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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Swamped with backlog, NBMC returns samples from Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

As the pandemic continues to spike across the country, pressure on the health infrastructure is stretching resources thin. While the region has been spared the trauma of overworked health-workers and over-booked ICUs, the strain on the only functioning viral lab here has been telling.

The lab at North Bengal Medical College [NBMC], Siliguri, has built up a backlog of tests so enormous that at the time of filing this report on 28 May, its technicians had only just begun screening samples received on 19 May. Since Sikkim continues to depend on the Siliguri facility for RT-PCR testing, its inaugurated viral

lab yet to begin work, it is still waiting on results for upwards of 800 samples sent there.

What is more, NBMC today sent back the 95 samples sent for testing by Siliguri, telling Sikkim that it was best to have it tested in its own viral lab since it was unlikely that they will get to Sikkim's latest samples before the lab in Gangtok gets operational.

The State had sent 95 samples for RT-PCR testing today but NBMC refused to even accept it following large numbers of samples already in backlog for testing in the lab.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday evening, Director General-cum-Secretary, Health, Dr PT Bhutia informed that a total

of 1,495 samples have been sent from Sikkim for RT-PCR testing at North Bengal Medical College and the State has received reports for 759 samples. Results for 736 samples are still due.

"Actually, North Bengal Medical College have been refusing to accept our samples for the last three days but they were keeping our samples after our request but they have even refused to accept the 95 samples sent today. We brought back our samples and have kept them in the viral lab established in STNM hospital and will test as soon as our viral lab is operational," he said.

Dr Bhutia expressed that viral lab will be operational soon as the lab has

passed the screening test and has already received its login ID and password. Now, only the confirmatory test is pending.

He added that RNA extractor and few other equipment required for COVID-19 testing were arriving Friday.

Dr Bhutia informs that a total of 114 samples were sent today for Truenat testing at STNM hospital.

He mentioned that overall 1,131 samples have been sent for Truenat testing at STNM Hospital and 1,042 samples have already tested negative and reports for 89 samples were pending.

Meanwhile, he informed that the COVID-19 patient admitted at STNM Hospital was keeping well and not showing any symptoms.

He added that four patients showing symptoms - 2 from Namchi and one each from Sumbuk and Janta Bhawan quarantine facilities were admitted at STNM hospital yesterday and all have been reported negative in Truenat testing. He informed that they will be back in their quarantine facilities after their symptoms go away.

Out of 4,520 returnees, Dr Bhutia informed that 3,456 were presently in quarantine and 1,062 have already been discharged and were in home quarantine now.

He urged everyone to strictly complete their 28 days of quarantine. He further urged the people not to fall for fake news and rumors.

Locust attack alert issued for Himachal Pradesh

SHIMLA, MAY 28 (PTI): A locust swarm attack alert has been issued for Himachal Pradesh, an official spokesperson said.

The high alert has been issued for four districts of Kangra, Una, Bilaspur and Solan of the total twelve districts of the state, he added.

The state Agriculture Director R K Koundal stated that a massive swarm of desert locust has been destroying crops in adjoining states and may spread to Himachal Pradesh.

Field functionaries have been alerted to keep continuous and constant vigilance on locust activity and get ready to control any locust emergency situation, he added.

Farmers have been asked to report any activity of locusts to nearby agriculture officers, he added.

Desert locusts usually fly with the wind at a speed of about 16 to 19 km per hour depending on the wind, he said. When a swarm settles down on a area, it should be quickly treated chemically, mechanically beaten and buried by digging trenches, he added.

The director further said all field officers have been directed to create awareness among the farmers regarding locust attack.

No locust activity has been reported from any part of the state so far and necessary steps for locust control have already been taken, he added.

235 people stranded in Bangladesh return to northeast



AGARTALA, MAY 28 (PTI): Altogether 235 people of the northeastern states who were stranded in Bangladesh due to the COVID-19 lockdown were sent back on Thursday through three Indo-Bangla border check posts in the region, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Riva Ganguly Das said.

Most of the returnees hail from Tripura, Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya, she said.

Das, who accompanied those hailing from Tripura to the Agartala-Akhaura integrated check post said all the 235 Indian citizens had expressed their desire to go back to their respective states and the High Commission facilitated their return.

The two other check posts through which the stranded people entered India are the Sutarkandi-Sheola check post in Assam and Dawki-Tamabil check post in Meghalaya.

Pratima Bhoumik, the Lok Sabha MP from Tripura who received the returnees here, said 129

people from the state had listed to come back, but 106 did on Thursday.

All of them would be kept in institutional quarantine for seven days and if they test negative, they would be released with advise of mandatory home quarantine. Otherwise, they have to be treated at the G B Pant hospital here, Bhoumik said.

The MP said all required steps had been taken by the health department in respect of collection of samples of the returnees and shifting them to institutional quarantine.

Quarantine for the returnees to Assam would be in Karimganj, in a Imphal hotel for those from Manipur, while those from Meghalaya would be kept in their respective districts, Bhowmick said.

She also said that Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb would visit all the 58 blocks in eight districts of Tripura from tomorrow to inspect ground realities and steps taken to fight corona virus.

Monsoon onset over Kerala on June 1: IMD

New Delhi, May 28 (PTI): The southwest monsoon is likely to hit Kerala on June 1, thanks to a cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal, the India Meteorological Department said on Thursday.

The IMD, in its onset date forecast on May 15, had said the monsoon is likely to hit the southern state on June 5, four days after its normal arrival.

The normal onset of monsoon over Kerala is June 1.

However, a cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal is likely to help in the faster progress of the monsoon.

"A low pressure area is likely to form over southeast and adjoining east central Arabian Sea during May 31 to June 4. In view of this, conditions are very likely to become favourable from June 1 for onset of southwest monsoon over Kerala," the IMD said.

A low pressure area is the first stage of

any cyclone. It is not necessary that every low pressure intensifies into a cyclonic circulation.

According to the IMD, the country is likely to receive normal monsoon this year.

A low pressure area has also formed over west-central Arabian Sea. It is very likely to concentrate into a depression over the same region during next 48 hours.

It is very likely to move northwestwards towards south Oman and east Yemen coast during next three days, the IMD added.

Under the influence of this weather system, heavy rainfall is likely over parts of south peninsular India during May 28-31, with isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall over Kerala and Lakshadweep during May 30-31.

The IMD has also predicted heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places over Tripura and Mizoram in the next 24 hours and heavy rainfall over Assam and Meghalaya.

Lockdown projected to wipe out 40% of Sikkim's revenue from sale of electricity

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

Sikkim's power sector is expected to face significant losses in the current fiscal year due to the unprecedented situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown which has been in force since end-March and economic activity has been at a standstill for more than two months now.

Even though the hydel projects remain in operation, demand for energy is low since

industries are in a slump and this is expected to reflect in the earnings of power generators.

Hydel operators in Sikkim are projected to lose upto 40 per cent of revenue as a result, Principal Chief Engineer, Power Department, Rodan Thapa, informs.

Sikkim generates 2,196 MWs annually of which 570 MW is generated by central PSUs, 27 MW by state PSUs and 1,599 MW by private sector hydel developers.

Mr Thapa informs that

in the last 70 days of the lockdown, Sikkim lost revenue to the tune of Rs 6 to 7 crores, including revenue from commercial consumption within the state, as compared to last year. He adds that power was sold to entities outside the state at Rs.2.70 per unit until before the nationwide lockdown and that this rate was now down to Rs. 2.10 per unit.

The actual loss is yet to be ascertained.

Sikkim collected Rs 239.73 crore in revenue

from power in 2019-20 from within the state and following updation of accounts as of March 2020, the revenue could increase to Rs250 crores.

Revenue from power sales outside the state in 2019-20 is estimated to be around Rs162.72 crores, Mr Thapa informed. As of now, Sikkim has seven operational hydropower plants. These plants generate about 9,800 million units of energy per year, of which Sikkim uses 1250 million units of free power.

Spokespersons or Bluff-Masters

ViewPoint
JIWAN RAI

I love the art of public speaking far more than I care to admit. I hate bad oratory with an equal level of passion. What I find most repulsive is oratory which flaunts an ill-mannered personality, is filled with shamelessly abusive language and possesses barbaric rudeness just for the purpose of conveying a series of blatant lies. Just like some people love movies, I love watching speeches by some of the great speakers in the world. Like movie buffs desire top class locally produced movies, I also like local good quality oratory.

The significance of public speaking for Sikkimese society cannot be gainsaid. We are not a reading culture and therefore we are not a thinking culture. Even in the 21st century, we have sustained our oral tradition. The construction of public opinions, expression of experts' views, sources of learning - all happen orally.

That explains why the grandest Sikkimese ideas and opinions cannot be found in books. That explains why our seriously thoughtful Sikkimese people are marginalized by their garrulous counterparts. Even if we seriously take 50 percent of these generalizations, we can safely conclude that the Sikkimese public IQ is determined by the quality of their oral source of knowledge.

I therefore understand how important it is for those who use their lips in public all the time to ponder what they say and vie for a constant upgrading of themselves. Such folks include leaders, teachers and media persons. Sikkim is exposed to their oral communication all the time.

The level and the content of our social communication, to a large extent, are therefore the reflection of the quality of the above three in the state. If we have made progress, kudos to them. If we haven't, they must reflect on the matter.

During the lockdown, the most audible group has been the SPOKESPERSONS. They have been heard in the morning, afternoon, evening and night. They have fulfilled their duty with religious regularity and passion.

My humble suggestions to them is simply this - if you want to contribute to the foundation of building up a robust intellectual society, here is what you need to do:

Be polite and use good language. You are not only representing your political parties and party chief, you are representing the Sikkimese society. The inherently polite and civilized Sikkimese soul must be represented in a befitting manner. If politeness and civilized language are not your traits, please leave the job to somebody else who can do it in a more dignified manner.

We are not expecting our spokespersons to talk like Shashi Tharoor and Narendra Modi. However,

spokespersons, by definition, should be the best speakers in the lot. Try to raise the standard of your language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, intonation, etc.

If the level of intellectual discourse in politics is going to rise, our debaters must work way harder than the majority of them are doing right now. Do intense hard work on facts and figures. I sincerely believe a half an hour of press conference must be preceded by at least 50 to 60 hours of serious study.

Politics, technically, should be a battle of truth and not the art of telling lies convincingly. Refrain from telling lies at the drop of a hat. Every spokesman must remind himself of this, that if the next generation politician were to build on his/her style of presenting facts, how much more honesty or otherwise would be added to politics as value addition or deletion.

Do not insult public

intelligence. The majority of young people are educated and informed. I frequently receive emails from people who are completely frustrated with some political leaders in this regard - spokespersons who are 'dumbing' people down all the time. Just because you are the one facing the camera does not mean that the rest of world doesn't know what you pretend to know. The level of public understanding in the emergent generation is ever on the rise. Gone are the days when the entire generation would blindly follow the silly opinions of a few smart bluff-masters.

Finally, concede your mistakes. That's what we need to do as humans. What our society needs is honesty and honesty is all about admitting mistakes and making sincere attempts to resolve them.

Good spokesmanship is the hallmark of a progressive civilization and the opposite of this fact is just as true.

SDF condemns moves to reallocate CMRHM allotments as SGAY

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

Sikkim Democratic Front today accused the SKM Government of routinely violating the basic norms of the Constitution of India by over-turning decisions of panchayat raj institutions.

In the SDF crosshairs is a recent development at Chingthang Gram Panchayat Unit under Bermoik-Gyalshing constituency in West Sikkim where, on 27 May, the panchayat members were allegedly "pressurized" to sign-off on a re-tender for projects under the Chief Minister's Rural Housing Mission (CMRHM) by "some" Sikkim Krantikari Morcha members wherein CMRHM has been re-named Sikkim Garib Aawas Yojana.

SDF has condemned this development as undemocratic and unjust and points out that CMRHM projects in question had been approved and sanctioned by the previous SDF Government and cannot be arbitrarily discontinued or re-sanctioned under a new scheme like Sikkim Garib Aawas Yojana since it will deprive beneficiaries who have already received allotment orders.

It is also important to mention here that the beneficiaries under the CMRHM were selected and the allotment orders were issued as per the due process of the law by the respective Gram Panchayat Units during the previous Government, an SDF press release informs.



Staying positive at JNVRavangla Quarantine

Namchi, 28 May(IPR):

Residents of Quarantine Centre at JNV, Ravangla are passing time by doing activities like cleaning and dusting. This kind of bonding activity has assisted the quarantined people to have fun and create a space where positivity prevails which is needed at this time in order to defeat the virus. Proper guidelines of COVID-19 are being maintained by the residents and efficient intervention from the South District Administration has brought about constructive transformation at the Centre.



MP visits East Districtscreening centre and quarantine facilities

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:

Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba along with executive members of SKM Students wing, visited screening centre at Rangpo and quarantine facilities at various places under Rangpo and Gangtok Sub-Division, a press release informs. He was accompanied by SDM Rangpo and later by SDM Gangtok.

During the visit, Lok Sabha MP and his team had an opportunity to interact with the students and other returnees availing the

facility and thanked them for their cooperation.

"I on behalf of the Govt, CM and students wing, appealed them to act responsibly once they go for home quarantine after they test negative for COVID-19," said the MP. The MP and team also met with the drivers at the transit facility of Rangpo and Ranipool, and thanked them on behalf of the government and CM for their dedication and service.

It is due to the dedication of our administration,

medical, sanitation and enforcement teams that quarantine facilities have been functioning so well, said MrSubba.

"Despite a number of limitations, Sikkim has been performing consistently well. We hope to keep up with the help of each and every Sikkimese people. We, as a responsible government, acknowledge the possibility of shortcomings at this time of crisis, but we also claim the fact that Sikkim government has been doing its best.



Our officials have been dedicated and hardworking. They've been putting every effort to ease the lives of those stranded and those in the quarantine facility. I appeal our learned Sikkimese people to cooperate and help them give their best out of available resources," said the MP.

Migrants gather at Jokatte as train to Bengal gets cancelled

MANGALURU, MAY 28 (PTI): Hundreds of migrant workers from West Bengal on Thursday gathered at Jokatte industrial area outside the city after getting information that a Shramik special train was scheduled to leave Mangaluru junction railway station for their home state.

The migrants, who later heard from authorities that the train has been cancelled, created a scene at the place

demanding alternative arrangements, police sources said.

Officials of the district information said the scheduled train was cancelled as the railway lines in the Bengal sector had been damaged due to the recent cyclone.

However, many workers who had vacated their rented places, were left stranded at the place for hours.

The labourers, who had been waiting for

long after registering their names with the governments 'Seva Sindhu' portal, told the officials that the contractors had not paid them wages in the last three months.

Police personnel who reached the spot later succeeded in pacifying the workers and sent them back to their places.

Around 50 among them found temporary shelter inside the hall of the Jokatte panchayat office.

Nalini cannot speak to kin: TN govt tells HC

CHENNAI, MAY 28 (PTI): The Tamil Nadu government on Thursday informed the Madras High Court that Nalini Sriharan, life convict in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, cannot be allowed to make a video call to her mother-in-law in Sri Lanka.

The government said there was no provision either in the Tamil Nadu Prison Rules or in the government orders to allow prisoners to make video call or even voice call to any person, and hence the court cannot give this right to Nalini.

The government made the submission before a division bench of Justices MM Sundresh and PT Asha when the habeas corpus petition (HCP) from S Padma, Nalini's mother, came up.

The bench then adjourned the matter to June 1.

The petitioner sought to permit her daughter and her husband Sriharan alias Murugan to make video calls to her mother-in-law in Sri Lanka and sister-in-law in London for at least 10 minutes daily.

A counter affidavit by the DGP/IG (prisons), Tamil Nadu, Sunil Kumar Singh said, "There is no provision either in the Tamil Nadu Prison Rules or in government orders to allow a prisoner to make video call or even voice call to any person in any foreign country."

The official noted that the issue involving foreign countries falls within the domain of Union Ministry for External Affairs, and the Tamil Nadu government or the prison authorities cannot take any unilateral decision.

He further submitted that since

the offence committed by the life convicts had international ramification and given their overseas contacts with banned outfits, there is no guarantee that they would use this facility for personal or family affair.

Besides the bar in rules, before a prisoner is allowed to make such calls, the prison authorities must verify the bona fides of the caller on the other end so that the regulations of the department are not jeopardised.

"In this case, we cannot verify the genuineness of the caller who will speak from a foreign land and we cannot take any action against them even if they violate any regulations," the officer added.

When the matter came up, the court observed that though a counter affidavit is said to have been filed, it is not available on file.

"The public prosecutor submits there is a protocol and procedure to be followed on instructions from the Ministry of External Affairs...and we are not able to know the exact stand of the respondents," it said and directed the Registry to put up the counter affidavit.

Besides Nalini, her husband Murugan, A G Perarivalan, Santhan, Jayakumar, Ravichandran and Robert Pyas are serving life imprisonment for their role in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 21, 1991 by an LTTE suicide-bomber at nearby Sriperumbudur.

They were initially sentenced to death, but later it was commuted to life imprisonment.

SKM forms research & analysis wing for its Kisan Morcha

SUMMIT REPORT
Gangtok, 28 May:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, on Thursday, constituted a research & analysis wing for its farmers' wing, Kisan Morcha.

This was decided at a meeting of the Kisan Morcha chaired by Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma in Gangtok. The other Minister accompanying him to the meeting was Power Minister, MN Sherpa.

The meeting was also attended by SKM Kisan Morcha vice president, Padam Sharma; the party's area in-charge for Rangang Yangang constituency, RK Basnett; former Principal Director, KB Panth, and had Dr Shiva Kumar Sharma as



resource person.

The "Research and Analysis Wing of Kisan Morcha" will act as an advisory body of the Kisan Morcha.

The meeting unanimously appointed KB Panth as the president and Dr Shiva Kumar Sharma as secretary of the new arm.

The appointed executives have been authorized to appoint other members to the executive body.

Minister Sharma advised the group to come up with a roadmap to bring "revolutionary change" in agriculture and allied sectors in the State.

Waiting for 'parivartan', says Nawin Kiran



SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convenor, Nawin KiranPradhanhas said that instead of talking about achievements in its first year in government, Sikkim KrantikariMorcha should immediately start working on its promises. He asserted that SKM government should stop blaming 25 years of the previous government and should start working for the people.

Addressing a press conference here today, MrPradhan congratulated the SKM government for completing one year in office. However, he added that the SKM government should remember its election promises and deliver on them.

"We want to know about initiatives taken by SKM government towards any of its promises made to the people in the election manifesto," he said. On

the same, he asserted that the SKM government has not taken any initiative aboutproviding tribal status to eleven left-out communities of Sikkim, reservation of seats for Limboo and Tamang, to bring CBI in the State and other promises made during election.

Accusing the government of nepotism, MrPradhan alleged that the 'parivartan' slogan is losing its meaning.

"I am preparing documents to approach the court for denial of equal opportunity to educated youths of Sikkim by the government due to nepotism. I will also file case in the court on the office of profit in the present government," he said.


Speaking about the general diary registered in Sadar Thana on PataalLok issue, he informed that the police have not filed an FIR on the case yet.

"We submitted

our complaint on 23 May at Sadar Thana and submitted a copy of the same to the Superintendent of Police [East]. They have assured to take up the matter after consulting with their seniors," he added.

On recent police arrests of some opposition functionaries over social media posts, MrPradhan spoke on Arnesh Kumar Vs State of Bihar case of 2014 in Supreme Court and asserted that proper procedure and parameters should be followed before any arrest.

He added that executive magistrates cannot direct the police to file a case against any person. He mentioned that Disaster Management Act, 2005 was applicable in the present pandemic situation of COVID-19 and action can be taken under the act if anyone spreads fake news.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

Treatment

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

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104

District surveillance Officer

EAST : 7029372100


WEST : 9593297809

NORTH : 9641957468

SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

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

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 Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501, 62970-03235, 98320-48410

Waiting Shed constructed at District Hospital Singtam

YOGEN THATAL
SINGAM, 28 MAY:

A waiting shed has been constructed at District Hospital, Singtam, for visitors and patients coming in for a check-up at the flu clinic here.

The number of patients visiting the clinic has been increasing ever since provisions of the lockdown were relaxed and it became easier for people from different places to visit the hospital, informs the registration-in-charge, Prabin Tamang.

Also, employees from private companies (especially pharmaceutical



companies) are also coming to the hospital in large numbers to get their medical fitness certificates for rejoining and reporting purposes to meet their respective company requirements, adds Mr Tamang.

2,598 new coronavirus cases in Maharashtra, 85 deaths

MUMBAI, MAY 28 (PTI): Maharashtra on Thursday reported 2,598 new coronavirus patients which took the tally of cases in the state to 59,546, a health official said. With 85 new COVID-19-related deaths, 38 of them in Mumbai, the death toll due to the pandemic reached 1,982. On the other hand, 698 patients were discharged from hospitals on Thursday, taking the tally of recovered persons in the state to 18,616, the official added.

“Out of 85 deaths, 37 deaths occurred in the last two days while remaining 48 had taken place between May 15 to May 25,” he said. Apart from 38 deaths

in Mumbai, 10 patients died in Pune city, nine in Satara, seven in Solapur city, five in Akola city, four each from Vasai Virar and Thane, three from Aurangabad, two from Navi Mumbai, one each from Raigad, Jalgaon and Nanded city, he said.

Of 59,546 cases in the state, Mumbai city alone accounts for 35,485 cases while the death toll in the country’s financial capital has risen to 1,135.

The worst-hit Thane division, which includes Mumbai and surrounding satellite towns, has reported 45,474 cases and 1,339 deaths.

The second worst hit area is Pune city where COVID-19 cases stand at 6,050 and number of

fatalities so far is 286. The number of coronavirus cases and deaths in Pune division are 8,036 and 376, respectively, the official said.

The Nashik division has reported 1,822 cases and 122 deaths due to COVID-19.

Kolhapur division has reported 675 cases and seven deaths while Aurangabad division has reported 1,640 cases and 61 deaths, the official said.

The Latur division has reported 310 cases and nine deaths while Akola division has reported 905 cases and 45 deaths.

630 cases and ten deaths have been recorded in Nagpur division.

Fifty-four persons from other states are receiving treatment for COVID-19 in Maharashtra.

The virus has also claimed lives of 13 persons from other states who were undergoing treatment in Maharashtra.

The state has conducted 4,19,417 tests so far.

There are 2,816 containment zones. Currently 6,12,745 people are in home quarantine and 35,122 in institutional quarantine.

M a h a r a s h t r a coronavirus figures are as follows: Positive cases 59,546, new cases 2,598, deaths 1,982, discharged 18,616, active cases 38,939, people tested so far 4,19,417.

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Textile sector ensuring inclusive growth of North East India

SHERRY LALTHANGZO

North Eastern Region of India is the true example of unity in diversity. With more than 225 tribes, around 220 languages and dialects, biodiversity including hilly terrains, streams, plain land, rivers, cloud kissed hills, this land is unique in many senses. Although this part of India occupies approximately only 8% of India’s geographical area and 4% of India’s population, it holds utmost strategic importance as it shares 5,300 km of international borders with countries such as China, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. It is also the doorway for South East Asia and development work is underway following Government’s ‘Act East’ policy.

The rich flora and fauna of the region is a major economic driver for the local population. Traditionally, sectors such as tea, handicrafts, sericulture, fisheries, livestock, and poultry have been the major contributor in the economy of the state. Women play pivotal and important role in the North East culture and economy.

Over the last decade, the region has witnessed a surge in the industrial and service sectors. Between, 2012 and 2018, Mizoram and Tripura were amongst the fastest-growing state economies in the country with Mizoram topping the chart.

Ministry of Textiles has taken many significant initiatives to strengthen Handloom, Handicrafts, Silk, and Jute sectors for the North East Region which will not only support in social inclusiveness but will contribute to Prime Minister’s vision of making the economy USD 5 Trillion by 2024–25.

Handloom

The handloom sector of India exhibits the rich and diverse heritage of our country along with the skills and artistry of weavers. The sector holds cultural significance due to its inextricable connection with the age-old traditions which have been inherited by the weavers over generations, with the earliest evidence tracing back to the Indus Valley civilization. The uniqueness of designs, intricacies and, complexities of weaves, the flexibility of production are some of the unique characteristics of this sector. Different parts of India produce distinct styles – muslin of Chanderi, Varanasi brocades, tie and die products of Rajasthan, Patola sarees from Patan, himroos of Hyderabad, phulkari and Khes from Punjab, Daccai and Jamdani from Bengal and traditional designs like Phenek and Tongam from Assam and Manipur, puan from Mizoram.

This sector has a unique place in the Indian economy owing to its ability to provide low cost, green livelihood opportunities to millions of households living in rural India. Weaving is an integral part of the culture throughout the North-Eastern Region (NER) states, with Assam having the highest number of handloom worker households (12.7 lakhs) in the country. According to the Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-2020, the total number of households in India engaged in handloom activities (weaving and allied activities) is 31.45 lakhs, out of which 18.35 lakhs households are from NER states.

Out of the total 35.23 lakh handloom

workers, more than 70% are women who are getting empowered by this sector through financial independence and improved self-worth both within and outside of their homes. This sector also plays an important socio-cultural role by providing employment to 11.13 lakh handloom workers from the SC/ST community. Owing to its size, employment potential, and social, economic and cultural significance in the Indian landscape, it is important to preserve and strengthen India’s rich handloom heritage. Focusing on the welfare of the weaver community will also help in attaining inclusive growth and achieving SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities and SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The Government of India has been dedicatedly supporting the sector with a view to safeguarding these products of pride and national importance. Ministry of Textiles has launched several key interventions and schemes to aid the weavers and enhance the productivity of this sector. The success of many such interventions has led to more than 10% increase in the number of households engaged in handloom activities over the past decade. Several flagship schemes include National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme, Yarn Supply Scheme, Weaver MUDRA Scheme, Hathkharga Samvardhan Sahayata, Capacity Building under SAMARTH, Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme and North East Region Textiles Promotion Scheme (NERTPS).

Under the umbrella scheme of NERTPS, 195 Cluster Development Projects (CDP) development projects with a financial outlay of Rs. 98.08 crore are under implementation in the states. The main objective is to develop the handloom sector in NER by providing the required government support to increase in employment and value of handloom products. The support is provided for construction of work sheds, design interventions, product diversification, and marketing. Under CDP, 1542 individual work sheds have been constructed in Meghalaya and 1268 in Mizoram, which has helped weavers increase their productivity and income from handloom products. A total of 306 group work sheds have been constructed in 51 clusters in Manipur, housing 7 looms/work shed, which has enabled weavers to work for more days in a year, thereby increasing their production. The engagement of designers and use of the Computer Aided Textile Design (CATD) has benefitted the weavers in Manipur and Sikkim by improvement in design capability, diversification of product lines, value addition in products and increasing sales. Corpus fund has been utilized to set up Yarn Depots, where acrylic, cotton, wool, and polyester yarn has been supplied to weavers within 1-2 weeks, which is an improvement from the earlier turnaround time of 3-4 weeks required to procure yarn from NHDC. Under Technology Upgradation Project in Sikkim, looms and accessories such as Frame Looms and Dobby/ Jacquard/ Heads, bobbins,

shuttles, etc. have been provided to more than 600 weavers in the state.

Handicrafts

Handicrafts form an integral part of the lifestyle of the local people of the North-East. It is a source of livelihood for a large number of artisans spread across the region. The 8 NE states have a total of 115 handicraft clusters (15% share of total clusters in India) that provide a livelihood to more than 35,000 people (17% in total employment in the handicraft sector in India). Cane and bamboo items, Hand Embroidery, Stone & wood carving, Metal ware, etc. are the major crafts in the North Eastern region of the country.

Office of the Development of Commissioner (Handicrafts) is implementing the National Handicrafts Development Programme and the Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) for providing support on design, technology upgradation, infrastructure development, research and development, market support, etc. to handicrafts clusters in the country. These schemes are aimed at the integrated and comprehensive development of the entire handicraft sector, with a special focus on the North East region.

The NERTPS scheme, wherein all the soft and hard intervention of NHDP schemes are applicable, is currently operational in two North Eastern States i.e. Nagaland and Manipur, for Handicraft sector.

Silk

The North-Eastern region of India has been practicing sericulture over a long period of time with the origins of oak tasar culture dating back some decades. The region holds a unique position in India’s sericulture landscape as it produces all major varieties of silk i.e. mulberry, tasar, eri, and muga. The raw silk production in these states constitute more than 21% of India’s raw silk production. It has grown at a CAGR of 11% between 2015-16 and 2018-19 outpacing India’s total production growth (i.e. 7%) during the same time period. Assam and Meghalaya are the key raw silk producing states with a majority 82% share amongst the 8 states. Silk sarees, mekhela chaddar (traditional outfits) are amongst the key products manufactured in this region using silk.

Given its geographical advantage, this region holds great potential for further development of the sericulture industry. Further, the livelihood and business opportunities that can be generated through this sector will help the development of the entire North-East economy. Hence, the Government of India has given special emphasis on the development of sericulture in this region. Under Ministry of Textiles’ NERTPS (North East Region Textile Promotion) scheme, Government has approved 38 Sericulture projects in all North Eastern States in the identified potential districts under three broad categories viz., Integrated Sericulture Development Project (ISDP), Intensive Bivoltine Sericulture Development Project (IBSDP) and Aspirational Districts. The key focus of these projects is to create necessary infrastructure and impart skills to the

locals for silkworm rearing and allied activities in the value chain. The aim of these projects is to increase the raw silk production by 2,650 MT and generating employment of more than 3 lakh people and also to fulfill the “Make in India” initiative taken by Prime Minister of India.

To strengthen the sericulture infrastructure in the region, the government had approved 16 projects under ISDP with an allocated budget of Rs.586.17 crore (Gol share is Rs. 483.35 crores). These projects were aimed towards supporting plantation and supply of quality seeds in all NE states, setting up Silk Printing & Processing unit for Tripura, Soil to Silk for BTC (Assam) and Post Cocoon Technology for Nagaland.

Gol had also approved 8 projects under IBSDP with an overall budget of Rs. 236.78 crores (Gol share is Rs. 210.41 crores) to produce high quality bivoltine silk which is currently being imported. The project was aimed to enhance the quality of silk produced across 4,000 acres of mulberry plantations in NE states (except Manipur) and benefit more than 9,000 women stakeholders. These activities will go a long way in import substitution and can also make NER an exporting hub of raw and value added silk products.

Till March 2019, about 30,652 acres have been brought under host plantation of Mulberry, Eri and Muga covering 41,026 beneficiaries and produced 2,614 MT of raw silk. Also, 85% of the allocated Gol budget has been utilized in these projects until the mentioned date.

Realizing the growth and future potential, Ministry of Textiles approved 14 new projects in 2018-19 aimed towards establishing silk mills, bivoltine sericulture development, women empowerment, and development of aspirational districts. The total allocated budget for these projects was Rs. 284.02 crores (Gol share is Rs. 261.30 crores).

Jute

In terms of Jute agriculture, Assam is the only state with a significant presence with approximately ~9% share in India’s raw jute production. The other three states that have some presence of jute agriculture in North East are Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura with a combined share of only 1% in the country’s total production.

In 2015, Jute-ICARE (Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise) was launched to popularize/ introduce some of these better agronomic practices and recently developed microbial consortium assisted retting among farmers intensively in Assam and West Bengal. In subsequent years, Meghalaya was also included under the purview of the scheme. Over its implementation period, the scheme has had positive outcomes that include increase of yield by 10-15%, reduction of retting time from an average 22 days to 13 days, improvement in Jute grade by at least 1.5 grades. Based on the successful outcome of this scheme, it was decided to replicate the programme for the improvement of jute farming in the coming years covering more areas, benefitting more jute farmers and finally to all the jute growing areas covering all jute farmers. Better seed and cultivation

methods will also be made available to farmers.

Other Jute related schemes being implemented in North East include ‘Promotion of Jute Geo textiles/Agro textiles’, ISAPM (Incentive Scheme for Acquisition of Plant & Machinery), JIDS (Jute Integrated Development Scheme), JRMB (Jute Raw Material Bank Scheme), etc.

The North East have taken significant initiatives to use Jute Geotextiles for civil engineering applications. Till now, approximately 4 million sq. mtr. of jute geotextiles has been utilized in these states, mainly for slope stabilization purposes. It is observed that Jute Geotextiles have been highly effective in the construction of rural roads, railway tracks in hilly areas, stabilization of earthen and hill slopes and growth of seedling/saplings, land-slide prevention, etc. In terms of the uptake of other schemes, it is still in nascent stage in the North Eastern Region with huge potential.

Covid-19 pandemic has brought about untold hardships and with most rating houses forecasting a gloomy economic scenario, people engaged in the Textiles sector are also bound to face the brunt of economic slowdown and the aftermath. The RBI on Friday indicating India’s GDP growth to be in negative territory in 2020-21 as the outbreak has disrupted economic activities, it’s time to take stock and take proactive steps to capitalize and innovate on the given challenge.

How India became the second largest producer of PPE after China in two month’s time with zero production facility in February 2020 to how swab testing kit could be produced in a week’s time, again from zero production, producing at a fraction of the market price are stories that’ll be repeated over and over again in days to come. We are enterprising people, dedicated and very talented. We can produce designer masks and supply to the world. E-commerce has to be used in a big way for all produce from the North East. Talent thrive of people who’ve returned home will now have to use their skills in e-market platforms. Normal cotton and designer masks are being sold in the e-market platform everywhere and we must grab this opportunity. Let’s reach the world.

The 20.06 lakh cr. package announced by the Prime Minister includes slew of assistance for the MSME sector that’ll help the Textiles industries operating in the region as well including the just approved Rs. 3 lakh crore Emergency Working Capital Facility for Businesses, including MSMEs. This will enable additional funding of up to Rs. three lakh crore to eligible MSMEs and interested MUDRA borrowers by way of “Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme which will provide 100% guarantee coverage by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) for additional funding of up to Rs. three lakh crore to eligible MSMEs and interested MUDRA borrowers, in the form of a Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility.

[the writer is Economic Adviser, Ministry of Textiles]

Instigate Involvement to Move Things Along

People are not echo-chambers, they need to disagree to refine their arguments

The region is embarrassingly pliant despite its claims to be otherwise. Diktats run without challenge and obviously dimwitted blunderings accepted without question as examples of strong and decisive leadership. In 1775, a full sixty years before Darjeeling passed from Sikkim into the hands of the East India Company, Samuel Johnson, the British man of letters and political thinker, famously said, “Patriotism is the last resort of scoundrels”. Of course, he was not belittling patriotism, just indicting false patriotism, a dodge that seems to have held superficial pride in good stead for close to two and a half centuries now, replacing patriotism with false nationalism or ethnic and cultural chauvinism. Invoke this call, and everything falls in line. Sikkim routinely does this with Article 371F, Old Laws and local protection, Darjeeling reverts to it with Gorkhaland and communities are whipped into offence with perceived slights and misrepresented interpretations. Each one of these issues strikes a strong emotional chord with the target audience, and when emotions come into the mix, rationality gets pushed aside. This does not mean that the issues in themselves are trivial, but by demanding unquestioning abidance to every call fired from the shoulders of these issues reduces them to the status of props, and the people into followers. This militates against every aspect of democracy which requires consensus to be earned, not dictated, where differences of opinion are respected, not browbeaten into submission and where people are encouraged to build social contracts, not erect walls. But one sees too much of that happening.

Irrespective of how the leaders will want to spin it, fact remains that in these parts people have not been reacting enough, they have been following directions and falling in line. Unfortunately, obedience is not involvement, and democracy requires involvement, and genuine involvement is a commitment born from discussion and debate. How much of that have we seen in these parts?

But that is not how things should remain. Apart from being unhealthy for democracy and its people, it is also undesirable for issues of importance to be only superficially addressed and deeper involvements not explored. For that to happen, democracy needs to be more vigorously institutionalized. Democracy requires its citizens to remain involved, critical and demanding. Extracting an emotional response which brings them to the streets for short bursts of protesting is the easy part, to convince them when the emotions have abated and the realities of living returned, that they are free and empowered with equal rights, is where the challenge begins. Mindsets groomed on feudal control cannot be shaken away just with the knowledge that democracy is available. That takes a sustained process of confidence-building, encouragement, even hand-holding and nurturing.

It is also not enough to just tell the people that they are free and then expect them to start behaving like free and responsible citizens. In fact, people should be egged to dissent and disagree because these reactions have been in very short supply of late even though these are emotional contributions necessary for a democracy to evolve. Politics and politicking in the region has reinforced supremacy of the leaders over the people, and if real participatory democracy is to be institutionalized from the grassroots upwards, people need to be proactively instigated to challenge, argue and demand. That will make them realize they have a voice and a role beyond raising slogans and participating in rallies. Then, the people will also become involved and be free with support and become pragmatic participants of the decision-making process. Then, maybe, the issues which have been flogged without resolution will receive the plans and processes which will push them out of the rut. People are not echo-chambers for leaders, there are enough hanger-ons for that; people need to be more than passive recipients of information and orders for their issues and movements to stay the course and stay true.

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Can antibody tests tell us who is immune to COVID-19?

SHAYAN SHARIF & BYRAM W. BRIDLE

THECONVERSATION.COM

Widespread media coverage of antibody testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has generated high hopes that we will be able to readily identify individuals who are immune to this virus.

There has also been coverage about developing immunity passports, which employers can use to let people return to work. While these are all tantalizing thoughts, the idea of using antibody testing as a true measure of protection is something that requires much more research.

As immunologists, our interest is in understanding how the immune system responds to viruses, especially zoonotic viruses that can be transmitted from animals to humans, like SARS-CoV-2. Here, we share our insights into different aspects of antibody testing, including its promises as well as caveats.

IMMUNE RESPONSE TO A NEW PATHOGEN

An emerging zoonotic pathogen — such as SARS-CoV-2 — is unique in the sense that humans have never been exposed to it, so our immune system has never mounted a response to this specific virus. When we are exposed to an emerging pathogen, our immune system mounts different types of responses within seven to 14 days.

Antibodies are one type of response: they are secreted into the blood and, more importantly, are present at sites of infection. In the case of SARS-CoV-2, antiviral antibodies can be found in the blood after infection, but they are also presumably present in the respiratory system, where the virus resides and propagates.

Although the presence of antibodies in an individual confirms that an infection has occurred, antibodies alone cannot differentiate between a historical versus current infection.

ANTIBODY TESTS

Several companies have begun producing antibody testing kits, some of which have received regulatory approval. Currently, Health Canada has approved only

one antibody test. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued emergency use authorization for 12 tests, including a combination of lab-based and point-of-care tests, while 200 other devices are awaiting approval.

Large-scale antibody testing has already been performed in parts of the U.S. and Europe. For example, in Chelsea, Mass., 64 out of 200 people in the downtown area tested positive for COVID-19 exposure using antibody testing. Other areas have also reported high prevalence of antibody response to SARS-CoV-2, including 25 per cent in New York City, approximately 2.8 per cent in Santa Clara County, Calif., and 14 per cent in Gangelg, Germany.

While these data imply that significantly more people have been exposed to or infected with SARS-CoV-2 than have been diagnosed using nucleic acid-based tests, these antibody-positive people may not be immune to SARS-CoV-2.

ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD COVID-19 IMMUNE?

Depending on the type of virus, antibodies in the blood may or may not confer protection against the virus. We can only hope that the antibodies circulating in the blood of patients infected with SARS-CoV-2 are good indicators of protection.

However, there is a chance that there is only a weak connection, or no connection at all, between antibody presence in the blood and protection against SARS-CoV-2. This is because antibodies in the blood will have to find their way to the respiratory system — where the virus resides — to exert their protective functions. Sometimes they do not end up in the lungs where they are most needed for protection. Also, these antibodies may not be of the right type to protect against infection or there may not be enough of them present to establish protection.

It is speculated that protective antibodies bind to the molecular structures on the surface of SARS-CoV-2, especially its spike protein. The spike proteins are the points that cover the surface of the virus, forming the “crown” that gives coronaviruses their

name. The virus uses these spikes to attach to cells of the respiratory system. The antibodies that bind to SARS-CoV-2’s spike protein may prevent the virus from attaching to cells. Viruses that are not able to attach and enter a cell cannot propagate and will eventually die out.

It is safe to say that antibody testing is an excellent way to determine whether there has been exposure to the virus, but not necessarily whether protection has been established. That presents a potential danger in rushing the concept of immunity passports into use: people with positive antibody tests may behave as though they are protected against COVID-19 when, in fact, they may not be.

HOW CAN WE TEST FOR IMMUNITY?

Given what we now know, can we conceivably use antibody testing as a measure of immunity? The answer is maybe! If one looks at other more familiar respiratory viruses, like influenza viruses, there is usually good correlation between antibodies in the blood and protection against influenza virus.

What needs to happen now is a series of epidemiological studies looking at people with high and low concentrations of antibodies to determine whether the presence of antibodies is associated with protection against re-infection with SARS-CoV-2 and if so, what is the minimum quantity of antibodies for conferring protection.

This process will take some time, but it is very doable. One way to speed up the process is to develop tests to assess antibodies for their potential to prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection. Using antibodies taken from the respiratory systems of individuals who have been infected, these tests would see if those antibodies could prevent the virus from infecting susceptible cells in a culture dish.

Simultaneously studying antibodies in the blood of these same individuals would then tell us how well the current “quick and easy” antibody tests correlate

with the antiviral functions of the antibodies in the respiratory system.

On April 23, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the formation of the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force to “... oversee the co-ordination of a series of country-wide blood test surveys that will tell us how widely the virus has spread in Canada and provide reliable estimates of potential immunity and vulnerabilities in the Canadian population.”

WHAT T CELLS CAN TELL US

If it turns out that antibody tests can confirm exposure but do not indicate immunity, there are alternative approaches to immunity testing. One of the main players in immunity against viruses is a subset of cells called T-cells. These cells have an enormous capacity to recognize and respond to viruses by killing the virus-infected cells.

We have limited understanding of the involvement of T-cells in immunity against SARS-CoV-2, but it is possible that these cells play a pivotal role in protection. The question is whether we can use T-cell responses as indicators of immunity. The answer is both yes and no.

While it is feasible to measure T-cell responses in laboratory settings, it is time-consuming and requires a level of technical sophistication that is not available in most diagnostic labs. Also, T-cell testing will have to be done as a high-throughput procedure, meaning that a large number of samples is tested at once. Although high-throughput testing has not been fully developed for diagnostic purposes, the technology is there, so T-cell testing may play a role in assessing immunity to SARS-CoV-2.

This pandemic has been a true test for science and scientists. Studying our immune response to SARS-CoV-2 may not only be the key to identifying who is protected from the virus, but also to developing potential vaccines and treatments.

[Shayan Sharif is Professor of Immunology and Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, University of Guelph; Byram W. Bridle is Associate professor, Department of Pathobiology, University of Guelph]

A four-day working week could be the shot in the arm post-coronavirus tourism needs

JARROD HAAR

THECONVERSATION.COM

When New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said recently, “I’ve heard lots of people suggesting we should have a four-day week”, she inevitably ignited debate.

Ardern was not, as some critics seemed to assume, just flying a kite. She was responding to various ideas about how to boost domestic tourism. Like the hospitality industry, tourism has been economically ravaged by the COVID-19 lockdown, so her remarks received a lot of coverage.

But Ardern added a caveat that received rather less attention: “Ultimately, that really sits between employers and employees.”

This suggests it is unlikely to become official government policy, but rather something businesses might choose to adopt if it made sense.

The idea has already gained traction in Australia and America, highlighting a widespread interest in new ways of organising work. Ultimately, Ardern was suggesting the end of lockdown might present organisations with a chance to do things differently.

But could it work? How would organisations do it? And what would be the benefits?

ONE COMPANY HAS SHOWN THE WAY ALREADY

In New Zealand, the four-day week was pioneered in 2018 by Andrew Barnes, now a champion of the concept after trialling and then adopting it for his finance company, Perpetual Guardian. Employees now work a four-day week on their previous five-day salary. They work normal eight-hour days, not simply longer hours to make up a normal 40-hour week.

Perpetual Guardian calls it the “100-80-100” model: 100% productivity for 80% time at 100% salary.

Research showed employees reported

significantly better well-being than before the trial, including a better work-life balance and lower job stress. They were more engaged and reported higher job satisfaction.

Managers reported the same level of productivity. Furthermore, management found their teams were more creative, more helpful, and provided better customer service.

Overall it was a win for employees and their employer.

From my own research I’ve identified a few key factors that determine success. Firstly, it needs leadership support. Having a leader who can champion the adoption of a four-day trial is vital.

Barnes recommends a trial as the first step to discovering whether it is an option for your organisation or not. As evidence of the benefits builds (for example, Microsoft in Japan reported a 40% increase in productivity), employees might want to lobby their managers to give it a go.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IS VITAL

My research also showed employees are central to making a four-day week work. Ultimately they have to create better ways to work – for example, collectively identifying what was previously wasted time and seeking solutions. In one case, a team told me they reduced a two-hour weekly meeting to 30 minutes a fortnight.

How to reschedule the week is another factor: organisations might adopt a fixed day off – such as Melbourne firm Versa, which chose Wednesday. Or they might rotate the day off among team members.

The latter approach requires a strong creative focus on maintaining team productivity. But there is no one way to make it work. While Perpetual Guardian operates 32-hour weeks, Versa works a 37.5-hour week in four days.

What is most important is that workers are empowered to think about productivity and

wastage and to make their work more efficient and effective. Even if an organisation trials the four-day week but chooses not to adopt it, it will still gain useful insights into working methods and productivity.

Beyond the benefits to employers (more focused and attentive staff, better customer relations) and employees (enhanced well-being and engagement), there are potentially wider social benefits too.

MORE LEISURE TIME EQUALS GREATER OPPORTUNITY

Reduced commuting times due to fewer days in the office mean fewer cars on the road, less congestion and lower CO₂ emissions. Offices use less power and, if an organisation is growing, potentially feel less pressure to expand if a rotating day off is in place.

If supporting tourism is the goal, business owners might be encouraged to close for one day a week, ideally a Friday or Monday, perhaps in split shifts if they need to remain operating five days a week. This would maximise people’s ability to plan a three-day weekend of travel – potentially within a “trans-Tasman bubble”.

Were Australian organisations to adopt a four-day week too it could significantly increase two-way traffic, enhancing both economies.

Paying workers 100% of their salary for 80% of a traditional working week while maintaining productivity would, in theory at least, increase opportunities for discretionary spending.

Combined with a patriotic call to use the extra time to support hospitality and tourism, it could align with the prime minister’s desire to find innovative ways to stimulate economic activity.

Healthier, happier and more productive workers helping other businesses stay viable? That sounds like a win-win for all.

[the writer is Professor of Human Resource Management, Auckland University of Technology]

Two people die while returning home: UP officials

ETAWAH/BANDA (UP), MAY 28 (PTI): Two people, one on board a special Shramik train and the other travelling on a hired vehicle, died while returning home, Uttar Pradesh officials said on Thursday.

Development Officer Raja Ganpati said a 50-year-old woman, Kita Sherpa, was found dead on a special train going to West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri from New Delhi on Thursday morning.

The body has been sent for a post-mortem, he said. "After the post-mortem, the body will be sent to New Jalpaiguri by road. The woman was accompanied by her two daughters, son-in-laws and a child, he said.

The other person who travelled on a hired vehicle with his family members died at a Banda hospital on Wednesday. He was going to UP's Varanasi from Mumbai.

Superintendent (CMS) Sampurnand Mishra said Ravindra Rajbhar (28) died in the hospital, where he was brought by his family members. He had cough and fever. His sample has been sent for testing, the CMS said.

Odisha CM wishes speedy recovery of corona warriors

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 28 (PTI): Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday wished speedy recovery of a sarpanch, and some ASHA and Anganwadi workers who have tested positive for COVID-19.

While speaking to them over telephone, the chief minister praised their courage and dedication in providing outstanding service to society, an official said. "These corona warriors will be an inspiration to others," the official

quoted the chief minister as saying. At least one sarpanch (village head) and some accredited social health activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers have been infected with the deadly virus in the state so far, the official said.

MeT forecasts rain in West Bengal till Saturday

KOLKATA, MAY 28 (PTI): The MeT department on Thursday forecast rain and squally wind in West Bengal for the next two days.

and Birbhum are likely to be affected by thundersqualls with wind speed of 50 to 60 km per hour till Saturday.

Other districts in Gangetic West Bengal are also likely to be affected by rain or thundershowers during the next two days, it said.

The city and some south Bengal districts experienced a cloudy day with intermittent showers on Thursday.

The weatherman said that the south Bengal districts of North 24 Parganas, East and West Burdwan, Murshidabad

A nor'wester packing a wind speed of 96 km per hour lashed Kolkata on Wednesday evening,

exactly a week after the city was devastated by Cyclone Amphan.

The metropolis had received 44.3 mm of rainfall in 24 hours till 8.30 am of Thursday, the MeT department said.

Other places which recorded heavy rain during the 24-hour period are Diamond Harbour (55.8 mm), Haldia (67.5 mm) and Kalaikunda (56.6 mm), it said.

Complaint against B'deshi singer for humiliating Modi

AGARTALA, MAY 28 (PTI): Tripura Police has registered a complaint against Bangladeshi singer Mainul Ahsan Nobel, who earned fame in the music reality show 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa' in Kolkata, for allegedly humiliating Prime Minister Narendra Modi over social media.

South Tripura district who is a student of Pandit Deen Dayal Petroleum University at Gandhinagar in Gujarat. The complaint was filed on May 25, the person who is called Suman Paul said.

Nobel is not yet a popular singer in Bangladesh and has always been rejected by the audience of that country. He participated in the TV music reality show called Sa Re Ga Ma Pa in Kolkata, earned money, gained fame and returned to Bangladesh. If the person insults our prime minister it cannot be accepted. So I filed the FIR, Paul told reporters.

and forwarded to Tripura Polices cyber crime cell. The complaint was registered the same day it was filed at Belonia police station under Indian Penal code sections 500 (punishment for defamation), 504 (intentional insult), 505 (public mischief) and the IT Act.

crime cell because it is not in the Indian cyber space. We have started investigation into the issue, the SP said.

Arms and ammunition seized in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, MAY 28 (PTI): Security forces have seized a cache of arms and ammunition in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh, police said on Thursday.

comprising jawans from the Army's 9 Rajputana Rifles and state police personnel, Changlang Superintendent of Police Mihin Gambo said.

explosive weighing around 500 gm, one .22 pistol and several other explosive materials were found, the SP said.

The arms and ammunition, suspected to have been hidden by insurgents, were seized from Miao Bum area on Wednesday by a team

An AK-56 assault rifle, three magazines, 115 rounds of 7.62 mm cartridge, a 40 mm under-barrel grenade launcher, a hand grenade, four stick powder-gel

Based on an FIR lodged by the 9 Rajputana Rifles, a case has been registered with the Miao police station and the matter is under investigation, Gambo added.

Footballers set out to help Amphan-affected West Bengal

NEW DELHI, MAY 28 (PTI): Well-known India footballers have set out to do their bit for the helpless people of cyclone Amphan-ravaged West Bengal.

Roychowdhury, Sandip Nandy, Pronay Halder, Pritam Kotal, Shouvik Ghosh among others.

The Amphan-affected areas in order to reach out to and help the people in need, informed national team midfielder Halder.

"This is the first time that I've seen such devastation inflicted by a storm. I would personally like to request everyone to stand together and help out the people who are most affected by this tragedy."

Amphan Cyclone has also joint that fight against us. West Bengal is going through a difficult phase now," he said.

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As many as 38 footballers have decided to pool in their resources to help the affected people.

The consortium -- 'Players for Humanity' -- includes the likes of Subrata Paul, Mehtab Hossain, Arnab Mondal, Subhashish

"I have heard reports that people have lost their homes. Many have their farms ravaged, and their entire source for income for the year has gone to waste. Some of us will also go to the affected areas and try to help the people as much as we can," he said.

Former Blue Tigers captain Mondal urged everyone from within and outside West Bengal to join the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and Amphan.

"We've been fighting COVID-19 so far. Now

Four elderly patients recover from COVID-19 in MP

BHOPAL/INDORE, MAY 28 (PTI): In a ray of hope amid the COVID-19 outbreak, four senior citizens, including a 90-year-old man, were discharged from different hospitals in Madhya Pradesh following their recovery, an official said on Thursday.



A 90-year-old man and an 84-year-old woman were discharged from hospitals in Indore and Bhopal, two of the worst-hit districts in the state, the official said.

evening.

Bhopal on Thursday morning.

viral infection in Bhopal, an official said.

According to authorities in Indore, the nonagenarian was admitted to a private hospital on May 22 after testing positive for COVID-19 and was discharged following his recovery on Wednesday

A video of the elderly patient being discharged from the hospital, with the staff showering petals on him, has gone viral on social media.

Following her discharge, the woman said people need not panic if they contract the infection, but they need to ensure physical distancing and wear masks at all times.

At least 870 COVID-19 patients have been discharged from hospitals in Bhopal, taking the recovery rate in the district to 63 per cent, he said.

Similarly, an 84-year-old woman, who had tested positive for coronavirus on May 13, was discharged from a private hospital in

Apart from this, two septuagenarians had also recovered from the

Indore has recorded 3,260 COVID-19 cases so far, while Bhopal's tally stood at 1,356 as on Wednesday.



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Denmark returns to action with fans taking their usual places via Zoom

NIALL McVEIGH
COPENHAGEN, 28 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: On Thursday night, Denmark will become the second country in mainland Europe to restart their league season after neighbouring Germany. In the opening fixture AGF Aarhus welcome local rivals Randers but it is on the sidelines where history will really be made. In front of one stand a giant screen, 40 metres long and 3m high, will be filled with fans watching via video link.

Supporters have signed up for free tickets to take part and can even choose their preferred section of the “virtual stand”. Two smaller screens will allow for neutrals and away fans to be there, too. The concept, created in partnership with Zoom, has taken weeks of preparation. “I’ve never been so busy before a game, which is funny when there are no spectators,” says AGF’s head of media, Søren Carlsen. “My colleagues, to put it bluntly, have been working their arses off to get everything working.”

The screens are the final piece of the puzzle, dropped into place on Wednesday at Ceres Park. The fans will form a digital backdrop for watching TV viewers, but sound has proved a stumbling block. “Imagine a big Zoom meeting, 10,000 people with their microphone on, it would just be white noise,” Carlsen says.



On Thursday night, fans in different sections will be encouraged to sing in unison. “We’re trying to create an atmosphere around the game. Players will be able to see the supporters and we hope they will be able to hear them chanting. They think it’s great that we’re trying something new.”

Last weekend a warm-up game was used as a test event with 50 fans invited to watch. Although the initiative has grabbed global attention, local supporters are still at its heart. The system allows season-ticket holders to head for their usual section and catch up with neighbouring fans. “When fans log in, they’ll see some faces they recognise,” Carlsen says. “Fans they normally see at the game, who they

haven’t seen for three months.

“When you go to football, it’s a community experience. That is lacking right now because of coronavirus. This is a chance for people to get together.”

Life under lockdown inspired the idea, with Carlsen and his colleagues keeping in touch with furloughed colleagues via Zoom. “We thought: ‘Could we use this technology in stadiums?’” The club have had enquiries from all over Europe about replicating the idea and Carlsen can see potential for it to feature across a number of different sports.

The derby could become a historic starting point but for the club it already carries huge significance. Aarhus were third in the table

and in the cup semi-finals when the shutters came down. Victory would seal AGF’s place in the championship play-offs – another reason to get fans involved.

“This is a very important game,” Carlsen says. “It’s hard for footballers to play without fans. How can we make sure that in an empty stadium the team remembers they are playing for a whole city?”

A team of more than 20 will try to make sure the game goes off without a hitch, including moderators who will tackle any fans causing offence.

AGF are not the only Danish club to try something different – the league leaders, Midtjylland, will set up big screens outside their stadium for fans to watch their first game back on

Monday. AGF will be at home again on that day, against Odense.

Will the “virtual stand” still be in place? “We will see how it works tomorrow,” says Carlsen. “Is it fun for people? Is it a good experience? If so, then why not?”

The long-term goal is to have fans back in the ground and there are still faint hopes that small crowds could return before the end of the season.

The club has a history of blazing a trail – they played in the first European Cup – and Carlsen already has one eye on his next big idea. “We could have 1,000 fans, picked in a lottery and safely distanced. What an exciting day that would be. I would rather have 10 fans here than an empty stadium. It makes the world of difference.”

FM launches instant allotment of e-PAN based on Aadhaar



NEW DELHI, MAY 28 (PTI): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday launched a facility for instant allotment of online PAN on furnishing of Aadhaar details.

The Budget 2020-21 had proposed to launch a system under which Permanent Account Number shall be instantly allotted online on the basis of Aadhaar without filling up the detailed application form as it sought to further ease the process of PAN allotment.

In a statement, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday formally launched the facility for instant allotment of PAN (on near to real time basis).

“This facility is now available for those PAN applicants who possess a valid Aadhaar number and have a mobile

number registered with Aadhaar. The allotment process is paperless and an electronic PAN (e-PAN) is issued to the applicants free of cost,” the CBDT said.

The ‘beta version’ for instant allotment of PAN on trial basis was started on February 12, 2020 on the e-filing website of the Income Tax Department. Since then, 6,77,680 instant PANs have been allotted with a turnaround time of about 10 minutes, till May 25, 2020.

As on May 25, 2020, a total of 50.52 crore PANs had been allotted to taxpayers, out of which around 49.39 crore were allotted to individuals and more than 32.17 crore linked with Aadhaar.

The last date for the PAN-Aadhaar linkage is June 30, 2020.

For generation of instant PAN, the applicant is required

to access the e-filing website of the Income Tax Department, provide her/his valid Aadhaar number and then submit the OTP received on the Aadhaar registered mobile number.

On successful completion of the process, a 15-digit acknowledgment number is generated. If required, the applicant can check the status of the request anytime by providing her/his valid Aadhaar number and on successful allotment, can download the e-PAN.

The e-PAN is also sent to the applicant on her/his e-mail ID, if it is registered with Aadhaar, the CBDT said.

“The launch of the Instant PAN facility is yet another step by the Income Tax Department towards Digital India, thereby creating further ease of compliance for the taxpayers,” the CBDT added.

Indian-American IBM scientist bags inventor of the year award for improving AI capabilities

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, MAY 26 (PTI): Prolific Indian-American inventor Rajiv Joshi has bagged the prestigious Inventor of the Year award in recognition of his pioneering work in advancing the electronic industry and improving artificial intelligence capabilities.

Dr Joshi, who is a master inventor with more than 250 patented inventions in the US, works at the IBM Thomson Watson Research Center in New York.

He was presented with the prestigious annual award by the New York Intellectual Property Law Association early this month during a virtual awards ceremony.

An IIT Mumbai alumnus, Joshi has an MS degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a PhD in mechanical/electrical engineering from Columbia University, New York.

His invention span from novel interconnect structures and processes for more scaling,

machine learning techniques for predictive failure analytics, high bandwidth, high performance and low power integrated circuits and memories and their usage in hardware accelerators, meant for artificial intelligence applications.

Many of these structures exist in processors, supercomputers, laptops, smartphones, handheld and variable gadgets and many other electronic items. His innovations have advanced day-to-day life, global communication, health sciences and medical fields impacting the world.

Necessity and curiosity inspire me, Dr Joshi told PTI in a recent interview, adding that the identification of a problem and providing out of the box solution as well as observe and think help him immensely to generate ideas.

Joshi said that while growing up, his parents always told him stories about great, renowned inventors like

Guglielmo Marconi, Madame Curie, Right Brothers, James watt, Alexander Bell, Thomas Edison and other great stalwarts. Their success stories and inventions really shaped his thought process and helped develop an interest in science and technology.

In his acceptance speech, Dr Joshi said that cloud, artificial intelligence and quantum computing not only remain the buzzwords, but their utility, widespread usage is advancing with leaps and bounds.

All these areas are very exciting and I have been dabbling further in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, he said.

Quantum computing, which has offered tremendous opportunities, also faces challenges, he noted, adding that he is involved in advancing technology, improving memory structures and solutions and their usage in AI and contributing to quantum computing to advance the science.

Manchester City’s Caroline Weir: ‘I want to help girls carry on playing’

SUZANNE WRACK
LONDON, 28 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: Caroline Weir has tried to make the most of the enforced break. “A real positive of lockdown is that players have had time to reflect, take a minute and think about what’s important. It has for me anyway,” the Manchester City forward says.

At 24, the Scotland international was playing some of her best football before the pandemic cut short the season. The focus of her career may have been on getting to the top but it had “always been in my head to give back. Now I feel I’m at the age where it is something I want to be more conscious of.”

She has acted quickly. First by becoming the 150th player to sign up to Common Goal, the organisation that commits players to giving 1% of their incomes to sporting charities. Now she is to become a global ambassador for the innovative Girls United, which runs football programmes in south London and Bacalar, Mexico, but with the wider remit of giving girls the confidence to embrace opportunities off the pitch.

At a time when the grassroots game is in limbo and fragile, there has never been a more important time for



players to help. “For me, growing up in Scotland, grassroots had such an important part to play in my career,” says the Dunfermline-born Weir.

“It’s where kids fall in love with football and it’s such an important time. I still remember playing with the boys at five all the way through to age 10 and going down on a Saturday morning to these big grassy muddy fields.”

Helping more girls enjoy football prompted the link-up with Girls United. “Lots of girls, especially teenagers, drop out of the game. I want to help highlight the many positive physical and social reasons for girls to carry on playing.”

It is also about more

than that. “If they want to stay in football that’s great but if they want to do something else then they’ve built up a whole host of skills that can take them to wherever they want to be, no matter where you come from.”

Studying for a degree in sports writing and broadcasting is balanced alongside the lockdown training provided by her club, FaceTiming family and Netflix, but it has “definitely been a challenge” for her, too. “I have felt like a 14-year-old girl again. I would only go out running and train with a ball by myself when I was younger.”

Weir is ready to play whenever and wherever

but there is some relief the cancellation of the season has brought the “hardest part” – the “not knowing” and having to be constantly ready to move up a gear – to an end. “You had to train in certain ways and at a certain time because you didn’t know when you would be back,” she says.

The isolation has also made a core part of the women’s game feel all the more valuable: the relationship between players and fans, something professionalism and growth must not jeopardise. “We do have to make sure we keep a hold on what’s important to the women’s game and I think as long as you’ve

got players who realise that stuff is important then I think it will be OK.”

By involving herself in causes that matter to her Weir has one eye beyond the game. Lockdown has “made me realise just how big a part football plays in my life and how much time is taken up by playing every single week,” she says.

“It’s made me think that whatever I go into has to give me a similar buzz and be something I enjoy. There won’t be a game day one day, so there has to be something similar that I’m working towards. But hopefully I’ve got a few years yet.”

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Angry US protests for second night over police killing of black man

Demonstrators clashed with police, looted stores and set fires as a man was fatally shot during a second night of protests in the US city of Minneapolis Wednesday over the killing of a black man by a police officer.

Police fired tear gas and formed a human barricade to keep protesters from climbing a fence surrounding the Third Precinct, where the officers accused of killing George Floyd worked before they were fired on Tuesday.

They pushed protesters back as the crowd grew, a day after firing rubber bullets and more tear gas on thousands of demonstrators angered by the latest death of an African-American at the hands of US law enforcement.

Minnesota state Governor Tim Walz urged people to leave the area around the precinct where several fires were burning, warning of the "extremely dangerous situation" in a tweet late Wednesday.

Outrage has grown across the country at Floyd's death on Monday, fuelled in part by bystander cellphone video which shows him, handcuffed and in the custody of four white police officers, on the ground while one presses his knee into the victim's neck.

President Donald Trump in a tweet called Floyd's death "sad and tragic", and all four officers have been fired, as prosecutors said they had called in the FBI to help investigate the case.

Minneapolis police chief Medaria Arradondo cautioned protesters

Wednesday to remain peaceful.

But by 10:00 pm (0300 GMT Thursday) an auto parts store across from the precinct had been set alight and a nearby Target was being looted, according to US media.

Police continued to hold the crowds back from scaling a fence into the precinct's parking lot, where their cruisers contain guns.

As the violence escalated, with more businesses looted, a man was shot near the protests and later died, police said. A person has been arrested.

Protesters remained peaceful at two other locations in the city.

At the place where Floyd was first taken into custody, people chanted and carried placards and sent out bouquets were set out as tributes to Floyd.

Calls for justice came from around the country.

"I would like those officers to be charged with murder, because that's exactly what they did," Bridgett Floyd, the victim's sister, said on NBC television.

"They murdered my brother.... They should be in jail for murder."

Protesters marched on downtown Los Angeles and briefly blocked the 101 Freeway.

Some demonstrators smashed the windows of two police highway patrol cruisers, clambering on the hood of one of the vehicles. One of the protesters was injured when they fell off the vehicle as it sped away.

Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey said



he could not understand why the officer who held his knee to Floyd's neck on a Minneapolis street until the 46-year-old restaurant worker went limp has not been arrested.

"Why is the man who killed George Floyd not in jail? If you had done it, or I had done it, we would be behind bars right now," Frey said.

- 'I can't breathe' -

The case was seen as the latest example of police brutality against African Americans, which gave rise six years ago to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Floyd had been detained on a minor charge of allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill to make a purchase at a convenience

store.

In the video, policemen hold him to the ground while one presses his knee to Floyd's neck.

"Your knee in my neck. I can't breathe.... Mama. Mama," Floyd pleaded.

He grew silent and motionless, unable to move even as the officers told him to "get up and get in the car."

He was taken to hospital where he was later declared dead.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said the FBI needs to thoroughly investigate the case.

"It's a tragic reminder that this was not an isolated incident, but part of an engrained systemic cycle of injustice that

still exists in this country," Biden said.

"We have to ensure that the Floyd family receive the justice they are entitled to."

Democratic Senator Kamala Harris called the policeman's using his knee on Floyd's neck "torture."

"This is not new, it has been going on a long time... what our communities have known for generations, which is discriminatory implementation and enforcement of the laws," she said.

"He was begging to be able to breathe," she said. "It was a public execution."

The protests evoked memories of riots in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 after a policeman shot dead an African American man suspected of robbery, and the case of New Yorker Eric Garner, who was detained by police for illegally selling cigarettes and filmed being held in an illegal chokehold that led to his death.

"How many more of these senseless excessive-force killings from the people who are supposed to protect us can we take in America?" said civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who was retained by Floyd's family

Crump pointed out that the arrest involved a minor, non-violent crime, and there was no sign, as police initially claimed, that Floyd resisted arrest.

"There is no reason to apply this excessive fatal force," Crump said.

"That has to be the tipping point. Everybody deserves justice ... We can't have two justice systems, one for blacks and one for whites."

China parliament approves plan to impose HK security law

China's parliament approved plans Thursday to impose a security law on Hong Kong that critics say will eradicate the city's promised freedoms.

The vote by the rubber-stamp National People's Congress came hours after the United States revoked the special status conferred on Hong Kong, paving the way for the territory to be stripped of trading and economic privileges.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the status had been withdrawn because China was no longer honouring its handover agreement with Britain to allow Hong Kong a high level of autonomy.

"No reasonable person can assert today that Hong Kong maintains a high degree of autonomy from China, given facts on the ground," Pompeo said.

China made the security law a top priority at its annual National People's Congress (NPC) session, after huge pro-democracy protests rocked the financial hub for seven months last year.

The law would punish secession, subversion of state power, terrorism and acts that endanger national security, as well as allow mainland security agencies to operate openly in Hong Kong.

On Thursday, the final day of the congress, delegates endorsed plans for the law, with a higher body now tasked with formulating the specific legislation.

"It's the end of Hong Kong. We know that they are cutting off our souls, taking away the values which we've always embraced, values like human rights, democracy, rule of law," pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo told AFP.

"From now on Hong Kong just becomes another Chinese city. It's demoralising."

NPC Standing Committee Vice Chairman Wang Chen said last week that Hong Kong's delays in implementing its own security law had forced the Chinese leadership to take action.

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

- US action -

Under a law passed last year by Congress aimed at supporting Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, the US administration must certify that Hong Kong still enjoys the

freedoms promised by Beijing when it negotiated with Britain to take back the colony.

Washington's decision on Wednesday that Hong Kong does not enjoy those freedoms means it could lose trading privileges -- including lower tariffs than the mainland -- with the world's largest economy.

President Donald Trump will ultimately decide which actions to take, said David Stilwell, the top State Department official for East Asia.

"The steps will be considered and they will be as targeted as possible to change behaviour," Stilwell told reporters, while acknowledging it was unlikely Beijing would change course.

He said the United States did not want to hurt the people of Hong Kong, adding: "This decision was made by the government in Beijing, and not by the US."

- Anthem law -

Washington's move came after fresh protests broke out in Hong Kong on Wednesday -- this time over another controversial proposed law that criminalises insults to the national anthem with up to three years in jail.

Police surrounded the city's legislature where the bill was being debated, fired pepper ball rounds at protesters and arrested more than 300 people,

mostly for unlawful assembly.

"It's like a de facto curfew now," Nathan Law, a prominent pro-democracy advocate, told AFP. "I think the government has to understand why people are really angry."

Under the "one country, two systems" model agreed before the city's return from Britain to China, Hong Kong is supposed to be guaranteed certain liberties until 2047 that are denied to those on the mainland.

The mini-constitution that has governed Hong Kong's affairs since the handover obliges the territory's authorities to enact national security laws.

But an effort to do so in 2003 was shelved after huge protests by Hong Kongers.

China is motivated by fear of a younger Hong Kong generation that "does not agree with the political system of the Communist Party," said Hua Po, an independent political commentator based in Beijing.

"If they lose control over Hong Kong, the impact on the Chinese mainland will be huge," Hua said.

Beijing has been infuriated by Hong Kongers -- especially football fans -- booing the national anthem to signal dissatisfaction with China.

EasyJet axes almost third of staff on virus fallout

EasyJet will axe up to 4,500 jobs, or almost one third of its staff, the British no-frills airline said Thursday, as the coronavirus ravages demand for air travel.

The carrier follows rivals British Airways, Ryanair and Virgin Atlantic in slashing thousands of jobs to save costs as the bulk of planes remain grounded despite easing of government lockdowns worldwide.

"We are planning to reduce the size of our fleet and to optimise the network and our bases," EasyJet chief executive Johan Lundgren said in a statement.

"As a result, we anticipate reducing staff numbers by up to 30 percent across the business and we will continue to remove

cost and non-critical expenditure at every level," he added.

The job cuts will impact up to 4,500 of the carrier's 15,000 staff, a spokesman told AFP. A consultation process will be launched in the coming days.

- Call for state help -

Thursday's announcement sparked an outcry from trade unions who are calling for state help for Britain's stricken airline industry.

"The statement from EasyJet follows the announcements of proposed job losses by other airlines and again demonstrates why it is imperative that the government urgently brings forward a bespoke plan to provide assistance to the UK's aviation sector," said

Unite union official Oliver Richardson.

Lundgren said EasyJet wished "to protect as many jobs... for the long-term".

"We remain focused on doing what is right for the company and its long-term health and success, following the swift action we have taken over the last three months to meet the challenges of the virus," he added.

EasyJet, which grounded its entire fleet at the end of March, plans returning to the skies in mid-June with a limited number of flights.

- Three years until recovery -

EasyJet on Thursday added that it expects to cut its fleet by about 15 percent to 302 aircraft by the final quarter of 2021.

"Although we will restart flying on 15 June, we expect demand to build slowly, only returning to 2019 levels in about three years' time," stressed Lundgren.

"We want to ensure that we emerge from the pandemic an even more competitive business than before, so that EasyJet can thrive in the future."

Travellers arriving in Britain will meanwhile face 14 days in quarantine from next month to prevent a second coronavirus outbreak.

The pandemic has caused also bankruptcies and rescue plans across the aviation sector -- although Lufthansa is wavering over a nine-billion-euro (\$9.9 billion) German state lifeline.

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DELIVERING THE NEWS



MUSCLE MADNESS! Britney Spears’ boyfriend Sam Asghari flexed his muscles as he left Bristol Farms in Los Angeles.

LeBron among US athletes outraged at black man’s death

NBA superstar LeBron James was among the US athletes taking to social media in outrage over the death of a black man in Minnesota after a white policeman knelt on his neck for several minutes.

Four Minneapolis police officers were fired Tuesday as a video showing one of them kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, a handcuffed black man who later died, sparked protests.

Los Angeles Lakers playmaker James contrasted the incident with the kneeling protests of former NFL star Colin Kaepernick in 2016.

Kaepernick was ostracised by the NFL for kneeling during the playing of the national anthem in a protest against police brutality and racial injustice.

“This.... .. Is Why,” James posted on his Instagram feed with side by side photos of the white policeman kneeling on Floyd’s neck and Kaepernick kneeling on the sideline.

“Do you understand NOW!?!?!?!” James wrote. “Or is it still blurred to you?? #StayWoke”.

Other figures from the sports world speaking out over the Minneapolis incident included Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr.

“This is murder. Disgusting,” Kerr tweeted. “Seriously, what the hell is wrong with US????”

Warriors star Stephen Curry lamented yet another death involving an unarmed African-American man at the hands of law enforcement.

“I’ve seen a lot of people speak up and try to articulate how fed up and angry they are,” Curry wrote on Instagram.

“All good and well but it’s the same same same reality we live in. George Floyd. George Floyd. George has a family. George didn’t deserve to die.”

Retired Los Angeles Lakers legend Magic Johnson also hit out, saying Floyd had been “clearly murdered.”

“How many times do we have to see black men killed on national television? This has been going on for entirely too long,” Johnson said.

“We need to start seeing black people as human beings and not animals on the street.”

NFL Cleveland Browns receiver Odell Beckham Jr. tweeted: “Worlds honestly sickening. It really is..... no explanation.”

Dallas Cowboys linebacker DeMarcus Lawrence wondered how any African-American could feel safe after watching the video.

THE DAY AHEAD

Aries: Sometimes, we get so caught up in the illusion created by our small, three-dimensional selves that we forget our inherent magic, the part we play in the collective. The Oracle is reminding you that you have been dulling your sparkle and undermining your potential. It's time to take the self-love game up a notch. It's time to start believing in the gifts you possess. If you haven't experienced that big moment yet, trust that Spirit has a plan.

Taurus: You are being asked to examine the foundation upon which you are building this dream. What are the cracks bringing your attention to? Are there certain pockets that need to be rebuilt or repaired? Tedious as the task may seem, it needs your urgent attention. In the realm of relationships, it may be time to practice tough love. Pretending like everything is okay isn't going to make everything okay. Neither is brushing things under the carpet for now.

Gemini: Giving freely does not deplete our resources. It helps us stay connected to the cosmic flow of abundance, thus making space for blessings to pour in. Remember, we are a part of a benevolent Universe, Gemini. So take a moment to examine where your fears about not having

enough are stemming from and actively work towards bringing about a shift. Today, the path of selfless service will bring you a sense of peace and joy you haven't experienced in a long time.

Cancer: Aren't you tired of trying to control every aspect of your life, of giving the Universe a step-by-step manual on how you would like things to unfold? Just for a day, try taking the 'less is more' approach. Less anxiety, more faith. You'll be surprised by the way things work out for you once you become one with the flow. If you're feeling lost and confused, you're probably too close to the given matter. Rise above the chaos to gain much-needed perspective.

Leo: Whether you practice charity, karma yoga or seva—the essence is the same. All sacred texts in the world propagate the idea of selfless service, i.e. the act of showing up for your fellow warriors from the goodwill of your heart rather than the expectation of receiving something in return. How are you being called to show up for the collective in these dark times? Call upon your higher self for guidance.

Virgo: You've cleansed your space, aligned your chakras, set your intention, and pulled an oracle

message for the day. You're feeling so woke now that your third eye is about to activate its own third eye. What a magical time in the Virgo HQ! You're aware of the mysteries that surround you in a way you never have been before. Some of you may feel called to share from your vast reserves. Trust where your intuition is guiding you. Feeling inspired to practice mediumship or study the divine arts? Turn to a mentor you vibe with.

Libra: We've all been there, Libra, with people who have loved us conditionally, walked out at the first sign of disagreement, and betrayed our trust in multiple ways. Yet, we stuck around because we didn't know better, or didn't have a prototype of what a healthy relationship looks like. But you're not the same person you were, say, half a decade ago. You're not even the same person you were when we first entered lockdown. So, raise your frequency instead of going back to the old ways. You deserve to be with somebody who's loyal to you and committed to making you feel safe.

Scorpio: As a Plutonian, you dance with the concept of death and rebirth rather intimately. You understand that nothing is inherently good or bad. The so-called dark experiences are

meant to awaken you to your truth and hidden potential. So you actively work towards befriending your shadows and transforming your wounds into wisdom. Today, you're being asked to tap into this superpower. The pain that's emerging from the depths of your soul deserves to be addressed with your loving awareness.

Tip: Tap into your inner alchemist.

Sagittarius: Spoiler alert, Sagittarius: you now have the time to do all the things you didn't in the past. Make the most of what's left of this lockdown. Embrace the philosophy of 'creativity over productivity' with a newfound fervour. Here are five things you can consider this week. 1: Learn a new language in keeping with the mood of Gemini season. 2: Practice knitting or embroidery. 3: Revisit a book you love in order to gain a fresh perspective. 4: Geek out on documentaries of your choice. 5: Learn how to read your birth chart. PS: The possibilities are endless.

Capricorn: When we create from our small, three-dimensional selves, we face roadblocks at every step. However, when we make space for Spirit to step in, the path begins to clear out for us in miraculous ways. Capricorn, where

will you choose to vibrate at? Just for today, consider the mantra 'less is more'. That's right! Less anxiety. More trust, surrender, and faith. If only you could see the invisible strings that are being pulled for you—right now and in this moment.

Aquarius: Intoxicants can numb your pain temporarily, but the wounds will resurface eventually. The path of denial isn't serving you, Aquarius. Tap into your inner reserves of courage and wisdom. Become a witness of the emotions that are coming up without judging them or feeling the need to attach a narrative. Awareness is the first step to liberation. You're also being encouraged to inculcate healthy habits. Mindful practices will help you raise your vibrations.

Pisces: You're on the right track, Pisces, actively moving aside the blocks that were standing in your way and co-creating with Spirit to bring forth miracles. It's a magical time in your world! Trust that you will receive rewards and recognition for your hard work. But before you take the final step, reassess the plan of action. Bring your attention to the loophole that you seem to have missed. It's better to deal with the flaw at this stage than to worry about damage control later.

Aidy Bryant on ‘SNL,’ ‘Shrill’ and Being Comfortable in Her Own Skin

Aidy Bryant admits that she does think about the day when she'll say goodbye to "Saturday Night Live." "I sometimes see these new people, and I'm like, 'I want to make room for them,'" Bryant, who has been with "SNL" since 2012, says on Thursday's episode of the Variety and iHeart podcast "The Big Ticket." "But I'm still having so much fun there, and I still feel challenged there, and it's my home. It's truly where I started. When I got hired, I had never been on camera in any form."

While she's racked up a slew of television and film credits since then, Bryant became a leading actor for the first time in Hulu's "Shrill" as Annie, an aspiring writer at an alternative newspaper in Seattle who's juggling work, romance, friends and her parents. The series, based on Lindy West's memoir "Shrill: Notes From a Loud Woman," has been picked up for a third season

Bryant says she always had hopes that she would play a woman who accepts her body the way it is, but she wasn't sure it would happen. "Even when I was auditioning for 'SNL' I was like, 'I wonder if they won't hire me because I'm fat or because that's sort of not the typical body you see on camera or there are less people for me to do impressions of, or that kind of thing,'" she says. "So then to kind of be in the position to also take on ['Shrill'] and really spearhead it? Total dream come true."

How much do people think that Annie is based on you?

Probably more than I'm comfortable with. [Laughs] Just the other day someone asked me about kind of a nasty sex scene we did, and they were like, "That's based on you?" And I was like, "No, that's not me!" But you know, there are definitely shreds of my own story in there.

Is there any real-life experience that



you didn't want to put in the show?

Not yet. I have things that I would be excited to put in going forward about being more secure with yourself. Even the experience of doing sex scenes on this show for me was a little bit of my own body journey. And I think I was maybe a little cocky going into making it where I was like, "Oh, I'm over a lot of these body issues, and I feel comfortable in my own skin, and I've worked really hard through therapy and friends and family to face some of these demons." And then it was like, "Okay, now be in your underwear in front of a crew of 30 people."

How do you balance the fat jokes to make sure people are not laughing at you, but with you?

That is hard because there are fully jokes about what she eats. But I always feel like it's sort of just a gut-check feeling, where you're like, "That feels good or that doesn't feel good." And we have other fat writers...We know the experience, and we kind of check it from within. But I also think it's like you're always on Annie's side even when she's doing bad.

Tell me about the first audition that you ever went on.

I got sent out to do an audition for a Walmart commercial, I was like 19 years old, and it was for a mother of

three. I was like, "I don't think I'm going to get this." And then I went in there, and every other woman there was in her 40s but sort of had my body type, and I was like, "Cool. This will be my journey in this industry."

Did you ever have an agent or manager say, "I want to work with you, but you've got to lose the weight"?

I didn't have an agent tell me that, but I definitely had an agent tell me while I was in Chicago, "You're not going to be castable for most things. You're going to be a really specific thing." So they didn't tell me to lose weight, but they were like, "You're going to be in hell for the rest of your life."

Who else do you want to do an impersonation of on "SNL"?

Oh, my gosh, that's a tough one. I really can't even think of it because at this point I would say Elton John, but then I finally did him. He was my great missing piece.

If you could sit down with Sarah Huckabee Sanders, what would you ask her?

"How's it going?" I don't know. I would be scared to sit down with her I think.

Would you?

Well, I've heard tales that they didn't love my impression over there. But yeah, I don't think we have much in common.

Larry Kramer used his anger to force elites to respond to the Aids crisis

MOIRA DONEGAN

It's largely because of his advocacy that US authorities finally responded to the Aids crisis decimating the gay community

He put a giant yellow condom over the house of the arch conservative Senator Jesse Helms, and he poured the ashes of Aids victims on the White House lawn. He interrupted live television broadcasts and shut down the New York Stock Exchange. It may be appropriate that Larry Kramer's protest tactics with Act Up, the Aids activist group that he helped to found, were theatrical; after all, Kramer himself was a playwright. But the mood at the Act Up protests themselves was not so much mischievous as rageful and stricken. "Sure I have a temper, who doesn't?" Kramer told Newsday in 1992. "It happens when you've seen so many friends die."

Kramer made an enemy of the elite and antagonized politicians, pharmaceutical executives and the medical bureaucracy who he thought were not responding with enough urgency to the Aids epidemic, accusing them in unflinching terms of genocide by inaction. He once wrote an open letter in the San Francisco Examiner calling Dr Anthony Fauci "a murderer" and "an incompetent idiot" for the inaction of the Reagan administration on Aids. His willingness to anger the powerful made him one of the most hated, most divisive and most effective activists of his generation.

For his own part, Kramer was not supposed to live to be 84, the age at which he died on Wednesday of pneumonia at his home in New York City. When the writer, dramatist and

activist began agitating for Aids treatment and research in 1981, forming a group called Gay Men's Health Crisis, he was in his mid-forties, and the disease that would later become known as HIV/Aids was accumulating a staggering body count among gay men even as it had no name. After being ousted from GMHC over his radicalism, Kramer went on to found Act Up in 1987, and the group took him as a model for much of its own militancy and passion. In 1988, at 53, Kramer learned that he had himself contracted HIV, lending a personal intensity to his activism. It would be eight more years before an effective treatment was introduced.

At the time, most of the people who contracted HIV – primarily gay men, like Kramer – swiftly progressed into Aids and died painful, isolated and early deaths. Kramer took it upon himself to change that, and it is largely because of his advocacy that government authorities began, finally, to respond to the crisis that was decimating the gay community. He died at his home in Manhattan, and is survived by his husband, David Webster. He is also survived by untold thousands of gay men and others living with HIV who would not be alive if it were not for his work. Because of Kramer and the movement he inspired, callous politicians who had withheld funding for Aids research and denied dying gay men the dignity of public acknowledgement were forced to begin mitigating the crisis. Because of Kramer and Act Up, a disease that was once an incurable death sentence has been converted to a manageable, livable condition for many.