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SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 74 | Gangtok | Saturday | 21 March 2020 ON TOP OF THE NEWS RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420 Pages 8 | ₹ 5

Essential commodities in stock, avoid hoarding: F&CS Dept

GANGTOK, 20 MAR [IPR]: The worldwide onslaught of the Corona Virus (COVID-19), which has been declared as 'pandemic', by the World Health Organization (WHO), has created an uncertain atmosphere. It has come to the notice of the Food & Civil Supplies Department, that this has led to 'panic buying' and hoarding of essential commodities like rice, oil, pulses and other food commodities in the State. The department assures the general public that, at present, the State has sufficient stock of food and ration supplies to sustain for more than 2 months, and is being replenished regularly. However, all traders/vendors of essential commodities, vegetables and fruits have been directed to strictly maintain sufficient stock.

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SSU students call off protest in view of COVID-19 situation

Not completely satisfied but got some assurances from Minister: Students

AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 20 MAR: Students of Sikkim State University [SSU] have decided to call off their protest for the time being after meeting the Education Minister, Kunga Nima Lepcha today. Although the students are not completely satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, in view of the COVID-19 situation, they have decided to call off their sit-in protest as of now. In the morning today, Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba met the students outside the SSU building in Tadong and convinced them to meet



the Education Minister and Department officials at the Minister's residence at VIP colony. Speaking to media persons after the meeting, a student representative, Aruna Adhikari said, "We placed our grievances and demands to the Minister during the meeting. We did not get a written assurance on our three main demands of land for the university, budget allocation and autonomy to the university as the Minister said it needs time, a cabinet meeting has to be held and bills have to be passed in the Assembly."

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Finance Ministry recommends approval of Rs 987 cr for SU campus

GANGTOK, 20 MAR [PIB]: Project Investment Board of the Government of India, under the chairmanship of Secretary (Expenditure), Ministry of Finance, has recommended approval of Rs 987 crore for establishment of Sikkim University. Expenditure for construction and other capital expenditure will be available through Higher Education Finance Agency (HEFA) loan under Window-IV i.e. it would be treated as a grant. Appraisal of Sikkim University was carried out by Project Investment Board (PIB) in its meeting held at New Delhi on 06 Feb, 2020. Once the formalities for availing HEFA loan under Window-IV is complete, Sikkim University will initiate process

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Sikkim State Human Rights Commission
Manan Bhawan, Development Area
Gangtok-737101

NOTIFICATION

No. 4/SSHRC/2020 Date: 19.03.2020

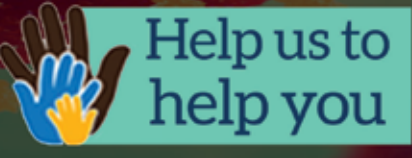
In its effort to respond pro-actively to the potential treat of spread of COVID-19 it is decided all the matters listed till 20th April 2020 before the Sikkim State Human Rights Commission, are hereby adjourned till further notice. Functioning of the Commission shall be restricted to urgent matters only, in view of the Coronavirus and other matters will be taken up thereafter.

The Commission shall, however, continue to function normally.

SECRETARY



Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India



NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

When to Practise Home Quarantine?

IF YOU ARE ASYMPTOMATIC but have ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Travel history to COVID-19 affected countries in last 14 days
- Physical exposure to COVID-19 case or body fluids or secretions or soiled items
- Living in the same household with a COVID-19 suspect who turned positive

Do Follow Home Quarantine for 14 days



STAY in a well-ventilated single-room



FOLLOW respiratory and hand hygiene



MAINTAIN 1 meter distance from co-inhabitants and stay away from elderly people, pregnant women and children



WEAR face mask, if you develop symptoms or you are caring for a suspect/confirmed COVID-19 case



AVOID sharing household items



STRICTLY AVOID visitors at home

Know the Do's and Don'ts of Home Quarantine for yourself and your family at www.mohfw.gov.in

Together we can fight COVID-19!

If you feel unwell (Cough, fever or difficulty in breathing) during home quarantine, immediately call the helpline numbers.

For further information:

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

1075 (Toll Free) | 011-23978046

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



mohfw.gov.in



@MoHFWIndia



@MoHFW_INDIA



mohfwindia

You may cut this out and paste in your office/public place/home

Nawin Kiran condemns move to keep journos away from budget session

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convenor, Nawin Kiran Pradhan, alleged today that the decision of the State Assembly Secretariat not to allow independent press and media personnel permission to cover the upcoming Budget Session was wrong and against all tenets of freedom of press and freedom of expression.

The Assembly Secretariat has explained this decision to limit the number of people allowed into the Legislative Assembly in light of the Novel Coronavirus situation.

Mr Pradhan asserted that if Novel Coronavirus was the reason, then the assembly session itself should have been cancelled.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Pradhan stated that the people are eagerly looking forward to the present Government's first full-fledged budget session and that journalists from private media houses were their only reliable source of information about the proceedings.

"We need to be vigilant and serious about COVID-19, but the reason offered by the department is not convincing enough," he said.

He also demanded that the Assembly Secretariat arrange live telecast of the assembly session.

**HAVE A
STORY TO
SHARE?**

email us: news@summittimes.Com

Support Janata Curfew, BJP Sikkim appeals

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

Bharatiya Janata Party Sikkim Pradesh president, DB Chauhan has appealed to the people of Sikkim to follow and abide by the advisory and guidelines issued by the State government and the Centre to prevent any outbreak of COVID-19 in the State. He has further appealed to Sikkimese people to support the call of the Prime Minister for Janata Curfew from 7 AM to 9 PM on Sunday by staying in their homes.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Chauhan highlighted the important points of the Prime Minister's address to the nation given on Thursday evening. He also urged the people to



practice social distancing, avoid crowds and to follow the Janata Curfew.

He also urged the people to support the PM's call to thank all essential service providers like med-

ical professionals, transport service providers and others who are fighting against COVID-19 by clapping and cheering them on 22 Sunday at 5 pm sharp from our balconies, doorways and

windows.

Mr Chauhan requested the State government to provide support to daily wage earners and hawkers during this quarantine period and further urged

traders and employers to take care of their employees in this period.

He stated that there is panic among the people regarding supply of essential commodities and urged the government to check hoarding and black-marketing of essential commodities to avoid any panic among the people.

He urged BJP workers to create awareness and sensitize the people on COVID-19 to prevent any outbreak in the State. He urged pharma companies in the State to distribute masks and sanitizers among the people.

Mr Chauhan expressed his satisfaction over the works and initiatives taken by the State government against COVID-19.

COVID-19 awareness for Panchayats and ICDS supervisors



NAMCHI, 20 MAR (IPR):

A day-long awareness program for the Panchayat Presidents (PPs) and supervisors of ICDS under Yangang sub-division on COVID-19 was held at the office of SDM Yangang today.

Present in the program were SDM Yangang, Sangay Gyatso, BDO Yangang, Kishor Thapa alongside Medical Officer (PHC Yangang) and staff of SDM Office.

SDM Yangang, Sangay Gyatso addressed the gathering wherein he spoke in detail about COVID-19 which he stated is a serious threat to human lives. He brought to light the recent notifications issued by

Government of Sikkim to create awareness on COVID-19 and urged the panchayats and stakeholders involved to disseminate necessary but accurate information on the spread and prevention of Corona Virus.

During the course of the program, it was informed that a team consisting of Panchayats, ICDS workers, staff and officials from Health, BAC and SDM office will be conducting a series of door-to-door campaign to create awareness on Corona Virus in their respective GPUs. Additionally, information about precautionary measures on hygiene and cleanliness, social distancing

will also be disseminated during the campaign. It was also informed that masks and other necessary items to the needy will be distributed in the days to come to combat the serious pandemic.

As per the discussion during the meeting, Tourism Guest House near Helipad at Yangang has been identified as sub-divisional level quarantine centre.

SDM Yangang also issued clear directives to the officials present to take stock of the quarantine buildings and prepare all necessary arrangements to avoid any problematic situation arising out of the outbreak.

'One Nation, One Ration Card' to be launched nationwide

DELHI, 20 MAR [PIB]: Under PDS reforms, a scheme on "Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)" is being implemented w.e.f. April 2018 in all States/UTs.

The main objective of the scheme is to introduce nation-wide portability of ration card holders under National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), through 'One Nation One Ration Card' system.

This system enables the migratory ration card holders to lift their entitled food grains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) of their choice in the country by using their existing/same ration card issued in their home States/UTs after biometric authentication on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs.

So far, the facility of inter-State/national portability under One Nation One Ration Card plan has been made functional in 12 States. Further, integration of remaining States/UTs depends on their readiness to implement the same.

The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is governed under the provisions of the National Food secu-

urity Act, 2013 (NFSA); which is implemented in all States/UTs. The NFSA provides coverage for about 81 crore persons to receive subsidised foodgrains through TPDS, which is about 2/3'd of the country's population as per census 2011. Presently, under NFSA, all States/UTs collectively, have issued about a total of 23 crore ration cards to nearly 80 crore beneficiaries.

Further, TPDS is operated in joint responsibilities of central States/UT Governments wherein inter-alia the operational responsibilities of identification of eligible households/beneficiaries under NFSA as per the criteria evolved by them, issuance of ration cards, etc' rests with the concerned State/UTs Governments.

Therefore as and when any matter/issue, including request for new ration card is received in this Department, the same is forwarded to concerned States/UTs Government for appropriate action at their end.

This information was given in a written reply by the Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Ramvilas Paswan, in Rajya Sabha today.

Passang Sherpa condemns barring of media from Budget Session

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

Political and social activist, Passang Sherpa has criticized the decision of the State Assembly Secretariat to not allow the press and media personnel to cover the upcoming Budget Session 2020 of Sikkim Legislative Assembly in view of the COVID-19 threat.

He asserted that barring press and media personnel from covering the Assembly session in the name of Novel Coronavirus goes against the freedom of press and freedom of expression.

It has to be mentioned here that State Assembly Secretariat has taken out a circular stating that press/media personnel from IPR Department, AIR and Doordarshan Gangtok shall be allowed to cover the proceedings of Budget Session 2020 and other media houses can obtain press release and photographs from IPR Department.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Sherpa thanked the

Finance Ministry...

for 2nd phase of construction which includes Classroom block, Laboratory block, Boys and Girls Hostels and some residential Quarters.

With completion of the second phase of construction, Sikkim University will be in position to start moving to its permanent campus at Yangang.

SSU students...

She stated that although students are not fully satisfied but the Minister has assured to place proposals related to the university in the upcoming Assembly session.

However, the department has given written assurance for immediate posting of Controller of Examinations, Registrar and a Finance Officer and till full time appointment of Finance Officer, AO of Education Department will hold the additional charge.

Ms Adhikari further informed that the department assured that the VC will go ahead with the selection process for appointment of faculty in Nepali and Sanskrit and both the departments shall be run in the present building.

The meeting was also attended by Additional Chief Secretary of Education Department, GP Upadhyaya, Vice Chancellor of SSU, GK Niroula and Director [Higher Education], Kapil Meena amongst others.

Essential commodities...

The department is aware of the shortage and illicit trade of masks (2 ply, 3 ply surgical masks and N95 masks) and hand sanitizers in the market. To bring relief to the general public, the Government of India has brought masks and hand sanitizers as essential commodities under the 'Essential Commodities Act, 1955,' upto 30 Jun, 2020.

This positive step will empower the State to regulate production, distribution and prices of these items and also crackdown on hoarding and black-marketing. Any contravention to the act will attract necessary provisions and penalties.

All Sikkim Chemists Association has assured that sufficient consignment of masks and hand sanitizers will be available in the markets by 22 Mar, 2020, Sunday.

The department requests the general public to refrain from rumour mongering and panic buying. The Nation and the State have sufficient stock of food and ration supplies.

Let us join hands in solidarity and fight the deadly coronavirus outbreak, and dutifully observe 'Janata Curfew' as called by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, on March 22 from 7AM to 9PM.

Now you can whatsapp
Summit TIMES @
9832556698
9832080753

KUTSHE SHEGU

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

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



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

**Mrs. Tshering Choden (Wife)
Chopel P. Bhutia(Son)
Mrs. Sonam Paden Bhutia (Daughter)
Ugen Palzor Bhutia(Son)
Sonam Dorjee Bhutia (son)
and family members.
Contact:740723003/9734142243.**

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

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

Nirbhaya: 4 convicts executed in Tihar Jail

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): The four men convicted of the gang rape and murder of a Delhi woman on December 16, 2012 were hanged in the darkness of pre-dawn on Friday, ending a horrific chapter in India's long history of sexual assault that had seared the nation's soul. Mukesh Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar Singh (31) were executed at 5.30 am for the savage assault in an empty moving bus on the 23-year-old physiotherapy intern who came to be known the world over as Nirbhaya, the fearless one.

"Doctor has examined the bodies and declared all 4 dead," Director General of Tihar Jail Sandeep Goel said. Jail officials said the bodies were kept hanging for half an hour, a mandatory procedure after execution as per the prison manual.

This is the first time that four men have been hanged together in Tihar Jail, South Asia's largest prison complex that houses more than 16,000 inmates. The executions were carried out after the men exhausted every possible legal avenue to escape the gallows. Their desperate attempts only postponed the inevitable by less than two months after the first date of execution was set for January 22.

In last-gasp attempts, one of the convicts knocked on the doors of the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court just hours before the hanging. Hours before the execution, Pawan Kumar Gupta approached the Supreme Court

challenging rejection of the second mercy petition by the President.

In an unprecedented late-night hearing that began at 2.30 AM and lasted an hour, a Supreme Court bench dismissed his last plea, paving the way for the execution.

It also refused to pass any direction allowing Gupta and Akshay Singh to meet their family members just before they are sent to the gallows.

Relieved that their daughter finally got justice after a seven-year-long legal struggle, Nirbhaya's parents said they will continue their "fight for India's daughters".

"We finally got justice. We will continue our fight for justice for India's daughters. Justice delayed, but not denied," her mother told reporters after the hanging.

She added that women will definitely feel safer after the execution of the convicts.

The mother said the entire country was awake and waiting for justice. There was cheer after the hanging as hundreds of people, carrying the national flag and shouting slogans of 'long live Nirbhaya' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', gathered outside the Tihar Jail since early hours of Friday.

Some of them distributed sweets after the four convicts were executed.

Among the people who gathered outside the jail was social activist Yogita Bhayana. She held a poster which read 'Nirbhaya has got justice. The other daughters still await.' "Justice has been deliv-

ered finally," she said, adding it was a victory of the legal system.

Sana, a resident of west Delhi, said, "Nothing will change after this hanging in our society, but we are happy that the four convicts have been hanged and the justice was delivered to Nirbhaya."

After raping and brutalising Nirbhaya, the men, one of whom was a juvenile at the time, dumped her on the road and left for dead on the cold winter night. Her friend who was with her was also severely beaten and thrown out along with her. She was so severely violated that her insides were spilling out when she was taken to hospital. She died in a Singapore hospital after battling for her life for a fortnight. Six people, including the four convicts and the juvenile, were named as accused.

While Ram Singh allegedly committed suicide in the Tihar Jail days after the trial began in the case, the juvenile was released in 2015 after spending three years in a correctional home. The road to the gallows was a long and circuitous one, going through the lower courts, the High Court, the Supreme Court and the president's office before going back to the Supreme Court that heard and rejected various curative petitions.

The death warrants were deferred by a court thrice on the grounds that the convicts had not exhausted all their legal remedies and that the mercy petition of one or the other was before the president.

Letter to the EDITOR

UNVERIFIED ALLEGATIONS
DISGRACED DEPARTMENT,
EXCISE DEPTT CLAIMS

Journals of columnists own very special responsibility in promoting peace and amity. The above dated “News Item” telecasted by you has been done in total violation of the “Norms of Journalistic Conduct” governing you. As a custodian of public interest, the press has a right to highlight corruption of irregularities in public bodies but such materials should be based on irrefutable evidence and published after due inquiries and verification from concerned source and after obtaining the version of the person/ authority being commented upon. But in the case of the Excise Department no information whatsoever was verified by your office.

Such telecast which has been seen and read by many people all over the world, has disgraced the reputation of the Department. Further the telecast as cited has misled the public regarding issue of “Loss of Revenues”.

You, are requested to do all the needful in respect of above cited publications or else the Department shall initiate appropriate action against you with 7 days from the date of receipt of this complaint.

So please fail not.

Thanking you.
Yours Sincerely,
Secretary, Excise Department
20 March, 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

The concern expressed by the Secretary, Excise Department, regarding the “Norms of Journalistic Conduct” is welcome, as is his recognition of the fact that the media is expected to “highlight corruption of irregularities in public bodies...”

What is incorrect though is the claim that the Department was not contacted before the news-report in question was published. In fact, the Secretary himself is quoted in the report and the Department’s stand is also included in the headline - “Unauthorised sale of liquor alleged on Rangpo-Ranipool stretch; Deptt wants more specific complaints” – published in SummitTimes issue dated 18 March, 2020.

A more detailed rejoinder by the Department, published on 20 March [“Allegations of illegal liquor sale on NH10 ‘baseless’, says Excise”], also had the Department admitting that “it cannot be denied that there could be isolated cases,” even as it detailed that 274 raids have been conducted in the current financial year. Clearly, liquor is being illegally sold and even teetotalers will attest to as much.

We are confident that SummitTimes did indeed “do all the needful” before publishing the report. As for the Department’s desire to “initiate appropriate action,” it is within its rights to do so and under no obligation to inform us in advance. In fact, such an exercise would even be advisable and welcomed by the many who have approached our office with more allegations and complaints against the department and might make submissions on record if they were assured fairness, transparency and protection against victimization.

-Editor, SummitTimes

Section 144 imposed
in West, Haat dates
and venues changed

RUDRA KAUSHIK
GYALSHING, 20 MAR:

West District administration on Friday imposed section 144 of the CrPc in all the urban areas of West Sikkim. As per a notification the order will remain in effect till 15 April. However exemption has been granted for special occasions such as wedding functions and funerals.

Prohibition on assembly of more than 5 persons in bazaar premises will be strictly monitored and constant patrolling by the police personals will be carried out till the imposition of 144 is lifted. The defaulters will face legal action.

Among the urban areas of west district where section 144 is imposed are Gyalshing, Yaksam, Tashiding, Legship, Darap, Dentam, Kaluk, Mangalbaria, Daramdin,

Daramdin, Sombaria, Soreng and Nayabazaar.

Similarly, it has been notified that all Haat day at Haat bazaars of West district would take place only on Monday and Thursday and the venues for the Haat at various urban areas have also been changed.

School grounds or public grounds have been selected for Haat instead of main bazaar premises. For instance, Haat at Gyalshing will be held at Kyongsa Sport Ground instead of Gyalshing bazaar.

The notification further directs that sufficient space and distance between vendors and customers should be maintained and SDMs and other law enforcement officials should make necessary arrangements to maintain safe distance amongst the people during Haat day.

Played one of my biggest matches under Banerjee: Bhaichung

KOLKATA, MAR 20 (PTI): Former India skipper Bhaichung Bhutia considers himself fortunate to have played under the tutelage of P K Banerjee, who died on Friday, and recalled how the iconic footballer-turned-coach had a huge role to play in one of his most memorable performances.

Bhutia endured racist taunts from Mohun Bagan coach Amal Dutta, ahead of the derby match, but Banerjee “soaked up all the pressure and ensured that the boys remain unaffected.” Banerjee died after prolonged illness at a hospital here.

Bhutia struck a famous hat-trick to script an epic 4-1 win for East Bengal in the 1997 Federation Cup semifinals in front of a record turn out of 1 lakh 20 thousand which remains the stuff of footballing folklore.

“There was a lot of hype surrounding the match and Amal da made some unwanted statements but Pradip da did

not let the pressure come into the his players,” Bhutia recalled while talking to PTI.

“Amal da was clearly under pressure and made some unnecessary statements. But we remained unaffected and it showed in our win,” he said.

“Pradip da was such a cool and composed man and it reflected in the match. That’s how he could get the best out of the players. It was definitely one of the biggest matches of my life,” the former India striker added of Banerjee, who won 54 trophies as coach of club and country, the most for an Indian.

Banerjee had earlier coached East Bengal to a historic five back-to-back Calcutta Football League titles from 1971-75.

The Federation Cup win made Bhutia an icon for East Bengal fans after he scored the first hat-trick of the Derby.

It helped Banerjee prove that his celebrated “vocal tonic” was more ef-

fective than Dutta’s imported “diamond formation”, which was popular in Europe in the ‘50s.

“Pradip da never came under pressure...He did not make any statement unnecessarily against anyone. He did not come under pressure like Amal da,” he said.

“He was not just a great player and coach, for me he was also a great human being. He was such a very happy man. He was always happy, smiling, full of fun. That was the greatest quality in him.

“It was so much fun to be around him, to listen to his stories and such happy man. He was always cool and composed. Even during matches he wasn’t someone who would take pressure, that reflected on the players,” he added.

Off the field too, Banerjee would interact with his players and take the team for meals at his house to strike a

chord with them. “He was definitely like a father figure to me. Not only on the playing ground, he used to call us or we went to his house and dine at his place. His family used to prepare wonderful meals.

“Definitely it’s a very, very big loss for Indian football. Pradip da was one of the legendary footballer cum legendary coach. I was very fortunate to play under him. I had one of the most memorable match under his coaching for East Bengal.”

The 1962 Asian Games gold-medalist also represented in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics where India made the semi-finals and later captained the country at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome, where he scored the equaliser against France in a 1-1 draw.

Banerjee also made big name for East Bengal rivals Mohun Bagan, coaching them to a record hat-trick of titles in 1977 by winning the IFA Shield, Rovers Cup and Durand Cup in one season.

GOVERNOR’S MESSAGE ON COVID-19

Let’s fight Corona virus with sanitation,
precaution and self-restraint

“My Dear Fellow

Sikkimese,

We are on a critical phase of Public Health Emergency due to the impact of Global Pandemic Noval COVID-19 today. We have witnessed its impact over the last few weeks which is alarming and beyond our estimation.

Since there has been no preventive and curative vaccination developed to contain and provide treatment to this epidemic so far, sanitation, precaution and self-restraint (Swachhata, Satarkta aur Saiyaam) are the only effective ways to contain its rapid spread. In view of its rapidly spreading footprint in our country as well and its possibility to reach Stage III, i.e., community level outbreak, we have our responsibility clearly defined.

As appealed and explained by our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in his address to the nation in the evening on 19 Mar, 2020, Social



ment agencies from time to time and follow ‘Do’s and ‘Don’ts’ in their letter and spirit contributing to our collective responsibility to prevent its entry and spread in our State. Let us start this from individual level.

Further, I reiterate the appeal of our Prime Minister to strictly observe ‘Janata Curfew’ on 22 Mar, 2020 from 0700hrs to 2100hrs, completely stopping our movement outdoors unless in emergency. Secondly, we all must come out of doors and windows of our homes on 22 Mar, 2020 at 1700hrs, for five minutes and applaud the efforts and sterling services of personnel in our medical, paramedical and other essential services at this hour of global crisis.

Together, we can defeat this human crisis and come out winner. We shall overcome!

Jai Sikkim! Jai Bharat!”

Ganga Prasad
Governor of Sikkim

SFA mourns football legend PK Banerjee’s death

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

Sikkim Football Association (SFA) held a condolence meeting at Football House, Gangtok today to mourn the sad demise of P.K. Banerjee at Kolkata this morning, a press release informs. Mr Banerjee was a distinguished former Indian footballer and coach of

the Indian national team.

The meeting observed 2 minutes silence as a mark of respect for the departed soul. The meeting was chaired by president, SFA, Menla Ethenpa.

While addressing the condolence meeting, Mr Ethenpa informed that PK Banerjee made 84 appearances for India,

scoring 65 goals during the course of his career. He was one of the first recipients of the Arjuna Award. He was awarded the prestigious Padma Shri in 1990 and was named Indian Footballer of the 20th century by IFFHS. In 2004, he was awarded the FIFA Order of Merit, the highest honour awarded by FIFA

House struck by lightning twice in North

**WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 20 MAR:**

The house of Jagat Subba in Manul ward of North Sikkim was struck by lightning twice on Friday morning at around 3:45 a.m.

The house has sustained major damage but no one was hurt since the family members escaped when the first lightning struck.

Mr Subba along with 3 family members, who

work as daily wage labourers, were living in the house.

The North district received heavy rainfall on Friday but no other disaster has been reported.

COVID-19 Precautionary Measures
adopted by State Govt

GANGTOK, 20 MAR (IPR): With the global outbreak of COVID-19 and the declaration of it as a global pandemic, the State of Sikkim, in order to contain the spread of Coronavirus in the State has adopted precautionary measures like:-

- Entry of Foreign and Domestic tourists has been suspended till 15 Apr, 2020 till further order.
- All public places such as Cinema Halls, Casinos, Pubs and Disco, Gyms, hotels, schools, colleges and Universities have been instructed to close down and public gatherings and events like Mela and festivals have also been instructed to close down or cancel until 15 Apr, 2020.
- Melli and Rangpo are the designated checkpoints for screening. Rambam, Reshi and Uttarey checkpoints have been closed for the visitors till 15th April, 2020, till further orders.
- Thermal Screening is being carried out in Rangpo and Melli Checkposts.
- Urban PHC (Old STNM), East Sikkim, Mines and Geology Building, Rangpo, SIRD Complex in Karfector, South Sikkim have been converted into quarantine units and the respective district hospitals are the isolation unit.
- Medicines, testing kits and all required equipment have been procured by the Government.
- State Level Task Force and District Level Task Force have been constituted to tackle the situation.
- Complete suspension on entry of new labourers into the State till the situation normalizes.
- All non-urgent works like issue of certificates, land registration, mortgage, natural calamities work etc. is suspended.
- Social Distancing has been advised to the people as a precautionary measure.
- Control Rooms have been set up in all four districts with adequate infrastructures and their contact numbers have been widely disseminated to the public.
- Help Line office has been set up for the State in Tadong with the Helpline Toll Free No. 104
- Advisory has been issued by the respective District Collectors to the public to tackle the situation.
- Awareness campaigns are being held in all the four districts.
- Financial Aid is being provided from the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund for procurement of equipment and up gradation of quarantine unit and other health facilities.
- Section 144 banning the gathering of more than 5 people has been imposed in East and South District of Sikkim.
- Travel Advisory Posters and stickers to be stuck on taxi’s plying from Siliguri to further disseminate the information regarding the Travel suspension for tourists to the State.
- Medical Team to be stationed at SNT complex for thorough screening of all the passengers travelling by SNT buses so that the burden in Rangpo and Melli checkpoint is reduced.
- All Departments heads have been directed to issue appropriate Notification/orders to ensure suspension of all non-essential work thereby ensuring social distancing.

Coronavirus cases climb to 223 in India

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): Novel coronavirus cases in India rose to 223 on Friday after 50 more people were infected with the fast-spreading virus in various parts of the country, according to Health Ministry data.

Among those found positive for coronavirus are 32 foreign nationals, including 17 from Italy, three from the Philippines, two from the UK, one each belonging to Canada, Indonesia and Singapore.

The figure also includes four deaths reported from Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra so far.

“The total number of active COVID-19 cases across India stands at 196 so far,” the ministry said, adding that 23 others have been cured/discharged/migrated while four have died.

Delhi has, so far, reported 17 positive cases, which includes one



foreigner, while Uttar Pradesh has recorded 23 cases, including one foreigner.

Maharashtra has 52 cases, including three foreigners, while Kerala has recorded 28 cases, which include two foreign nationals.

Karnataka has 15 coronavirus patients. The number of cases in Ladakh rose to 10 and Jammu and Kashmir four. Telangana has reported 17 cases, which include nine foreigners.

Rajasthan has also reported 17 cases, including that of two foreigners. Gujarat has reported

five cases so far.

Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand have reported three cases each.

West Bengal, Odisha and Punjab each reported two cases while Puducherry, Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh reported one case each.

In Haryana, there are 17 cases, which include 14 foreigners.

“A total of 14,376 samples from 13,486 individuals have been tested for SARS-CoV2 as on March 20,” Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) officials said.

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There's Flora. There's Fauna. And Then There is Greed

*The environment needs protection
from greed, not punishment for need
alone*

If you are a sculptor who works with wood or a craftsman carving delicate traditional designs, and if you happen to be based in Sikkim, then you know how difficult it is to source wood for your craft. And this, not just because the ideal wood for carving is difficult to find in Sikkim, but also because bringing it in from outside the State is also wrapped so tight in red tape that few with an artistic bent of mind will find the patience to negotiate the paperwork. A peek into this situation was offered some years ago when Gangtok hosted a National Art Festival and the sculptors had to twiddle their thumbs with no work for two days because the wood they had ordered from Siliguri was held up because clearance from the forest department was taking too long. They might as well have contacted some locals who would have commissioned some porters to chop down the required kind of wood. The worst that would have happened is that if caught, the porters would have been arrested under the Forest Act. After all, much the same had transpired for much lesser a cause than Art when widespread felling was noticed at Kyongnosla reserve forest several years ago. At that time, it was suggested that the trees there had been felled allegedly for the construction of an army garage. Only the porters languished in judicial custody.

The laws protecting our forests and wildlife are very strict. Apart from rape and murder, violations of the Forest Act are perhaps the only crimes that cannot be settled out of court or dropped or withdrawn. We have seen how strict forest officials can become when it comes to evicting encroachers from forest land when they are impoverished families like migrant labours or rural folk who live off the forest. We often hear of woodcutters arrested for illicit felling and rural folk have been banned from taking their cattle to graze in reserve forests. How often have we heard of a project developers even being made to abide by compensatory afforestation commitments they have themselves volunteered, or deliver on the environment protection conditions stipulated for their profit-making ventures? Have we ever heard of a raid on a palatial building which has consumed many trees just to get the flooring done and consumed still more for the panelling and the furniture? Have you ever been to a village anywhere in Sikkim which has denuded its neighbouring forests for firewood or timber? But all of us have seen urban expansion consume groves and farms and springs and shade.

The porters who double as woodcutters and who invariably are the only people rounded up and marked out as criminals, might or might not be aware of the forest laws. They might even be felling trees knowing that it is illegal to do so, but they are driven by their need to do so. Those who order the wood from them are definitely aware of the laws against such activities and have only their greed to blame for their actions. What has to be targeted is this greed. No amount of legislations and laws and rules can ever succeed if the only people who get rounded up are those driven by their need. Greed, on the other hand, can be easily suppressed if some examples are set. So long as the demand remains, there will be those desperate enough or well connected enough to service that greed. So long as one arm of government is expected to police and monitor the rapacious appetite of "developmental", "nation-building" projects, even the worst offences will get swept under the carpet.

Everyone knows that Sikkim has among the more expansive forest covers in the country, but in the interest of fairness, our protectors of the forests have to start striking at places from where the demands are being placed or from where the more largescale damage is being caused. Why is it that illicit wood is almost always caught in-transit or in houses serving only as warehouses? Why are those who place orders after which trees are felled, never booked? Why is it that fishermen (not anglers, mind you) will be caught and challaned, but not a squeak of protest escapes the required lips when a hydel project ignores corrective measures to save an indigenous fish species from extinction?

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Stopping Coronavirus – what does the evidence say are the best measures?

CLAUDIA ABREU LOPES & SANAE OKAMOTO
theconversation.com

The new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been spreading rapidly but at a different rate in different countries. A variety of emergency responses and policy strategies have been implemented with varying outcomes so far.

The Asian countries and territories that were first hit by the outbreak have built on responses to previous epidemics such as SARS. Other countries are learning from this but also adopting their own strategies.

It's possible there is no best strategy that works for everyone, as measures will have different results in countries with different political and health systems, social norms or operating procedures. There also seems to be a lack of consensus between various experts and governments as to what will work best, partly thanks to the limited evidence. However, there have been a number of new studies that give us some indications.

One of the first measures many countries try to prevent the disease reaching them but also to limit its spread after it is established, is to ban travel in and/or out of a region. A study on restrictions in Italy showed they reduced travel by 50% in affected regions after three weeks.

A global analysis that modelled how travel restrictions have affected transmission revealed that a travel ban in Wuhan delayed the inevitable epidemic progression by only three to five days in Mainland China. But travel restrictions were effective in reducing international transmission by nearly 80%, suggesting that such bans can be effective when paired with other interventions.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

One strategy that does seem to be effective at interrupting the transmission of the virus is social distancing, minimising social contact by limiting public gatherings and getting people to stay in their homes unless necessary. We have seen evidence for this in the slowdown of new cases in China and South Korea, as well as the relatively low numbers of cases in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.

European countries have learned the hard lessons from the rapid spread of the virus in Italy and

are implementing social distancing measures in the first stages of the outbreak. This includes the UK, which has ramped up the limited measures it introduced initially. But there are ongoing debates over whether social distancing should be encouraged or enforced, and whether social isolation should apply to the whole population or the groups most at risk.

These options reflect two main approaches: mitigation and suppression. These have been modelled in a report by the scientists from Imperial College London advising the UK government on its approach. The aim of mitigation is to delay the spread of infection to avoid a large peak in healthcare demand that could overwhelm the health system.

This was the UK's initial strategy, which involved encouraging those with symptoms to stay at home, and testing and treating only those with moderate or severe symptoms. It is only likely to work in countries with very robust health systems that can cope with a surge of mild and severe cases. But the Imperial report showed that the UK's National Health Service (NHS) would still be overwhelmed by pursuing mitigation, and that suppression would be better to reduce the number of deaths both from COVID-19 and other causes.

Suppression consists of halting the progression of the pandemic in a shorter period, keeping the total number of cases very low. It involves more extensive social distancing even among those at low risk from the disease, banning public gatherings and potentially closing schools and other public venues. This can be done on a voluntary basis or with an enforced lockdown, as has been implemented in parts of China with a positive outcome.

But there are other factors to consider besides the effect on the spread of disease. Women may be more vulnerable to the infection given the fact they make up most of the health workforce. School closures may force health workers and other essential personnel to stay at home to look after their children. Children from low-income families will not have the same resources to learn.

Lockdowns may trigger or aggravate mental health problems. People living with depression and anxiety will suffer from withdrawing social contact and psychotherapy. Elderly households will be iso-

lated. Victims of domestic violence will be confined to the same space as their aggressors.

Evidence from China suggests that suppression is possible in the short term without a massive increase of cases after the measures are lifted (at least so far). It remains to be seen what the optimal duration of lockdowns should be and whether it's possible for suppression measures to work consistently or even be kept in place for longer.

It is possible to pursue a combined strategy of intermittent social distancing, guided by changes in the spread of the disease. This involves relaxing restrictions for short periods and observing the effect. If the number of cases rebounds, suppression measures need to be reintroduced. This could help prevent people from becoming so psychologically fatigued by the restrictions that they start to ignore them, although behavioural scientists have argued there's no evidence for this problem.

TESTING

One final element that South Korea's success in limiting the spread of the disease suggests is essential is the testing of suspected cases. Evidence from one of the initial clusters of COVID-19 in Italy supports the idea that widespread testing coupled with quarantining sufferers can significantly reduce the number of people infected and halt the disease progression.

Without working out who has the disease and ensuring they self-isolate, it's much harder to break the infection chain. The World Health Organization is encouraging widespread testing, but many scientists disagree because testing everyone is unnecessary, could induce a panic and raises the question of how to counsel patients about their result.

There is also a shortage of test kits in certain countries and screening capacities are stretched in countries with many cases. Not only does this make stopping the spread of the disease difficult, but it also means less accurate evidence about whether measures are working.

[Claudia Abreu Lopes is Research Fellow, International Institute for Global Health (IIGH), United Nations University; Sanae Okamoto is Researcher in Behavioural Science, Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute (MERIT), United Nations University]

How to spot coronavirus fake news – an expert guide

SAMANTHA VANDERSLOTT
theconversation.com

The proliferation of fake news about the COVID-19 pandemic has been labelled a dangerous "infodemic". Fake news spreads faster and more easily today through the internet, social media and instant messaging. These messages may contain useless, incorrect or even harmful information and advice, which can hamper the public health response and add to social disorder and division.

Confusingly some fake news also contains a mixture of correct information, which makes it difficult to spot what is true and accurate. Fake news may also be shared by trusted friends and family, including those who are doctors and nurses. They might not have read the full story before sharing or just glanced over it. Before you decide to share, make sure to read stories properly and follow some checks to determine the accuracy.

If the story appears to claim a much higher level of certainty in its advice and arguments than other stories, this is questionable. People will be seeking certainty in a time of high uncertainty, anxiety and panic. So it is only natural to more readily accept information that resolves, reassures and provides easy solutions – unfortunately, often in a false way.

Similarly, if a story is more sur-

prising or upsetting than other stories it is worth double-checking, as fake news will try to grab your attention by being more exaggerated than real stories.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Source. Question the source. References have been made to "Taiwanese experts" or "Japanese doctors" or "Stanford University" during the outbreak. Check on official websites if stories are repeated there. If a source is "a friend of a friend", this is a rumour unless you also know the person directly.
- Logo: Check whether any organisation's logo used in the message looks the same as on the official website.
- Bad English: Credible journalists and organisations are less likely to make repeated spelling and grammar mistakes. Also, anything written entirely in capital letters or containing a lot of exclamation marks should raise your suspicions.
- Pretend social media accounts: Some fake accounts mimic the real thing. For example, the unofficial Twitter handle @BBCNewsTonight, which was made to look like the legitimate @BBCNews account, shared a fake sto-

ry about the actor Daniel Radcliffe testing positive for coronavirus. Media platforms try to remove or flag fake accounts and stories as well as verify real ones. Look out for what their policies are to try to do this.

- Over-encouragement to share: Be wary if the message presses you to share – this is how viral messaging works.
- Use fact-checking websites: Websites such as APFactCheck and Full Fact highlight common fake news stories. You can also use a search engine to look up the title of the article to see if it has been identified as fake news by the mainstream media.

WHO TO TRUST

The best sources to go to for health information about COVID-19 are your government health websites and the World Health Organization website. Primary sources are generally better than news articles.

Even government messaging and the mainstream media can get things wrong, but they are more trustworthy than unverified sources on social media and viral messaging. For instance, The Conversation is a more trusted source because all content is written by academics who are experts in their fields.

Charlatans have been promoting false preventions and cures for people to spend their money on. For example, the New York attorney general has had to send cease and desist notices for claims that toothpaste, dietary supplements and creams will prevent and cure COVID-19.

The effects can also be more serious than losing some cash. Iran has reported at least 44 people died from alcohol poisoning after drinking bootleg alcohol in a misguided attempt to cure COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the most basic and correct advice given so far does not offer a miracle or special insight. Wash your hands often (use hand sanitisers if you cannot), avoid touching your face, and sneeze or cough into the crook of your elbow or a tissue (and throw it away in a bag-lined bin). Avoid crowds and public places, keep a sensible distance from people, and do not travel unless absolutely necessary. Now many governments are introducing measures including travel bans and quarantines that need to be followed to protect the health of everyone, especially the most vulnerable.

We can all get caught out. Think twice about the messages currently circulating and help guide your family and friends to decide what to trust.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Researcher in Social Sciences, University of Oxford]

Share trading should be stopped: TMC MP in LS

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): A TMC member in Lok Sabha on Friday proposed that the government close share trading in the country on account of "bloodbath" on Dalal Street.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, Saugata Roy (TMC) said there is a bloodbath in the stock market and huge amount of investors' wealth has been wiped out.

"I have a proposal for the government. Share trading should be stopped as there is a bloodbath in the stock market," he said.

He said there was a hope of announcement of some kind of fiscal stimulus by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the nation on Thursday.

"But he did not speak about that," Roy said, adding US President



Donald Trump has announced USD one trillion fund to deal with the outbreak of coronavirus.

Intervening, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said the prime minister has announced setting up of a COVID-19 economic response task force.

The government, he said, is taking steps to deal with the matter.

"...I do not want to politicise the issue," he said, adding, "If you want to say something, give suggestions to the government".

The task force will intervene if the situa-

tion warrants, he said and added that panic is not good. Manish Tewari (INC) demanded an investigation into a suspected coronavirus patient committing suicide at the Safdarjung Hospital here.

He alleged that the 23-year old, who landed here from Sydney and

suspected to be infected with COVID-19, allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of the Safdarjung Hospital on Wednesday, soon after he was admitted to the facility here by airport authorities.

Tewari said authorities did not give proper information to his mother about his whereabouts and the family ran from one hospital to other.

He said the postmortem was also carried out only on Friday.

"I request the home minister to undertake an investigation into this incident," he said.

He said there was no circumstance for him to commit suicide if he was effected by COVID-19.

The incident also reflects the psychological pressure being faced by people, the Congress leader said.

COVID-19: Bodoland Territorial Council election deferred

GUWAHATI, MAR 20 (PTI): The Bodoland Territorial Council election has been deferred in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic, an official said on Friday.

Polls to the 40 constituencies of the BTC was earlier scheduled on April 4 and it can now be held by April-end, the official said.

The BTC's jurisdiction is over four districts of Assam -- Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri -- and they are



collectively known as Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts.

"We have issued a notification deferring the election" due to the measures taken by the state government to prevent

the spread of the deadly COVID-19, Assam State Election Commissioner Alok Kumar told PTI.

Asked when the elections would be held, he said: "Most probably by the end of next month."

Tributes pour in for PK, the man with 'golden kick'

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): Prominent personalities from all walks of life joined athletes cutting across sports to pay their tributes to PK Banerjee after the football legend's 83-year-old heart stopped beating following a long battle with the uncontrollables.

From cricket greats Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly to renowned actor Ajay Devgn, Twitter was flooded with messages that relived fond memories associated with the man, whose name goes well beyond the sport he played.

"Heartfelt condolences on the passing of the great Indian footballer PK Banerjee! Have fond memories of meeting him on a few occasions and the positivity he spread. May his soul Rest In Peace!" Tendulkar tweeted.

Banerjee was suffering from respiratory problems due to pneumonia and had an underlying history of Parkinson's disease, dementia and heart problem.

He was on life support at a hospital here since March 2 and breathed his last at 12:40pm on Friday.

"Lost a very dear person today .. someone who I loved and respected enormously.. someone who had so much influence in my career when I was a 18 year old boy .. his positivity was infectious .. may his soul rest in peace..," Ganguly tweeted.

Devgn, a big name in the hindi film industry, said, "Had the good fortune of meeting foot-

ball legend PK Banerjee in Kolkata during the Maidaan schedule in November. Sad to hear about his demise. RIP, the man with the golden kick"

Indian football's biggest player in the present day, Sunil Chhetri called him a pioneer.

"I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to the family of Mr. PK Banerjee as well as to the entire Indian football fraternity.

"He was a pioneer in every sense of the word, and his achievements will forever have a place in Indian footballing history. Rest in peace," Chhetri said.

The political class also recalled his contribution to the sport and life in general.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said Banerjee's death has saddened him.

"...a legendary figure in the world of Football in India. It's a massive loss for the nation's footballing fraternity. I pay my heartfelt tributes to the departed soul," he tweeted.

Former Sports Minister Ajay Maken tweeted with a photograph, "The man with a golden kick-legendary P.K. Banerjee no more with us! RIP #PKBanerjee.

"PK Banerjee famously scored an equaliser to hold France to a 1-1 draw during the 1960 Olympics. "My fond memories as Union Sports Minister - with him on felicitation of 1960 Olympians! Down pointing backhand index."

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote, "PK Banerjee's

unparalleled contribution to Indian football will be etched in our memories & he will continue to serve as an inspiration for generations to come.

"Condolences to fans, family and the sporting fraternity for this irreparable loss." Union minister Babul Supriyo and West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankar also expressed their grief.

"Knew him so very well personally, had gone to his place several times. A vivacious competitor on ground, a tough taskmaster but a very affectionate soul & that's what made him a father figure to so many players. Amal Dutta & PK Banerjee both gone! End of an Era. RIP PradipDa," Supriyo tweeted.

India cricketer Wridhiman Saha was saddened too, and so were a few of his cricket colleagues.

"Extremely saddened to hear about the passing away of Legendary P.K.Banerjee. One of the greats of the Indian Football. His contribution towards #IndianFootball will never be forgotten. Rest in Peace," Saha tweeted.

Former footballer Raman Vijayan said, "RIP PK Banerjee Sir Great legend..Fantastic coach.. We will miss you Sir."

Director Shoojit Sirkar wrote, "RIP P.K. Banerjee. Indian Football Legend." A member of the holy trinity, that also included Chuni Goswami and Tulsidas Balam, Banerjee was the last surviving scorer of the 1962 Asiad gold-winning team.

Let's work together in tackling coronavirus: Mamata



KOLKATA, MAR 20 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made a proposal to stay indoors and urged everybody to work together in fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The chief minister made a slew of announcements, including the creation of a state emergency relief fund to collect aid from those willing to donate.

Banerjee also requested the Centre to send necessary medical kits at the earliest.

The state government would provide rice, which is distributed in

ration shops, for free over the next six months, benefiting 7.5 crore people of the state, she said.

Banerjee announced that state government employees would in rotation till March 31.

"From next week, state government employees will work in rotation. Fifty per cent will work from home through e-office system. This roster system will be in place till March 31," she said.

Asked if she supported Modi's proposal of "Jana curfew" on Sunday, the CM said: "In this crisis situation, the PM has made a proposal. Let us all work together in tackling the pandemic.

24-hr lockdown in Shillong on Saturday

SHILLONG, MAR 20 (PTI): Shillong will go into lockdown on Saturday, with markets, offices, commercial establishments and public transport shut for 24 hours, as a preventive measure to check the spread of Covid-19, officials said. The order, however, will not be applicable to security forces and medical teams on duty, she said.

"All public transport will stay off the roads and operations will remain suspended at markets and commercial establishments. Assembly of five or more people in public areas has also been prohibited," East Khasi Hills District Magistrate M W Nongbri said.

The lockdown order has been issued to ensure social distancing, in

line with the advisories issued by the health department, she insisted.

Nongbri said the order will come into force from midnight.

Tourist spots across the state have been shut and inbound visitors mandatorily asked to observe self-quarantine for two weeks.

Local authorities in other districts have been asked by the government to issue shutdown orders on weekly markets until further orders.

Churches and mosques, too, have been asked to also shut their doors at least till March 31 to avoid mass gatherings, a senior home department official said.

Meghalaya has not recorded any Covid-19 case so far.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Derek O'Brien goes into self-quarantine: Sources

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): TMC MP Derek O'Brien self-quarantined himself after BJP MP Dushyant Singh, who sat beside him in Parliament, revealed that he he attended a party by singer Kanika Kapoor, who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Singh and his mother, former Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje, have gone into self-quarantine after attending Kapoor's party in Lucknow, Raje tweeted on Friday.

Kapoor has become the first Bollywood celebrity to test positive for coronavirus in the country and says she's under complete quarantine and medical care.

There were reports that the singer landed in Lucknow from the United Kingdom and was admitted in a city hospital after she



showed signs of flu.

"This Govt is putting us all at risk. The PM says self isolate yourself but the Parliament is on. I was sitting next to Dushyant the other day

for 2.5 hours. There are two more MPs who are in self isolation. The session should be deferred," the TMC MP had said earlier when the news of Singh broke.

World Bank, ADB give USD 588 million to Pak to fight coronavirus pandemic



BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, MAR 20 (PTI): The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have committed to providing USD 588 million to Pakistan for its emergency response to fight the coronavirus and to address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, a media report said on Friday.

According to an official statement, the World Bank would provide USD 238 million and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) USD 350 million to Pakistan in support for the COVID-19 emergency response and to tackle the socio-economic disruption associated with it.

The announcement

was made by the Planning Commission after a meeting with representatives of the two lending agencies on Pakistan's preparedness and response to fight COVID-19, the Dawn newspaper reported.


The meeting, presided over by Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, was attended by World Bank Country Director Illango Patcha Muthu, ADB Country Director Xiaohong Yang, besides other officials and representatives of the ministries of economic affairs, finance and national health services.

The meeting also

approved in principle a project concept "Pakistan National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19".

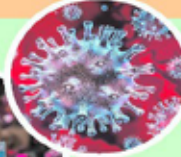
The participants of the meeting agreed that not only they needed to enhance cooperation to jointly fight challenges but also work to demonstrate firm commitment for a multi-faceted cooperation in different fields, the report said.

Pakistan's coronavirus cases sharply rose to 453 on Thursday, a day after it reported its first two casualties due to COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed 9,800 lives and infected more than 232,650 people in 158 countries and territories.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7029372100</p> <p>WEST : 9593297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9841957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p> </div>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

In self-isolation, I have found some freedom: Mary Kom

Poonam Mehra
New Delhi, Mar 20 (PTI): The COVID-19 pandemic has isolated her from the world outside but iconic Indian boxer M C Mary Kom says the forced slowdown of life as usual has also redefined the meaning of freedom for her.

Mary Kom has self-isolated at her Delhi residence since returning from the this month's Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Jordan where she booked herself a second Olympic berth.

The precautionary measure was necessitated by a training trip to Italy before landing in Jordan even though the entire Indian team got COVID-19 negative certificates from the IOC.

"I am chilling, doing my exercises, taking care of my fitness and playing with my children after being away from them for almost one month," Mary Kom told PTI in an interview.

"That's the best part of this isolation, I am with my family through the day without having to think of anything. My appeal to everyone is don't panic, try and stay at home if you can and spend time with your family," she said.

"In my case, I have felt a sense of freedom with this isolation. I have realised that I am not feeling the stress of a daily schedule right now."

The six-time world champion is also a sitting Rajya Sabha MP. Does she miss not being in Parliament when it is in session, given that she is among the most regular MPs?

"I hope to attend the last few days of the session. My isolation is till end of this month. Parliament will function for a few more days after that," she said referring to the schedule of the ongoing budget session which runs till April 3.

"Right now, all I know is that my children are very happy. For 10-15 days, they have got their mom and that too without any interruption," she quipped.

Relaxed she might be at home but Mary Kom said she understands

the fear of the virus outbreak, which has killed more than 9,000 people globally.

In India four have died so far and the number of positive cases stands at more than 190 now.

"My children, out of innocence, ask me, 'mama this virus will stay na?' They are happy being at home playing and missing school but I know how serious it is. It is a scary situation and I hope everyone follows the health guidelines. It is crucial that everyone does," she said.

"That's the only way we can save ourselves. Everyone has to be careful," she added.

"The precautions that I am taking include not giving appointments to anyone right now," she further stated.

A five-time Asian champion besides being a gold-medallist at the Commonwealth and Asian Games, Mary Kom would be competing in her last Olympic Games if it goes ahead as scheduled in July-August in Tokyo.

There are growing concerns about the Games' fate with several current and former athletes demanding that IOC put their safety first. The IOC, however, has resolutely stated that the quadrennial showpiece will go ahead on time despite the current crisis.

"I don't think the Games will be postponed or cancelled. It is too huge an event to be shifted just like that. It will cause chaos. In any case, it's not in my hands. So, it's better I don't say much," she said.

But will the current situation, in which travel restrictions by most countries have nearly brought the world to a halt, have a bearing on her preparations for Tokyo?

"Some planning is required. I haven't yet made up my mind, Training here is also pretty smooth. There is nothing missing. We will see how the situation is in the next couple of weeks before deciding on whether going outside is an option," she explained.

Rangers allow foreign players to return home

LONDON, MAR 20 (AFP): Scottish giants Rangers have allowed their foreign players to return home while the football calendar is suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Manager Steven Gerrard, who will also split his time between Glasgow and home in Liverpool, believes his foreign contingent are best to spend the shutdown nearer their loved ones if they can travel, with restrictions on border crossings across the world.

Football in Scotland has been indefinitely suspended to help halt the spread of the coronavirus.

"Players from out-with the UK have been allowed to return home but are on strict programming including diet recording," Rangers said

in a statement. "Some players have decided not to return home and have remained in Glasgow.

"The club's management are in daily dialogue with each player and are monitoring the ongoing situation regarding the virus.

"The manager will continue to balance his time between Glasgow and home during this period of uncertainty," Sonia O'Neill from Rangers women's team has already flown home to Canada.

"A huge thank you to the staff of @RangersWFC for getting me on the next flight home," O'Neill posted on Twitter.

"Extremely thankful to be home, it's crazy to see how many people are stuck overseas but I hope to be back in Glasgow soon and this all passes over.

PK Banerjee: Character who carried essence of Kolkata Maidan

KUSHAN SARKAR

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): He could pack a punch in 35 yard pile drivers as a player, mix emotional quotient in tactical moves, and regale any audience with unheard stories. PK Banerjee will forever remain more than a sum total of his parts in Indian football's golden folklore.

One of the greatest Indian footballers, who dazzled as a player in the 'Swinging 60s' and was probably the most sought-after coach during 'Those 70s Show' of Kolkata maidan, 'PK', or, Pradeep 'Da' to one and all, is an enduring love story that will not end even in his death. Two Olympics (Melbourne 1956, Rome 1960), three Asian Games (58, 62, 66), gold medal as a player and bronze as a coach (1970 Bangkok) in his first big tournament, his credentials remains unmatched and are unlikely to be emulated.

PK was not just a player but a character who epitomised everything that Bengalis loved over the years.

Good football, great stories and everlasting bond.

Kabir Suman, the man who brought about a renaissance in Bengali music in the early 90s, through his unforgettable number 'Ei Shohor Jane Amar Prothom Sobkicu' (This city knows my every firsts) had a couple of lines appropriate for a player of such calibre.

'Prothom Khela laker dhaare Prothom football



Manna, PK, Chunir r chobi Biraat Sombol'

('My first game of football beside the Rabindra Sarobar Lake when photos of Sailen Manna, PK Banerjee and Chuni Goswami were treasured possession').

The particular lyric speaks about how PK, for the last 50 years, was ingrained in the quintessential Bengali's collective conscience.

So how big a player was PK? There are no video recordings of his playing days but just imagine a player scoring against Japan and South Korea in a single edition of Asian Games.

"I don't think anyone had

more power in his shots as Pradeep and that kind of with the ball speed down the flanks. And add to it, terrific ability to read match situations," his best friend and skipper of the 1962 Gold winning team Chuni Goswami had once said in an old interview.

It was his match reading ability that made Banerjee one of India's greatest football coaches from the 70s to 90s.

Probably he was India's first 'football manager' when the term was not in vogue in this part of the world.

Talk to any of his wards who played for East Bengal, Mohun Bagan or India, they would tell you that he was a

pro at handling gigantic egos in his own inimitable style and get the best out of them.

Be it the temperamental duo of Subhash Bhowmick or Gautam Sarkar or the moody Samresh Chowdhury or the bullish Mohammed Habib, he had a specific "dose" for everyone. They were great players who needed a great "Man Manager".

The big derby days during the 70s -- be it an IFA Shield final at the Eden Gardens or the Durand summit clash at the Ambedkar or the Rovers Cup at the Cooperage -- any match in which he was coaching one of the sides was an event in itself.

His "vocal tonic", as they popularly referred it in the

Maidans, is stuff of legends. So what was vocal tonic? A former East Bengal legend known for his bicycle kicks recalled a game in the 70s when the team was trailing.

"Pradeep Da would keep an East Bengal Jersey on the floor and show it to us and say 'Look at that jersey. It's your mother and some people are making fun of your mother and you guys are doing nothing'.

"The next thing we knew was we were so charged that we scored twice in the second half. It might not work now but it worked for us in 1970s when emotions played a big part," he had said in 2010.

Prior to the 1997 Federation Cup semi-final, a match that attracted 120,000 people at the Salt Lake Stadium, erstwhile Mohun Bagan coach Amal Datta had mocked a young Bhaichung Bhutia, calling him "Chung Chung Bhutia".

PK used the derogatory remark by Datta to fire up Bhutia who scored a hat-trick in that game. Such was his oratory skills that before the 1990 Ranji Trophy final against Delhi, Bengal captain Sambaran Banerjee called him to the dressing room to address his players for an hour. It worked.

An unbelievable raconteur, legend has it that he could even invoke a smile off a very serious late Chief Minister Jyoti Basu.

With his demise, Kolkata Maidan, which many feel is fast losing its character, lost one of its very own.

British Olympic chiefs issue virus vow over Tokyo Games

LONDON, MAR 20 (AFP): British Olympic Association chiefs insist they will not "endanger the health" of athletes by encouraging them to prepare for Tokyo 2020 if the coronavirus makes it unsafe.

The International Olympic Committee remains committed to the Olympics going ahead in Japan on schedule on July 24.

But many athletes have raised concerns that current social distancing restrictions imposed due to the pandemic are making it impossible to prepare properly.

Guy Learmonth, hoping to be picked in the

800m, this week became the first British athlete to warn that the risks of going to Tokyo are too high in the circumstances.

Athletes' frustration was not reserved for the British, with Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi also blasting the IOC.

With Euro 2020 and the Copa America postponed because of the virus, there have been calls to cancel the Olympics or push it back, given the widespread chaos in the global sporting schedule at present.

The BOA support the IOC's decision-making process but said: "We can be categorically clear

that we will not endanger the health and well-being of the athletes or wider delegation at any point.

"It is imperative to preserve competitive integrity for athletes, but it is clearly only wise for athletes to continue to prepare for the Games where it is safe and appropriate to do so, with-in relevant Government and public health guidelines."

Officials from the BOA and British sports federations returned from Tokyo this week following a series of venue and athletes' village visits, and reported that preparations appeared to be on track.

Some Spanish clubs decide to leave virus tests for others



MADRID, MAR 20 (AP): Some soccer clubs in Spain have decided not to use the coronavirus testing kits offered to them by the Spanish league, saying there are others who need them more.

The league last week offered some 500 tests to its teams, prioritizing those that recently traveled to high-risk areas or already had players infected.

Celta Vigo said Thursday it wouldn't use the

tests because it there are other groups in greater need for them in Spain.

Valladolid said it would not test its players at the moment, since none of them have shown symptoms. Team spokesman David Espinar said the tests should be prioritized for other people in the country, which is struggling to battle the pandemic.

Spain has more than 17,000 people infected with the virus. Nearly 770 people have died

and more than 930 were in intensive care.

First-division club Alav s on Wednesday said it had 15 people infected three players, seven members of its coaching staff and five other employees.

Valencia and Espanyol also were hit by the virus. Valencia said 35% of its squad and coaching staff were infected, while Espanyol said six members of its team and staff had the virus.

BWF cancels five more tournaments amid COVID-19 pandemic



NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Friday suspended five more tournaments, including three continental championships crucial for Tokyo Olympics qualification but stripped of that significance now, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic in the host cities.

The announcement came a week after the BWF put a halt to all of its events till April 12.

"...a further five tournaments have also been cancelled or postponed," the BWF said in a statement.

"This includes the suspension of the three Continental Confederation championships scheduled for week 17 on the BWF Tournament Calendar one of the last chances for athletes to gain qualification for Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games before the April 26 deadline," it added.

The suspended tournaments are Croatian International (April 16-19), Peru International 2020 (April 16-19), European Championships (April 21-26), Badminton Asia Championships (April 21-26) and Pan

Am Individual Championships 2020 (April 23-26).

"The escalation of the COVID-19 outbreak globally has led the BWF, in close consultation and consensus with its Continental Confederations and Host Member Associations, to confirm the suspension of these tournaments," the BWF said.

The COVID-19 global death toll has climbed past 10,000 with more than 250,000 infected. The BWF had drawn severe criticism from players for continuing with the All England Championships despite the rising threat of the deadly virus.

"The health, safety and well-being of all athletes, their entourage, officials and the greater badminton community remains the top priority for all relevant parties," the BWF said.

"Heightened travel and quarantine restrictions and the subsequent extreme logistical complications this has caused also contributed to the suspension," it added.

The European Championships were scheduled in Ukraine, while

Asia event was to be held in Philippines.

The Asia Championships had already relocated once, switching from Wuhan, China to Manila due to the COVID-19 outbreak in that city. All top Indian shuttlers, including PV Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, B Sai Praneeth and Kidambi Srikanth were scheduled to compete at the event.

"Badminton Pan Am also said it was no longer feasible to stage the XXIV Pan Am Individual Championships 2020 in Peru because of health and safety fears linked to COVID-19.

"The tournament was originally planned for Guatemala City," the BWF said.

All five tournaments were to be played within the Tokyo Olympic Games qualifying period, but will "no longer contribute to Olympic qualifying as they will now fall outside the qualification window."

"BWF will make a further announcement on any implications related to the Olympic qualification period at a later date," the BWF said.

Portable AI device can use coughing sounds to monitor COVID-19 trends

BOSTON, MAR 20 (PTI): Scientists have developed a portable device powered by artificial intelligence (AI) which can detect coughing and crowd size in real time, then analyse the data to directly monitor trends in flu-like illnesses such as COVID-19.

The researchers from the University of Massachusetts Amherst In the US said the device called FluSense is envisioned for use in hospitals, healthcare waiting rooms and larger public spaces.

The cutting edge-computing platform may expand the arsenal of health surveillance tools used to forecast seasonal flu and other viral respiratory outbreaks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or SARS, they said.

The researchers noted that models like these can be lifesavers by directly informing the public health response during a flu epidemic.

These data sources can help determine the timing for flu vaccine campaigns, potential travel restrictions, the allocation of medical supplies and more, they explained.

"This may allow us to predict flu trends in a much more accurate manner," said Tauhidur Rahman, co-author of the study published in the journal Proceedings of the ACM on Interactive, Mobile, Wearable and Ubiquitous Technologies.

The FluSense platform processes a low-cost microphone array and thermal imaging data with a Raspberry Pi and neural computing engine. It stores no personally identifiable information, such as speech data or distinguishing images, noted Ph.D. student and study lead author Forsad Al Hossain.

The researchers first developed a lab-based cough model. They then trained the algorithm to create thermal images representing people, and then to count them.

"Our main goal was to build predictive models at the population level, not the individual level," Rahman said. The researchers placed the FluSense devices, encased in a rectangular box about the size of a large dictionary, in four healthcare waiting rooms.

From December 2018 to July 2019, the FluSense platform collected and analysed more than 350,000 thermal images and 21 million non-speech audio samples from the public waiting areas. The researchers found that FluSense was able to accurately predict daily illness rates at the university clinic.

Multiple and complementary sets of FluSense signals "strongly correlated" with laboratory-based testing for flu-like illnesses and influenza itself, according to the researchers.

"The early symptom-related information captured by FluSense could provide valuable additional and complementary information to current influenza prediction efforts," the researchers noted.

Coronavirus: Indian-American doctors seek total lockdown and self-quarantine of US

BY LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, MAR 20 (PTI): Concerned over the rapid spread of the deadly coronavirus across the US, an influential group of Indian-American doctors has urged the federal and State governments to enforce a total lockdown and self-quarantine of the entire nation to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections.

A total of 218 people have died in the US due to the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic, while there are 14,299 confirmed infected cases in the country. Coronavirus cases have been reported in all the 50 States in the US and District of Columbia as well as Puerto Rico.

Globally, the death toll from the virus has risen to over 9,800 with more than 232,650 cases in 158 countries and territories. "American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin or AAPI urges the federal, state and local governments and policy makers to advocate for more immediate and severe action to prevent the crisis from becoming unmanageable," said Suresh Reddy, AAPI president.

Representing nearly 100,000 physicians of Indian-origin in the United States, AAPI is the largest ethnic medical association in the country. AAPI members are



concerned over the growing COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on its society, healthcare system and economy, Reddy said.

"While applauding our fellow healthcare workers, including physicians, nurses, EMS, paramedics, medical assistants, and healthcare professionals, we are saddened that many of these heroes are being infected with COVID-19 while treating patients and often without personal protection equipment, endangering their safety and that of their families," Reddy said. "We

urge the authorities to provide the much needed equipment, testing and facilities enabling them to be isolated and treated, which will reduce our healthcare workforce at precisely the time we need them to be healthy and treating patients," he said. Since the coronavirus outbreak in China's Wuhan city in December, AAPI has had several meetings.

"In our efforts to contain and prevent this pandemic, we are recommending that the authorities across the nation implement and enforce a total lockdown of the nation,

social distancing, and enforce self-quarantine of the total population, as has been practised in other countries in order to flatten the infection curve," said Deeptha Nedunchezian, chair of AAPI's COVID-19 Response Task Force.

Arunachellum Einstein, member of the AAPI's COVID-19 Response Task Force, said, with as many as 222,642 confirmed coronavirus cases across the world, nearing 10,000 confirmed cases in the US alone and with nearly 10 per cent of those tested for the coronavirus

verse effect on both the senior populations and fellow physicians and healthcare workers who are on the front lines fighting the infection. "It's essential to create a wholesale expansion of free COVID-19 testing available in order for identifying asymptomatic carries and then isolating them," he said.

Anupama Gotimukula, AAPI vice president warned that if the current trend continued without effective action: "we would likely only see an effect on infection rates in 5-6 days, which means we could expect a tripling of infections and deaths in the interim."

During the COVID-19 national emergency, which also constitutes a nationwide public health emergency, covered health care providers subject to the HIPAA rules may seek to communicate with patients, and provide telehealth services, through remote communications technologies. "We appreciate regulations that remove HIPAA requirements for telemedicine to allow easier adaption and implementation," said Ravi Kolli, AAPI secretary.

AAPI is urging the government to make telemedicine to be allowed for services and enforce that all insurance companies and government systems reimburse for services provided by medical professionals in these critical times.

Italy overtakes China with most virus deaths, California goes on lockdown



LOS ANGELES, MAR 20 (AFP): Italy has surpassed China as the country with the most deaths from coronavirus as California, home to more than 39 million people, was placed under lockdown in the most drastic containment measure yet by a US state.

President Donald Trump said meanwhile that the United States is fast-tracking antimalarial drugs for use as a treatment and lashed out at China for not informing the world earlier about the original outbreak.

China for its part reported on Friday a second day with no new domestic cases since the virus appeared in the central city of Wuhan in December, before spreading worldwide.

While there was a glimmer of hope in China, several nations tightened their borders and imposed lockdowns, trapping tens of millions of people in their homes.

And the UN chief warned "millions" could die if the virus spreads unchecked around the globe.

World leaders also unleashed nearly a trillion dollars to prop up the teetering global economy, only to see the once-in-a-century pandemic seemingly spiral further out of control.

The death toll soared in Europe as Italy announced another 427 fatalities on Thursday, taking its total to 3,405, according to a tally compiled by AFP from official sources.

China has officially reported 3,245 deaths from the virus, which can cause respiratory failure, particularly in the elderly.

France reported 108 more deaths over the last 24 hours, bringing the total number to 372.

Globally, the death toll from the virus has risen to over 9,800 with more than 232,650 cases in 158 countries and territories, according

to the AFP tally.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Thursday of the virus's potentially devastating effects. "If we let the virus spread like wildfire -- especially in the most vulnerable regions of the world -- it would kill millions of people," Guterres said.

The number of infections and deaths in the rest of the world has surpassed those in China, which appears to have staunchened the virus with strict measures including a complete quarantine of Wuhan since January. Trump, who has come under fire for his response to the crisis, charged Thursday that the world was paying for China's lack of transparency about the outbreak there.

"It could have been contained to that one area of China where it started. And certainly the world is paying a big price for what they did," he said.

Trump said US authorities were fast-tracking antimalarials chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine for use as a coronavirus treatment, making them available "almost immediately." The drugs are synthetic forms of quinine, which has been used to treat malaria for centuries.

As the toll surged in Italy, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said the national lockdown, which has been copied around Europe, would be prolonged to April 3.

France also mooted extending its two-week lockdown ordered this week by President Emmanuel Macron, as the interior minister blasted "idiots" who flout home confinement rules and put others at risk. In Argentina, President Alberto Fernandez announced a "preventative and compulsory" lockdown from Friday to March 31, while Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state will close

its famed beaches as well as restaurants and bars for 15 days to try to contain the pandemic.

California Governor Gavin Newsom said the state's lockdown would begin Thursday evening in a "recognition of our interdependence." In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the country could "turn the tide" on coronavirus within 12 weeks -- but only if people heed advice to avoid social contact. The disease continued to hit high-profile figures with EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, Monaco's Prince Albert II and at least a half-dozen NBA players in the United States among those testing positive.

Also falling victim to the pandemic was the G7 summit in June, which was meant to be hosted by Trump at the Camp David presidential retreat near Washington. The group of seven wealthy democracies will now meet via videoconference. With countries paralysed by the pandemic and stock markets imploding, policymakers this week unleashed a wave of measures to shore up the global economy.

The European Central Bank announced a 750-billion-euro bond-buying scheme, dubbed the "big bazooka." In the United States, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin urged Congress to pass a USD 1-trillion emergency stimulus package. Wall Street finished higher Thursday following a volatile session as investors weighed the government stimulus measures against some of the first data pointing to a sharp US economic slowdown.

European stocks staged a rebound on the stimulus news, although Asian markets took another beating. The battle is only just beginning across the rest of the world, with the shadow of the virus lengthening across Africa.

The Nigerian mega-city of Lagos announced it would shut its schools while Burkina Faso confirmed the first death in sub-Saharan Africa.

Russia reported its first death and even the Pacific nation of Fiji said it had its first case.

Countries are taking increasingly drastic steps to stem infections, with Australia and New Zealand banning non-residents from arriving.

5.9-magnitude quake hits Tibet near Nepal border



BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, MAR 20 (PTI): A 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck China's remote Himalayan region of Tibet close to Nepal on Friday, authorities said.

The epicentre of the quake was located 28.63 degrees north latitude and 87.42 degrees east longitude, with a depth of 10 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Centre.

Tremors were felt in Tingri county of Xigaze city in Tibet near Mount Everest at 9:33 AM, the local government said, adding that no house

collapse or disruption of traffic and communications were reported.

The county government has sent officials to villages and towns to collect more information, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Tingri borders Nepal to the south. Most areas of the county belong to the Mount Everest National Nature Reserve, it said.

In the meantime, nine firefighters and three fire tenders were dispatched to the epicentre. More than 100 firefighters and dozens of vehicles are on standby. Meanwhile,

tremors were also felt in Nepal's capital city Kathmandu and surrounding districts.

The earthquake measuring 6.2 magnitude was recorded at National Seismological Centre in Kathmandu at 7.18 AM.

The epicenter of the earthquake was located at Quilling in Tibet, according to the National Seismological Centre of Nepal. No causality or damage to property was reported.

Five days ago, western Nepal's tourist hub Pokhara was hit by a 5-magnitude earthquake.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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BEACH BABE! Model, Candice Swanepoel enjoyed the water in a teeny bikini in Miami Beach.

My whole life has been a miracle: **Rajinikanth**

Mumbai, Mar 20 (PTI): From starting out as a bus conductor to becoming one of the biggest stars of the country, actor Rajinikanth says he looks at his life as nothing but a series of miracles. While working in the Bangalore Transport Service, Rajinikanth began acting in plays and eventually made his debut in K Balachander's 1975 Tamil drama, "Apoorva Raagangal". He went on to feature in Hindi films, including "Hum" with Amitabh Bachchan, "Chaalbaaz" with Sridevi and "Aatank Hi Aatank" with Aamir Khan.

The actor later found immense success with films like "Billa", "Baashha", "Sivaji", "Enthiran" among others.

More than four decades after his silver screen entry, Rajinikanth gears up for his TV debut with Discovery's, "Into The Wild with Bear Grylls".

Speaking about his life, Rajinikanth-- in excerpt from the adventure show-- said, "Well, yes, actually, my whole life has been a miracle. It's a miracle! Even consider this show for example, I never thought of this, not even in my dreams that one day I'll do a show like this for Discovery!"

The 69-year-old actor, who shot for the "Into The Wild with Bear Grylls" episode in

Bandipur National Park, is the second big Indian name after Prime Minister Narendra Modi to feature on the adventure show.

The special episode, which will air on March 23, will see Rajinikanth on an adventure trip with Grylls, doing stunts, discussing



wide variety of topics including intimate details about his personal life and issues close to his heart such as water conservation.

The show will air across 12 Discovery channels and the premiere on Discovery and Discovery HD will be available in eight languages including Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi and English.

The newly launched streaming app Discovery Plus will give access to the episode at 6 AM on March 23.

Bollywood bigwigs unite for video to spread awareness about coronavirus

MUMBAI, MAR 20 (PTI): Several top stars of the industry, including Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn, Madhuri Dixit and Ranveer Singh have come together for a special video to spread awareness about the novel coronavirus.

The one minute fifty second long video, an initiative by Rohit Shetty Picturez in collaboration with Maharashtra government, features actors appealing to citizen to tread with caution and safety amid the pandemic.

Bachchan took to Twitter to share the clip, writing, "The film fraternity pleads and cautions for safety and precaution... an initiative by the Industry and the CM Maharashtra."

The video begins with the 77-year-old saying that by taking necessary precautionary measures, "we can stop it from spreading."

"During this difficult time, it's very important that all of us together fulfil the responsibilities of a good citizen so that we can fight with this virus with caution and precaution rather than fear," Bachchan says. The clip features actors giving out important do's and don'ts in times of the pandemic.

Actor Anil Kapoor says it's time to pay attention to one's personal hygiene by washing hands regularly using soap, while Madhuri highlights the use of tissue or handkerchief to cover mouth while coughing or sneezing and disposing them off in a closed box. Ranveer says, "If there's no facility available to

wash hands at a place, then apply alcohol sanitiser in your hand."

Actor Shilpa Shetty advises against subscribing to any fat diet and asks to increase intake of nutritious food to

adds. Devgn says one step by the citizens towards safety "can save a lot of lives."

"If every citizen contributes by following these rules, then we all can prevent this danger. Stay healthy, stay safe,"



boost immunity. "Avoid unnecessary travel, maintain one metre distance from those who are ill," Varun Dhawan says in the video.

Arjun Kapoor urges to take "extra care of kids and elder people" because their chances of getting infected are the highest. Ayushmann Khurrana says whenever possible, people should work from home and asks not to crowd public places.

"Don't touch your face and eyes without washing your hands. If you have cough, fever or experience breathlessness, don't come in contact with anyone. Immediately see the doctor," Alia Bhatt

Akshay adds.

The video ends with a message "Together we can and we will fight this."

According to the Health Ministry data, the novel coronavirus cases in India rose to 195 on Friday after 22 fresh cases were reported from various parts of the country. The cases include 32 foreign nationals including 17 from Italy, 3 from the Philippines, two from the UK, one each belonging to Canada, Indonesia and Singapore.

The figure also includes four deaths reported from Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra so far.

Cannes Film Festival delayed over coronavirus concerns

CANNES, MAR 20 (PTI): The Cannes Film Festival has been postponed to contain the spread of the coronavirus. The event, which was scheduled for May 12 through 23, might be shifted to June or July, the organisers said.

"Several options are considered in order to preserve its running, the main one being a simple postponement," the organisers' statement said.

"As soon as the development of the French and international health situation will allow us to assess the real possibility, we will make our decision known, in accordance with our ongoing consultation with the French Government and Cannes City Hall as well as with the Festival's Board Members, Film industry professionals and all the partners of the event," they added.

The festival was expected to attract about 40,000 attendees, including delegates to the film market that operates alongside the screening schedule.

Filmmaker-activist Spike Lee, who was selected as the first black president of the festival's jury, welcomed the organisers' decision.

"The stuff that we love has to take a back seat: movies, TV, sports, the NBA is a global sport, baseball. So many things have been postponed, and I agree with this move," Lee told Variety.

The director added that if the festival happens on another date in future he

would be available to take on his role as jury president. "Let's not forget this is the world's biggest film festival, the world's biggest stage for cinema and I'll be the first black president of the jury."

Speculations that the 73rd edition of the premiere movie gala would be



cancelled or postponed were doing the rounds since March 8, when France brought in restrictions on mass gatherings, limiting them to 1,000 people, to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. However, festival president Pierre Lescure had said last week that he was reasonably optimistic the 2020 event would go ahead.

Total 372 people have died in France because of the deadly virus which originated in China's Wuhan city in December.

In past one month various events, festivals, shooting schedules and movie releases have been called off due to the COVID-19 virus, that has claimed over 9800 lives and infected more than 2,32,650 in 150 countries and territories.

Coronavirus: Release of Ranveer Singh-starrer '83' put on hold

MUMBAI, MAR 20 (PTI): After Akshay Kumar's "Sooryavanshi", Ranveer Singh-starrer cricket drama "83" is the the latest Bollywood film to indefinitely postpone its release due to coronavirus pandemic.

Ranveer took to his Twitter to share the news with his fans, saying "health and safety of the nation" came first.

The film, directed by Kabir Khan, was set to be released April 10 but it will now arrive in theatres at a later date.

"In the wake of the risks posed by the recent outbreak of Covid-19 and the growing health concerns, the release of '83' has been put on hold. We will take a decision regarding the next course of action once the conditions return to normal.

"We urge our fans to take all the necessary precautions and take care of their loved ones. '83' is a film about fighting the odds and we hope we all will bounce back from this soon," the statement from the team of '83' read.

The drama chronicles India's first World Cup win under the captaincy of Kapil Dev in 1983.

The film also stars Deepika Padukone, Hardy Sandhu, Tahis Bhasin, Jiva, Saqib Saleem, Pankaj Tripathi among others.

ARIES: Your time away from the matrix is giving you a chance to reconnect with yourself on a deeper level. But who says meditation and mindfulness has to be incense sticks and mantras? Art is meditation too, depending on the state of mind with which you approach it. Visualise yourself as a clear channel of creativity.

Tip: Let Spirit weave magic through you.

TAURUS: The storm may or may not have passed but you have developed the means to deal with the given circumstances in an evolved manner. When in doubt, tap into your inner reservoir of patience and resilience. See how you can make the 'now' better. Turning to meditation and mindfulness is an excellent way to stay centred. Yes, the thoughts will come and go.

Tip: Meditation will help you stay centred despite the chaos.

GEMINI: Geminis in toxic relationships, three words: cut it out. If somebody is constantly depleting your resources and making you question your own abilities, it's called gaslighting. What would you tell a friend who is in the same circumstances as you? Some of you may feel haunted by the ghosts of your past. Keep in mind that there is a reason things didn't work out. Rekindling the flames will do more harm than good.

Tip: Be mindful of your consumption habits.

CANCER: Sometimes you just have to put your phone on flight mode and give the project at hand your undivided attention. There's no better time to push your limits and show the

world what you are truly capable of. Keeping the distractions at bay will be challenging, but not impossible. If you're working from home right now, it's best to have boundaries in place so others don't weigh you down with unrealistic expectations. Head over heart. Cancer. You are not putting anybody else down by choosing yourself.

Tip: The project at hand needs undivided attention.

LEO: Who says working from home is dull and uninspiring? Create a conducive environment for yourself by decluttering and rearranging your possessions in a way that they support your sacred purpose. Oh, and while you're at it keep the elixir of life (aka ginger, turmeric, lemon, and honey tea) handy!

Tip: Find new ways to stay motivated professionally.

VIRGO: You win some, you lose some, and that's the way life goes. The cards are reminding you that the problems you are facing are not as big as you are making them out to be. Try to look at the given situation from a different perspective. This will help you understand their side of the story. The drama will take backstage once you focus on bringing in peace and harmony. As for the sacrifice you're having to make, know that it is minuscule in comparison to what you will receive.

Tip: Your sacrifice is in alignment with the greater good.

LIBRA: This is a sacred time in the Libra headquarters, one that is facilitating your journey inwards. Listen to what Spirit is communicating to you via dreams, visions, signs, and sym-

bols. They hold the master key to the future you are about to write. The more silent you are, the clearer the messages will become to you. Consider practicing Vipassana meditation (or silence) for a few hours today. The transformative practice assists mind-body connection and helps you become an observer rather than actively engaging with the ebb and flow of your emotions.

Tip: Become aware of the divine downloads.

SCORPIO: It's easy to practice kindness when everything is picture-perfect. The real test: how you show up for others in times of distress. Scorpio, the Universe is giving you a gold star for the compassion you are displaying at the moment. Take things up a notch. Spend quality time with your family members (or soul crew depending on who you share space with).

Tip: Laugh and make merry.

SAGITTARIUS: Let's remove the first two letters from 'unlucky in love'. What the cards are urging you to do is turn to the virtual world for romance. Remember, the intention with which you approach the given medium will make all the difference here. Negativity will attract douchebags. Keeping your heart open to possibilities will, on the other hand, align you with kindred spirits. Love at first sight is overrated. Share your likes and dislikes. Start a conversation about the things that matter. It's all about building an authentic connection, right?

Tip: You're about to get lucky in love.

CAPRICORN: Date nights don't always have to be about

painting the town red or being snapped by the paparazzi at 'it' places. This week, you're finding the joy in small, simple rituals like reorganising your space, upcycling your possessions or doing laundry together. Two is always better than one, Capricorn! As such, spending quality time with the fam is going to be big on your agenda.

Tip: Spend quality time with the crew.

AQUARIUS: House arrest isn't particularly easy. Neither is sharing space with family. Statutory warning: you will get triggered, Aquarius, and as a result you could lose patience with your loved ones. At times like these, it's important to embrace the virtues of kindness and compassion. We're all in this together, remember! On the upside, something you have been manifesting is likely to take a tangible form. Remember to send out a prayer of gratitude to the mysterious forces above.

Tip: Practice kindness and compassion.

PISCES: It's easy to put terms and conditions on the people in our lives. But true love does not understand 'ifs' and 'buts'. In fact, it does not understand the language of reason at all. What you're being asked to practice today: unconditional love. Make a conscious effort to honour the light in everybody. Shower upon them the gift of acceptance. Trust that the most challenging relationships will transform under the spell of your love.

Tip: Learning to accept people as they are will bring balance and harmony into your world.