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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Section 144 imposed in East and South

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR: East and South district administrations imposed section 144 CrPc today wherein assembly of five or more persons is prohibited. The order will remain in force till 15 April.

This has been done with the view of preventing any outbreak of COVID-19, it is informed.

Gogoi takes oath as RS member amid 'shame' slogans, walkout

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on Thursday took oath as a nominated member of Rajya Sabha amidst unprecedented scenes of opposition members shouting slogans and walking out of the House.

This is the first time ever that the House has witnessed slogan shouting and walkout during oath taking.

Gogoi, 65, who retired as the Chief Justice of India in November last year after a tenure of 13 months, took oath in English in the name of God.

As his name was called for oath taking, Congress and Left members started shouting slogans like 'Shame on You' and 'Deal'.

Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu ordered that the slogan shouting will not go on record.

As Gogoi took oath, Congress, Left and their allies shouted slogans and staged a walk out from the House.

Naidu said it was not fair to shout slogans. "It is very unbecoming of members of Parliament."

"No, this is not the way. Nothing will go on record. (It is) very unfair, very unfair," Naidu said as Gogoi completed his oath.

After taking oath, Gogoi walked up to the chair to greet Naidu, who responded to his greetings with folded hands.

Naidu said members have the liberty to express their views outside the House on the issue.

"You know the Constitutional provision, you know the precedent, you know the power of the President (to nominate a member to Rajya Sabha)," he said.

"You should not do anything in the House. Whatever views you have you are at liberty to express outside," he said.

Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who was among the first to greet Gogoi when he entered the House minutes before the proceedings began, said what opposition members did was "grossly unfair".

FRUSTRATED BY DEPTT'S CASUAL APPROACH, STUDENTS REBUFF APPEALS TO LIFT PROTEST

State Univ students want Minister and Secy to address them at protest site

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 19 MAR: Students of Sikkim State University continued their protest demanding seriousness in how their university was been managed and today sported black bands and flags to reinforce their frustration with the system. This was the fourth day of their ongoing protest in front of the building in the Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College campus which stands in for the State University complex.

Numbering barely 50, the numbers of the State University students were bolstered today with representatives from the Sikkim University Students' Association and other youth organizations and also saw the Education Department try and engage the students more earnestly and even



inviting them to a consultative meeting to discuss the State University's affairs.

These feelers, and even the arrival of a Sikkim Police detachment to try and convince the students to accept

the offer for talks and lift their demonstration were rebuffed. The students want the Education Department to deploy adequate staff for the university, provide the infrastructure required for them to get

a decent education, ensure autonomy for the university and that these deliberations be preceded by the Education Minister and Secretary to meet them at their protest site and hear out their grievances and demands.

The agitated students have now issued an ultimatum till Friday noon to address their demands failing which they will take their movement to the next level.

One of the students, while speaking to SummitTimes, stressed that the department's continuing refusal to take their situation seriously had already tested their patience to the limit.

"Now our patience has worn thin and today we were compelled to raise black flags of protest. After seeing our agitated step, the department has now expressed its desire to meet 10 of our representatives. And this message was also communicated to us through the university's Assistant Registrar," she informed.

Already disturbed by the Department's casual approach, this indirect communication did not go down well with the students.

Later in the day, a Joint Secretary level of the Department

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CS TAKES STOCK OF COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS

All non-essential work in Govt offices to be suspended



RETURNING STUDENTS TO BE HOME-QUARANTINED

GANGTOK, 19 MAR [IPR]: Chief Secretary SC Gupta took stock of the level of preparedness for prevention of COVID-19 in the State in the first meeting of the State Task Force, today.

The meeting was attended by officers of the State Task Force, and was joined by the District Collectors and officials of all four districts through video-conferencing.

The meeting laid emphasis on the preventive measures in place by the Government, and areas which needed urgent intervention.

It was decided that all non-essential work in Government offices needs to be suspended for the time being to avoid movement and gathering of people at work place.

All heads of departments and District Collectors were directed to issue necessary orders to this effect.

It was informed that a substantial amount of fund has been transferred to the Health Department from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, for the purchase of new equipment and necessary essentials for quarantine wards and health facilities.

The Chief Secretary directed the District Collectors to requisition for additional fund, if necessary, from the Health Department, especially for the up-gradation of quarantine facilities in the district headquarters and sub-divisions.

The need for restricting the movement of labour force, especially along Rangpo-Mamring was discussed and necessary directions issued.

In order to make tourists and visitors aware of the restrictions on travel to Sikkim, the Transport Department was directed to put up posters with travel advisory on taxis plying from Siliguri.

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Gyalshing College students call off agitation after meeting CM



Will complete pending works of Rs 25 crore within three months: CM

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR:

Gyalshing Degree College's Student Representative Council [SRC] president, Sanjay Hang Limboo has expressed satisfaction over the assurance given by the Chief Minister, PS Tamang during a meeting held here at Samman Bhawan on Thursday. He informed that the students are ending their agitation today after getting the written assurance on their demand from the government.

The meeting was also attended



by Minister of Education, Kunga Nima Lepcha, Minister of PHE cum Gyalshing MLA, Bhim Hang Subba, MP (Lok Sabha), Indra Hang Subba, Rhenock MLA, Bishnu Khatiwada, Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling, Additional Chief Secretary, Education, G.P. Upadhyaya, Director, Higher Education, Kapil Meena, Joint Secretary, Subha Mukhia, and Chief Engineers, A.B. Subba & Pravin Pradhan, along with other officials from the Education Department and the Chief Minister's Office.

Addressing the gathering of students and SRC members, the CM reiterated that education and health

sectors have been the top priority of the State government and that the government will do everything in its power to resolve the issues of the college at the earliest. He added that developmental process takes time and students need to be patient while the State government works towards expediting the completion of the college infrastructure.

Responding to the demand of the students for provision of a permanent Principal, the CM informed that the concerned authority has already been directed to appoint a Principal for Gyalshing College, the official order of which will be issued today.

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Coronavirus impact may render 3.8 cr people jobless in tourism, hospitality sector

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): The coronavirus impact could render 3.8 crore people jobless, which is around 70 per cent of the total workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector, according to a grouping.

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) also said there should be a support fund for twelve months to support basic salaries with "direct transfer" to the affected tourism employees.

"As a result of this pandemic, Indian tourism industry is looking at pan India bankruptcies, closure of businesses and mass unemployment," FAITH said in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It is believed that around 70 per cent out of a total 5.5 crore workforce could get unemployed, which is around 3.8 crore people. This effect of job losses and layoffs has already begun throughout the country, it added.

The figure is for direct as well as indirect jobs.

"A large percentage of total tourism business activity of India, which is estimated at USD 28 billion+ in forex and upwards of Rs 2 lakh crore in domestic tourism activity will be at economic risk through the year. Thus, in excess of Rs 5 lakh crore of direct tourism industry and almost double that of total economic activity is at risk," the letter said.

With declining revenues, almost all tourism businesses are running out of working capital. However, with the responsibility of staff and payment of their salaries, EMIs to service, advance tax, PF, ESIC, GST, excise and other state levies, bank guarantees, security deposits, this industry needs your support now more than ever, it added.

"We request you for a twelve-

month moratorium on our EMIs of principal and interest payments on loans and working capital from Financial Institutions (both banking & non-banking)," the letter said.

Additionally, FAITH requested the PM for doubling working capital limits on interest free and collateral free terms. This will prevent all tourism businesses from going bankrupt, it added.

"Sir, additionally to prevent insolvency, we request you for a deferment for 12 months of all statutory dues whether GST, Advance Tax payments, PF, ESIC, customs duties at the central government level or at any state government level the excise fees, levies, taxes, power & water charges, bank guarantees & security deposits and deferment of all renewals, across the tourism, travel, hospitality & aviation industry," the letter said.

FAITH also requested the PM to set

up a support fund for twelve months on the lines of MNREGA to support basic salaries with 'direct transfer' to affected tourism employees, it added.

"TCS (tax collected at source) on travel has been proposed in Finance Bill 2020 to be levied from April 1, 2020 and we request that it should not be introduced as it will displace business from India to overseas, which will lead to shutting down businesses of most Indian tourism companies," the letter said.

It also requested a complete GST Tax Holiday for the tourism, travel and hospitality industry for a period of 12 months.

The letter requested the PM to, "set up...a national tourism task force of all relevant ministries of the central government along with ministry of tourism and chief secretaries of State governments and industry stakeholders to meet regularly to fast-track all tourism investment approvals.

LTVC submits memorandum to UDHD Minister

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR:**

A delegation of Limboo Tamang Voluntary Committee [LTVC] met UDHD Minister, Arun Uprety here on Thursday. The delegation has submitted a memorandum to the Minister and further requested to forward the same to the Chief Minister.

An LTVC press release informs that the memorandum consists of two important agendas with respect to the Limboo and Tamang communities of Sikkim.

The memorandum demands the passing of a bill in the State Assembly in this coming budget session with regard to the Limboo-Tamang Tribal Assembly seat reservation with appropriate formula. The memorandum has further demanded the passing of a bill in the assembly for the protection of Tamang community land in Sikkim.

The Minister listened to queries and assured the team to forward LTVC's demand and concerns to the CM, the release informs.

Awareness program on Swachhta Pakhwada



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR:**

An awareness program on Swachhta Pakhwada was organised by ICDS Singtam Rural Project (East) at Duga BAC under West Pendum Constituency in East Sikkim.

BDO Duga, IB Chettri, CHO, Milan Thatal, PP Rai, Supervisor of the ICDS, Chandrakala Sharma along with members of ASHA,

Anganwadi and BAC Duga attended the program.

Resource persons attending the program highlighted about Coronavirus, symptoms and preventive measures to take from the presentation. The highlight of the program was hand washing techniques to prevent this disease by members of Anganwadi and Asha workers.

TMC sniffs "hindutva agenda" in PM's coronavirus address

KOLKATA, MAR 19 (PTI): Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation on combating novel coronavirus had a "hidden hindutva agenda", the TMC on Thursday said he failed to give any direction on how to tackle the pandemic.

The remark was made by Mamata Banerjee's Cabinet minister Subrata Mukherjee minutes after the PM's address.

"He has failed to provide a direction to the nation in combating the pandemic. There is no proper proposals to tackle it. Rather he was speaking of ringing bells, this is absurd. How will

you combat coronavirus by ringing bells?

"There is a hidden agenda of Hindutva and RSS in his speech. We condemn such approach during this national crisis," Mukherjee, a senior TMC leader, said.

The prime minister, in his address, made a fervent appeal to all Indians to stay indoors as much as possible to avoid getting infected by coronavirus, saying the world has never seen a danger as grave as this.

He called for "janata curfew" on March 22 from 7 am to 9 pm, saying no citizen, barring those in essential services, should get out of house.

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Gyalshing College...

Speaking to media persons after the meeting, Mr Limboo expressed his satisfaction on the outcome of the meeting with the CM.

"We came to the meeting with positive vibes, thoughts and hopes and it also ended in a positive way. We clearly placed our demands in the meeting and received positive and satisfactory response from the CM," he said.

He informed that students have placed the demand to complete the college campus as per the map of 2010 within one year and to provide progress report of the project every two months. However, he added that the CM has assured to complete the project in three different phases following different technicalities.

Mr Limboo informed that the CM assured to first complete pending works of Rs 25 crore within three months which includes auditorium, library and playground and to prepare new plans in these three months.

He added that the CM assured to complete the academic building as per the plans of Modern Degree College and boys' hostel within one year. The CM also assured to complete all other infrastructures except for the swimming pool as per the blueprint within two years.

He added that the department has also given assurances in written to give work progress in every two months. The college was sanctioned as the Model Degree College in year 2010 with sanctioned budget of Rs 152 crore with the year of completion in 2015 but even after 5 years crosses the year of completion not even 25% of works have been completed so far, he informed.

SKM launches 'Sikkim's Campaign Against COVID-19'

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha started a sensitization and public awareness campaign, 'Sikkim's Campaign Against COVID-19' on Thursday to prevent the outbreak of Novel Corona Virus [COVID-19] in the State.

The campaign joined by leaders and workers of SKM party was launched here at SNT complex, where they sprayed sanitizer in the complex and on people's hands and created awareness on how to avoid the virus.

From SNT complex, volunteers in the campaign covered Ranka Stand, MG Marg, West and South Taxi Stand and Main Line Taxi Stand in Deorali. It is informed that the party will also cover other areas to sensitize the people.

Speaking to media persons at SNT complex, SKM senior leader and Political



Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling expressed that the public awareness and public participation was most important to prevent any outbreak of Novel Corona Virus in the State.

He stated that the State government has been working vigilantly and has taken all possible strict steps to prevent it so the participation of the people

is most important in such situation. He mentioned about various steps and initiatives taken by the State government in the State.

Mr Khaling mentioned members of different fronts of SKM party have come to spread mass awareness on use of sanitizers, proper handwash, avoiding crowd and other mes-

sage among the people.

"We have come in small numbers in view of the situation to spread mass awareness and we will carry out such awareness campaign in different public places in the State," he said.

He urged the people not to panic as the government is working actively and vigilantly.

SOUTH DISTRICT TASK FORCE MEETS High traffic at Melli checkpost, need more manpower



NAMCHI, 19 MAR (IPR): A meeting of South District Task Force on the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) was held at District Administrative Centre, South, today.

The meeting was chaired by DC (South), Ragul K also present amongst others were Senior SP (South), Pravin Gurung, ADC (South), Satyen Kr Pradhan, CMO (South), Sharda Rai and various HoDs who are the members of this task force.

During the meeting, the DC spoke in detail about the various measures that the State Government has implemented to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the state as well as the district. He added that HoDs of various departments should issue strict instructions to their staff on how to safeguard themselves

from this disease.

As per the direction of the state government it has been decided that SIRD, Karfector will be made into a quarantine unit and urged the concerned officials to make adequate arrangement. He also said that all the important information with regard to COVID-19 should be submitted to the task force which will then be updated with the state task force. Mr. Ragul also said that sufficient protection gear should be provided to healthcare workers and other officials engaged in COVID-19 screening process.

Speaking during the meeting, the SP said that the department will be providing ample security. They will also regulate the movement of people visiting the quarantine

facility. He also highlighted that there has been overcrowding at Melli Checkpost and requested for additional manpower from line departments.

Additionally, it was informed by SP that a District Control Room for COVID-19, has been set up at Namchi Police Station. 03595-263722 is the landline number for this control room.

Addressing the meeting, CMO spoke about the various systems put in place by the health officials in the district.

She emphasized that capable and trained manpower will be posted to operationalize the isolation/quarantine facility in the district. The CMO and their staff will be responsible in checking the health of the public who are suspected of COVID-19.

Training on Kharif Vegetable Production



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAR:**

Mevedir in collaboration with Horticulture Department organized a ward level training on production of Kharif Vegetables at Middle Daramdin ward under Lower Thambong GPU, and Ramidham under Samdong GPU, West Sikkim, a press release informs.

In Middle Daramdin, Bhuwan Chettri (HDO) along with Mevedir Master Trainer, Ghanendra Sharma were the resource persons for the training while at Ramidham, the resource persons were Suzan Ahmed (Mevedir Agronomist) & Jason Nim Sherpa (Mevedir Supervisor) along with Mevedir Field

officer Sharon Samdup Lepcha, Aruna Gurung, Chandra Kala Sharma, Ran Maya Rai and Tanka maya Sharma.

Both the training programs were attended by more than 30 farmers. The trainings concluded at both sites and farmers were assured of technical support any time by Mevedir field functionaries.

State Univ...

arrived at the protest site and read out a message from the Education Minister inviting student representatives to a consultative meeting.

A student at the spot, said that they were willing to meet the Department but not under the condition imposed by it.

"Why only ten students? And why only students from the State University?" they question while stressing that all of them want to be part of the meeting.

They also want the Education Minister, Education Department Secretary and the State University Vice Chancellor to first come together to the protest site and address the students.

"We are standing firm on our condition that they should address all the students on our demands since it concerns every student of the university and they have the right to know the stand and decision of the government," she said.

She stressed that the students have been patient for two years now and that it was only after several representation to the Department and as many let-downs that they were driven to such public displays of their protest.

All non...

Likewise, the Chief Secretary suggested that a medical team be stationed at SNT complex, Siliguri, and all passengers travelling on SNT buses be thoroughly screened to avoid overcrowding at Rangpo and Melli check posts.

Regarding movement of students studying in other States and cities following the outbreak of Coronavirus, it was decided that those who have already started or have reached the State will invariably have to report to the authorities and need to be home-quarantined.

However, those students who are still in the cities should be advised to stay put wherever they are, and avoid travelling to Sikkim.

The Chief Secretary directed for an advisory to be issued especially to the parents to adhere to the travel restrictions.

The Chief Secretary advised all the Heads of Departments and the District Collectors to exercise their authority and issue relevant orders whenever necessary. He urged all the officers to put their best foot forward to follow the common protocol being advocated country-wide for prevention of COVID-19. He said that the State Task Force will meet regularly to take stock of the situation.

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KUTSHE SHEGU

49th days Kutshe Shegu (Anthyesti Kriya) of Late Chewang Dorjee Bhutia (Chewang Sardar), who left for heavenly abode on 01/02/2019 falls on 20/03/2020.

All the relatives, friends and family members are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Naya Bazar, west Sikkim.

We also express our heartfelt gratitude to those who stood by us in the time of bereavement.

**Mrs. Tshering Choden (Wife)
Chopel P. Bhutia(Son)
Mrs. Sonam Paden Bhutia (Daughter)
Ugen Palzor Bhutia(Son)
Sonam Dorjee Bhutia (son)
and family members.**

Contact:740723003/9734142243.



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GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at 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 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

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

PM calls for Janta Curfew on Sunday

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI):

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday made a fervent appeal to all Indians to stay indoors as much as possible to avoid getting infected by coronavirus, saying the world has never seen a danger as grave as this.

He called for 'Janta curfew' on March 22 from 7 am-9 pm, saying no citizen, barring those in essential services, should get out of house.

"Even World War I and II did not affect as many countries as coronavirus has done," Modi said in a national broadcast. Asking people to sacrifice "some weeks of yours, some time of yours", Modi said given that coronavirus has no cure yet, the only way to stay safe is to stay indoors.

"I request all people in country to get out of house only when it is extremely necessary, try and do all work from home," he said.

Substandard sanitisers worth Rs 25 lakh seized in Mumbai

MUMBAI, MAR 19 (PTI):

The Food and Drugs Administration personnel raided a hand sanitiser manufacturing unit in suburban Nahur and seized substandard sanitisers worth Rs 25 lakh, officials said.

The sanitisers were manufactured illegally and were being exported without any valid licence and necessary permissions, officials said on Wednesday.

Officials had received specific information about the manufacturing unit, where hand sanitisers were manufactured without proper licence from the FDA, an official said.

FDA officials also raided another facility where sanitisers were manufactured by using floor cleaning chemical, the official said.

Govt invites NCPEDP to explain RPWD Act to all departments

GANGTOK, 19 MAR

(IPR):

Social Welfare Department organized a sensitization program on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act) 2016 and its provisions for the line departments, in collaboration with NCPEDP (National Centre for Promotion of Education for Disabled People), India's apex body representing the rights and interests of persons with disabilities here on Friday. In total, 18 departments of Sikkim government were part of it.

"In 2019, the Bombay High Court had asked the Maharashtra government to conduct compulsory awareness and training sessions for its officials on legal rights of differently-abled persons

in line with the RPWD Act 2019. Post this development, we wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all states reiterating the provisions of the order and offering our support for conducting such a training and received positive response from states such as Sikkim, Nagaland, Lakshadweep, and Arunachal Pradesh. We are thankful to the Sikkim government for its support," said Arman Ali, executive director, NCPEDP.

According to the 76th round of the NSO survey conducted between July and December 2018, Sikkim has 2.7 percent male population and 2.4% female population in rural areas; while in urban areas, the population is 1.5% and 1% for men and women respectively.

The seminar was attended by a cohort of more than 60 people with presence of Hem Kr. Chettri, SCS, Secretary, Social Justice and Welfare department and Rohini Pradhan, Joint Secretary, Social Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim. NGOs, special educators and Sikkim's disability diaspora were part of the event.

Emphasizing the need for coordination between departments, Rohini Pradhan said, "We are still way behind in the implementation of the RPWD act. It must be implemented not just in letter but also in spirit and that will be possible only when all departments converge and work together to realise this."

The disability ecosystem was represented by Amvalika Senapati of Shishu Sarothi, and Rati Misra of NCPEDP.

Rati Misra of NCPEDP added, "We are delighted to see the proactive steps the Sikkim Government is taking to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities. The Act remains a piece of paper unless all stakeholders come together to collaborate and push for its implementation. We look forward to working closely with the Department of Social Justice and Welfare, Sikkim in the coming days and we wish all other states would also emulate this action of creating awareness about the RPWD Act and its provisions among their officials and key decisions makers."

Gujarat reports first coronavirus cases; two infected

Ahmedabad, Mar 19 (PTI): For the first time, two positive cases of the novel coronavirus, one of them a woman, were detected in Gujarat, said officials on Thursday as it joined a growing list of states affected by the infection.

While one of the infected patients is from Rajkot, the other is from Surat, they said, adding both of them had come from abroad recently.

"Two suspected coronavirus cases of Rajkot and Surat are positive. Our teams have already taken necessary steps, including quarantine of all the contacts," the state health and family welfare department said in a tweet.

Samples of a young woman from Surat and a man from Rajkot came positive for the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) after their samples were sent to the NIV, Pune for confirmation, the officials said.

On Wednesday, the



health department had said these samples were sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) after local labs' report came inconclusive.

"There are two suspected cases for which result in our labs is inconclusive so sample has been sent to NIV, Pune.

As part of precaution, we are following all protocols for suspected cases such as contact listing and Quarantine of contacts" the department had tweeted.

After the results came positive, authorities in both the cities swung into action and are taking

necessary steps.

"There were two suspected cases which we had sent to NIV for confirmation. One is a young woman from Surat who had returned from New York and another patient is a man from Rajkot, who had returned from Mecca.

"Both of them are positive for the coronavirus. They are under treatment and breathing without the help of ventilators," said principal secretary (health) Jayanti Ravi.

She said district as well as police officials of Rajkot and Surat have

been asked to trace all the people who came into contact with the two patients.

In Rajkot, 17 persons who came into contact with the infected person have been put in a quarantine facility, said district health officer P P Rathod, adding screening of the area where the person lives is going on.

In Surat, authorities have stopped the entry of state transport buses of Maharashtra into the district and also halted bus services to the neighbouring state from Surat in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus.

Sikkim Olympic Association postpones elections

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 MAR:

The general election of Sikkim Olympic Association which was scheduled to be held on 19 Mar, 2020 at the conference hall of Paljor Stadium Complex, Gangtok, has been postponed till further notice as per the precautionary

advisory issued by the Government of Sikkim for COVID-19, a press release informs.

The association continues to monitor developments regarding COVID-19 and is working closely with the District Administration and the Sports & Youth Affairs Department, to ensure

the health and safety of its officials.

"This is our top most priority and we are on the job ensuring that we cater to the safety of our members," the release states.

The association will inform about the new dates of election afterwards to all the associations affiliated to Sikkim Olympic Association.

Allegations of illegal liquor sale on NH10 'baseless,' says Excise

GANGTOK, 19 MAR (IPR):

This is in reference to some news items appearing in local press on 18 Mar, 2020, stating that rampant illegal sale of liquor is taking place on NH10 from Ranipul to Rangpo. The department of Excise would like to state that this serious allegation is baseless and highly motivated.

It cannot be denied that there could be isolated cases. Apart from

the routine field monitoring carried out by the department there is dedicated Flying Squad for conducting continuous raids and confiscation of illegal liquor. Penal actions including fines and confiscation of items are executed by the department on a regular basis.

It is to put on record that no individual/s has/have brought the matter to the notice of the Excise Department as

claimed in the news item.

No media person has approached the department for clarification in this matter before putting it in print.

Hence, it is an attempt to discredit and disgrace the department. In contrary to the report published, the department has conducted 274 raids and collected Rs.10,78,105 as fines and confiscations during the financial year 2019-20 till date.

Novel coronavirus cases in India rise to 169

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI):

The novel coronavirus cases in India rose to 169 on Thursday after 18 fresh cases were reported from various parts of the country, according to the Health Ministry.

The cases include 25 foreign nationals -- 17 from Italy, 3 from the Philippines, two from the UK, one each belonging to Canada, Indonesia and Singapore. The figure also includes three deaths reported from Delhi, Karnataka and Maharashtra so far.

"The total number of

active COVID 2019 cases across India stands at 151 so far," a health ministry official said, adding that 15 others have been cured/discharged/migrated while three have died.

Delhi has, so far, reported 12 positive cases which includes one foreigner, while Uttar Pradesh has recorded 17 cases, including one foreigner. Maharashtra has 45 cases, including three foreigners, while Kerala has recorded 27 cases which include two foreign nationals.

Karnataka has 14

coronavirus patients. The number of cases in Ladakh rose to eight and Jammu and Kashmir four. Telangana has reported six cases which include two foreigners.

Rajasthan has also reported seven cases including that of two foreigners. Tamil Nadu has two cases so far.

Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Pondicherry, Chandigarh and Punjab have reported one case each. In Haryana, there are 17 cases, which include 14 foreigners.

Why Sikkim is a non-debating Society?

JIWAN RAI

VIEWPOINT

I related a personal dalley khorsani story on my FB page. A friend jokingly sent a side post asking if the story was politically aimed. We laughed about it. But isn't that a valid question in our social context? We are eternally chained by suspicion over other's political overtones, underlying motives, hidden implications and so on. Suspicion in such cases is not a bad thing - insofar as we are inspired by an urge and passion for critical reasoning. It is wonder that we are a society devoid of a rigorous discourse on any issue. Our socio-political, cultural, environmental, educational, economic issues die out without being discussed at length. What is our problem? We dismissively blame it all on politicians to remit ourselves. As I see it, we have scores of inherent and acquired traits that make us a non-debating society. Anti-intellectualism is not very far from us.

Political interest without an accompanying knowledge: Dim-witted politicians and empty-minded supporters driven by consuming self-interest make for a deadly combination. Commitment to learning is conspicuous by its absence in our politics. Nonsensical statements, blatant lies and mindless noise fill the political atmosphere. The so called 'politically-savvy' in our state are those who know everything there is to know about contracts, tenders, supplies and JCB (whatever that means). 'Politically active' individuals are those who reach the MLA/Minister/CM's residence the earliest with khadas on their birthdays. Their speeches are full of (a) praise for the incumbent and (b) hatred for the rest. Their understanding of political ideologies - 'which bird's name is it' sums it all up. "Gyan" is the most neglected aspect in our political arena.

We don't seem to need it because we don't seem to like it.

Childish political debate: Physical aggression and not mental agility is the prerequisite for political debate. The louder one shouts, the more points s/he scores. Seriously, there is more heat than light in our political debate. Civility is a weakness, lying is a strength, an intimidating tone is an art and the ability to dumb down is a virtue. When people debate with a wrestler's mindset, the obvious outcome is the short-circuiting of dialectics.



Lack of courage to commentate on politics: Our courage to be a coward is extraordinary. Some great minds have gone silent. No one wants to go through the "jhamela" (hassle) of a political fall-out by questioning things. We have the right to choose to live a non-confrontational life. However, the reason behind such rampant fear among the general public is attributable to malicious people who have mastered the art of instigating politically powerful leaders against their critics. These talebearers (kurautey) feel obligated to take gifts to their leaders all the time and what better gift than to tell their leader that 'so and so wrote this' and 'so and so said this against you sir/madam. We have to silence him before he becomes too noisy'. However, take note, they will be first ones to fly the coop when their beloved leader is in trouble. This criticism-phobia attitude amongst our leaders has been induced by these malicious creatures and is crippling our political growth. Why not expose our political leadership across the spectrum to open and harsh criticism? Let them face it and find their way out of it. That makes leadership stronger and refines our political discourse at large.


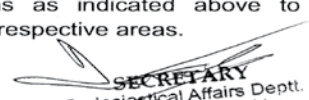
When any one asks the government a question or supports the government - why

label him or her? Why stifle their voice? Aren't people free to live with their opinions?

Zero tolerance for a counter-perspective: That humans are political beings and therefore nearly everyone has a political preference is no secret. Democracy is all about being politically active and choosing your side. However, because we are characterized by a dismissive attitude, we do not give the counter-perspective the serious thought it deserves. In politics, our perception of 'right' and 'wrong' or discussions about the truths of opinions must involve a sincere consideration of the counter-view as well. The idea that, because you support the opposing political force you are completely wrong and I therefore fully disagree with you is the next level to stupidity. We have to grow up to be open to the idea of a 'low resolution grand narrative' because no political party can be absolutely right. What we all must aspire to is the creation of a free society where people not only enjoy freedom to express their views but they also find people on the other side to give them the attention and consideration they deserve. The final objective of politics is not to establish a monolithic political paradigm. Politics must seek to expand the horizons of human habitation where people can live happily and productively without feeling constrained to do or think what they do not feel comfortable doing or thinking. Politics is not divine. It is human.

"Our courage to be a coward is extraordinary. No one wants to go through the "jhamela" of a political fall-out by questioning things. The reason behind such rampant fear among the general public is attributable to malicious people who have mastered the art of instigating politically powerful leaders against their critics. These talebearers (kurautey) feel obligated to take gifts to their leaders and the gits is always a load of gossips"

 GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM MOTOR VEHICLES DIVISION, TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT YATAYAT BHAWAN, GANGTOK: 737101 Ph No: 03592-201073, Fax No: 03592-201074, Email: headoffice.mvd@gmail.com No. GOS/MVD/T/2020-21/1859 Dated: 13/03/2020	
SUB: SHOW CAUSE NOTICE	
Whereas, Ms. Sangeeta Gurung, LDC/HQ, Motor Vehicles Division, Transport Department was sanctioned 1076 days leave vide O.O. No. 256/MV/T dated:25.02.2017 as under:	
1. 120 days w.e.f. 01.02.2017 to 31.05.2017 as Earned Leave 2. 98 days w.ef. 01.06.2017 to 06.09.2017 as Half Pay Leave 3. 858 days w.e.f. 07.09.2017 to 11.01.2020 as Extra Ordinary Leave.	
Whereas, Ms. Sangeeta Gurung, LDC/HQ, Motor Vehicles Division, Transport Department has exceeded the admissible leave period of 3 years and still not reported for duty nor intimated the department on expiry of leave period till date which is in contravention of Rule 14 of Sikkim Government Service Rules, 1974.	
Now, therefore, in accordance with Rule 14 (2) of the Sikkim Government Service Rules, 1974, the lien to the post of LDC in R/o Ms. Sangeeta Gurung, LDC/HQ, Motor Vehicles Division, Transport Department shall stand cancelled and she shall cease to be in Government employment with effect from 12.02.2020.	
 Secretary Transport Department	
To, Ms. Sangeeta Gurung W/o Bhim Lal Gurung Chakung, West Sikkim	
R.O. No.397/IPR/PUB/Classi19-20 Dated: 17/03/2020	

 GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM ECCLESIASTICAL DEPARTMENT GANGTOK No. 32/60 Date: 17/03/2020	
CIRCULAR	
In view of the recent outbreak of COVID -19 in India and in some countries of the World, the Ecclesiastical Department has deemed to take some preventive measures against spread of the disease in the State of Sikkim. Therefore, it has been decided to take the following steps to prohibit entry of foreign as well as national tourist in the religious institutions of the State of Sikkim –	
1. The entry of foreign tourists into all the religious institutions of Sikkim is temporarily prohibited till further orders. 2. The entry of Indian visitors/tourists into the religious institutions is to be discouraged.	
Hence, all the Duchi/Committee of religious institutions of Sikkim are requested to take necessary actions as indicated above to ensure prevention of Corona Virus within their respective areas.	
R.O. No.399/IPR/PUB/Classi19-20 Dated: 18/03/2020  Secretary (Ecclesiastical Affairs Deptt.) Government of Sikkim Secretary/Ecclesiastical Department.	

Instil Conservation by Cultivating Pride

When the young learn what is special, they will take care of it better

21 March is World Forestry Day. Given the whole Novel Coronavirus scare in the air, it's unlikely that any mega events will be held and the day will pass without much ado in Sikkim unlike other Days which see an outpouring of 'concern' and 'activity' constricted to a once-a-year routine.

What would have Sikkim done on World Forestry Day even if a big event had been planned? A lot of plantation, some seminars and an odd workshop depending on what the budget allowed. Such initiatives actually mean little and achieve even lesser. Sikkim is lucky that it is snuggled in the horseshoe that gives it a bio-diversity that few places its size can boast of. One could carry on endlessly about the variety of flora and fauna that is abundant in Sikkim, but that is exactly what we are striving to make a point against.

No, not the flora and fauna, but the tokenism that goes by way of concern on ecological issues in Sikkim.

What is most ironic about environment-related issues in this Himalayan State is that all initiatives are taken up by the government voluntarily. The environment cess for example, as also the clause proposed to be added to work orders on all civil works which will require contractors to undertake plantation works around their work sites, the ban on plastic and the legislations protecting jhoras from dumping. All these decisions were taken by the government on its own. Even the first environmental assessment reports for major projects is taken up by another arm of the government, the Sikkim Pollution Control Board.

See anything askew in this picture? All such policy decisions emanate from public pressure in other places and because it is the groundswell of public opinion that the governments usually pay heed to, the conversation is sustained and future direction and course-corrections informed by public opinion. This model also sustains public pressure. But the public can pressurise the government only when it is aware and involved, a condition that continues to avoid Sikkim. Sikkim should consider itself lucky that at least some measures have come its way voluntarily. What is after all obvious is that no one would have missed them if the government had not initiated these initiatives.

But conservation can never succeed when it is one-sided. It is a collaborative effort which should involve everybody. Before the government announces another pro-environment legislation, it should perhaps direct the Human Resource Development Department to prepare Sikkim-specific text books for Environmental Studies [a subject already in the syllabus] for all schools in Sikkim whether government or private. If this is done and some activity-based topics included in the curriculum, then the generation still in schools will understand the environment they live in better. If they understand it, they will also appreciate its uniqueness and will soon start taking pride in it. No one will then have to lecture them about conservation anymore because the privilege of living in Sikkim will automatically imbibe itself into their mindsets. Sikkim, its ecology and its people will then be safe forever.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

How Chinese people came together when separated by quarantine, creating hope, humor and art

BELINDA KONG
theconversation.com

Fear and blame appear to be fast becoming Americans' defining emotions around COVID-19. Headlines seem to offer either worst-case estimates or government leaders' mutual accusations.

Amid the bewildering figures and contradictory political narratives, it is important to recall that numbers and governments are abstractions – whereas people actually live with and through disease. By fixating on the former, we risk losing sight of the human dimensions of epidemic life.

As a scholar researching the cultural aspects of the 2003 SARS epidemic, I too initially focused on geopolitics and biosecurity. But what I discovered in addition – rarely discussed but vitally humanizing – were the vibrant forms of everyday communal life generated by SARS at its very epicenters.

Under conditions of obligatory isolation and social distancing, common people invented new kinds of sociality and new genres of epidemic expressions. With COVID-19 now even more than SARS, the Chinese internet and social media offer a cornucopia of examples of epidemic communities brought together by heart, humor and creativity.

PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY

One early set of viral videos surfaced in Wuhan just five days into the city's lockdown. On the night of Jan. 27, residents shouted "jiayou" – literally "add oil," meaning "hang in there" or "don't give up" – out their apartment windows, in a spontaneous burst of solidarity. It was a demonstration of collective strength and defiance, of people's refusal to be quelled by the virus and the quarantine, and their desire to cheer each other on.

One of these clips, uploaded onto YouTube by the South China Morning Post, has received over a million hits, with netizens from numerous Asian countries echoing "Wuhan jiayou!" in encouragement. Indeed, the refrain has flourished into a rallying cry among an international public on social media, despite the Chinese government's attempts

to co-opt it as a slogan for ethnonational patriotism.

PANDEMIC CARE

This spirit of reciprocal support extends to the care of animals. The Wuhan lockdown has stranded tens of thousands of residents outside the city, leaving an estimated 50,000 pets trapped in unattended homes. Through social media, some pet owners connected with Lao Mao ("Old Cat"), who heads a team of volunteer animal rescuers in Wuhan. These rescuers now roam the city and sometimes break into deserted homes to feed abandoned cats and dogs.

Outside Hubei, other animal lovers likewise help those stuck inside the province look after their pets at home. These tales of animal caretaking, even in times of human crisis, can usefully offset perceptions of Chinese culture as simply one of cruel and unbridled animal consumption.

Another unexpected focal point for communal care is the face mask. Across China, masks have become a powerful vehicle for enacting goodwill, generosity and fellowship during the epidemic. In one viral video from Anhui, an anonymous Good Samaritan was captured on surveillance camera dropping off 500 masks at a local police station. As he hurried away, two officers ran outside to salute him.

This video in turn inspired the Hong Kong-based singer G.E.M. (Gloria Tang/Deng Ziqi) to compose "Angels," a song that garnered nearly 600,000 hits within the first day of its upload. A tribute to ordinary people's small acts of fortitude and kindness during the outbreak, the music video opens with the Anhui clip and then splices together other moving scenes, including a train employee gifting a mask to an elderly woman passenger and a man distributing free masks to travelers in an airport abroad.

PANDEMIC HUMOR

This creative energy has also spurred China's folk humor culture. In locked-down sites across the country, social media is spawning a new genre of quarantine humor. On Weibo, WeChat and Douyin,

memes of quarantine boredom and stir-craziness proliferate. Netizens record themselves singing the lockdown blues by rescripting classic tunes, fishing from home aquariums, playing mahjong with plastic bags over their heads, playing solo mahjong, playing living-room badminton and choreographing wacky dance moves.

People also showcase their creative flare in donning protective gear and venturing out to neighborhood convenience stores and parks in inflatable costumes of T-Rex dinosaurs, green aliens and Christmas trees. When they run out of face masks, some half-jokingly substitute with bras, sanitary pads, and orange rinds.

As Manya Koetse reports from Beijing, these social media trends allow people to "mock neighbors, their friends or family, or even themselves in the extreme and sometimes silly measures they are taking to avoid the coronavirus." But more than mockery, the very sharing of these memes is a constructive and healing social act. In times of high stress and distress, to sustain these virtual communities is to deliver shared recognition, concern and laughter.

This is not to say that China's epidemic experience is solely lighthearted or affirming. Yet neither does life at epicenters have to be apocalyptic, defined by epic heroes and villains or horror scenarios of collapse and conflict.

Indeed, in other countries that have since become COVID-19 epicenters, social media offer similarly inspiring examples. Frontline health workers in Iran dance in hospital hallways to buoy their patients as well as themselves, and Italians in lockdown sing from their balconies to boost each other's morale – in turn prompting a string of "Italy jiayou" videos from Chinese netizens.

Collectively, these chronicles attest to the idea of pandemic resilience – the possibility that disease outbreaks can be lived through with empathy, ingenuity and sheer human ordinariness.

[the writer is Professor of Asian Studies, Bowdoin College]



Coronavirus: how to help children through isolation and lockdown

EMMA MAYNARD
theconversation.com

The UK has become the latest country to close schools in a bid to slow down the spread of the novel coronavirus. This is a game changer for families, displacing children from friends, learning and their school community. To help them through what could be months of isolation and potentially lockdown, we need to consider how this new world looks and feels to them.

Unfortunately we cannot just soothe the situation away and protect a little bubble of normality. The stakes are too high, and we need children to take the key messages seriously. As any parent knows, it isn't exactly easy to get them to wash their hands and not touch their faces. But there are things we can do to make the situation easier for them, and get them to cooperate.

Children are often soothed by touch. Touch calms the heart rate, and allows children to feel secure, so we can expect them to be more clingy and in need of affection at such an unsettling time. But if a parent has a cough and can't be physically close to their children – even teenagers – this will be exceptionally hard for them to cope with.

It is therefore important to maximise physical contact where possible. Encourage affection where it is safe to do so and keep them topped up with the security of warm hugs from those that can offer them. Where it's not possible, you could treasure their need for physical contact by taking

their requests for hugs sincerely and "banking" them in a special jar with homemade tokens.

In the meantime, ask them how you can help them feel better. Children are unique and resourceful, so it's important to keep the communication open. Even if there is no easy answer, they will hear that you have noticed them in the midst of the crisis. Be aware that children and young people will be hearing news broadcasts and adult conversations – they know when we are worried, and they will be hearing stories of death every day, which is deeply unsettling.

If they have direct questions about the pandemic, it is best to answer honestly, but also positively. You can tell them that: "Some people have died, yes, but not children. And washing our hands and staying at home is helping all of us stay safe." Diverting their attention is a powerful alternative. You can use games, cooking activities, stories and conversation starters to take the attention away from frightening talk of the virus.

KEEPING A ROUTINE

Remember that children's sense of time can be quite different from adults, with hours and days feeling much longer. If in isolation, keep a tally on when you may be able to come out and let them tick off the days on a chart.

Also make sure to keep a routine. Children and young people's lives are punctuated with school times, home time, meal times and bed times. Don't let this go out the window. Keep a schedule of daily activities, including reading and maths sessions, and

learn from those who have been doing this already as part of the home learning community.

Make use of technology to help children continue learning, and use activities such as baking, art and garden time as a portal to the natural sciences and creative arts. Engage them in social science about how people are changing their behaviours, helping each other, and realigning their priorities and beliefs. Note the vastly improved air quality in China and Italy. These conversations can convey stories of hope and resilience. And read. It offers all of us a different world to inhabit for a while.

It's also a good idea to make use of children's favourite bears, rags and dummies, and be willing to relax your rules about them. These items have a special place in childhood because they act as transitional objects, helping us bridge the gap between ourselves and our primary carers in infancy. Ultimately, these items help children feel safe. Their "distinctive" smell and look may be slightly off-putting, but this is actually all part of the continuity of attachment, so avoid washing them.

And when it comes to hygiene, don't forget that children love play. Turn the handwashing into soapy hand monsters and soapy handwashing races. Get soaps in different colours and smells, invite them to play with it in the sink, play music to get their 20 seconds in, and do it together.

The latest guidance on self-isolating in the UK allows people to get out for exercise at a safe distance. This is

incredibly useful in helping children continue to play and stay healthy. Think about the usual times children have space to move: on the way to school, breaks, PE and after school activities – their bodies will miss this when it stops. Research has shown that exercise protects our mental and physical health – and can even boost exam grades.

TEENAGERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Teenagers live in a world where school and exams are valued very highly. The decision to cancel A-level and GCSE exams may therefore create a lot of anxiety. Make sure you talk to them about it and encourage them to continue learning. If your school has created online materials, make use of them.

Accept that they will also need to talk with friends and process what is happening around them, so tune into the value of the technology they are glued to, and actively encourage face time and group chats. It is best to talk with teenagers as the near-adults they are, emphasising the positives – the experts are working round the clock.

Ultimately, children will need to accept that we have to do this to make sure we are safe. It will pass. Be aware of the horror stories circulating on social media and try to diffuse these as best you can – they are not helping anyone's mental health. And think carefully about the TV and films you allow them access to – it may be wise to avoid anything too close to home.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Portsmouth]

Passenger count dwindling; Bengal buses going off roads

KOLKATA, MAR 19 (PTI):

With dwindling passenger count as a fall-out of the Coronavirus scare, many interstate and intra-state buses in West Bengal have gone off the roads, according to bus owners' associations here on Thursday.

Local and city buses are also plying with fewer passengers than usual, leading to huge losses to the owners of privately-owned buses, Rahul Chatterjee, general secretary of All Bengal Bus Minibus Samannay Samity said.

"Less than 50 per cent of buses are running in different routes - inter-state, intra-state or local," he said.

The situation worsened on Thursday with less number of passengers taking buses compared to earlier days in the week due to the coronavirus scare, Chatterjee told PTI here.

West Bengal Transport secretary N S Nigam had earlier said that passengers in state-run buses have also gone down drastically owing to the situation.

With only a few buses and fewer passengers, the long-distance bus termini at Esplanade and Babughat wore an almost deserted look on Thursday, as if it was a public holiday.

Joint Council of Bus Syndicates general secretary Tapan Banerjee said that operators are finding it difficult to recover fuel cost for running buses.

"With educational institutions, several offices and many public places closed owing to the COVID-19 spread in some parts of the country, passenger count has gone down severely and as such, several private buses have been off the roads," he said.

He, however, hastened to add that owing to social responsibility, public transportation will be continued by the private operators along with the state-run buses.

Chatterjee said that with advisories to people to stay at home as much as possible, many drivers and conductors are also not reporting for work.

"Many of them have gone home and are not coming for work," he said, expressing fear that the number of buses on the roads will further go down in the coming days.

The association secretary claimed that the Sikkim government has stopped entry of public vehicles from other states, thus leading to a number of buses in north Bengal that ply to and from different destinations in the Himalayan state going off the roads.

"Buses to and from Odisha and Jharkhand are plying, but there very few passengers," he said.

Chatterjee said that the operators of long-distance buses are offering huge discounts on fares to attract passengers so that the vehicles do not run empty.

He said that both air-conditioned buses and non-airconditioned buses are offering discounts.

Eight confirmed coronavirus cases in Ladakh

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): There were eight confirmed coronavirus cases in Ladakh and COVID-19 had reached the Union Territory through the pilgrims who returned from Iran, the Home Ministry said on Thursday.

A total of 58 people were quarantined in various hospitals of Ladakh and 18 people, including positive cases, were kept in isolation in the hospitals, it added.

"Presently there are eight confirmed cases, which include an Army jawan, in Ladakh. COVID-19 has reached Ladakh through the pilgrims who returned from Iran," a statement issued by the Home Ministry said.

The administration had taken several steps, it added. The number of suspected cases in the Union Territory, including those who returned from Iran, their relatives and contacts, was 284, it said.

Of them, 208 people were in home quarantine and being monitored on a daily basis by health workers, the ministry said, adding that 150 of them had completed the mandatory 14 days.

"No other person with COVID-19 symptoms has reported to the hospitals or been found on random verifications in the identified sensitive areas. These checks shall continue," the statement said.

A number of precautionary steps were taken for preventing the trans-



mission of coronavirus in Ladakh, which will come into effect immediately and remain in force till April 15, it added. Advisories have been issued to the public, asking them to stay at home and restrict movement.

Police checkposts have been established all over Ladakh to prevent any avoidable movement of people and the movement of people between Leh and Kargil has been barred.

All government offices have been closed except those necessary for maintaining essential services,

namely power, water supply, food and civil supply, petrol pumps, police, revenue and municipalities etc.

The remaining officers and staff have been put on call and advised to work from home.

Some religious organisations have voluntarily agreed to avoid the Friday prayers. A majority of public transport has been barred from plying, except what is required for the commuting of essential service providers.

All hotels, guesthouses etc. have been closed. No community hall

-- government or private -- will be permitted to offer bookings for any public function, social or religious.

Banks and ATMs will take all sanitary precautions such as hand washing, providing sanitisers, daily fumigation etc. All restaurants, bars, food courts, food joints, roadside eateries, community kitchens, shops etc. have been closed, barring essential outlets such as ration, LPG, essential daily use commodities, vegetables and medicines.

All schools and colleges have

been closed.

Orders have been issued prohibiting the entry of foreign tourists in Ladakh. All incoming movement of labourers from other states by any means of transport have been banned.

Helicopter services through Pawan Hans or the Indian Air Force (IAF) will be limited to only medical or other emergencies.

All air services of the Army and the Air Force through IL76 or C17 or AN32 aircraft, carrying civilians from Jammu and Srinagar to Kargil or Leh, have been suspended.

In order to regulate gatherings of five or more people, the district administrations of Leh and Kargil have imposed prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Mobile shops are being operated in both districts, which will deliver essential supplies to houses and localities.

All conferences, workshops, rallies, gatherings, sit-in protests have been barred throughout Ladakh.

A 100-per cent screening of all the passengers arriving at all three airports is being carried out.

Any passenger movement by road has been barred through Zoji La. "These measures are being implemented strictly and it is hoped that they would have a salutary effect on the situation," the statement said.

COVID-19: Work from home, staggered working hours for central govt employees

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI):

The Central government on Thursday allowed 50 per cent of its employees to work from home and the remaining to attend office every day besides implementing different time slots for working hours in its effort to further check the spread of the coronavirus disease.

An order issued by the Personnel Ministry directed the Heads of Departments (HoDs) to ensure that 50 per cent of Group B and C employees are required to attend office every day and the remaining 50 per cent staff is instructed to work from home.

"All HoDs are advised to draft a weekly roster of duty for Group B and C staff and ask them to attend office on alternate weeks. While deciding the roster for the first week, HoDs are advised to include officials who are residing in close proximity to their office or use their own transport to travel to the offices," it said.

The order further said the working hours for all employees who attend office on a particular day should be staggered.

It suggested that three groups of employees be formed and asked to attend office during three time slots -- 9 AM to 5.30 PM, 9.30 AM to 6 PM and 10 AM to 6.30 PM, the ministry said.

"The officials who are working from home on a particular day as per the roster drawn up



should be available on telephone and electronic means of communication at all times. They should attend office, if called for any exigency of work," it said.

These instructions shall not apply to the offices and employees engaged in essential/emergency services and those directly engaged in taking measures to control spread of COVID-19, the ministry said.

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) and Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) may issue similar instructions regarding financial institutions and public sector undertakings, it said.

The decision came after the Personnel Ministry on Tuesday asked all central government departments to take precautionary measures.

"Discourage, to the maximum extent, entry of visitors in the office complex. Routine issue of visitor/temporary pass-

es should be suspended with immediate effect. Only those visitors who have proper permission of the officer who they want to meet, should be allowed after being properly screened," it had said. All government departments were asked to install thermal scanners as feasible as well as mandatorily place hand sanitisers at the entrances of government buildings.

"Those found having flu-like symptoms may be advised to take proper treatment/quarantine etc.," the ministry had said. It said meetings, as far as feasible, should be done through video conferencing.

All departments were asked to avoid non-essential official travel of its staff, undertake essential correspondence on official email and avoid sending files and documents to other offices, to the extent possible, and facilitate delivery and

receipt of postal documents at the entry points of the office buildings as far as practicable. "Close all gyms/recreation centres/creches located in government buildings.

Ensure proper cleaning and frequent sanitization of the workplace, particularly of the frequently touched surfaces," the ministry said.

The order advised the leave sanctioning authorities to sanction leave whenever any request is made for self-quarantine as a precautionary measure.

"Advise all employees who are at higher risk, i.e. older employees, pregnant employees and employees who have underlying medical conditions, to take extra precautions. The ministries/departments may take care not to expose such employees to any front-line work requiring direct contact with the public," the ministry had said in a communique to all the ministries.

liveries through online food ordering platforms.

"We apprehend a further reduction in sales with people not keen to venture out, particularly in towns where home delivery options may not be available," Khemani said. There have been also reports of diners not frequenting the popular Chinatown in Tangra area of the city.

"There are about 40 restaurants in Chinatown and they are largely bereft of patrons," said a Tangra-based businessman.

PM chairs review meeting on COVID-19

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 MAR [PIB]:

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting to review the ongoing efforts to contain COVID-19.

Ways to further strengthen India's preparedness were discussed. This includes further enhancing testing facilities.

Prime Minister em-

phasised on actively engaging with individuals, local communities and organisations in chalking out mechanisms to fight the COVID-19 menace. He also urged officials and technical experts to deliberate on the steps to be taken next.

Prime Minister expressed gratitude to all those at the forefront of combating COVID-19 in-

cluding the various State Governments, medical fraternity, paramedical staff, armed and paramilitary forces, those associated with aviation sector, municipal staff and others.

PM, Narendra Modi will address the nation on 19 Mar, 2020 at 8.00pm, during which he will talk about issues relating to COVID-19 and the efforts to combat it.

Cal HC issues order on Matua mela amid coronavirus scare

KOLKATA, MAR 19 (PTI):

Amid the growing coronavirus scare, the Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered police authorities to ensure that Matua mela is not held in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas without necessary approvals.


Passing the order on a prayer seeking directive to disallow the fair, the

court asked police to act in accordance with law. The police will be free to enforce law pertaining to organising or holding a fair, Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya said.

A respondent in the petition claimed that the Matua Maha Sangha, being a "legitimate permission holder", has called off the fair in pub-

lic interest. The writ petitioner does not have any locus standi or even permission to hold such a fair and ought to be restrained by police authorities from doing so in larger public interest, the respondent said.

The annual Matua Mela was scheduled to be held from March 20 to March 27.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Coronavirus scare: Kolkata restaurants stare at losses

KOLKATA, MAR 19 (PTI): Most restaurants of Kolkata are witnessing dwindling footfall as people steer clear of mass gatherings amid the growing coronavirus threat, say eatery owners.

There has been a 30 per cent dip in customer count since the last few days, the owners of a popular rooftop lounge in Russel Street area, said.

"People are avoiding mass gatherings... A lot of 80-100 guest events have been called off in the past few weeks," Abhishek Dutt

and Kritikaa Dutt told PTI. Supratik Ghosh, the managing head of a Bollywood-themed restaurant in Bidhannagar, said the presence of foreigners is becoming uncomfortable for regular patrons.

"We tried to explain to them that they (foreigners) have undergone thermal screening at the airport but that assurance went in vain," Ghosh said.

The managing director of city-based ice cream firm, Gaurav Khemani, said it has seen a 20-per cent decline in the number of de-

Premier League clubs urged to help food banks during coronavirus crisis

JAMIE JACKSON
LONDON, 19 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]: Premier League clubs have been urged to follow the leads of Liverpool and Brighton to “avoid a disaster waiting to happen” by fighting the threat of the coronavirus crisis to food banks and ensuring casual staff are paid during football’s suspension.

The move, by the organisation Fans Supporting Foodbanks, comes the Premier League and its clubs prepare for Thursday’s emergency meeting called to discuss the postponement of matches, which is all but certain to stretch beyond the initial 3 April date because the disease continues to spread.

This means collections by FSF before home games are no longer possible, raising concern that food banks will struggle to feed the sizeable constituency dependent on them. There is also doubt regarding the livelihoods of thousands of casual workers in the game.

In an open letter to clubs FSF made the following requests: “To follow the example of Liver-



pool and provide immediate, direct emergency funding for food-banks in their region. To follow the example of Brighton and commit to paying all match day and other casual staff through all cancelled fixtures.” It also called for clubs to immediately suspend all remaining season card charges until such a time as league and/or cups fixtures restart.

The statement added: “The long-term ramifications of Covid-19 on foot-

ball are still unknown, but the effects of the virus on wider society are beginning to unfold with food-banks already bearing the brunt of what promises to be massive disruption to our communities. Add in the many people on ‘casual’ or zero-hours contracts which have been terminated due to the crisis and it is likely that a whole new wave of people will need the food-banks imminently in the absence of govern-

ment action. Given that approximately 40% of food parcels currently go to feed children, this is a disaster waiting to happen.”

FSF has a “Hunger Doesn’t Wear Club Colours” maxim and was launched in 2015 jointly between Liverpool and Everton supporters. It raised £50,000 towards food banks in Liverpool 48 hours after setting up a donation site on Saturday, the European champions contributing £40K

of the sum. There are other club supporters’ initiatives under the FSF umbrella at Manchester City and Manchester United, Burnley, Newcastle, West Ham, Leeds, and Huddersfield, with more expected to join.

Speaking to the Guardian an FSF spokesperson said: “This week we’re launching a fans fund with the MUFC fans food bank to try and get funds in for the 18 food banks across Greater Manchester.”

Don’t have tournaments, trials till April 15: Ministry advises NSFs

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): The sports ministry on Thursday advised all National Federations to refrain from conducting tournaments and selection trials till April 15 besides asking them to ensure that Olympic-bound athletes are isolated from anyone who is not a part of their training camp.

The directive has been necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic which has wreaked havoc on sporting events across the globe. The fresh advisory puts a

question-mark on the upcoming Indian Grand Prix of athletics that is to be held on Friday.

“All sport organisations and their affiliate units are advised against holding any sports events, including competitions or selection trials till 15th April, 2020,” the ministry said in a letter to the Indian Olympic Association and NSFs.

It also asked federations to not allow any non-camper athlete, coach or support staff in Olympic trainin1g camps

without following proper quarantine protocols for the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry’s two-point directive states: “No exposure to athlete be allowed from outside in the campus where training is underway.

“No coach, technical/support staff athlete etc presently not in training camp and not staying in the training campus be allowed to interact or mingle with trainee athletes without following quarantine protocols.

Premier League, EFL and WSL football will not restart before 30 April

DAVID CONN
LONDON, 19 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]: The provisional date of the first weekend in April for the resumption of professional football has been pushed almost a month further on until “no earlier than 30 April”, the Premier League, Football Association and EFL have said in a joint statement.

The announcement, which emphasises that public health is the overriding priority in the coronavirus crisis, was issued after an emergency conference call with the 20 Premier League clubs. The FA said that it had “extended indefinitely” the date for the season to conclude, after its board sanctioned a relaxation of the standard 1 June finish date given the unprecedented circumstances caused by the pandemic.

No date, even provisional, was given by the leagues for the season to be concluded, as there is a recognition that the whole of society is in terribly uncertain times and any resumption, most probably behind closed doors, is dependent on government health advice and policies.

Uefa this week did state a hoped-for finish date of 30 June for the conclusion of European club football seasons when it postponed this summer’s European Championship, due to be held from 11 June to 11 July, to allow more time. Fifa, though, said on Wednesday that it had set up a working group with Uefa and the other continental federations to examine how to relax normal player registration rules if the season, and players’ contracts, need to be extended beyond 30 June.

“The FA, Premier League, EFL and women’s professional game, together with the Professional Footballers’ Association and League Managers Association, understand we are in unprecedented times and our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid-19,” the statement said. “We are united in our

commitment to finding ways of resuming the 2019-20 football season and ensuring all domestic and European club league and cup matches are played as soon as it is safe and possible to do so.

“We have collectively supported Uefa in postponing Euro 2020 to create space in the calendar to ensure domestic and European club league and cup matches have an increased opportunity to be played and, in doing so, maintain the integrity of each competition.

“The FA’s Rules and Regulations state that ‘the season shall terminate not later than the 1 June’ and ‘each competition shall, within the limit laid down by the FA, determine the length of its own playing season’. However, the FA’s board has agreed for this limit to be extended indefinitely for the 2019-20 season in relation to professional Football. Additionally, we have collectively agreed that the professional game in England will be further postponed until no earlier than 30 April.

“The progress of Covid-19 remains unclear and we can reassure everyone the health and welfare of players, staff and supporters are our priority. We will continue to follow government advice and work collaboratively to keep the situation under review and explore all options available to find ways of resuming the season when the conditions allow. We would all like to re-emphasise that our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid-19.”

Having set the space of six weeks before even considering playing again, football’s authorities are holding urgent talks with Sky, other broadcasters and sponsors about maintaining the game’s financial stability. On Wednesday the EFL announced a £50m package, in effect bringing forward the distribution of TV money, to help clubs with immediate cash flow crises.

Sports looking to return in east Asia



SEOUL, MAR 19 (AP): While professional sport has been suspended around much of the world due to the coronavirus, basketball is moving closer to a return in east Asia even if, for now, fans are not allowed to attend.

South Korea has been working desperately to contain the virus that has resulted in more than 8,500 cases there, with the rate of infection slowing since its peak on February 29.

On the same day, the 10-team Korean Basketball League (KBL), which was originally scheduled to finish its regular season on Mar. 31, was suspended.

Next Tuesday however, the league will hold a meeting to discuss restarting the competition, with reports suggesting it could return to the court as early as the end of the month, though behind closed doors.

Current champion Ulsan Hyundai Mobis has arranged practice games against local universities from Mar. 24-27 and a number of foreign players who had left the country after suspension are expected to return soon.

Murphy Holloway, who plays for the Incheon ET Land Elephants, arrived back in Korea on Wednesday. Aaron

Haynes of Seoul SK Knights is due to land later this week.

“There is a shortage of tickets from the United States at the moment but we expect that Haynes will enter the country on Sunday,” a Knights official said.

The KBL said it would hold a board meeting to decide whether spectators will be allowed to attend when the schedule resumes.

“We will continue to check the progress of the virus and consult with the teams,” the governing body said.

It is not only basketball which is aiming to return to action. Reports in China suggest soccer’s Chinese Super League, which was due to start on February 22, will kick off in early to mid-May, though it remains to be seen whether fans will be allowed.

Mitsuru Murai, chairman of Japan’s professional soccer league, told players in a video message on Saturday they had to stay as fit as possible as there will be many games to play when the league resumes.

The league will meet on Wednesday to decide whether it can restart on April 3, as currently scheduled or whether the suspension will last until mid-May.

Govt will make efforts to take kabaddi to Olympics: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): The government will make efforts to take indigenous sport kabaddi to the Olympics, Union minister Kiren Rijiju said on Thursday.

“A total of 2,880 athletes have been selected under Khelo India scheme for further training to excel in various national/international competitions,” he told Lok Sabha.

Responding to supplementaries during the Question Hour, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports

said kabaddi is an indigenous sport and that the government would make efforts to take it to the Olympics. Under the schemes, promising sports persons and teams identified are provided support of modern sports science and exposure abroad under experts of respective disciplines, among others, he said.

“Sports being a state subject, the responsibility of promotion of sports, including identification of young talent and its nurturing, rests with state governments,” he added.

IOC, you’re joking right? fumes Kashyap

NEW DELHI, MAR 19 (PTI): Indian shuttler Parupalli Kashyap has termed International Olympic Committee (IOC)’s statement to encourage athletes to continue training for the Tokyo Games as a joke, saying it “makes no sense” as government has shut down all training centres due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite growing calls to defer the Olympics, the IOC on Wednesday said it expects the Games to begin as planned from July 24 and encouraged “all athletes to continue to prepare for Tokyo 2020 as best they can.”

“IOC is encouraging us to continue training .. and how? Where? Ur joking right,” Kashyap, a 2014 Commonwealth Games champion and a former top 10 player, wrote on his Twitter handle.

Kashyap, who is currently ranked world no 25, is in self-isolation following his return from Birmingham after participating at the All England Championship.

The SAI-Gopichand academy in Hyderabad, where Indian shuttlers

train, has been shut down till March 31 to contain the virus following the directive of the Telangana state government.

“Firstly, it isn’t decided yet who’s Tokyo bound, next for players who have already made the cut there’s no training centre open because we are following the govt rules of isolation which is necessary for the safety of all. So the statement of continuing training makes no sense.”

The Olympic qualification period ends on April 28 with the top 16 players in singles making the cut for Tokyo Games.

The COVID-19 pandemic has so far claimed over 9000 lives and infected more than 2,00,000 people worldwide, leading to cancellation and postponement of sporting events across the globe.

Kashyap had recently urged the world body to freeze the ranking points and suspend all tournaments. He was also critical of the world body for conducting the All England Championships despite the growing COVID-19 cases in the country.

Pity everything is blocked off: Steyn on COVID-19 impact on sports

JOHANNESBURG, MAR 19 (PTI): Chilling at home after coming back from a coronavirus-forced “hotel arrest” in Pakistan, South African pacer Dale Steyn feels it’s a pity that sporting events are being cancelled en masse due to the crisis as “if you take sport away, then I don’t know really what we have.”

Steyn, who returned from Pakistan due to the virus outbreak, said it’s indescribable how the situation changed in a matter of hours. He was playing for Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League which was suspended on the day of its semifinal clashes.

“It is actually such a pity that everything is being blocked off, because in a country like South Africa, where we have all of our problems from the past - culture, religion, ethnic backgrounds - the one thing that brings everybody together is sport,” Steyn told ‘ESPNcricinfo’.

“But now at the moment, you don’t have that. In South Africa, we kind of like looking for things that unite people in big, big groups. When you don’t have sport, it’s like, oh, what do we fall back onto?”

“And I think Nelson Mandela was the first person to really say that: sport unites people in a way that nothing else does. And if you take sport away, then I don’t know really what we have. We’re gonna have to work it all out.”

Major events such as the Euro and Copa America football, French Open

tennis and Formula One races have been postponed due to the health emergency gripping the world. Despite the panic all around, Steyn said he has avoided stockpiling essentials like many others as it’s unfair to do so in a crisis.

“It just seems like it is the only topic of conversation. Any WhatsApp groups that I’m part of, it’s really tough to escape. Normally if I am on holiday I’ll be planning a fishing trip or a surfing trip. At the moment I am just chilling at home,” Steyn said.

“We were under that kind of hotel arrest - advised not to go out and wander the streets, which is totally fine; I don’t want to break protocol and (have) something happen and be blamed for cricket never being played in Pakistan again because I did something stupid.”

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to more than 8,000 deaths globally, has raised fears that markets maybe shut in coming days and households may run out of essentials but hoarding is not an option for Steyn. “We just decided that stockpiling is definitely not the way to go. It is not fair on everybody who needs that stuff. I went to the grocery store the other day and everyone had bought all the toilet paper,” he said.

“We have what we need, and when that runs out, that runs out, and we need to go and get some more. We didn’t feel it was necessary to go and absolutely just, like, zom-

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Asia stocks dive, dollar soars as ECB bazooka fails to ease fears

Asian equities sank again Thursday while the dollar surged as a European Central Bank plan to spend more than \$800 billion to buy bonds failed to instil optimism in traders who fear that the world is heading for a virus-fuelled economic catastrophe.

In what one analyst said could be a “game changer” for the coronavirus-wracked euro-zone, the ECB’s so-called Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme aims to give financial markets some much-needed liquidity as investors pull the plug on markets.

It said the 750-billion-euro (\$820-billion) programme was temporary and will be halted when the coronavirus crisis is judged to be over “but in any case not before the end of the year”.

After announcing the move, ECB boss Christine Lagarde tweeted that “extraordinary times require extraordinary action. There are no limits to our commitment to the euro.”

Those comments echoed the words of her predecessor Mario Draghi, whose pledge to do “whatever it takes” to preserve the eurozone was seen as a turning point in the region’s sovereign debt crisis.

Asian markets initially climbed on the news but soon tumbled as investors contemplate months of economic hardship with countries around the world in lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which has now infected more than 200,000 people and killed almost 9,000.

Seoul tanked more than eight percent, Singapore dived 4.5 percent and Hong Kong, Sydney, Wellington and Bangkok lost more than three percent. Tokyo ended down one percent, while Taipei and Jakarta crumbled more than five percent.

Mumbai and Shanghai were more than one percent lower.

Manila plunged almost 25 percent after reopening following a two-day suspension



prompted by the outbreak but it later bounced back to sit more than 13 percent down.

The sharp losses were in tandem with a surge in the dollar as investors scrambled for cash to pay debts or just stash away.

The pound is now wallowing around its lowest levels since the mid-1980s, while the greenback was up more than six percent against the Australian dollar and more than three percent on the South Korean won.

The US dollar hit a record high above 75 Indian rupees, while the New Zealand dollar and Russian ruble lost more than five percent.

- ‘At home watching Netflix’ - And AxiCorp’s Stephen Innes warned of further turmoil despite the historic moves by banks and governments. “War-time economics is not going to help with everyone in lockdown sitting at home watching Netflix,” he said.

The ECB’s bazooka was the latest in a string of measures by central banks and governments aimed at supporting the global economy, which have amounted to almost \$2 trillion.

Still, the measures have not been enough to soothe panic-stricken investors and analysts say more must be done. Soon after the ECB announce-

ment, French President Emmanuel Macron called for more fiscal action from leaders.

Australia’s central bank became the latest to move, slashing interest rates to a record low on Thursday and pledging to pump billions into the financial system.

But Ryuta Otsuka, chief strategist at Toyo Securities, told AFP: “Offering of liquidity by the (European) authorities supported morning trade, but that was short-lived as people don’t know where the exit is from fears over the coronavirus, even though it seems like it is simply something like a bad kind of cold.”

The latest rout in Asia followed another day of carnage on Wall Street, where the Dow ended down more than six percent and below 20,000 for the first time since 2017 as traders feared that the spiralling pandemic could tip the world into a severe and long-lasting recession.

The ECB move also had a dramatic effect on the oil market, with the price of the US benchmark West Texas Intermediate up almost 17 percent at nearly \$24 a barrel, recouping much of the 24 percent lost the day before.

However, the commodity tracked the sell-off on other markets and lost a large chunk

of those gains. Oil markets have been hammered by collapsing demand as the virus prompts sweeping travel restrictions and business closures, and as major producers Saudi Arabia and Russia engage in a price war.

“There is just extreme volatility in the market now as participants try to assess the economic impact of the coronavirus and what it means for oil demand,” Daniel Hynes, at Australia & New Zealand Banking Group, said.

- Key figures around 0620 GMT - Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 1.0 percent at 16,552.83 (close) Hong Kong - Hang Seng: DOWN 3.3 percent at 22,548.65 Shanghai - Composite: DOWN 1.4 percent at 2,691.71 Dollar/yen: UP at 108.90 yen from 107.96 yen at 2100 GMT Euro/dollar: DOWN at \$1.0901 from \$1.0912 Pound/dollar: DOWN at \$1.1506 from \$1.1589 Euro/pound: UP at 94.72 pence from 94.20 pence Brent North Sea crude: UP 4.1 percent at \$25.90 per barrel West Texas Intermediate: UP 11.3 percent at \$22.67 per barrel New York - Dow: DOWN 6.3 percent at 19,898.92 (close) London - FTSE 100: DOWN 4.1 percent at 5,080.58 (close) -- Bloomberg News contributed to this story --

China reports no new domestic coronavirus cases for first time: NHC

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, MAR 19 (PTI): For the first time after the deadly coronavirus broke out about three months ago in Wuhan, China on Thursday said that no new domestic cases of the COVID-19 were confirmed, including in the virus’ epicentre, even as eight more fatalities have been reported, taking the death toll in the country to 3,245.

China’s National Health Commission (NHC) in its daily report said that no new domestically transmitted cases of the novel coronavirus disease were reported on the Chinese mainland on Wednesday.

However, a total of 34 new COVID-19 cases were reported on the Chinese mainland on Wednesday, all of which were from those arriving from abroad, marking a sharp increase, it said.

Of the 34 newly imported cases, 21 were reported in Beijing, nine

in Guangdong Province, two in Shanghai, one in Heilongjiang Province and one in Zhejiang Province, the NHC said.

Capital of the central Hubei Province Wuhan, which bore the brunt of the coronavirus since the outbreak originated in December last year, also reported zero cases on Wednesday, marking a notable first in the city’s months-long battle with the deadly virus.

The Health Commission of Hubei Province said the total confirmed cases of the coronavirus disease in Wuhan and Hubei remained at 50,005 and 67,800 respectively on Wednesday with no confirmed cases.

Also on Wednesday, eight deaths and 23 newly suspected cases were reported on the mainland. All deaths were reported in Hubei Province, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The overall confirmed cases on the mainland

had reached 80,928 by the end of Wednesday. This included 3,245 people who died of the disease 7,263 patients and 70,420 patients discharged after recovery.

The NHC said the number of imported cases in China rose to 189 with 34 confirmed cases from the people arriving from abroad.

China has reported a total of 80,928 confirmed cases of the COVID-19, of which 3,245 have died and 70,420 patients were discharged after treatment.

By the end of Wednesday, 192 confirmed cases including four deaths had been reported in Hong Kong, 15 confirmed cases in the Macao and 100 in Taiwan including one death, the NHC said.

The coronavirus outbreak has killed 8,809 people and infected 21,8631 across 157 countries and territories, according to a tracker maintained by Johns Hopkins University.

London headed for tougher lockdown as UK’s coronavirus hotspot

LONDON, MAR 19 (PTI): The UK capital is headed for much tougher lockdown measures within days as London remains the country’s coronavirus hotspot, with over a third of the UK’s 2,626 confirmed cases, at 953.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson insisted on Wednesday that Britain remains a “land of liberty” but did not rule out a further crackdown on London, where the virus has been spreading faster than any other part of the country despite government advice to refrain from all social contact and unnecessary travel and work from home as far as possible.

“I have to tell you we will rule nothing out and we will certainly wish to consider bringing forward further and faster measures where that is necessary to suppress the peak of the epidemic to protect our NHS [National Health Service], to minimise casualties, and to minimise suffering,” he said during his daily Downing Street briefing, when asked about bringing in measures similar to those in place across the border in France where citizens require paperwork to justify their movements out and about. “Absolutely we do not rule it out, because

it would be quite wrong to do so. We do not rule out taking further and faster measures in due course, Johnson said.

As the death toll from COVID-19 hit 104, the UK Cabinet Office has reportedly asked government departments to draw up plans that would force cafés, pubs and restaurants to close and drastically reduce the Underground Tube, rail and bus service network.

Transport for London is already putting in place plans for the closure of up to 40 Tube stations, with most Underground lines set to run heavily reduced services across the capital.

People should not be travelling, by any means, unless they really, really have to, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said in a direct plea to Londoners.

Johnson also appealed for people to take the self-isolation advice seriously: I am a believer in freedom. But let us be in absolutely no doubt that these are very, very important choices we are now making.

The more closely, the more strictly, the more ruthlessly we can enforce upon ourselves, our families, the advice the fewer deaths we will have. The move came as he

announced the closure of schools indefinitely from Friday and cancelled annual board level exams scheduled for May and June.

Provisions are being made for the children of key workers in the healthcare and delivery of essentials sectors, so that parents are able to carry on their work.

The Army is also preparing to provide support during the pandemic, with the number of troops in a heightened state of readiness to be doubled to 20,000 and Reserves to be placed on standby to support public services in a new “COVID support force”.

The Ministry of Defence is also planning to put 150 military personnel into training to drive oxygen tankers around the country to support the NHS.

Emergency laws will be introduced in Parliament later to provide new powers to deal with the pandemic. The Coronavirus Bill includes provisions for border controls, ways of boosting the NHS workforce and making it easier to register a death. The government says the measures will only be used when necessary and have a time limit of two years.

Trump renominates Indian-American law professor to civil liberties board

BY YOSHITA SINGH

NEW YORK, MAR 19 (PTI):

US President Donald Trump has renominated a prominent Indian-American law professor and legal expert to an agency whose mission is to ensure the federal government’s efforts to prevent terrorism are balanced with the need to protect privacy and civil liberties. The nomination of Aditya Bamzai of Virginia, to be re-appointed a Member of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board for a term expiring January 29, 2026, was sent to the US Senate.

In August 2018, Trump had nominated Bamzai, a professor at University of Virginia’s School of Law, to be a member of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board for a six-year term expiring January 2020.

The Board is an independent agency within the Executive Branch established by the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. The Board’s mission is to ensure that the federal government’s efforts to prevent terrorism are balanced with the need to protect privacy and civil liberties.

Israel’s Netanyahu accused of exploiting virus crisis

JERUSALEM, MAR 19 (AP): With the Israeli government enacting a series of emergency measures to stem the spread of the new coronavirus, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing growing accusations that he is exploiting the crisis to entrench himself in power and undermining the country’s democratic foundations.

Amid a wave of sweeping restrictions that have put Israel in near shutdown mode, Netanyahu has managed to postpone his own pending criminal trial, authorize unprecedented electronic surveillance of Israeli citizens and block parliament from pressing ahead with legislation aimed at pushing him from office.

The moves, on the heels of the country’s third inconclusive election in less than a year and under the shadow of Netanyahu’s corruption indictment, sparked leading opposition figure Yair Lapid to tell Israeli citizens that they no longer live in a democracy.

There is no judicial branch in Israel. There is no legislative branch in Israel. There is only an unelected government that is headed by a person who lost the election.

You can call that by a lot of names, it isn’t a democracy, he said in a recorded video.

The new coronavirus has spread to more than 100 countries, infected more than 217,000 people worldwide and killed more than 8,700. For most people, it causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it

can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus.

Israeli health officials have diagnosed over 400 coronavirus cases, roughly a quarter of them detected in the last 24 hours.

With the numbers quickly rising, authorities have issued a series of tough guidelines that have brought the country to a standstill. People have been instructed to stay home, tens of thousands are in home quarantine and foreigners have been banned from entering the country.

Most controversially, the Israeli government instructed the shadowy Shin Bet internal security service to start deploying the agency’s phone surveillance technology to help curb the spread of the new coronavirus in Israel by tracking the moves of the infected. Israel uses phone surveillance in the occupied Palestinian territories, saying it’s an important tool to prevent attacks on Israelis, but critics say it’s also aimed at maintaining tight control.

The step has sparked widespread criticism from lawmakers and civil rights groups. Opponents planned to file a Supreme Court challenge on Thursday.

Many of the measures are not unique to Israel. In neighboring Jordan, King Abdullah II has shut the country’s court system and parliament to control the spread of the virus. Abdullah, who is not elected, appears to have won wide public support for his handling of the crisis. The British government

plans to introduce a bill in Parliament on Thursday that will give authorities stronger powers to respond to the pandemic.

Many of these are relatively uncontroversial like allowing retired doctors to return to work without taking a hit on their pensions. But critics have raised questions about some proposals, including a move to give police and immigration officers powers to detain people and put them in appropriate isolation facilities if necessary to protect public health. The emergency legislation is due to have a two-year time limit, but opposition lawmakers want a shorter cut-off date.

Like Abdullah, Netanyahu has thrived in the crisis, delivering stern televised addresses to the nation each evening.

Presenting himself as the responsible adult steering the country through an unprecedented crisis, he has defended the tough steps, including the electronic surveillance, as measures that he has reluctantly been forced to impose to save lives while his opponents are focused on petty politics.

In a televised interview Wednesday, Netanyahu said that during his 11 years as prime minister, he had previously always refused to use surveillance normally used to hunt down wanted Palestinian militant on Israeli citizens. He said there would be maximum oversight to protect privacy concerns.

The last thing I will do is harm democracy, he said. The liberal Haaretz daily responded Wednesday with a lead editorial titled An Epidemic of Surveillance.

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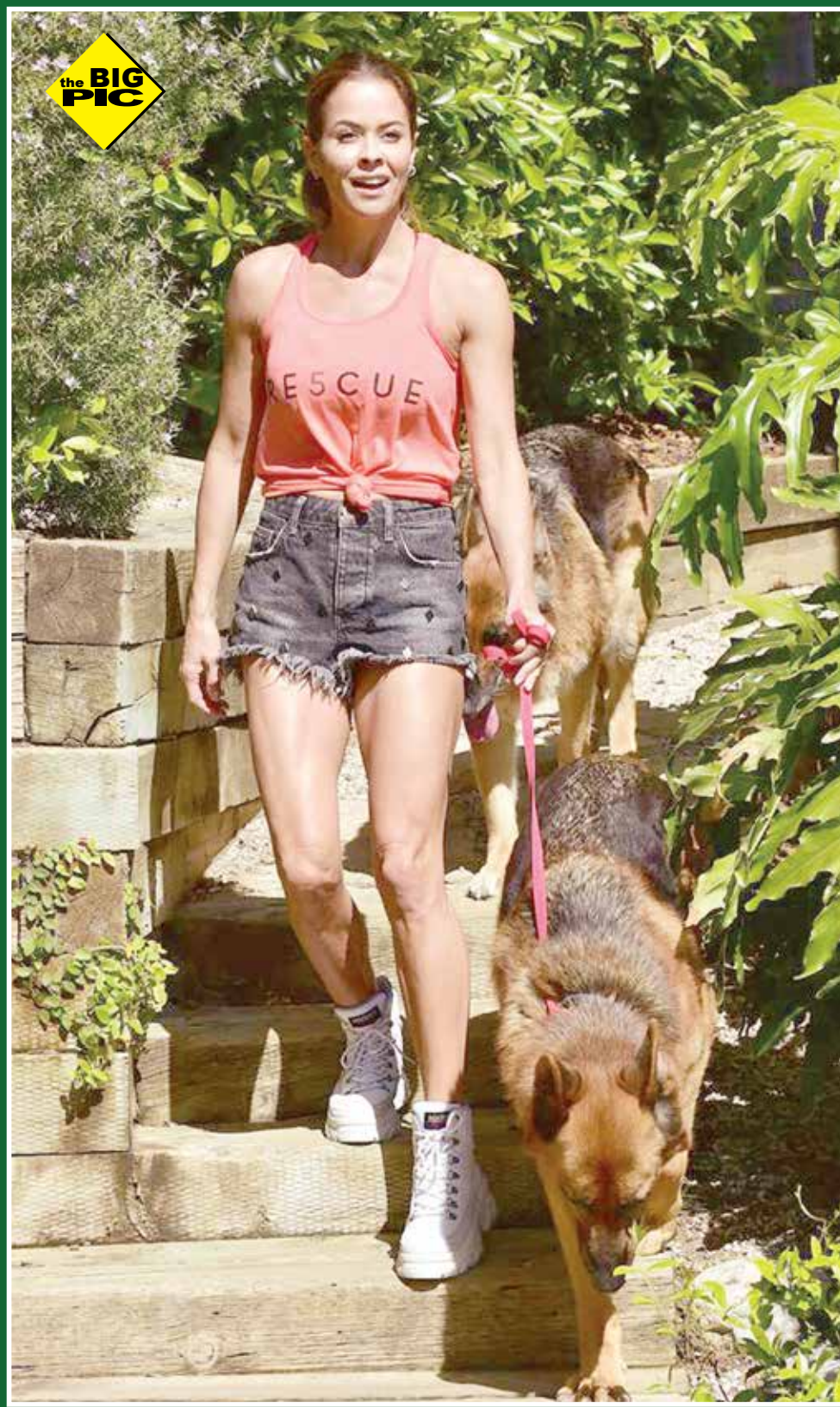
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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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STAYING ACTIVE!! The actress, Brooke Burke goes for a hike with her dog in the back of her home in Malibu.

Sony to release 'Bloodshot' digitally

LOS ANGELES, MAR 19 (PTI): With movie theatres shutdown around the country due to the coronavirus pandemic, Sony has decided to release Vin Diesel's "Bloodshot" available for digital purchase.

Sony Pictures chairman Tom Rothman said the decision to release the film digitally was done keeping in mind the "exceedingly rare circumstance" where theatres are closed down.

"Sony Pictures is firmly committed to theatrical exhibition and we support windowing. This is a unique and exceedingly rare circumstance where theaters have been required to close nationwide for the greater good and Bloodshot is abruptly unavailable in any medium.

"Audiences will now have the chance to own Bloodshot right away and see it at home, where we are all spending more time. We are confident that like other businesses hit hard by the virus movie theaters

will bounce back strongly, and we will be there to support them," Rothman said in a statement.

The film opened in theatres last Friday but the box office is at its 20-

"Emma" and "The Hunt", which will be made available digitally for 48-hour rental periods as early as this Friday.

Production of movies everywhere has been put on hold with people being



year low.

NBCUniversal has also broken the gap between a theatrical and streaming release with "The Invisible Man",

advised to stay at home or work from home to avoid the spread of the virus, which has infected more than 200,000 people globally.

Coronavirus: Hugh Jackman closes his New York cafe



NEW YORK, MAR 19 (PTI): Hollywood star Hugh Jackman has temporarily closed his cafe Laughing Man to avoid the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

The 51-year-old actor felt it was the "right thing" to do in order to ensure the safety of the staff and guests.

"We have made the decision to temporarily close the @laughingmancafe. We feel this is the best course of action to ensure the safety of our staff and community, he wrote on Instagram.

We also feel it is the right thing for the larger community of NYC. We want to be a

place of healthy interaction and not a potential danger to you.

Jackman also urged his fans to take care of each other as the world grapples with the virus.

"This is a time when we find new depths to our motto ALL BE HAPPY and hope, more than ever, for it to help guide humanity. While it pains us not to serve you person to person, we will look for other ways to serve you during this time. Let us take care of each other the best we can. We wish the whole world health, peace, patience and love. #allbehappy, he wrote.

Kevin Bacon encourages fans to stay home

LOS ANGELES, MAR 19 (PTI): Kevin Bacon, Hollywood's most interconnected star, wants his fans to stay at home to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Bacon, who has a parlour game on himself based on the concept of 'six degrees of separation' where fans challenge each others to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and Bacon, said staying at home is the only option to protect loved ones.

"Hi, folks. You know me, right? I'm technically only six degrees away from you," he said in a video posted across the different social platforms.

"Right now, like people around the world, I'm staying home, because it saves lives and it is the only way we're going to slow down the

spread of this coronavirus. Because the contact that you make with someone, who makes contact with someone else, that may be what makes somebody's mom or grandpa or wife sick."

The actor said he was staying home for his wife, actor Kyra Sedgwick.

"Every one of us has someone who is worth staying home for... The more folks involved, the merrier We're all connected by various degrees (Trust me, I know!), he said encouraging fans to post similar videos.

The coronavirus outbreak has killed 8,809 people and infected 218,631 across 157 countries and territories, according to a tracker maintained by Johns Hopkins University.

'Fauda' S3 gets premiere date



LOS ANGELES, MAR 19 (PTI): The third season of the Israeli thriller series "Fauda" is set to debut on April 16, Netflix has announced. According to Deadline, the new chapter will start premiering from next month in all territories where Netflix is available, excluding France and French-speaking territories (June 4) and Israel (June 25). The 12-episode series is presented bilingually in Hebrew and Arabic with subtitles.

"Fauda", Arabic for "chaos", follows an undercover unit in the Israeli Defense Forces, centering on top agent, Doron Kavillio, played by Lior Raz, who

is also the show's creator. Season three will see Kavillio deep undercover in the West Bank, posing as an Israeli Arab boxing instructor in a sports club belonging to a low-level Hamas member. Following many, deadly clashes with Hamas and a tragic incident that all but shatters the team's morale, Doron and the team find themselves in an unfamiliar territory: Gaza.

"Fauda" also features Avi Issacharoff, Ala Dakka, Khalifa Natour, Itzik Cohen, Marina Maximilian, Jacob Zada Daniel, Idan Amedi, Doron Ben David, Boaz Konforty, Rona-Lee Shimon, Reef Nee-man and George Iskandar.

'Game of Thrones' star Indira Varma tests positive for coronavirus

LONDON, MAR 19 (PTI): "Game of Thrones" star Indira Varma has revealed that she has tested positive for coronavirus.

Her diagnosis comes two days after fellow "Game of Thrones" actor Kristofer Hivju also said that he tested positive for the COVID-19 infection.

Varma, who played the role of Ellaria Sand in the epic HBO series, took to Instagram on Wednesday to share the news.

"I'm in bed with it and it's not nice. Stay safe and healthy and be kind to your fellow people," she wrote.

The 46-year-old actor was starring in the modern take of Anton Chekhov's play "The Seagull" in London's West End, alongside "Game of Thrones" alum Emilia Clarke.

The play is on hold due to the pandemic.

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ARIES: Given the general state of chaos, it will be easy to hit the panic button, lose your cool at the drop of a hat and blame others for how you are feeling. Take responsibility for where you are. Sharing space (even with your loved ones) isn't always easy. Keep your ego aside and see how you can work as a team. We're in this together, Aries!

Tip: We're in this together!

TAURUS: Look at you breaking old habits and turning your wounds into wisdom. You've come such a long way, Taurus! Don't fall into the old trap of worrying about the things you have zero control over. Use this time to step back emotionally, reassess your patterns, and bring light to the shadows. Remember, if you're struggling, it's okay to reach out for help. Your family or your flatmates will be more than happy to brew you a pot of ginger-lemon-honey tea and take your mind off what's weighing you down.

Tip: Turn your wounds into wisdom.

GEMINI: You can either complain about social distancing or adapt your schedule and adjust your attitude. Gemini, you're definitely in the mood to turn lemons into lemon tart. That library at home has been calling for your attention for some time now. Turn to your favourite literary geniuses for solace or learn a new skill that will enhance your CV. Channelling your inner geek is the

best way to ride this storm.

Tip: Turn to your favourite literary geniuses.

CANCER: What's happening on an individual level is bound to affect the collective, and vice versa. It's important to draw energetic boundaries that will help you differentiate between what's yours and what's not. Stay physically and energetically protected at all times. If what you're consuming by way of 'information' is causing anxiety, it's best to detach for a bit.

Tip: Draw physical and energetic boundaries.

LEO: The truth is, neither of us could have predicted this storm. Yet, the only way to ride it is by adapting and learning to go with the flow. What the cards are urging you to do: instead of succumbing to the general state of panic, make a conscious attempt to vibrate higher and remind those around you to choose happiness over gloom and doom.

Tip: Make a conscious attempt to vibrate higher.

VIRGO: But, what do *you* desire, Virgo? What's keeping you from having the conversation? Forget about the rules of dating and mating for a second. If you envision a life together with them, speak your truth. If the feelings are mutual, there is no reason they won't meet you halfway. Those who've been planning their wedding, an event or ceremony could be in a general state of panic.

Tip: Have the talk.

LIBRA: If there's anything your time away from the matrix is teaching you, it's that there's too much to do and too little time. Libra, you are a powerhouse of ideas at the moment and there's no putting that overactive imagination of yours to rest. Use this time wisely. Invest in projects that have been calling for your attention. Some of you may feel inspired to learn a new skill. Pick a book that will be your guiding light or look for courses in the virtual world.

Tip: Start something new!

SCORPIO: While those around you may be screaming their guts out about distancing, your inner introvert is secretly relieved. You're looking at your time off as a wonderful opportunity to turn inwards, water your garden, and start a dialogue with yourself about the things that matter. Things will get better eventually—this you trust. Use your voice to inform, educate, and show up for your fellow warriors in the best way you can.

Tip: Use your voice to inform and educate.

SAGITTARIUS: "I will remember the kisses, our lips raw with love, and how you gave me everything you had, and how I offered you what was left of me." Bukowski is a big mood in the Sagittarius HQ and you're in the mood to spend your time away from the matrix

nurturing your relationship with your special someone.

Tip: Use this time to nurture your relationship.

CAPRICORN: It's a 'find what you love and let it kill you' kind of week in the Capricorn headquarters. Allow yourself to be intoxicated by what you are creating. Immerse yourself in your art. You will find that there is no greater joy than expressing your innermost thoughts. But does that mean you are compromising on wealth and financial stability in the bargain? Anything but.

Tip: Immerse yourself in the process of creation.

Aquarius:

Given the general state of chaos in the world, your finances may have taken a hit. Now is not the time to take risky decisions. Put yourself on savings mode until the storm has passed, Aquarius. As for the money that is owed to you, trust that it will clear in due course of time. It's true that life is beginning to seem like an obstacle course.

Tip: You will find the light at the end of the tunnel.

PISCES: Old structures are falling away right this moment, making space for an energetic shift on a collective level. But that doesn't mean the transition to the new age is going to be devoid of chaos. As an empathetic and sensitive soul, you understand this on a deep level and are finding a way to keep your feet on the ground..

Tip: Establishing small, simple rituals is the key to consistency.