All India Radio has a particularly important role to play in stopping the flow of rumours. He also requested the RJs to also work towards checking the spread of rumours.

Prime Minister urged the RJs to work towards ensuring a constructive and positive attitude in society. He said that 'an attitude of togetherness combined with positivity is the key to facing the challenge posed by COVID-19'.

Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting and Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting also participated in the interaction.

Cong points out nCoV danger of pharma employees travelling in buses



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee [SPCC] has asserted that the operation of private companies during the lockdown period has proved risky and irresponsible.

The party states that transportation of employees in buses was in direct violation of social distancing norms directed by the Central and the State governments.

On the same, the party has demanded that the State government to immediately stop the operation of pharma companies in the State.

An SPCC press release issued by its general secretary, Sumitra Rai, mentions that all State governments have been following the announcement of the Prime

Minister on 24 March to lockdown the country to maintain social distancing.

The release adds that despite the State government's announcement of lockdown, several pharma companies in the State have been operating openly and buses being used as transportation for company employees.

While strongly condemning such practice, the party has urged the government to take appropriate action in the interest of the people by taking note of such "careless practices."

The party has further urged the government to direct these companies to give salaries to their employees for the lockdown period.

SSC urges State to formalize economic relief package and resolve pharma co issues

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convenor, Nawin Kiran Pradhan, today urged the State government to come up with an economic package to support thousands of workers engaged in different pharmaceutical and other companies in the State. He further urged the State government and managements of private companies to come up with a solution of issues facing by employees of these companies. The State Government, it may be mentioned here, came up with a detailed economic package this evening [detailed report on page01].

Mr Pradhan stresses that the lockdown has hit the economy and middle and working class very severely and that in the days to come, it will only worsen for them.

He also mentions the Rs 17 lakh crore relief package announced by the Union Finance Minister yesterday and the announcements made by the RBI.

"Regarding the RBI Governor's statement, I would like to state that the RBI Governor has used the term as 'may' so now, it is for the Banks to decide whether to give relief to the loanees and bor-

rowers," he points out while urging that the state government work in coordination with economic experts to remit the three months moratorium on repayments of term loans.

A press release issued by Mr Pradhan also criticizes "that amidst this situation the only economic planning so far done by the state government has been opening of two bank accounts namely 'Chief Minister Relief Fund' and ask a donation for the same."

"In this regard, I am reluctantly forced to state that there are few in Sikkim who can contribute to the CM's Relief Fund at this point of time. Rather it is the common people who need relief from the state as there is no business and everything is in a standstill. Therefore, I rather request the state government to come up with relief and with proper distribution process so that it reaches to the most-needy," he adds.

He has also urged the state government and management of pharma companies here to come up with a solution to worker issues presently prevailing all over Sikkim and also ensure that there is no stoppage of manufacturing and supply of life-saving drugs to the nation.

IAS Officer suspended for fleeing Kerala while under quarantine

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR 27 (PTI): The Kerala Government on Friday suspended IAS officer Anupam Mishra, who left the state violating instructions to remain under home quarantine after his trip abroad.

An FIR had been registered against Mishra, the Kollam Sub-Collector, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, on the basis of a report from the health department about the violation.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told reporters that the officer had left without taking permission from the authorities. "That is not a right

act. We have requested those under observation to strictly follow quarantine instructions. But when a responsible officer like the sub collector fled Kerala, it has brought disgrace to the state, Vijayan said.

Hence, "We have de-

cided to suspend him", he said.

The young IAS officer had returned to the state on March 19 from his honeymoon abroad and had been asked to remain under observation.

However, he left for his brother's place in Bengaluru without informing anyone.

Kollam Collector B Abdul Nasser said Mishra had returned to Kerala on March 19 from his Malaysia-Singapore trip and was advised to remain under quarantine, as per the protocol for overseas returnees in the backdrop of coronavirus outbreak.

Though he underwent a medical examination, he did not show symptoms. His personal staff, including gunman, have also been kept under observation.

When the Collector got in touch with him, Mishra informed him that he was in Bengaluru.

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सारा विश्वमा कोरोना भाइरस अर्थात कोभिड 19-को महामारी दिन प्रतिदिन बढिरहेको छ। विकसित र सम्पूर्ण रूपले सशक्त देशहरूले पनि आज यस प्रकोपबाट आफूलाई बचाउन सकिरहेका छैनन्। बढ्दो यस महामारीबाट बच्ने एउटै मात्र उपाय भनेको सामाजिक भेटघाटलाई बन्द गरेर एका-अर्कामा दूरी बनाइराख्नु मात्र हो। यस्तो गर्दा भनेमात्र हामीले छिट्टै यस महामारीबाट मुक्ति पाउन सक्छौं। कतिपय देशले यस प्रक्रियालाई अपनाएको कारण आज उनीहरू यस रोगको संक्रमणलाई घटाउन सफल बनेका छन्। यस कुरालाई मध्यनजर गरेर माननीय प्रधानमन्त्री श्री नरेन्द्र मोदीज्यूले कोरोना भाइरसको महामारीबाट देश साथै समस्त देशवासीलाई बचाउने सोचका साथ 24 मार्चको मध्य रातिदेखि देशव्यापी रूपमा 21 दिन लामो तालाबन्दी अर्थात् लकडाउनको घोषणा गर्नुभएको छ।

यति लामो समयसम्म लकडाउन हुँदा देश अति राज्यले खराब आर्थिक परिस्थितिको सामना गर्नुपर्ने हुन्छ तर हाम्रो निम्ति जनताको जीवनभन्दा ठूलो अनि महत्वपूर्ण कुरा अरु केही होइन। हाम्रो राज्य र देशलाई यस भयानक रोगबाट बाहिर निकाल्न हामी सबैले धैर्य राखेर, अनुशासित भएर, सावधानीका साथ पाइला चाल्ने समय हो।

लामो समयसम्म घरभित्र बस्नुलाई अनुचित हुन्छ, खाद्यान्नको अभाव हुन्छ भन्ने डर निकाल्न नजनालाई अपील गर्दछु। राशन दोकान, औषधी दोकान, जीवन बचाउने आवश्यक वस्तुका दोकानहरू सबै खुल्ला रहनेछन्। राशन दोकान विहान नौदेखि राती आठ बजीसम्म खुल्ला रहनेछन्। हामी आवश्यक सामग्री, खाद्यान्न र औषधिको अपूर्ति सुनिश्चित गर्न कडा मेहेतत गरिरहेका छौं। तर तपाईंहरू आवश्यकता परेका सामग्री किन्नै पर्ने अवस्थामा मात्र घरबाट बाहिर निस्कनुहोस्, त्यो पनि एउटा घरबाट केवल एकजना सदस्यमात्र। जरुरत नभए घरभित्रै बस्नुहोस्। बिना कारण घर बाहिर पस्नु नसकिनुहोस्। सरकारले लिएको यस निर्णयलाई सामान्य रूपमा नलिनै न आइए। यस परिस्थितिमा जनताले खेलाडीको गरे यस संक्रमणबाट मानिसलाई बचाउन छिट्टैका डाक्टर, नर्स, अन्य स्वास्थ्यकर्मी, पुलिस, सैनिक बल, अर्थ सैनिक बल, सफाई कर्मचारी, सरकारी निकायहरू सबै सबै हतौसाहित हुनेछन्। म, सङ्घको यस श्रद्धा विधि मानव समाजलाई संक्रमणबाट बचाउनका लागि अग्रिम पङ्कतिमा रहेर काम गर्ने सबैलाई धन्यवाद दिन चाहन्छु अनि उनीहरू र उनीहरूका परिवारका निम्ति प्रार्थना गरिदिने समस्त सिक्किमवासीलाई अनुरोध गर्न चाहन्छु।

आज हामीले इटली जस्तो स्वास्थ्य सेवाको क्षेत्रमा विश्वकै दोस्रो नम्बरमा आउने देशमा समेत कोरोना भाइरस संक्रमणको महामारीले तापबन्दी मद्दाईरहेको सुनिरहेका छौं। आज त्यहाँ दैनिक रूपमा मर्नेको संख्या सयौं छ अनि संक्रमित हुनेको संख्या हजारौं छ। त्यहाँका कोरोना संक्रमण पीडितहरूले जीवनको कठिन दिनहरू भोग्नु परिरहेकोले अनि आफन्तहरू लगातार मर्दै गरेको देखेकोले विभिन्न माध्यमबाट हामीलाई घरबाट बाहिर ननिकल्ने अपील गरिरहेका छन्। जसले अपील गर्दछन्, उनीहरू मध्ये धेरैजना मृत्युको मुखमा उभिएका छन्। उनीहरू हामीलाई बचाउन चाहन्छन्। उनीहरूले जस्तो लापरवाह हुने गल्ती हामीबाट नहोस् भन्ने चाहन्छन्। यसैले उनीहरूलाई लगातार घरभित्र बस्ने सल्लाह दिइरहेका छौं। हाम्रो राज्य सिक्किम लगायत यस क्षेत्रका समस्त नागरिकको बाँचोलाई ध्यानमा राखेर हाम्रो सरकारले केन्द्र सरकारलाई सिक्किम अथवा छिमेकी राज्यमा जतिमको छिट्टै कोरोनाभाइरस संक्रमण जाँच सुविधा स्थापित गरिदिने अनुरोध गरेको थियो। यस कुरालाई मध्यनजर राखेर छिमेकी राज्य पश्चिम बङ्गालको सिलिगुडीस्थित उत्तर बङ्गाल मेडिकल कलेजमा त्यो सुविधा शुरु भएको जानकारी प्राप्त भएको छ।

यसरी हाम्रो अनुरोधलाई चाँडो सुनवाई गरेर उत्तर बङ्गाल मेडिकल कलेजमा कोरोना संक्रमण जाँच सुविधा उपलब्ध गरिदिनुभएकोमा म सिक्किम सरकार साथै सिक्किम जनताको तर्फबाट माननीय प्रधानमन्त्री श्री नरेन्द्र मोदीज्यू अनि माननीय केन्द्रीय स्वास्थ्य मन्त्री डाक्टर हर्ष वर्धनज्यूलाई आभार व्यक्त गर्दछु। यसका साथै हामी बाहिरक पनि यस महत्त्वपूर्ण कार्यमा पत्राचार गर्नेहरूको हामी आभार व्यक्त गर्दछौं। अब यस भाइरस विरुद्ध लड्न सबैजना अलग अलग स्तर हुने समय आएको छ। यो 21 दिन देशका निम्ति अति नै महत्वपूर्ण दिन हो अनि यसले हाम्रो अविश्व निर्धारण गर्नेछ। जनता कफरू सफल पछि म यस समय पनि तपाईंहरूको समर्थन र सहयोग पाउनेछु भन्ने कुरामा विश्वस्त छु। एकजुट भएर हामी यस भयानक रोगलाई जिउ सक्छौं। अन्तमा, म सबैलाई सुनिश्चित गर्न चाहन्छु कि हामी कुनै पनि परिस्थितिको सामना गर्ने पूर्णरूपले तयार छौं।

कोभिड 19-को यस महामारीको कारण गरिएको यस लकडाउनको समयमा यसलाई रोकका निम्ति विभिन्न स्तरबाट आफ्नो महत्वपूर्ण समय दिइरहेका स्वास्थ्य कर्मी, पुलिस कर्मी साथै अन्य सबैलाई राज्य सरकारको तर्फबाट विभिन्न सहयोग उपलब्ध गर्ने हामीले घोषणा गरेका छौं। आर्थीय जनसमुदाय, वर्तमान महामारीको अवस्थालाई मध्यनजर राख्दै सरकारको तर्फबाट राहतस्वरूप निम्न घोषणाहरू गर्न चाहन्छु:-

- 1) पाँच सदस्य भएको परिवारलाई अहिलेको निम्न-
चामल- 20 केजी
दाल- पाँच केजी
तेल- पाँच लिटर
नुन- एक केजी
आलु- सात केजी
प्याज- दुई केजी प्रदान गरिनेछ।
- 2) यसरी प्रकारले दुईदेखि तीन सदस्य भएको परिवारलाई-
चामल- 10 केजी
दाल- दुई केजी
तेल- दुई लिटर
नुन- एक केजी
आलु- पाँच केजी अनि
प्याज- दुई केजी प्रदान गरिनेछ।
- 3) राज्यमा रहेका सबै दवाई कम्पनीमा काम गर्ने कर्मीहरूलाई लकडाउनको समयमा प्रतिदिन अतिरिक्त तीन सय रूपियाँको दरले प्रदान गर्नुपर्ने राज्य सरकारले निर्देश दिएको छ।
- 4) हाम्रो सरकारले कोभिड 19-को प्रकोपलाई मध्यनजर राखेर आपातकालीन अवस्थामा अतिरिक्त स्वास्थ्य कर्मीहरू, पुलिस विभागमा कार्यरत पुलिस कर्मीहरू जस्तै SAP, IRBP, Home guards, यातायात विभागका चल्कहरू साथै नगर पालिका र नगर पदायत एवं शहरी विकास विभागअन्तर्गत कार्यरत सफाई कर्मचारीहरूलाई अहिलेको निम्ति तीन हजार रूपियाँको दरले सहयोग राशि प्रदान गर्न घोषणा गरेको छ।
- 5) सरकारले कोभिड 19-को प्रकोपलाई रोक विभिन्न स्तरबाट लागूगरी स्वास्थ्य कर्मी, पुलिस कर्मी लगायत अन्य सबैको बीमा गरिदिने पनि घोषणा गरेको म तपाईंहरूलाई जानकारी गराउन चाहन्छु।
- 6) यसका साथै म तपाईंहरूलाई यो पनि जानकारी गराउन चाहन्छु कि सिक्किम राज्य ब्याङ्क अथवा SBS-बाट आफ्नो व्यवसाय चलाउन ऋण अथवा लोन लिएकाहरूलाई ब्याज अर्थात् इन्टरस्ट तिर्नमा तीन महिनाको लागि माफ गरिदिने निर्णय हाम्रो सरकारले गरेको छ। आर्थीय जनसमुदाय, तपाईंहरूलाई यो पनि जानकारी गराउन चाहन्छु कि हाम्रो राज्यमा आगामी दुई महिनासम्मको लागि पुर्ण खाद्यान्नको आवश्यक राज्य सरकारले गरिनेकोछ। तपाईंहरू अतालिननु पर्दैन।

अति खाद्यान्नको आवश्यकता अथवा कुनै पनि आपातकालीन स्थिति भएको घण्टामा जनताले हुनसक्ने सम्पूर्ण सक्नु भन्ने उद्देश्यले राज्य सरकारले सात दिन अति चौबीसै घण्टा उपलब्ध रहने हेल्पलाइन सुविधाहरू जारी गरेको छ। साथै तपाईंहरूले आफ्नो क्लिनिकमा क्लिनिकपान र खण्ड विकास अधिकारी अथवा BDO-रुमलिन कुनै पनि मामलीको कति भएको अवस्थामा सम्पर्क गर्न सक्नुहुने भन्ने तपाईंहरूलाई अनुरोध गर्दछु।
पनि भन्ने आजको निम्ति तपाईंहरूको माझबाट म विदा लिन चाहन्छु।
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LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Road-side just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 959373387 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



DISINFECTING RAVANGLA BAZAAR: Fire & Emergency Services, Ravangla, in collaboration with the Ravangla Sub-Divisional Administration disinfected Ravangla bazaar today. [IPR]

DACS contributes Rs 10 lakh to CM's Relief fund



GANGTOK, 27 MAR [IPR]: Denzong Agricultural Co-operative Society Limited [DACS], a Government of Sikkim undertaking, has donated a sum of Rs 10 lakh to Chief Minister's Relief Fund to support the state government's fight against Novel Coronavirus. The cheque was formally handed over to the Chief Minister, PS Tamang [Golay], this evening at Samman Bhawan by the DACS chairperson, MLA Sonam Venchungpa. The Chief Minister expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards DACS Ltd and Mr Venchungpa for the kind gesture and generosity.

NHPC-Teesta-V Power Station distributes essentials to stranded labourers



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 MAR: NHPC Teesta-V Power Station, Balutar, East Sikkim, today distributed basic utility packets to labourers stranded here due to the Novel Coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing lockdown. The Utility Packets include basic ingredients like Rice, Daal, Cooking Oil, Soaps, Vegetables, Biscuits etc, an official press release informs. Sahadev Khatua, Head of the Power Station, stressed that the virus can be defeated by collective action.

Governor joins special video-conference with Prez on COVID-19

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Governor Ganga Prasad joined a special video conferencing session presided over by the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, and conducted by Vice President of India, M Venkaiah Naidu, today. The conference was held to review the state of preparedness in all the States and Union Territories following the nationwide lockdown in the wake of rapid spread of COVID-19 in the country, an official press release informs.

The video-conference was participated in by Governors and Lt Governors of all States and Union Territories. The President urged all the Governors, Lt. Governors and Administrators of the State and Union Territories to ensure that the welfare and initiatives of the government reached the intended sections of population without compromising on the objectives of the nationwide lockdown and social distancing norms. He asked the Governors, Lt. Governors and Administrators of the State and Union Territories to guide the

people and motivate the front line warriors in the collective battle in coordination with the State Governments, the release adds. Governors and administrators of the States worst hit by COVID-19, namely Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat, Telangana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Chandigarh, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar provided updates and the state of preparedness in their respective states. They also shared good practices being followed in their states during the delib-



eration. The conference ended with the collective resolve to make the efforts of the government successful in containing the spread and emerge victorious with the support of the people of India.

State Civil Servants contribute to CM's Relief Fund



GANGTOK, 27 MAR [IPR]: A Sikkim State Civil Service Association delegation led by its president, Tshewang Gyachho, and two members, general secretary Annapurna Alley, and vice-president Bhim Thatal, called on Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] at Samman Bhawan this afternoon and handed over a cheque of Rs 5 lakh as a contribution towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to fight the Novel Coronavirus pandemic. The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude towards the association for their graciousness and generosity. Sikkim State Civil Service Officers' Association has 18 Secretaries, 10 Special Secretaries, 32 Additional Secretaries, 51 Joint Secretaries, 38 Deputy Secretaries and 130 Under Secretaries as members.

Local growers feel the pinch of empty haat in Singtam

YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 27 MAR:

Friday, the haat day for Singtam bazaar, wore a desolate look as people supported the lockdown provisions today, day-3 of the 21-day nationwide lockdown. There were some local farmers who were

keen to sell today, but decided to stay away in support of the lockdown even though it hurts their livelihood. What has happened because of the lockdown though is that local organic produce is no longer available and the only shops open get

most of their supply from Siliguri. Some villagers suggested that the government could consider lifting their produce and supplying it locally, that way, kitchens here can continue receiving local produce and growers too will not be setback too much.

Governor donates Rs 12 lakh towards CM's Relief Fund



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 MAR: Governor Ganga Prasad announced a Rs 12 lakh donation from his discretionary fund and Rs One Lakh from his personal account to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund today in a gesture of support towards the government's efforts to tackle COVID-19 in the State, a press communiqué from Raj Bhawan informs. The Governor has further appealed to everyone to come forward and contribute voluntarily towards this fund. "It's the time of distress for all of us and everyone, as per our stature and capacity, must take responsibility to bring the society out of this crisis with whatever means and logistics we can," the Governor has appealed.

DGP calls on people to make lockdown successful



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAR:

Director General of Sikkim Police, A Shankar Rao, has appealed to the people of Sikkim to cooperate to ensure complete success of the lockdown to fight COVID-19. He has appealed that the people remain at home and reinforce this fight. Speaking to media persons here this evening, the DGP stressed that COVID-19 was a serious threat to mankind and its existence. He added that the State government has been taking a series of measures to combat this massive epidemic and mentioned how initially Inner Line Permits were suspended

and subsequently local tourists as well banned from entering Sikkim and a number of shops and establishments have been closed save essential commodities. "We appeal to the people of Sikkim to remain at home and fight COVID-19. Any violation of the lockdown will be seriously dealt with under sections of the IPC and NDMA, which includes rigorous imprisonment of upto six months for violating the lockdown provisions," the DGP said. He added that unnecessary movement will not be tolerated by the police and strict action will be taken against those violating

the lockdown provisions. However, he added that general public can go to purchase essential commodities like food and medicines. He stated that the Section 144 has been imposed in the entire State and gathering of more than four persons will lead to prosecution. "I appeal to the entire people of Sikkim to fully cooperate to ensure the complete success of lockdown and fight against the COVID-19," he added. He mentioned that there were three options for the people - stay at home or stay in hospital or in photo frames.

Now, donate online to CM's Disaster Relief Fund

GANGTOK, 27 MAR [IPR]: The Department of Information Technology, under the directions of the Chief Minister, has developed an online portal to make donations into the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund [CMDRF] account. The portal is currently live at cmdrf.sikkim.gov.in. The portal allows users to donate into the CMDRF account from anywhere in the world. People can donate as individuals or companies/ firms or groups depending on the type of donation. Donations can be made either as guests [that is without registration in the portal] or as registered users. While donating as a guest, the user is required to fill basic details and upload his/her photograph or companies/ group logo (optional) without logging into the portal after which the user is directed to the Payment Gateway. Registered users are required to login either as individuals or companies/ firms or groups. After successfully logging in, users are directed to a dashboard where they can maintain their profiles, view their transaction history and also donate. In the case of firms/ companies or groups the portal has the facility to add the name of the contributing members. The portal also allows guest users to download/ print donation receipts by entering the reference number. The names of the donors can be viewed publicly in the home page of the portal. The portal, under the transparency section, displays the total amount collected and the total expenditure from the CMDRF account including the donations received through offline modes for the purpose of transparency. Citizens can view the list of donors by applying filters like type of donor, month wise donations received, year wise donation received.

After successful completion of payment, an email/SMS alert is sent to the user thanking them for their contribution into the said account. It is important for the user contributing/donating as a guest to note the reference number, in case the user wants to print the receipt from the portal in future. The portal was launched by the Chief Minister on 27 March at Samman Bhawan in the presence of the Jacob Khaling, Political Secretary to CM, SD Dhakal, Secretary to CM, Rajendra Chettri, Director/DIT, Ratna Mani Pradhan, PRO to CM, DK Chettri, OSD to HCM and Prem Ashis Pradhan, Assistant Director/DIT. The Chief Minister congratulated the Department of Information Technology for developing the online portal and stated that in the present era of Information Technology, such online portals played a major role in the upliftment of the state's development during the time of disasters as users worldwide can contribute into the CMDRF account.

Govt warns of penal action against peddlers of fake news and paranoia on nCoV

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 MAR: The State Government today issued an order warning that anyone engaging in "propagating false information and rumours including creating/ circulating forwards, video clips, audio clips etc. and whatever they receive on their devices out of 'Look, I've just seen this' excitement or sheer ignorance" will be liable to face penal action, conviction under which imprisonment of up to 3 years and/ or fine. These acts are punishable under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which is currently in force. An order issued by the Information & Public Relations Department, while recognizing that Novel Coronavirus has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation, adds that the State Government has taken various measures to curtail transmission. Misinformation about the virus, the disease, home remedies, conspiracy theories and false govt advisories have however circulated extensively on Facebook and Whatsapp, leading that State Government to warn of penal action against those who circulate falsehoods and add to the panic.

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What 'Walden' can tell us about social distancing and focusing on life's essentials

ROBERT M. THORSON

THECONVERSATION.COM

Seeking to bend the coronavirus curve, governors and mayors have told millions of Americans to stay home. If you're pondering what to read, it's easy to find lists featuring books about disease outbreaks, solitude and living a simpler life. But it's much harder to find a book that combines these themes.

As the author of three books about essayist, poet and philosopher Henry David Thoreau, I highly recommend "Walden," Thoreau's 1854 account of his time living "alone" in the woods outside Concord, Massachusetts. I qualify "alone" because Thoreau had more company at Walden than in town, and hoed a bean field daily as social theater in full view of passers-by on the road.

Published in over 1,000 editions and translated into scores of languages, "Walden" is the scriptural fountainhead of the modern environmental movement, a philosophical treatise on self-reliance and a salient volume of the American literary canon. In his introduction to the Princeton edition, John Updike claims that Thoreau's masterpiece "contributed most to America's present sense of itself" during the cultural renaissance of the mid-19th century, yet "risks being as revered and unread as the Bible."

Another reason to read or reread "Walden" during trying times is that it gushes with sorely needed optimism and is laced with wit. And Thoreau befriends you by writing in the first person.

REALITY LIES WITHIN US

As governments mandate social distancing to protect public health, many readers may be coming to grips with solitude. Thoreau devotes a chapter to it, extolling the virtue of getting to know yourself really well.

"Why should I feel lonely?" he asks, "is not our planet in the Milky Way?" Elsewhere he clarifies the difference between what we need and what we think we need, writing, "My greatest skill has been to want but little."

"Walden" doesn't have to be read straight through like a novel. For readers who have previously given up on it, I suggest rebooting in the middle with "The Ponds," which opens thus: "Sometimes, having had a surfeit of human society and gossip, and worn out all my village friends, I rambled still farther westward than



I habitually dwell..." Thoreau then retreats away from the mindless distractions of community life toward an immersion into Nature, with water at its spiritual center.

Next, flip back to the earlier chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived For." Here Thoreau invites readers on a downward journey, from the fleeting shallows of their social lives to the solid depths of their individual lives:

"Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that allusion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality..."

Our brains build that reality – yours, mine, everyone's – by integrating external sensory signals with internal memories. Thoreau's point – which is supported by 21st-century cognitive and neuroscience research – is that the real you precedes the social you. Your world is built from the inside of your skull outward, not vice versa.

THE ELUSIVE SIMPLE LIFE

Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond is often mistaken for a hermit's flight deep into the woods. Actually, Thoreau put some distance between himself and his home and village so that he could understand himself and society better. When not in town, he swapped human companionship for the "beneficent society" of Nature for long enough to make "the fancied

advantages of human neighborhood insignificant."

Today mandatory social distancing is wrecking the global economy, based on traditional metrics like gross domestic product and stock prices. Viewed through "Walden," this wreckage may look like a long-overdue correction for an unsustainable system.

Thoreau feared that the economy he saw was headed in the wrong direction. His opening chapter, "Economy," is an extended rant against what he viewed as a capitalistic, urbanizing, consumption-driven, fashion-conscious 19th-century New England.

Of his neighbors, Thoreau wrote, "By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book" – meaning the Christian Bible – "laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before."

In contrast, his recipe for a good economy is one of "Walden"'s most famous quotes: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand."

That was easier said than done, even for Thoreau. When he conceived "Walden," he was an unemployed, landless idealist. By the time it was published, he lived in a big house that was heated with Appalachian coal, earning income by manufacturing pulverized graphite and surveying for land developers.

Since then, the world's popu-

lation has more than quintupled and developed nations have built a global economy approaching US\$100 trillion per year. Human impacts on the planet have become so powerful that scientists have coined the term Anthropocene to describe our current epoch.

FINDING PERSPECTIVE IN SOLITUDE

Some Americans have tried at least halfheartedly to follow "Walden"'s idealistic advice by living deliberately, being more self-reliant and shrinking their planetary footprints. Personally, although I've downsized my house, walk to work, fly only for funerals and cook virtually every meal from scratch, in my heart I know I've also contributed to the world's swelling population, burn fracked natural gas and am hopelessly embedded in a consumer economy.

Nevertheless, after several weeks of social distancing, I'm rediscovering the value of two of Thoreau's key points: Solitude is helping me recalibrate what matters most, and the current economic slowdown offers short-term gains and a long-term message for the planet.

These benefits don't compensate for the incalculable personal losses and grief that COVID-19 is inflicting worldwide. But they are consolation prizes until things stabilize in the new normal. On my daily solitary walk in the woods, I am mindful of Thoreau's words: "Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are."

[the writer is Professor of Geology, University of Connecticut]

The Dalai Lama in Exile

The Precious One is special

On 31 March, 1959, the Dalai Lama crossed into India at Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh after a 15-day journey from Lhasa, completing one leg of an epic journey which continues to this day, having spent more years away from home than he spent in Tibet growing up. A lot has changed over the years, the Dalai Lama has aged, China, save the totalitarian instincts, has junked communist ideology for all practical purposes and exported along with its cheap products nCoV as well, and there are now many more refugee-creating situations around the world. What has not changed though is China's handling of Tibet and the foisting of a situation there which continues to force people to rebel and flee and even end their own lives in protest. Given the present environment, has anyone wondered why there is no word about whether or not Novel Coronavirus has found any hosts in Tibet?

Meanwhile, one may ask here, how, despite countries and their leaders wanting to be friends with China, does Tibet still make news; how their situation still makes headlines? Even when the Tibetan Government in Exile goes out of its way to temper down its desire for autonomy in Tibet just so that host India does not get discomfited? Well, because of the Dalai Lama. Tibetans in exile have been refugees for nearly six decades now. Media has lost interest in other exiled people within a few years and communities in exile have "assimilated" in new homes shortly after. And yet, Tibet, its people both within and in exile remain in conversation. How much does one read about the Lhotsampa refugees from Bhutan anymore, for instance?

It is in the manner that the Dalai Lama has led Tibetan aspirations, modulated public debate on Tibet and communicated a nation's desire for greater expression that keeps the movement alive [in the media circles and thus public consciousness]. It is because of the Dalai Lama's personality and the hope he inspires that the aspirations remain alive even inside Tibet. Tibetans in Tibet have never experienced democracy and their world-view now comes distilled from Beijing which is no democrat. And yet, Tibet witnesses uprisings. Rioters, even when they veer away from the Dalai Lama's path of non-violence, hold up his photographs and his flag of Tibet to prove their devotion to him and qualify to become patriots. Distressingly, an increasing number of them are hurting themselves through self-immolation, a desperate act of violence on self in the hope that the world may pay heed. The world, however, is not nearly as engaged as it should be even though the issue remains unchanged.

And yet, the Dalai Lama keeps everything Tibetan relevant. Which is also why China has launched and sustained a concerted effort to demonise him and strong arming countries into ignoring him. China, which routinely humbles India, browbeats the Koreans, stares down USA and generally bullies everyone else, has met with only failure when it comes to challenging the Dalai Lama. It has swamped Tibetans into a minority at home, indulged Tibet Autonomous Region with developmental funds but has utterly failed in quelling the unquestioned devotion the Dalai Lama commands [even if in secret] among the million Tibetans still in Tibet. And this frustrates them. China obviously plans to wait out the 14th Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama obviously knows this as well. While China continues to unsuccessfully project the Dalai Lama as a "splittist" in the world's eyes, the Dalai Lama is reinforcing the Tibetan spirit in exile – literally forcing democracy on his people, ensuring that they practice it, and grooming alternatives in the religious realm who could deliver the unifying compassion that his people in exile will need in a future without him. When the Dalai Lama stepped on to Indian soil in 1959, very few knew of him or the Tibetans. That is no longer the case even if there is an awkward sidelining even in the host country. The awkwardness results from the fact that the world has not seen a leader who has remained relevant and universally loved for any substantial period of time, and for six decades the Dalai Lama has showed us what selfless commitment means and can deliver. And this journey began on this day back in 1959. Just like the Kundun hence, even this day has become special.

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By sending doctors to Italy, Cuba continues its long campaign of medical diplomacy

STÉPHANIE PANICHELLI-BATALLA

THECONVERSATION.COM

As Italy continues its battle against the global coronavirus pandemic, Cuba has sent 52 doctors and nurses to the country to help. The excellent training of Cuban doctors as well as the fact that they are used to working in precarious and high-risk situations will provide invaluable support for the Italian people.

For nearly 60 years, Cuba has been sending healthcare professionals around the world. It does this in solidarity with those in need, but also as part of a concerted campaign of medical diplomacy and to make money to help the country survive an ongoing US embargo.

Since the very early years of the Cuban revolution, its former leader, Fidel Castro, made clear that universal healthcare and internationalism would be key to the country's strategy. Based on the socialist concept that everyone should have the same opportunities in life, Cuba believed these ideals should be applicable at the global level. The Cuban programme was born out of an interest to export its revolutionary socialist ideals, first to Africa, and later to South America and the rest of the world.

Cuba sent its first long-term mission of Cuban doctors to Algeria in 1963, a country facing a territorial conflict with Morocco. Since then, Cuba has sent more than 400,000 healthcare professionals to work in 164 countries, according to statistics published by the state media.

They have helped both in disaster relief, as well as to provide access to healthcare for those living in remote areas, for example in Venezuela and Brazil. These interventions are born out of trade cooperation agreements between the receiving country and Cuba, for which the Cuban government gets paid either in cash or in goods.

In 2019, more than 28,000 Cuban healthcare professionals were working abroad. And before the outbreak of the coronavirus, 59 countries

were benefiting from Cuba's medical internationalism. The Cuban government recently confirmed that its medical missions will be maintained and that, where needed, the services provided by their doctors would focus on combating the virus.

The national press never misses an opportunity to present Cuba's internationalist doctors as heroes, responsible for giving hope to people all over the world who are in desperate situations. Pedro*, one of the doctors I interviewed as part of my research on the life stories of Cuban healthcare workers, explained the uniqueness of the Cuban doctors' position:

The doctor can be Cuban, or from another country, but not every doctor will sacrifice their life and put themselves in danger to save lives, and this without any kind of financial compensation. This is something we Cubans only do.

CRITICS AND FUGITIVES

Despite the admirable aspects of the programme, it has also received criticism. Some suggest the real interests of the programme are economic and diplomatic and that it allows Cuba to shift scrutiny away from its own poor human rights record.

Others have criticised what they see as the "selective humanitarianism" of the programme, calling attention to the lower numbers of doctors available to the Cuban population due to the high numbers of doctors working abroad. In my research in Cuba, I've witnessed long waiting times in medical centres and several of the people I interviewed spoke of a lack of continuity in doctor-patient care.

As for the doctors and nurses who take part, their participation is not always driven by solidarity but in some cases by the opportunities these missions represent for them and their families. In many cases, working on a mission will improve their standard of living when they return to the island. Many are also able to send goods such as fridges or other household

appliances to their families while they are away.

Many doctors have also used the mission as a way to escape a country that is still governed by an authoritarian regime and between 2006 and 2016, more than 7,000 Cuban doctors defected to the US. Several have even accused the Cuban government of using them as modern slaves.

A MOMENT FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

Cuba always offers its medical help, but Italy is the first developed European country which has decided to accept it.

Many global leaders have been wary of doing so, because of Cuba's poor human rights record. The case of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 is illustrative here. Castro offered to send 1,500 doctors to the US to help with the relief effort. A special group of healthcare professionals was formed for the task called the Henry Reeve medical brigade, named after an American who supported the Cuban independence forces in 1868 and died in combat for the cause. But US president George W Bush never got back to Castro and the doctors and nurses were redeployed elsewhere. It's this same brigade which has now gone to Italy.

In 2005, while waiting for Bush's response, Castro made clear what should be at the centre of decisions in times of crisis:

This is not a war between human beings, it is a war for the life of human beings, it is a war against diseases, against repeating calamities, and one of the first things this world should learn especially now, with the changes that are taking place and the phenomena of this type, is to cooperate.

While everyone may not agree with Castro's revolution, perhaps this is a moment for the world to put ideological disagreements aside and focus on the global war against coronavirus by all working together.

[the writer is Associate Professor in Global

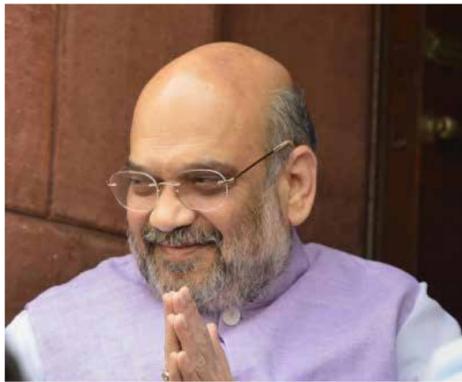
Sustainable Development, University of Warwick]

Shah speaks to some CMs on exodus of migrant workers

NEW DELHI, MAR 27 (PTI): Union Home Minister Amit Shah has spoken to some of the chief ministers and asked them to look into the issue of mass exodus of migrant workers from different parts of the country after the announcement of 21-day lockdown.

Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs Punya Salila Srivastava said Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has also asked the state governments and Union Territory administrations to provide food and shelter to the migrant workers so that they remain at the place where they are.

"The home min-



ister has spoken to some of the chief ministers and asked them to look into the matter," she told a press conference here.

There have been reports of a large number of migrant workers leaving their work places in different parts of the country and

walking down to their native places, hundreds of kilometres away facing hardships on the way.

The migrant workers have no option but to walk as there is no transport available after the announcement of the lockdown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday.

GUWAHATI, MAR 27 (PTI): The 21-day nationwide lockdown has brought out both sides of the Assam Police, with its personnel, on one hand, enforcing the restrictions on the movement of people by caning violators and making them do push-ups and on the other, they were also seen feeding the poor and helping the needy.

The lockdown imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contain the spread of novel coronavirus entered the third day on Friday.

Individual and collective deeds of kindness by police personnel were witnessed across the state in the past two days.

While lone constables were seen feeding beggars in Golaghat

and Nalbari districts, a police team distributed food grains to the needy in Nagaon district.

Another such team eased the home-bound journey of an octogenarian who walked nearly 100 km from Kaliabor to reach Biswanath Chariali by giving him lift in a police vehicle to his village in Lakhimpur district.

On Thursday, personnel of the Smart Protection Unit of the Assam Police were seen distributing cooked food in Guwahati's Fancy Bazar area.

The 70,000-strong state police force has earned praise from people for such initiatives.

"We are helping people with the mindset of social service. We are doing every



possible thing to alleviate the distress of the people in this hour of need," Additional Director General (Administration) Harmeet Singh told PTI.

Singh said a nodal officer has been appointed to coordinate with organisations and individuals willing to feed the poor.

He said in the last two days, several NGOs have come forward and provided the needy with food items while a doz-

en others have contacted the police for similar initiatives in the coming few days.

From Friday, police personnel in Goalpara district will feed lunch to 100 BPL cardholders every day for the next 20 days, Singh said.

At Srirampur in Kokrajhar district along the Assam- West Bengal border, police personnel have fed hundreds of people arriving from various parts of the country

before placing them under quarantine, he said.

Personnel of the force were also seen delivering essential commodities, including medicines and gas cylinders, to elderly persons.

"We are looking after elderly persons who live alone as their children have migrated to other states or abroad for work. We are responding to many requests for help across the state," Singh added.

Key questions as Wimbledon faces postponement or cancellation

LONDON, MAR 27 (AFP) The All England Club will hold an emergency meeting next week to discuss the possible postponement or even cancellation of Wimbledon in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

AFP Sport looks at the key questions facing the organisers of what is generally regarded as the world's most prestigious tennis tournament.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR WIMBLEDON THIS YEAR?

Wimbledon, which is scheduled to take place from June 29 until July 12, has been staged every year in peace time since 1877, shelved only during the two world wars.

However, the spread of the coronavirus has brought havoc to the 2020 global sports calendar.

Tennis is at a standstill until June 7 with the entire European clay-court season already wiped out.

Roland Garros, traditionally the season's second Grand Slam of four, has been rescheduled from its traditional late May-early June slot to September 20-October 4.

The grass court season is relatively short, five weeks for the leading events, so Wimbledon would appear to have time on their side.

However, building and preparation work at the All England Club site in leafy south-west London takes two months to complete and is set to start at the end of April.

There is also the issue of when the coronavirus will peak. By Thursday, there had been 170 fatalities in London alone with 578 nationwide. Around 9,500 people have been infected so far in the

United Kingdom.

Health is the top issue for an event which attracts not only the superstars of the sport, but also close to 500,000 spectators each year as well as 6,000 staff and around 3,200 accredited media.

WHY CAN'T THE TOURNAMENT BE PLAYED LATER IN THE YEAR?

A slot has opened up in the calendar after the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics until next year.

However, Wimbledon organisers know that a postponement by a just fortnight to take advantage of that opening would solve little.

It would also mean running into the build-up to the US hardcourt season, the precursor to the August-September US Open in New York.

"At this time, based on the advice we have received from the public health authorities, the very short window available to us to stage The Championships due to the nature of our surface suggests that postponement is not without significant risk and difficulty.

"Playing behind closed doors has been formally ruled out," said a spokesman.

Two-time Wimbledon mixed doubles champion Jamie Murray said he appreciated the difficulties.

"I don't know how long they could push it back," Murray, 34, told the BBC.

"There's a lot of other stakeholders, a lot of other tournaments to consider. Even things like daylight for the tournament.

"Once the tournament gets put back, there's less and less daylight."

WHAT WOULD BE

THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF A CANCELLED WIMBLEDON?

The tournament is an annual money-spinner. For example, in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, it was reported that Wimbledon generated 336 million with a pre-tax profit of 52 million. Over 90 per cent of that was ploughed into British tennis.

The BBC, which broadcasts Wimbledon, will have a two-week black hole if the event is called off. They reportedly shell out around 72 million a year for the rights.

WHO WOULD BE THE LOSERS OF A CANCELLED WIMBLEDON?

As well as the purely sporting implications of a binned Wimbledon, Britain's well-heeled would suffer a jolt to their busy summer social season.

The Henley Royal Regatta on the River Thames, a feature since 1839, has already been cancelled.

Wary eyes will now be cast towards June's Royal Ascot, which has drawn British royalty and the cream of society since 1911.

The British tabloids would also be stripped of their two-week Wimbledon headline bonanza and celebrity fix.

'Meghan Markle's Wimbledon hair is a look she rarely wears' or 'Meghan Markle's Wimbledon outfit draws backlash' were particular diversions in 2019.

Also into cold storage will go the dependable, 'Game, sweat and match', dusted off every time the sun drives up the temperatures in London.

And farewell to the 'gruntometer', that notorious low-tech gadget employed by the red-tops to categorise the on-court Wimbledon shrieks and screams.

Meghalaya church asks parishes to open facilities as quarantine centres

SHILLONG, MAR 27 (PTI): The Catholic Church here has written to its parishes across the Khasi Jaintia Hills region to open the facilities as centres for quarantine, if the need arises, amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Shillong Archdiocese administrator John Madur asked the parishes to provide shelter to those in need of space and food during the crisis.

I understand we are in difficult times. But I am sure we can

be of some services to humanity, he said in a letter to the over 30 parishes under its jurisdiction.

The Catholic Church is one of the biggest churches in the state with over 3 lakh members.

Assam Police personnel feed poor, deliver medicines amid lockdown

GUWAHATI, MAR 27 (PTI): The 21-day nationwide lockdown has brought out both sides of the Assam Police, with its personnel, on one hand, enforcing the restrictions on the movement of people by caning violators and making them do push-ups and on the other, they were also seen feeding the poor and helping the needy.

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Ward boy of private hospital in Patna tests positive for coronavirus

PATNA, MARCH 27 (PTI): A 20-year-old man, who worked as a ward boy at a private hospital where he came into contact with a COVID-19 patient, has tested positive, taking the total number of such cases reported from Bihar to seven, the health department said on Friday.

According to a health department official, a 38-year-old man from

Munger district who died at AIIMS, Patna, last week before his test results confirmed that he was suffering from COVID-19, was first admitted to the private hospital situated in Khemnichak locality of the city which has since been sealed.

The district administration ordered all doctors, nurses and other staff of the facility to be quarantined.

Samples of 13 people working at the private hospital were sent for testing and the result of one that of the ward boy hailing from Jaganpura area in the city was found positive.

Efforts were on to trace the other staff of the private hospital who would be quarantined as a precautionary measure and their samples will be sent for testing, the official

said.

Notably, Bihar had reported zero coronavirus positive cases until Sunday when the deceased patient from Munger who had returned from Qatar where he worked as a welder and a woman resident of the city who is admitted to AIIMS, Patna, tested positive.

There has been a spike in the number of cases since then with seven per-

sons testing positive in less than a week.

On Thursday, two persons a woman in her 40s and a 12-year-old boy who lived in a house adjacent to that of the deceased patient in Munger had tested positive.

They have been sent to a hospital in Bhagalpur for treatment. Samples of more than 50 people living in the vicinity, however, tested negative.

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SummitTIMES

Colombian cyclist Gaviria says recovered from coronavirus



BOGOTA, MAR 27 (AFP): Colombian sprinter Fernando Gaviria said he had recovered from coronavirus.

The 25-year-old of Team UAE Emirates contracted the disease during last month's Emirates Tour that was canceled on February 27 after several riders caught the virus.

"The last tests I took came back negative and the doctors have discharged me from hospital," Gaviria wrote on Instagram on Thursday.

Following days of rumors amidst a social media silence, Gaviria had admitted on March 12 he was one of the cy-

clists to have caught the virus.

He remained in the United Arab Emirates, where his team is based, under constant medical attention, during which time he insisted he felt healthy.

"My focus now is on returning home and reuniting with my family," said Gaviria.

However, Colombia is under total lockdown until April 13 due to the pandemic.

It has closed its borders and banned commercial flights from arriving.

Colombia has recorded almost 500 coronavirus cases and six deaths.

Real Madrid's stadium to be used in fight against coronavirus

SID LOWE
MADRID, 27 MAR: The Santiago Bernabéu will be turned into a storage and distribution centre for medical materials donated to the health authorities as the coronavirus crisis continues in Spain.

Two days ago the head of the Madrid regional government, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, publicly thanked Real Madrid for what she described as a "big donation in health materials" after a conversation with the club's president, Florentino Pérez. A donation was also made by Atlético Madrid. Now, the Spanish sports council and Real Madrid have announced their famous 78,000-capacity stadium will be used to store donations made in the fight against Covid-19.

Madrid will use their charitable foundation to receive financial donations and have set up a point of contact to collect and receive donations of materials which will then be stored at the stadium, authority for which has been handed to the ministry of health.

The move continues a trend of emergency solutions to the crisis, with buildings being adapted to aid the state. A field hospital with 5,000 beds was erected in Madrid's IFEMA conference centre and the ice rink nearby has been converted into a morgue. Madrid's stadium has hosted the final of the World Cup, European Cup and Copa Libertadores.

Spain has the world's second highest death toll from coronavirus, behind Italy and surpassing China. Of 4,089 deaths as of Thursday morning, 2,090 were in Madrid.

Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the president of the community of Madrid who has tested positive for coronavirus, tweeted her gratitude to David de Gea on Thursday night after the Manchester United goalkeeper pledged a substantial sum towards the fight against the disease.

Meanwhile Barcelona are yet to reach an agreement with their players over the application of a pay cut that could be as high as 70% for as long as coronavirus lockdown lasts in Spain. The players are understood to be receptive to a reduction in salary and discussions are continuing but, in consultation with the players' union the AFE, they rejected the first proposal.

The intention is for any measures to apply equally to every athlete at the club, from the men's and women's football teams to the B team and the under-19s to those who play basketball, handball, futsal and roller hockey. But the impact would be felt differently across each sector and negotiations also continue with those who play other sports for the club.

Labour legislation in Spain allows for companies to apply ERTES - temporary measures to lay off staff or reduce wages in circumstances such as these - but Barcelona prefer to negotiate a settlement. If they are unable to reach agreement, the club could apply the changes unilaterally but they are reluctant to do so. The relationship between boardroom and dressing room is already fraught. There are also likely to be measures applied to non-sporting staff.

England's Anderson says coronavirus won't end cricket career

LONDON, MAR 27 (AFP): England bowler James Anderson is determined that the coronavirus will not end his illustrious career as he focuses on keeping fit by taking part in "virtual" training sessions with his teammates.

Anderson, 37, whose 584 Test wickets are the most taken by any pacer in the history of the game, is nearing the end of his playing days.

But the Lancashire veteran says despite having no cricket to play until the end of May at the earliest, the idea of not bowling professionally again has not crossed his mind.

"I've not actually thought about never playing cricket again," he said during a conference call on Thursday.

"I feel like we will play again and I will play again at some stage.

"I'm still hungry to play, I've still got ambitions to play for England.

"So I think the fact I've been able to do this for a long time and I get to play a sport as a job means when I do get to

do that again, I'm really going to cherish it and enjoy every single moment of it."

With Britain under a coronavirus lockdown, Anderson is keeping fit by working out on-line with teammates including fellow pacemen Stuart Broad and Mark Wood.

"A few of the lads are training together virtually," he said.

"I did a workout with Stuart Broad and Mark Wood yesterday.

"We've all got Pelotons -- the bikes. You can compete against each other. Stuart came out on top this time, with me a close second and Mark Wood in third."

Anderson made the most recent of his 151 Test appearances against South Africa in Cape Town in January before a broken rib ended his tour prematurely.

That followed an Ashes campaign last year in which he bowled just four overs because of a calf problem.

- ANDERSON PRIMED

England left Ander-



son out for their recent tour of Sri Lanka, curtailed by the coronavirus, in a bid to get him fit for the English summer.

"To get injured again was a big frustration," he said.

"But it was lucky in a way that it was a broken rib. If it was a muscle injury it would have taken much longer to recover."

The England and Wales Cricket Board last week put cricket on hold until May 28 -- just a week before the sched-

uled start of the first Test against the West Indies.

Anderson believes even if that return date is feasible, the timescale could be tight unless players can train outdoors in May.

He is also wary about the prospect of matches being played behind closed doors, saying the game has to be played in front of fans.

Although he has long been a red-ball specialist, Anderson

said he would be prepared to play white-ball cricket again, even in the new Hundred competition.

Anderson has an ambassadorial role with the Manchester Originals, one of the franchises, but no contract.

"I want to be playing cricket and if that is the only cricket going on, if it's the Hundred or the T20 Blast, I'd love to be involved in that," he said.

"If there wasn't any red-ball cricket this summer, it would be a long,

long time for me to be ticking over in the nets." Despite the frustrations as a cricketer during the coronavirus lockdown, Anderson said it was important to look at the bigger picture.

"People are sacrificing a hell of a lot for us to try and keep us healthy," he said.

"I think us sacrificing some of, and maybe all of, the cricket season and staying inside for a bit, I don't think that's a huge sacrifice.

No easy solutions: clubs across Europe in the dark as players battle wage cuts

NICK AMES
LONDON, 27 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:

As clubs across Europe move to reduce or defer their footballers' salaries, one thing is crystal clear. There will be no comfortable, one size fits all solution to an issue that faces almost everyone: the need to save money during the coronavirus crisis in an industry that, taking the continent as a whole, pays out 64% of its revenue in wages.

That figure, Uefa's latest, is accurate up to 2018 and will certainly have risen. It is no wonder that, with income streams compromised indefinitely, clubs at all levels are seeking new arrangements. Goodwill - and an understanding that no two situations are the same when dealing with governments, leagues, clubs and even individuals - is essential and the positive stories are offset by examples of clubs being, at best, ham-fisted in their attempts to force through cuts.

It is a precarious enough state of affairs to concern Fifpro, the global players' union, although it is aware every league has its unique challenges and a particular level of recourse to state support. Two cases provide a glimpse into how fraught things may become without compromise.

At Sion, in Switzerland, nine players - including the former Arsenal pair Alex Song and Johan Djourou - were

sacked last week after refusing a proposal that would, according to one source close to the squad, have seen the highest earners take a reduction of up to 80%. A raft of legal cases is inevitable. The club claim just cause but the players' stance is that the deal involved a government support package for "partial unemployment" that had not been put into law for footballers at that point.

The players are believed to be happy to enter into individual negotiations. Sion have emphasised that the dismissed players were asked for their agreement in the event that the government's deal, which subsequently came into force, was passed and that they were not fired for rejecting a wage cut per se.

The standoff at Dinamo Zagreb, whose players have refused the imposition of a six-month package that would see a third of their wages paid, a third deferred and a third cut entirely, risks becoming similarly drawn out. The Croatian footballers' association said that, even though the squad want to help, it is too early for such decisions and that the measure seems drastic given the low matchday and TV revenues in the local league. It claims the players were not consulted. Dinamo are yet to respond to a request for comment.

Elsewhere, the Guardian has learned



of clubs in Scandinavia that have told foreign players to take cuts of between 25% and 50% if they wish to spend the Covid-19 shutdown in their homelands. There is an acknowledgement at all levels below the very top that the issue is an existential one, but the balance between clubs' financial needs and those of their players is highly delicate and may prove impossible to strike.

"We are concerned that a significant number of clubs are acting to unilaterally reduce the salaries of players," the Fifpro general secretary, Jonas Baer-Hoffmann, told the Guardian. "We are aware of such situations in more than half a dozen countries. In one case, within days of the suspension of the national league, players had their salaries immediately and arbitrarily decreased by two-thirds for a period of six months. While we fully understand the economic pressure employers are facing, we cannot accept unilateral actions that are based neither on individual consent nor collective agreements.

As is already happening in other countries, clubs and leagues with cash-flow difficulties should meet with national player unions to discuss and negotiate fair and proportionate arrangements."

The willingness of some clubs to take such firm action has led, in certain quarters, to a growing sense that the decks are being cleared for a universal termination of the 2019-20 campaign. But others are keener to bide their time before making demands of their players. The president of a club dominant in its nation's top flight said he accepted "nothing will be like it was before" when coronavirus has subsided, expecting sponsorship deals to take a particularly punishing hit. But he did not want to rush into a decision about passing any costs on to his team, particularly when football's legal status in the economy of that country remains unclear.

One agent describes wage cuts or deferrals as essentially a two-tier issue, with leading

Premier League sides operating in a different sphere to everyone else. Top-flight clubs are understood to be monitoring the subject closely although, in many cases, requests to forego money would be viewed dimly unless they were with the express intention of assisting support staff. While the players and staff at Championship club Leeds have taken a wage deferral for that reason, it is pointed out that a second-tier player in the autumn of a time-limited career who has - for example - a year left on his contract is not as financially secure as most might assume. The implication from many in the game is that livelihoods may be severely damaged if cases are not viewed one by one, as grinding a process as that might be.

English chief executives will have noted the examples of Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and Borussia Mönchengladbach, whose players have taken temporary cuts of varying degrees to help lower-paid employees. Barcelona's sit-

uation, while caught up in a tangle of complex Spanish employment regulations and existing tensions between squad and board, will also not have escaped attention. Their players are yet to agree reductions of up to 70%. The problem with imposing a blanket decrease within a single club is highlighted by the fact that, as currently proposed, the Barcelona deal could see staff from lesser-remunerated areas - such as the women's operation or handball team - take the same percentage cut as the likes of Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez.

The number of players across Europe whose contracts expire in June, or in some cases sooner, brings a further layer of difficulty. As another player representative puts it, most of those trying to pick a way through this situation feel completely in the dark. The worry is that, for all the attempts to meet in the middle, good intentions may not be enough for an industry that has never faced challenges like these.

We will talk about IPL later once life gets back to normal: Rohit

MUMBAI, MAR 27 (PTI): Sport is least of priority at a time when India fights against the COVID-19 pandemic which has brought life to a standstill, feels star India batsman Rohit Sharma, who wants to talk about IPL only after normalcy returns.

Rohit, who has been

out of action for last two months due to calf muscle injury was due for a comeback in the cash-rich Indian Premier League, which has been postponed till April 15 but stands a good chance of getting cancelled if prevailing situation continues.

"We should first think

about the country. The situation needs to get better first then we can talk about the IPL. Let life get back to normal first," Rohit said.

The opener was responding to questions during an Instagram chat with teammate Yuzvendra Chahal.

India has so far recorded nearly 700 positive cases of coronavirus besides 16 deaths.

Globally, the death toll has crossed 22000 while infecting lakhs of people.

Thanks to the lockdown, all the Indian metropolises are wearing a deserted look.

"I haven't seen Bombay like this before. As cricketers, we don't get time with family. So much of tours and cricket is there.

"This is a time to spend with them and loads of it," said Rohit. The vice-captain of India's limited overs squads leads Mumbai Indians in the IPL.

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Russia to close restaurants, cafes from Saturday

MOSCOW, MAR 27 (AFP): The Russian government has ordered all cafes and restaurants to close for a week from Saturday to stem the spread of the coronavirus infection.

Russian regions are to "halt the activities of public food service organisations," except for delivery services, a government decree said on Friday.

The decree also or-

dered regional authorities to halt the work of resorts until June, and to recommend that Russians limit travel.

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday declared a non-working week from March 28 to April 5 to "prevent the threat of the quick spread of the illness," as the number of coronavirus cases has spiked in recent days, particularly in Moscow.

Putin also urged Russians to heed all recommendations of health-care professionals and government officials.

The country has grounded all international flights from Friday, but stopped short of ordering a full-blown quarantine.

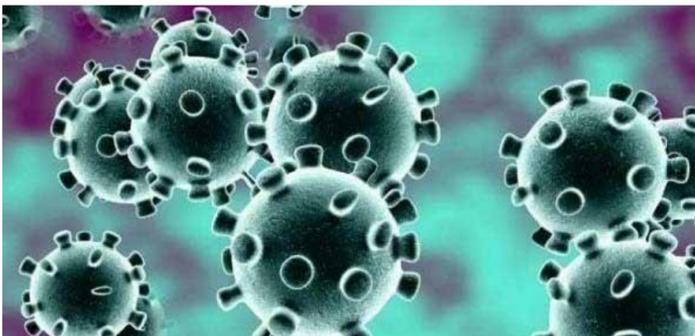
Two people have died of the coronavirus infection and 840 have so far fallen ill, according to official statistics.

BEIJING, MAR 27 (PTI): Researchers have reviewed the existing potential treatment approaches against the novel coronavirus behind the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that drugs directly targeting the virus are likely to be most effective.

According to the research, published in the journal Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy, a number of potential therapeutic approaches for the treatment of COVID-19 is growing, including blocking the virus (SARS-CoV-2) from entering cells, disrupting its replication, suppressing overactive human immune response, and vaccines.

However, the scientists, including those from Wuhan University in China, said no drug or vaccine has been officially approved due to

'Existing potential treatment approaches for COVID-19 summarised'



cies transmission. SARS-CoV-2 is more likely to infect lung type II alveolar cells, which may explain the severe alveolar damage after infection," the scientists wrote in the research.

The study noted that a pilot clinical trial is underway in patients with severe COVID-19, investigating use of genetically modified human ACE2 to act as "decoys" that would attach to spike proteins, disabling SARS-CoV-2's mechanism for entry

SARS-CoV-2 replication in laboratory studies.

It also noted that the clinical condition of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the US improved following intravenous remdesivir administration.

However, they said more data on its effectiveness is needed.

The scientists also noted that Tilarone, a broad spectrum antiviral, may also be active against SARS-CoV-2.

They said the 50-year-old synthetic

proved in Russian Federation countries, the researchers said, it has not been tested for safety and efficacy in studies that meet the US Food and Drug Administration standards.

Another approach the study mentioned is the transfusion of blood from recovered patients -- which contain antibodies against the virus -- into current patients.

But due to the lack of high quality clinical trials and knowledge of the precise mechanism

of action, the researchers said, it is not clear how effective this therapy is, and is used mainly in patients in critical condition.

Several clinical trials investigating its effectiveness and safety against COVID-19 are underway, they added.

The study also said there are over fifteen vaccine candidates currently under development around the world, with each taking a different approach to vaccine design -- all of which may take approximately 12-18 months for completion.

"Among these options, we suppose the therapeutic drugs that directly target SARS-CoV-2 will be most effective. Besides, vaccines are critical for the prevention and limitation of COVID-19 transmission," the researchers concluded in the study.

Xi tells Trump China and US must 'unite to fight virus'

Beijing, Mar 27 (AFP) China and the United States should "unite to fight" the deadly coronavirus pandemic that has ravaged the globe, said President Xi Jinping in a call with his US counterpart on Friday, according to state media.

The two countries have clashed in recent weeks over the virus, but Xi told President Donald Trump that China "wishes to continue sharing all information and experience with the US," said state broadcaster CCTV.

The two leaders appeared to strike a conciliatory tone after Trump and his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo angered Beijing this month by repeatedly referring to "the Chinese virus" when discussing the COVID-19 outbreak



first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Earlier this month a foreign ministry spokesman in Beijing also suggested in a tweet that the US military brought the virus to Wuhan.

Friday's call also took place as the US overtook China as the country with the most coronavirus cases -- the pathogen has now infected more than 82,400 people in the world's largest economy.

Xi said Sino-US re-

lations were at a "critical juncture", CCTV said, adding that cooperation was mutually beneficial and "the only right choice." "I hope that the US will take substantive actions to improve Sino-US relations, and both sides can work together to strengthen cooperation in fighting the epidemic," he said.

Some provinces, cities and companies in China have provided medical supplies and support to the US as well, Xi added.

Germany sends plane to rescue stranded tourists from Nepal

KATHMANDU, MAR 27 (AP): A rescue flight arranged by the German government on Friday picked up hundreds of tourists who had been stranded in Nepal since the Himalayan nation went on lockdown earlier this week, officials said.

The Qatar Airways charter flight took off with 305 people on board, said Deo Chandra Lal Karna, an official at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan

International Airport. Immigration official Sagar Acharya said most of the passengers were German nationals or had some connection to the country.

The airport reopened only for the flight, which did not bring any passengers to Nepal.

Nepal, home to the highest mountains and hiking trails, is popular with tourists during the spring season when the weath-

er is favourable for climbing.

Up to 10,000 tourists are believed to be stranded in Nepal since the government ordered a complete lockdown that halted all flights and road travel to prevent the spread of the virus.

Businesses and government offices were also shut.

Nepal has only three confirmed cases of the coronavirus, including one who has recovered.

'Printing money': booming mask producers in China meet global demand

As the coronavirus pandemic that originated in a central Chinese city has gone global, thousands of factories in China have nimbly turned to a new and very profitable market -- face masks for export.

At the height of China's outbreak in early February, Guan Xunze's company created a new mask factory in just eleven days.

The factory, with five production lines in northeastern China, made the much-needed N95 face masks which were in huge demand as infection numbers surged.

As cases in the country have dwindled, the 34-year-old -- who was previously in pharmaceuticals -- is now profiting from new markets and exporting masks to Italy, where the death toll has overtaken that of China.

In the first two months of the year, a staggering 8,950 new manufacturers started producing masks in China, according to business data platform Tianyancha -- racing to fill the huge gap in demand.

But after the virus epicentre of Hubei province was placed on lockdown and the initial frenzy began to die down in China, virus outbreaks emerged in new hotspots elsewhere in the world.

Globally more than

400,000 have been infected with the deadly coronavirus, and demand for protective equipment is still soaring as nations across the globe battle the outbreak.

"A mask machine is a real cash printer," said Shi Xinghui, sales manager of an N95 mask machine company in Dongguan city, southeastern Guangdong province. "The profit of a mask now is at least several cents compared to less than one in the past."

"Printing 60,000 or 70,000 masks a day is equivalent to printing money."

Qi Guangtu has put more than 50 million yuan (\$7 million) into his factory producing mask-making machines in the southern industrial hub of Dongguan.

It has been in 24-hour continuous production since January 25 -- two days after the dramatic lockdown of Wuhan, where the virus first emerged.

"Cost recovery is certainly not a problem," he said, adding that 70 sets of equipment have been sold for more than 500,000 yuan (\$71,000) each.

He has more than 200 additional orders in hand, worth over 100 million yuan (\$14 million).

"The machines pay for themselves in 15 days," said Qi, saying the invest-



ment is worth it for his clients.

- Rising costs and blind investment -

Manufacturer You Lixin had never set foot in a mask factory before.

But as the market soared and he saw the opportunity, it took him just ten days from first deciding to enter the industry to delivering automated machines capable of producing masks.

"I slept two or three hours a day, so did my clients," he said.

You's clients also slept in his plant, waiting desperately to collect their new machinery.

Some of them are garment factory owners in Wenzhou, eastern Zhejiang province, who had switched to producing face masks.

"They were facing orders they had insufficient capacity to deliver, and they couldn't make the deliveries," You said.

"The panic intensified as the crisis accel-

erated at that time."

The high levels of mask production has dramatically pushed up prices for raw materials.

According to Guan, the price of fabric has risen astronomically -- from 10,000 yuan to 480,000 yuan per tonne.

Producer Liao Biao struggled to bring back the components of mask machine piece by piece from outside Hunan Province in late January, with the cross province border closed.

Finally, to pay an expert tester for the mask machines, Liao paid more than ten times the normal price.

"Investment is blind now," You said.

- World's factory -

But despite the rising costs of production, the profits still make the industry appealing.

According to China's official figures, China's daily mask production has passed 116 million now, with many meeting overseas demand.

Guan has already delivered one million masks to Italy, while Shi currently has more than 200 orders from South Korea and countries in the European Union.

"Dongguan remains the world's factory," said Shi.

"The first peak of orders was during the middle of February. Now there is a second wave because of the pandemic," said Shi.

Liao is also seeking to export his masks to Europe and Canada.

"The demand for masks has been alleviated at home -- now we can have some surplus to support other countries," said Liao.

"We are willing to help others."

And Guan is optimistic about the future of the industry beyond the outbreak.

"Most people will have the habit wearing a mask after this outbreak," said Guan.

"I'll stay in the industry."

S.Africa reports first two virus deaths as lockdown starts

South Africa recorded its first two deaths from the novel coronavirus on Friday as the number of confirmed cases breached the 1,000 mark just hours after a three-week nationwide lockdown swung into action.

"This morning we wake South Africans up with sad news that we now have our first deaths resulting from COVID-19," Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said in a statement.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has ordered the 57-strong population of Africa's most industrialised nation to stay at home for 21 days, joining other countries across the continent which have imposed strict measures to halt the spread of the disease.

But many people defied the order which came into effect at midnight Thursday, lining up outside food stores or at bus terminals.

Police appeared overwhelmed in downtown Johannesburg on Friday where hundreds of shoppers pushed and shoved trying to force their way into a supermarket.

"The lockdown is a good thing for the country, even though I feel that a lot of people and taking it for granted, saying this virus is not for us... which is bad because by the time we wake up this thing will have spread enormously in the country," said bank employee Dumisani July, 39, wearing a mask and black latex gloves.

Mkhize said the

two people died in the Western Cape province, and announced that the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases have topped 1,000.

On Thursday, the country had reported 927 confirmed cases, a jump of more than 30 percent from the previous day, with Ramaphosa projecting it could reach 1,500 "within a few days".

Kenya, Rwanda and Mali are some of the African countries that have imposed restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus, which has been confirmed to have infected more than 3,200 people and killed 89 across the continent.

Although Africa's toll is far lower than in Europe, the United States and the Middle East,

health experts say the world's poorest continent is especially vulnerable and the figures likely fall far short of the reality.

- 'Invisible enemy' -

Donning a camouflage uniform complete with a cap, Ramaphosa on Thursday saw off soldiers before they deployed from a military base in Soweto township outside economic hub Johannesburg.

"This is unprecedented, not only in our democracy but also in the history of our country, that we will have a lockdown for 21 days to go out and wage war against an invisible enemy coronavirus," he said.

During the shutdown, jogging,

dog-walking and the sale of alcohol are banned across the country, which so far has the highest number of detected infections in sub-Saharan Africa.

Violation of any of the regulations will carry a six-month jail sentence or a fine.

In West Africa, Nigeria's government warned Thursday that Africa's most populous nation could soon see an "exponential" increase in infections unless contacts of confirmed cases are tracked down more rapidly.

- 'War against invisible enemy' -

Kenya, which has 31 cases, on Thursday recorded its first death -- a 66-year-old Kenyan man who had travelled from South Africa on March 13.

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CATCHIN' SOME RAYS! The reality TV star, Tyler Cameron enjoys the sunshine while out for a run in Palm Beach, Florida.

Evangeline Lilly Apologizes for 'Arrogant,' 'Insensitive' Coronavirus Comments



Evangeline Lilly has apologized for recently making dismissive statements regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

The "Ant-Man and the Wasp" and "Lost" actor came under fire last week after making comments on social media that, despite the current health crisis, she would not be adhering to calls for social distancing and sheltering in place to slow the spread of coronavirus. When a commenter questioned her indifference, Lilly responded by acknowledging that both her and her father are immune compromised, while standing by her decision.

"Some people value their lives over freedom, some people value freedom over their lives. We all make choices," Lilly wrote.

On Friday, Lilly offered an apology on social media, characterizing her previous words as "dismissive" and "arrogant." She goes on to state she is now staying at home with her family and expresses concern for communities being affected by the pandemic.

"My direct and special apologies to those most affected by this pandemic. I never meant to hurt you. When I wrote that post 10 days ago, I thought I was infusing calm into the hysteria," she said. "I can see now that I was projecting my own fears into an already fearful and traumatic situation."

Aries:

Aries, prioritise! Yes, there are deadlines to meet, and friends to check in on, and burritos to make, but your laundry basket isn't going to clear itself. Let's not get started on the mess that has collected around in your space! Your word for the day: declutter. It's time to let go of the things that are adding to the noise or narrating a story of who you used to be, as opposed to who you are becoming. As for the things that are precious to you, find a way to arrange them in a way that makes them accessible. It's a good idea to smudge the house with incense or sage once you've cleared your space. In the wise words of Marie Kondo who wrote the bestseller *The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up*, "Life truly begins after you've put your house in order."

Taurus:

Remember when you complained about not being able to spend enough time at home? Well, the Universe hath answered your prayers, Taurus! Think of these 21 days as a respite from the noise outside, the mad rush of e-mails and the constant buzzing of your phone. Think of this time as a spiritual retreat, but with unlimited access to Netflix. What the cards are urging you to do today: sit in your sacred place, light a candle and go within. Take time to listen to what your higher self is telling you. Strengthen your connection with your own intuition.

Gemini:

The new moon is a sacred time to set your intentions and plant the seeds you would like to see come to fruition. While you know exactly how the manifestation game works, you haven't always been able to carve out the time to put your plan into action. But, oh, the things you can shift over a period of 21 days! Why not start by lighting a candle,

bringing out your journal, and having a conversation with Mama Moon tonight? PS: The Universe is on your side and wants to help you create your best life.

Cancer:

You've been indoors for God knows how many days, and you can't even remember what the world outside looks like anymore. Statutory warning: this self-isolation business could start to feel like confinement, Cancer. Remember, you've still got your terrace and your balcony. Make sure you spend some time soaking in the sun and practicing your breathing exercises. Given how cranky you're feeling, there's a good chance you may get snappy with those around you. Remember, just because they're holding space for you doesn't mean they're not going through catharsis of their own. Kindness doesn't cost a thing, moon child.

Leo:

We all have an idea of how things should materialise in our lives, and when these timelines get disturbed, they become a cause of anxiety and panic. Look deeper, Leo. Where is this feeling of distrust stemming from? Are you overlooking the fact that the divine plan is perfect and without a flaw? Trust what's taking place behind the scenes. Nothing is lost, though it may not seem so in this moment. You'll be surprised by how beautifully things turn out once you make it to the other side.

Virgo:

Sophy Burnham, the bestselling author of *The Art of Intuition*, defines this phenomena as "knowing without knowing." Virgo, the subconscious mind is a powerhouse, that not only has a record of our past experiences, but our past lives as well. When we feel lost or without a roadmap, it tends to delve into this reservoir to provide us

with the perfect guidance. But we love facts, figures, and numbers, don't we? As a result, we tend to dismiss anything illogical as 'woo-woo'. Today, the cards are urging you to delve into the mysterious. This is the opening through which miracles will begin to take place.

Libra:

There are dishes to do, phone calls to make, and deadlines to meet. Where's the time to practice self-care? Oh, Libra! Look at you getting caught up in worldly responsibilities even when you're outside of the matrix. Truth is, the only way you can survive this storm is by maintaining a healthy body and mind. So make a conscious attempt to rethink your priorities and find a way to approach the world inside-out. Remember to get plenty of rest and some exercise from time-to-time as you do. Incorporating immunity-boosting foods like ginger, garlic, lemon, and basil into your meals will make you feel like the most radiant version of yourself.

Scorpio:

Joshua Becker describes minimalism as "intentionally living with only the things I really need—those items that support my purpose." In other words, the philosophy isn't necessarily about possessing less. It's about surrounding yourself with things that tell your story and add value to your life. So, let go of the old narrative and physical reminders of a time long gone, Scorpio. Trust that this is the first step to making peace with your past.

Sagittarius:

The divine plan is perfect and without a flaw. In other words, everything that unfolded in your life has brought you to this point in your existence. So, you are learning to replace regret with gratitude and take pride in the person you are today. Reflect upon the prominent themes from your past, the soul lessons you are meant to integrate in

this lifetime. As Eckhart Tolle says, "Awareness is the greatest agent for change."

Capricorn:

Dreams, visions, signs, and symbols: the Universe talks to us in mysterious ways. Let these 21 days of self-isolation provide you with the opportunity to look beyond the veil and strengthen your intuition. Remember, you have always possessed the ability to commune with the mysterious forces. It is society that convinced you to suppress your gift. To keep a track of all the messages that are coming through, it's a good idea to maintain a journal. You may not be able to make sense of everything immediately, but you will find a way to connect the dots over a period of time.

Aquarius:

Let's talk about anger, resentment and disappointment. They all stem from our past experiences; reminders of the battles that left us bruised. Where are you vibrating at, Aquarius? What are you unwilling to let go of? Observe how the negative emotions are blocking the stream of joy, love, and creativity in your life. Think of these 21 days as a period of Vipassana or self-observation. Make time to go within and bring light to your so-called broken parts. Remember to practice compassion towards yourself as you do. We're only human after all!

Pisces:

It's never too late to fall in love with life. Your thoughts exactly, Pisces. You are on top of your game, achieving the things you once thought were impossible. Your newfound fervour is helping you approach problems with the precision of a Zen Master. Your positivity is making you a powerhouse of creative solutions. The best part about this chapter of your life: you're slaying dragons alone. Your soul crew is holding your hand virtually.

Kathy Griffin Was Sent To A Coronavirus Ward With "Unbearably Painful" Symptoms — And Can't Get Tested

"I was sent to the #COVID19 isolation ward...after showing UNBEARABLY PAINFUL symptoms."

Kathy Griffin was recently placed in a coronavirus isolation ward at an ER, but despite her "unbearably painful" symptoms, she says, the hospital refused to test her for the virus.

Kathy shared this update in response to President Donald Trump's misleading claim that the US is doing more coronavirus testing than South Korea. (The US has done more tests in total because our population is more than six times larger than South Korea's. But South Korea has tested far more people per capita than we have: One in 170 South Koreans have been tested, compared with 1 in 1,090 Americans.)

So Kathy called out that claim and shared a terrifying experience of her own.

"He's lying," the comedian wrote. "I was sent to the #COVID19 isolation ward room in a major hospital ER from a separate urgent care facility after showing UNBEARABLY PAINFUL symptoms."

She added, "The hospital couldn't test me for #coronavirus because of CDC (Pence task force) restrictions," along with the hashtag #TestTest.

Kathy then gave an interview to the Los Angeles Times, in which she opened up about her experience in the COVID-19 ward, and said she saw firsthand how overwhelmed the hospitals are getting.

"I remember vividly the doctor telling me...I'm going to send you to Cedars ER today because I don't think I could get you in 13 days from now."



Kathy added that she's still not sure whether she actually has the coronavirus or something else. She called out the CDC for being "too strict" about who can get tested.

"I just don't have an answer. I don't know," she told the LA Times. "Someone at Cedars said to me, we cannot give you this test because of the CDC guidelines. I'm suggesting that the guidelines are still too strict because they don't have enough tests."

It's been a particularly difficult time for Kathy, who announced just last week that her mother, Maggie Griffin, died at 99 years old.

Madonna honors 'Desperately Seeking Susan' co-star who died from coronavirus

Mark Blum was a veteran character actor who most recently had a recurring role on "You."

ALYSSA NEWCOMB

Madonna paid tribute to her "Desperately Seeking Susan" co-star Mark Blum on Thursday after she learned the veteran actor died as a result of complications from the coronavirus.

The 61-year-old singer shared a photo of herself and Blum from the 1985 movie "Desperately Seeking Susan" on Instagram.

"I Want to Acknowledge the Passing of a remarkable Human, fellow actor and friend Mark Blum, who succumbed to Coronavirus," she wrote. "This is really tragic and my

heart goes out to him, his family and his loved ones. I remember him as funny warm, loving and professional when we made Desperately Seeking Susan in 1985!!"

Madonna also used the tribute as an opportunity to remind people to stay home to help stop the spread of the deadly virus.

"Another reminder that this virus is no joke, nothing to be casual about or pretend won't affect us in some way," she wrote. "We need to stay grateful -be hopeful- help each other-and follow the quarantine rules!"

Blum, who hailed from New Jersey, started acting in the 1970s and built a career as a character actor. He played the husband of Rosanna Arquette's character, Roberta Glass, in "Desperately Seeking Susan," among a slew of other film credits.

His TV credits include "Frasier," "NYPD Blue," "Succession," "Billions" and many more. He recently had a recurring role on the first season of "You," where he played Mr. Mooney, the owner of the bookstore and a father figure to the main character, Joe.

Blum was 69 years old.

Netflix pulls plug on 'Messiah' after season one

LOS ANGELES, MAR 27 (PTI): Netflix has decided to cancel its thriller series "Messiah" after just one season.

The 10-episode series premiered on the streamer's platform on January 1. It was mostly panned by the critics.

The news of the show's cancellation was shared by actor Wil Traval on Instagram.

"It's a very sad day today. I have just received news from Netflix that there will be no season two of 'Messiah'. I wanted to say to all the fans thank you for your support and love. I wish things were different," the actor wrote.

Virus: Bollywood celebs criticise police brutality during lockdown

MUMBAI, MAR 27 (PTI): Prominent Bollywood actors and filmmakers have reacted angrily to reports of alleged police excesses in various parts of country amid the lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic.

The country is witnessing a 21-day lockdown, as announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to contain the spread of the virus, which has claimed the lives of over 20,000 people globally.

Several disturbing videos have appeared on social media showing cops allegedly thrashing people with sticks at several places, over-churning vegetable carts and making migrant workers, who are travelling to their home from cities on foot, do sit-ups and or crawl on the road.

Sharing one such video, filmmaker Anurag Kashyap tweeted, "This is horrible."

Writer and comedian Varun Grover posted the same video, asking if the country belongs to those with "houses and power".

"Can a worker not even walk bare-foot 300 km to his village? Does the government want them to die of starvation in the cities, for the sake of a germ they don't even know," he added.

Director Sanjay Gupta also reacted angrily, tweeting, "Stop Lathi Charging Period."

"Thappad" director Anubhav Sinha shared a video of two policemen beating up a motorist, who was carrying a sackful of essential supplies.

"Is it even legal to beat up someone like that," Sinha asked.

Actor Richa Chadda wrote, "What's the logic behind beating people to death in order to prevent them from dying of a virus?"

Meanwhile, filmmaker Shekar Kapur expressed his disappointment over the class divide visible in the country and said his heart went out to thousands of migrant workers, who are struggling to get back home.

"Even as we struggle to overcome the #CoronavirusOubreak, we are facing what could become a class war in India. For never have the inequalities within India been so apparent, as thousands of homeless jobless hungry migrant workers struggle to get home," Kapur said.

Tagging Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Sonu Sood appealed to him to help the workers to reach their home.

"Help them reach their homes sir. As mostly these labourers are from UP and Bihar they need a place to stay or means to reach their families. Time to find a way sir @CMOfficeUP @ArvindKejriwal.