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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim in complete lockdown again Too many circulars and contradictions confuse public

DECISIONS MADE AT MEETING CHAIRED BY CM

1. The State of Sikkim will continue to be in a state of complete lockdown till 03 May, 2020.
2. Relaxations will continue for MGNREGA works, agriculture, permitted industries and activities.
3. The State Government will review the situation again before 03 May to decide on further course of action.
4. Inter-state movement of vehicles will be restricted till 03 May, 2020. All movement will be regulated and permitted through identified vehicles only.
5. All educational institutions will remain closed till 31 May, 2020.
6. The meeting also discussed in detail about the measures to be taken after possible lifting of lock-down on 03 May, 2020 for which decisions will be taken well in advance.
7. The Chief Minister stressed on the importance of AarogyaSetu App and called for mandatory use of the App by every individual for their own safety.
8. MGNREGA workers should carry out only those activities which are within the confines of their private holdings/farms.
9. No construction work to be carried out till 03 May, till further orders.
10. All offices will remain closed till 03 May, 2020, except for the necessary services, as was the practice before 20 Apr, 2020.
11. There will be restrictions on the issue of vehicle passes to check unnecessary movement. The e-passes issued in the past shall no longer be valid.

CLARIFICATION FROM DM EAST DISTRICT

1. All Government offices are closed as per decision of Government of Sikkim.
2. All Hardware shops will be closed till 3rd May. Order issued today will be in abeyance.
3. Rest all things are as usual allowed on 20th April like Construction activities, Private offices, Banks, Liquor shops etc.
4. Passes including E-Passes issued after 20th April for Essential commodities, Medical emergency, Medicines, Construction Activities & Private entities will remain valid.
5. Passes including E-Passes issued by SDMs after 15th April for Govt Officials except DC Office, Health, Power, PHE, Police, Forest, GMC, Food dept, SIMFED and Emergency vehicles at GPU are NOT VALID.
6. Passes issued for Hardware shops on 21st April are not Valid now. Read order Carefully. Forget all other orders.



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 APR:

A day after lockdown relaxations were introduced, the State Government today decided to reinstate complete lockdown in the State till 03 May. The decision was made during an emergency meeting called by the Chief Minister, PS Tamang [Golay] with Cabinet Ministers and top officials of the state administration today.

While the government has not given any explanation for the change in decision, it has caused some confusion among the public. For instance, announcing relaxations in the lockdown on 20 April, the government had said that construction work will be allowed. However, the meeting today had decided that no construction work will be allowed till 03 May.

Subsequently, the DM

East, Raj Yadav came out with clarifications on social media in the evening today informing that construction work will be allowed.

The notification issued by the East District Administration states that construction activities will continue "where workers are available on site and no workers are required to be brought in from outside [in situ construction]". However, no new construction will be started, it adds.

Meanwhile, an IPR press release informed that the CM had called the meeting today "to take stock of the situation in the wake of rise in the cases of COVID-19 in other parts of the country, and to assess the level of preparedness and the reports with regard to the compliance of lockdown guidelines in the State after the recent relaxations implemented from 20 April."

The meeting also decided that all educational institutions will remain closed till 31 May,

SIMFED launches Mobile Ration Van

Gangtok, 21 Apr [IPR]: With the view to reach essential commodities and kitchen items to the doorsteps, Sikkim State Cooperative Supply and Marketing Federation Ltd (SIMFED) launched the Mobile Ration Van in Gangtok, today.

Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma launched the service to ensure delivery of basic commodities and other kitchen items at the time of COVID-19 crisis.

Speaking to media, after launching the Mobile Van, Minister Sharma informed that the SIMFED has come up with a new initiative



to launch the Mobile Ration Van that will carry every essential commodities like rice, mustard oil, pulse, flour, sugar, salt, soaps, etc. and make a round of interior pockets in the capital and outside to avail

all required basic items for individuals and retail soaps at reasonable rate. He also assured to maintain all preventive measures like social distancing at the time of selling of items at minimum rate to benefit the people.

Managing Director, SIMFED, Pawan Awasthy said that the SIMFED will work according to the route plan and the customer will be informed in advance about the movement of the Mobile Ration Van. He also informed that swap system will be installed for cashless transaction. It was felt necessary to launch the van to ensure convenience of the customers during ongoing lockdown period. It may be noted that the SIMFED has been working tirelessly to deliver vegetables in all four districts during COVID-19 crisis.

RDD Minister convenes meeting to discuss MGNREGA works

GANGTOK, 21 APR [IPR]: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of RDD Minister in the conference hall of Rural Development Department on 21 Apr, 2020.

The meeting was attended by the Principal Secretary and senior officers of the Department.

The Principal Secretary appraised the house in detail regarding the distribution of relief materials in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. He further stated that

social distancing was maintained by the public while receiving the relief. The Minister appreciated the teamwork of the Department in swift distribution of relief materials in the rural areas.

The Minister was of the view that the C.C. footpaths being constructed under MGNREGA should be eco friendly with minimal use of cement.

He instructed to take note of this in future implementation

of the scheme. PD/MNGREGA appraised the house about the instructions received from the Ministry of Rural Development to take up irrigation and water conservation works with minimum number of workers to maintain social distancing.

She further informed that works for which materials have already been received at the construction site prior to lockdown will be utilised on priority to ensure that cement does not get spoil.

Thereafter, the Principal Secretary informed the MGNREGA cell to explore the possibility of using locally available materials as desired by the Chief Minister in co-ordination meeting held on 21 Apr, 2020 for generating further mandays for the needy.

In his concluding remarks, the Minister appealed to the officers to carry on the work of public good while taking necessary precautions to contain the spread of COVID-19.

ICMR asks states not to use rapid test kits for 2 days

NEW DELHI, APR 21 (PTI): Amid complaints about faulty rapid test kits, the Indian Council of Medical Research on Tuesday advised states not to use them for the next two days, saying it will issue an advisory after their teams carry out field validation of these equipment.

At the daily government briefing on the coronavirus situation in the country, ICMR's Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar was asked about the faulty rapid testing kits.

"We have received complaint from a state yesterday and so far discussed with three states. Too much variations have been reported in results of rapid test kits and RT-PCR

kits. We advise states not to use them for the next two days, he said.

These kits will be tested and validated in the field by our teams. We will issue a clear-cut advisory in two day. If problems are detected in batches, we will tell the companies for replacement," he said.

He said that a total of 4,49,810 samples for COVID-19 infection have been tested till Tuesday of which 35,852 were done on Monday.

As many as 29,776 samples have been tested in 201 labs under the ICMR network, and 6,076 at 86 private laboratories, he said.

The Chairman of the 4th Empowered Group (to tackle COVID-19) said that the government has created a portal with

the master database of healthcare professionals and volunteers.

"Till now, details of 1.24 crore human resources of various kinds have been added to it, he said.

Details of corona warriors in 20 categories and 49 sub-categories, who can contribute to COVID-19 management efforts, are available to states and union territories on the portal, he said

Lav Agrawal, the Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry, told the press conference that 18,601 positive cases have been reported across the country so far. As many as 3,252 people have been cured till now, he said, adding 705 of them recovered on Monday.

NSS volunteers take to social media for COVID-19 awareness

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 21 Apr:**

National Service Scheme [NSS] volunteers have been delivering their duties and responsibilities through activities on social media as well as on the ground wherever possible. Even in the COVID-19 situation, NSS volunteers of Sikkim have been seen actively working especially in creating awareness among the masses on the novel coronavirus through digital media and by distributing handmade face masks to family members and neighbours.

NSS volunteers from different educational institutions in the State have been fighting against COVID-19 by uploading awareness videos and message on social distancing, personal

hygiene, cleanliness and other related topics on social media pages.

Additional Director Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Doma Tshering Bhutia, who is also the State NSS Officer, stated that strictly following the total lockdown situation in the State, NSS volunteers are spreading awareness on social media.

She informed that NSS volunteers have made videos related to the prevention of COVID-19 like demonstration on proper handwashing technique, hand sanitization, social distancing, symptoms of COVID-19 and other related topics. She informed that few NSS volunteers have even distributed handmade face masks among their family members and their neighbors.

Ms Bhutia stated that more than 200 videos and photos



have been shared on Facebook pages and YouTube by NSS volunteers of Sikkim to create mass awareness on COVID-19 and its prevention.

Minister for Sports & Youth Affairs, Kunga Nima Lepcha was also closely monitoring the situation and has been taking stock of all NSS activities from the State NSS Officer, informed Ms Bhutia.

She added that the Minister

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Why might Sweden’s Covid-19 policy work? Trust between citizens and state

ViewPoint
LARS TRÄGÅRDH AND UMUT ÖZKIRIMLI
THEGUARDIAN

That coronavirus is colour blind and respects no borders is true enough, although far from being the great equaliser, it forces the poor to bear the brunt. And given the prominent role played by experts in epidemiology who speak in a universalising language of objective science and mathematical curves, attempts at containing or mitigating the spread of Covid-19 sound similar around the world.

Yet the responses differ significantly from country to country, even among richer countries; shaped by historical legacies, political culture and social mores. The Swedish historian Sverker Sörlin, himself a Covid-19 survivor, noted in a recent article that there was never just one global pandemic but many, each shaped by its own national logic. Sörlin was building on William H McNeill and his classic Plagues and Peoples from 1976, in which McNeill tried to show that epidemics mirrored each affected society. There is not a universal biological enemy waging war, these global viruses strike societies, as much as the individuals within them.

Indeed, the pandemic constitutes a huge stress test for countries, a test that brings to the surface their deep, sticky societal structures. Values, institutions and practices, that in ordinary times are partially hidden by global fashions and

trends, come to the fore, protruding as safe rocks in a stormy sea.

For us – a repatriated Swede who spent 40 years living abroad, and a self-exiled Turk who has lived in Sweden but is now based in Spain – cultural collisions are a touchstone of our efforts to understand both global commonality and national difference.

We’ve always had our differences, but with coronavirus, we’ve also found ourselves subject to very different European pandemic regimes.

Spain, one of the worst affected countries in Europe, imposed a strict lockdown to slow the spread of the virus and ease the burden on already overcrowded hospitals. Confinement was not a matter of personal choice; social distancing became the law of the land and a matter of surveillance and policing.

Sweden opted for a calmer – and highly controversial – approach led by the state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell. Instead of draconian lockdown, social distancing is a matter of self-regulation. Citizens were instructed to use their judgment, and to take individual responsibility within a framework that rested on mutual trust, rather than top-down control.

We were both convinced that the “Swedish model” could not be exported to countries such as Spain or Turkey, where levels of social and institutional trust are much lower. But could it work in Sweden itself? And why did Sweden choose to stray from the path followed by the many,

including its Nordic neighbours? Here, our views diverged.

The itinerant Turk (also a Swedish citizen) was convinced that Tegnell’s approach was far too lax – considering the health risks involved – even for high-trust Sweden, where personal independence, including among the elderly, is cherished. In any case, lockdown was not only a matter of saving lives, but also mitigating the workload of overcrowded hospitals. The repatriated Swede, on the other hand, believed that an all-out war to save individual lives involved huge costs to the social fabric – beyond the health versus economy debate. So we decided to shift our attention to the societal consequences of different paths chosen.

For Sweden, a total lockdown was unsustainable in the long term. If schools and pre-schools were closed, for instance, parents would have to leave work to home-school. This would potentially make matters worse by removing workers in critical sectors such as healthcare, or exposing grandparents to the disease, not to mention depriving children of crucial time in school.

In a society where gender equality and children’s rights are paramount, these risks understandably touched a raw nerve. Lockdown might work for the middle and upper classes with comfortable houses, especially in societies with more traditional gender norms. In Sweden, schools are key institutions not least for disadvantaged children, and single and/or

low-earning parents.

This raises the question of whether policy choices across the world are made on strictly rational, scientific grounds, or if they reflect culturally rooted constraints and possibilities. Take social distancing: it now appears to be an internationally shared goal. The crucial choice is between achieving it through commands backed up by threats of fines and arrests, or though recommendations that appeal to a sense of a shared individual responsibility.

In Sweden, the path chosen may be less draconian but it is possibly more demanding, since it shifts the burden from laws and policing to self-regulation. While social media memes at times suggest an endless after-ski party afoot in the hipster joints of Stockholm, for those of us who live here the reality is a more sombre balance between distancing and the remaining freedoms to move about and carry on a normal life, while supporting local businesses.

And to be sure, even in Sweden there are many who call for a more radical closure of society. It may yet come to that. But others continue to plead for continued calm, reminding us that the word for society in Sweden is samhälle, to hold together. They worry that the stricter measures entail the privatising of suffering by justifying social closure.

The Swedish experiment, however, clearly touches a raw nerve abroad. The choice though is not simply between individual freedom and authoritarian

rule. In Spain, lockdown measures also enjoy broad popular support, and security forces spend more time organising ad hoc birthday parties for the elderly than issuing fines. But there too, voices of dissent are raised as the societal consequences of the confinement become clearer. “Free our children!” said Ada Colau, the leftwing mayor of Barcelona, in a Facebook post on 15 April, paradoxically just before the Madrid government declared that schools would not be reopened this term.

There is no doubt that what we will see – globally, in the wake of the coronavirus crisis – is the return of the state. The question is what state.

For the likes of Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, who are busy exploiting the pandemic to further cement their authoritarian rule, the answer is clear: less liberalism and less democracy. But both the Swedish and Spanish examples show us, in their own way, that another answer is possible: the rollback of neoliberal democracy and the return of the social democratic welfare state.

And here we agree with Sörling. It is wise to respect citizens as responsible, ethical beings, equal in their contributions. This may, in fact, be the best way to develop the reciprocity that is the hallmark of a high-trust society: mutual trust between citizens, and between the citizens and the state.

‘Millions hang by a thread’: extreme global hunger compounded by Covid-19

PETER BEAUMONT
LONDON, 21 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: The warning from the World Food Programme (WFP) that an extra 265 million people could be pushed into acute food insecurity by Covid-19, almost doubling last year’s total, is based on a complex combination of factors.

WFP’s latest warning underlines the increasing concern among experts in the field that for many the biggest impact will not be the disease, but the hunger hanging off its coat tails.

While the majority of people suffering acute food insecurity in 2019 lived in countries affected by conflict (77 million), climate change (34 million) and economic crises (24 million people), the coronavirus has massively complicated existing crises and threatens to worsen others.

WFP sounded the alarm in concert with a report from the Global Network Against Food

Crises – an international alliance working to address the root causes of extreme hunger – that disclosed that as 2019 ended, 135 million people across 55 countries and territories experienced the highest levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition documented by the network since the first edition of the report in 2017.

The report identified a number of factors that could worsen food security in many of the 55 countries, classifying those dependent on food imports and oil exports (the price of oil collapsed to below zero this week) as particularly vulnerable, as well as those dependent and on tourism and remittances for income.

“ R i s i n g unemployment and under-employment and decreasing purchasing power will have serious consequences for poor and vulnerable populations in countries

already dealing with crises such as conflict and/or ongoing economic and political turmoil,” the report said.

“Displaced people living in camps and d i s p l a c e d / h o s t populations in urban settings as well as the elderly, young children, pregnant and lactating women, and the disabled are particularly vulnerable to the far-reaching impacts of this disease.”

In Yemen, as Mark Lowcock, the United Nations emergency relief coordinator, told the Guardian earlier this week, UN agencies were already feeding 13 million people, amid a funding crisis that is threatening to many people before the impact of coronavirus is even taken into consideration.

As WFP’s chief economist Arif Husain warned, “Covid-19 is potentially catastrophic for millions who are already hanging by a thread. It is a hammer blow for millions more who can only eat if they earn a wage. Lockdowns and global economic

recession have already decimated their nest eggs. It only takes one more shock – like Covid-19 – to push them over the edge. We must collectively act now to mitigate the impact of this global catastrophe.”

The new warning reinforces concern sounded by Lola Castro, regional director of WFP for southern Africa, last month. She said the interruption of food programmes for millions of people in the 12 countries that they cover, which have experienced three years of poor harvests because of drought, would have a “critical impact”.

As Castro and other experts have made clear, what is occurring as coronavirus begins to bear down on the world’s poorest and most vulnerable countries is a perfect storm that has seen coronavirus act as an accelerant on a host of well established problems from poverty, the impact of the climate crisis, pre-existing conflict and pre-existing health crises in places with high incidence of diseases like Aids and HIV and malaria.

Perhaps most pressing, beyond the immediate threat of the disease, is the economic impact in countries less able to deal with the shock, particularly for workers on daily subsistence wages.

Talking about the situation in southern Africa in an interview with the Guardian last month, Castro described the specific challenges in detail.

“The lean season has been very, very hard for the last three years with almost no rain and poor harvests which have left 45 million people food insecure with 8.1 million supported by the WFP”

Already, as Castro points out, new restrictions on travel, border crossing and the threat of the disease has disrupted ongoing operations even as more people have been pushed towards poverty by lockdowns affecting their ability to work.

“We are already the region of the world that is the most affected by HIV-Aids. We are having to totally change our distribution models: to reduce concentrations of people at distribution points; to make sure we have hand washing

NOTICE

In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country, the Government has announced PradhanMantriGaribKalyan Package which comprises of “PradhanMantri-GaribKalyan Anna Yojana”(PM-GKAY)with an objective to ensure the minimisation of hardships faced by the poor resulting from the ongoing crisis.

Under this scheme 80 crore beneficiaries falling under the category of AAY & PHH Ration Cards covered under the NATIONAL food Security Act 2013 will be provided with the following foodgrains free of cost for a period of 3 months w.e.f April 2020 to June 2020 at the following scales:-

1) Rice: 5 Kilograms Per Head/Per Members

2) Dal: 1 Kilogram Per Ration Card/Per Family.

The allocation under PM-GKAY will be provided to the ration card holders over and above the regular monthly allocation under NFSA free of cost.

The allocation has already reached the Food Godowns under North District and the distribution will be done through the designated Fair Price Shops registered under the Food & Civil Supplies Department Government of Sikkim from 23.04.2020 with strict supervision and monitoring by the Department.

Palden N Lachungpa

District Civil Supplies Officer(North)

Food & Civil Supplies Department

Government of Sikkim.

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Police books Jamia students under UAPA

NEW DELHI, APR 21 (PTI): Delhi Police has booked Jamia students Meeran Haider and Safoora Zargar under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in a case related to communal violence in northeast Delhi over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, said a lawyer.

Haider and Zargar, arrested for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to incite the communal riots in February, are in judicial custody. While Zargar is the media coordinator of Jamia Coordination Committee, Haider is a member of the committee.

The police has also booked Jawaharlal Nehru University student leader Umar Khalid under the UAPA in the case, said advocate Akram Khan who is representing Haider in

the case.

Haider (35) is a PhD student and the president of RJD youth wing’s Delhi unit, while Zargar is an MPhil student of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) university.

In the FIR, the police has claimed that the communal violence was a “premeditated conspiracy” which was allegedly hatched by Khalid and two others.

The students have also been booked for the offences of sedition, murder, attempt to murder, promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and rioting.

Khalid had allegedly given provocative speeches at two different places and appealed to the citizens to come out on streets and block the roads during the

visit of US President Donald Trump to spread propaganda at international level about how minorities in India are being, the FIR alleged.

In this conspiracy, firearms, petrol bombs, acid bottles and stones were collected at numerous homes, the FIR claimed.

Co-accused Danish was given the responsibility to gather people from two different places to take part in the riots, the police alleged.

Women and children were made to block the roads under the Jafrabad metro station on February 23 to create tension amidst the neighbourhood people, it said.

Over 20 film personalities, including Anurag Kashyap, Vishal Bhardwaj, Mahesh Bhatt and Ratna Pathak Shah, on Sunday had released a

statement raising their voice against the arrest of the students and activists by Delhi Police for protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and demanded their release.

Following this, the police had said investigations into the JMI violence and northeast Delhi riot cases were done impartially, and arrests were made after analysis of forensic evidence.

In December last year, the police had allegedly entered the JMI campus after protests over the CAA, being held a few metres away from the varsity, turned violent.

Rajya Sabha MP and RJD leader Manoj Jha had tweeted, “Delhi Police called him for investigation and then received orders from above and arrested Meeran Haider, who has been helping people

~ 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

Free ration supplied in Tadong



GANGTOK, 21 APR: Residents of Daragaon-Tadong eligible for free rations in these COVID-19 times received their supplies here today. A total of 753 beneficiaries received the rations as per government notified quantities. A family of more than 3 people received 20kg rice, 7kg Potato, 5kg Daal, 1 pkt salt and 5 ltrs cooking oil. Families of below 3 are entitled for 10 kg rice, 2 kg each of dal & cooking oil, a packet of salt and 5 kgs potato. [from SUBASH RAI]

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Goa may allow entry of only coronavirus negative people

PANAJI, APR 21 (PTI): Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday said his government was considering to allow the entry of only those people who are coronavirus negative once the borders of the state open again after the end of the lockdown period.

Sawant also hinted that the state BJP government might allow only coronavirus negative people with a valid certificate once trains and flight operations resume.

He said opening of Goan borders, which are currently sealed off in view of the coronavirus spread, will depend upon the Central and state guidelines. The national lockdown is in force till

May 3.

"The government is of the view that even if borders are opened up, they should be restricted only for those people who are certified COVID-19 negative," he said.

Responding to a query, Sawant told PTI that the Centre will decide on the guidelines only after consulting the respective states.

"Borders of Goa will have to remain shut in view of the (COVID-19) situation in neighbouring Karnataka and Maharashtra," he said.

The CM also said that the state government was well prepared to keep Goans, who are stranded on various ships due

to the lockdown, in quarantine facilities after their return.

"Once the Ministry of Home Affairs works out a plan to bring them back to the country, we will quarantine them and then test them for the infection. The decision is in the final stages now," he said.

Once a decision is taken, they will be brought back to Goa within 15 days, Sawant added.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Vishwajeet Rane has expressed the need to ramp up testing facilities at the industrial units and airports.

Goa has reported recovery of all the seven COVID-19 cases in the state.

"The government will install a state-

of-art 'Smart Kiosk' in collaboration with GE (General Electric) through a CSR initiative to have a random testing for COVID-19.

"This robust method will help us to increase our scope of testing in the state with swift sample collection," he added.

Rane said the kiosk will be placed at various locations, including Urban Health Centre/Red Cross Panjim, Verna Industrial Estate, Kundaim industrial estate, Mapusa industrial estate, Cuncolim industrial estate, Dabolim Airport, MPT and at the border locations of Patradevi check post, Keri check post, Pollem check post, Mollem check post and Dodamarg check post.

14 lions captured in Gir, after cubs fall ill

AHMEDABAD, APR 21 (PTI): At least 14 lions were captured from Gujarat's Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and shifted to Jasadhar care centre in the forest, after some cubs in a pride fell ill, a senior official from the state forest department said on Tuesday.

One of the sick lion cubs was infected with babesia, a protozoan parasite, while two others were found to be anaemic, chief conservator of forest of Junagadh Wildlife Circle D T Vasavada said.

Babesia, canine distemper virus (CDV) and other bacterial

infections were responsible for the death of 34 lions in September 2018.

Refuting media reports that the 14 rescued lions may be infected with the deadly CDV, Vasavada said only four of the animals were sick, including a cub suffering from babesia infection, and clarified that reports of 10 lions dying of serious illnesses in Gir were false.

"I want to assure you that no lion has died due to CDV in recent times. I also disagree with the death figures. If a lion is sick, then we have to

capture the entire pride and keep them together till we treat that lion," he said.

A pride of 10 lions were captured to treat two sick cubs, one of which is anaemic and the other has contracted babesia, he said.

Forest staff have also captured another pride of three to treat a sick cub, said Vasavada, adding that the cub is also anaemic.

"A lioness was also rescued from the forest after she was found to be suffering from age-related ailments. In all, 14 lions were captured

from Tulsishyam and Jasadhar range of Gir forest. Out of these, only four are sick," he said.

The animals will be released after treatment, he added.

In February last year, the state government had informed the state Assembly that 34 lions had died in 2018 due to diseases including CDV, babesia, streptococcal bacteria and gram-negative bacilli infections.

As per the last census carried out in 2015, Gir forest had 523 lions, while the current estimates have put the count at 600.

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 APR:

Sustainable fashion designer and social entrepreneur from Sikkim, Omi Gurung, will be representing India as one of the 50 most powerful and inspiring voices of the youth of South and South East Asia at the global campaign, "My Future, My Voice" by the Earth Day Network on 22 April, a press release informs.

The campaign marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and is

scheduled to feature voices of 50 youths from around 15 countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

Omi was recently awarded with Karamveer Chakra by United Nations and ICONGO (International confederation of NGO's).

He says, "Earth Day

matters now more than ever and it's more important than ever to be green. We all have seen how the world has changed during lockdown period. It's high time to take climate action and we need to pay attention to our footprints and learn to adapt to a minimalist and earth friendly lifestyle. We need to be a conscious consumer!"

He adds, "As the lockdown is on, take a moment to ask

yourself, how you can minimise food and household waste? Be conscious of what you buy. For example, choosing cotton fabric over polyester does make a difference. It takes 5-6 months for cotton to decompose whereas polyester takes about 200 years. A little goes a long way when it comes to be green."

"Earth Day Network is pleased to bring together the voices of 50 youth from the region as youth are

the torch-bearers for a climate safe, sustainable and environment-friendly future. We hope that all those who hear them speak are inspired to emulate their examples and that #MyFutureMyVoice builds bridges of friendship across the region so that a concerted effort is made for the environment," says Karuna Singh, Regional Director of Earth Day Network, South and South East Asia.

Sri Lanka postpones parliamentary poll for nearly 2 months due to COVID-19 outbreak

COLOMBO, APR 21 (PTI): Sri Lanka's Election Commission

has postponed the parliamentary elections for nearly two months in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak that has killed seven people and infected 295 others in the country.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on March 2 dissolved the Parliament, six months ahead of schedule and called a snap election on April 25.

A gazette notice signed by the three members of the National Election Commission

announcing June 20 date of the election was issued on Monday.

The EC has written to President Rajapaksa asking him to seek the highest court's opinion on a possible constitutional standoff arising from the postponement of the election.

It said that the postponement meant that parliament would not be able to meet on June 2, which is three months from the dismissal of last parliament on March 2.

However, Rajapaksa asserted that it was the

election commission's job to fix the polls date and as such no need for the Supreme Court's intervention.

Earlier, the election commission met with the government officials and reviewed the pandemic situation affecting the election machinery.

On Monday, the government dropped its decision to relax the nationwide curfew and extended it to April 27 following a sudden spike of 41 coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours. On Sunday, the government announced

to partially lift the curbs from Monday to boost economic activity.

The island nation has been under a 24-hour curfew since March 20 to combat the deadly viral infection.

All opposition parties and many civil society groups have urged the government to show caution in trying to rush through holding the election.

Sri Lanka has so far reported 295 COVID-19 cases, including seven deaths, and 96 recoveries, since the first viral infection was

reported in the country on March 11.

The parliamentary polls were announced 6 months ahead of the schedule as Rajapaksa, who was elected as president in November, wanted a new Parliament to implement his mandate.

Rajapaksa is also under pressure to re-summon the dissolved Parliament in order to approve finances for government business from May.

The previous Parliament had approved funds till April 30.

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Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104

District surveillance Officer

EAST : 7029372100

WEST : 9593297808

NORTH : 9641957468

SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402

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Let This Lockdown be About Books *Is Sikkim reading enough? It could still read more*

Tomorrow, 23 April, is World Books Day. Perhaps a lost day for Sikkim to observe since libraries remain unfortunately ignored investments in the State and bookstores, Raman at Rachna Books will confirm, ranked among the least frequented shops even the ongoing lockdown had snatched away the joy of holding a new book as well.

But one need not always look at the negatives. Recent days have seen the launch of “How to Collect a Folktale”, a collection of poems by one of Sikkim’s more skilled and nuanced poets, Tashi Chophel. Interestingly, it was at around this time some years ago that another exciting collection of poems, “Monk on a Hill,” by another Sikkimese poet of slightly older vintage, Guru T Ladakhi, was released. Those who follow poetry or have studied English in Sikkim’s government schools would have already read some of Guru’s works, and one looks forward to Tashi’s works also being introduced to students at an age when reading opens new worlds and approaches to the rare and even the mundane. Guru and Tashi have served Sikkim well, serving up an introduction which at once “world class” and effusively “local.” With their respective debuts, they have raise the bar high for even their own follow-ups, leave aside new writers wishing to interest readers. While their works move all over the world and speak of all experiences and people, they are essentially a meditation on Sikkim, its places and its people because this is where the poets were born and live.

And before this extends into a book review (which too shall come at a later date), we return to the theme this piece began with. What the launch of a book of poems just as the lockdown rolled into the nation highlights is the welcome development of recent years which have seen a surge in Sikkim-centric books being published. And it has been a handsome mix of titles ranging from fine fiction to orchids to history & culture to poetry to coffee table books. There have been books on Sikkim by scholars from outside looking in and also by locals looking around. The Nepali publications scene has not been as active as it was prolific till some years ago and it remains to be seen whether the present boom in English titles sustains. But books are important, not just for the pleasure they offer or the moments they capture for posterity, but also for the discussions they trigger, conversations they start and the insights they share.

When it comes to Sikkim, while books have been published, there has not been much discussion around or on them. There may have been private discussions to rip apart efforts or celebrate publications, but books, since they are in the public domain should attract wider discussions. This could be because we prefer to be polite, but it could also be because not enough of us are really reading. The former is a hesitation some instigation can overcome, but what about the latter? What is Sikkim doing about that? It could begin today by making this weekend about books, starting by attending a book launch and then willing themselves to also pick up more titles now that they have made it to the bookshop.

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This isn’t the first global pandemic, and it won’t be the last. Here’s what we’ve learned from 4 others throughout history

DAVID GRIFFIN & JUSTIN DENHOLM
THECONVERSATION.COM

The course of human history has been shaped by infectious diseases, and the current crisis certainly won’t be the last time.

However, we can capitalise on the knowledge gained from past experiences, and reflect on how we’re better off this time around.

1. THE PLAGUE, OR ‘BLACK DEATH’ (14TH CENTURY)

While outbreaks of the plague (caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*) still occur in several parts of the world, there are two that are particularly infamous.

The 200-year long Plague of Justinian began in 541 CE, wiping out millions in several waves across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East and crimping the expansionary aspirations of the Roman Empire (although some scholars argue that its impact has been overstated).

Then there’s the better known 14th century pandemic, which likely emerged from China and decimated populations in Asia, Europe and Northern Africa.

Perhaps one of the greatest public health legacies to have emerged from the 14th century plague pandemic is the concept of “quarantine”, from the Venetian term “quarantena” meaning forty days.

The 14th century Black Death pandemic is thought to have catalysed enormous societal, economic, artistic and cultural reforms in Medieval Europe. It illustrates how infectious disease pandemics can be major turning points in history, with lasting impacts.

For example, widespread death caused labour shortages across feudal society, and often led to higher wages, cheaper land, better living conditions and increased freedoms for the lower class.

Various authorities lost credibility, since they were seen to have failed to protect communities from the overwhelming devastation of plague. People began to openly question long held certainties around societal structure, traditions, and religious orthodoxy.

This prompted fundamental shifts in peoples’ interactions and experience with religion, philosophy, and politics. The Renaissance period, which encouraged humanism and learning, soon followed.

The Black Death also had profound effects on art and literature, which took on more pessimistic and morbid themes. There were vivid depictions of violence and death in Biblical narratives, still seen in many Christian places of worship across Europe.

How COVID-19 will reshape our culture, and what unexpected influence it will have for generations to come is unknown. There are already clear economic changes arising from this outbreak, as some industries rise, others fall and some businesses seem likely to disappear forever.

COVID-19 may permanently normalise the use of virtual technologies for socialising, business, education, healthcare, religious worship and even government.

2. SPANISH INFLUENZA (1918)

The 1918 “Spanish Flu” pandemic’s reputation as one of the deadliest in human history is due to a complex interplay between how the virus works, the immune response and the social context in which it spread.

It arose in a world left vulnerable by the preceding four years of World War I. Malnutrition and overcrowding were common.

Around 500 million people were infected – a third of the global population at the time – leading to 50-100 million deaths.

A unique characteristic of infection was its tendency to kill healthy adults between the ages of 20 and 40.

At the time, influenza infection was attributed to a bacterium (*Haemophilus influenzae*) rather than a virus. Antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections were still more than a decade away, and intensive care wards with mechanical ventilators were unheard of.

Clearly, our medical and scientific understanding of the ‘flu in 1918 made it difficult to combat. However, public health interventions, including quarantine, the use of face masks and bans on mass gatherings helped limit the spread in some areas, building on prior successes in controlling tuberculosis, cholera and other infectious diseases.

Australia imposed maritime quarantine, requiring all arriving ships to be cleared by Commonwealth Quarantine Officials before disembarkation. That likely delayed and reduced the Spanish flu impact on Australia, and had secondary effects on the other Pacific Islands.

The effect of maritime quarantine was most striking in Western and American Samoa, with the latter enforcing strict quarantine and experiencing no deaths. By contrast, 25% of Western Samoans died, after influenza was introduced by a ship

from New Zealand.

In some cities, mass gatherings were banned, and schools, churches, theatres, dance and pool halls closed.

In the United States, cities that committed earlier, longer and more aggressively to social distancing interventions, not only saved lives, but also emerged economically stronger than those that didn’t.

Face masks and hand hygiene were popularised and sometimes enforced in cities.

In San Francisco, a Red Cross-led public education campaign was combined with mandatory mask-wearing outside the home.

This was tightly enforced in some jurisdictions by police officers issuing fines, and at times using weapons.

3. HIV/AIDS (20TH CENTURY)

The first reported cases of HIV/AIDS in the Western world emerged in 1981.

Since then, around 75 million people have become infected with HIV, and about 32 million people have died.

Many readers may remember how baffling and frightening the HIV/AIDS pandemic was in the early days (and still is in many parts of the developing world).

We now understand that people living with HIV infection who are on treatment are far less likely to develop serious complications.

These treatments, known as antiretrovirals stop HIV from replicating. This can lead to an “undetectable viral load” in a person’s blood. Evidence shows that people with an undetectable viral load can’t pass the virus on to others during sex.

Condoms and PrEP (short for “pre-exposure prophylaxis,” where people take an oral antiretroviral pill once a day), can be used by people who don’t have HIV infection to reduce the risk of acquiring the virus.

Unfortunately, there are currently no proven antivirals available for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19, though research is ongoing.

The HIV pandemic taught us about the value of a well-designed public health campaign, and the importance of contact tracing. Broad testing in appropriate people is fundamental to this, to understand the extent of infection in the community and allow appropriately targeted individual and population-level interventions.

It also demonstrated that words and stigma matter; people need to feel they can test safely and be supported, rather than ostracised. Stigmatising language can fuel misconceptions, discrimination and discourage testing.

4. SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) (2002-2003)

The current pandemic is the third coronavirus outbreak in the past two decades.

The first was in 2002, when SARS emerged from horseshoe bats in China and spread to at least 29 countries around the world, causing 8,098 cases and 774 deaths.

SARS was finally contained in July, 2003. SARS-CoV-2, however, appears much more easily spread than the original SARS coronavirus.

To some extent SARS was a practice run for COVID-19. Researchers focused on SARS and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome, another coronavirus that remains a problem in selected regions), are providing important foundational research for potential vaccines against SARS-CoV-2.

Knowledge gleaned from SARS may also lead to antiviral drugs to treat the current virus.

SARS also emphasised the importance of communication in a pandemic, and the need for frank, honest and timely information sharing.

Certainly, SARS was a catalyst for change in China; the government invested in enhanced surveillance systems, that facilitate the real time collection and communication of infectious diseases and syndromes from emergency departments back to a centralised government database.

This was coupled with the International Health Regulations, which require the reporting of unusual and unexpected outbreaks of disease.

Advances in science, information technology and knowledge gained from SARS, allowed us to quickly isolate, sequence and share SARS-CoV-2 data globally. Likewise, important clinical information was distributed early to the medical community.

SARS demonstrated how quickly and comprehensively a virus could spread around the world in the era of air transportation, and the role of individual “superspreaders.”

SARS also underlined the importance of the inextricable link between human, animal and environmental health, known as “One Health”, that may facilitate the crossover of germs between species.

Finally, a crucial, but perhaps overlooked lesson from SARS is the need for sustained investment in vaccine and infectious disease treatment research.

Few infectious disease researchers were surprised when another coronavirus pandemic broke out. A globalised world, with overcrowded, well connected people and cities, where humans and animals live in close proximity, provides fertile conditions for infectious diseases.

We must be ever prepared for the emergence of another pandemic, and learn the lessons of history to navigate the next threat.

[David Griffin is Infectious Diseases Fellow, The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity; Justin Denholm is Associate Professor, Melbourne Health]

Governments need to do more for refugees affected by coronavirus: here’s how

CRISTIANO D’ORSI
THECONVERSATION.COM

Alongside managing the coronavirus pandemic from a health perspective and the economic fallout of lockdowns, governments and international organisations are coping with the ways in which the most vulnerable categories of society will be affected. These include refugees.

But many countries hosting refugees don’t have clear plans.

Among the countries in Africa affected by the pandemic, there are three that make the top ten globally when it comes to refugee populations: Uganda (1,165,700), Sudan (1,078,287) and Ethiopia (903,226). Dozens of other African countries host tens of thousands of refugees.

In response to the pandemic, the United Nations refugee agency has appealed for \$255 million to curb the risk and lessen the impact of COVID-19.

The money will be used to improve conditions in refugee camps and settlements. This will include expanding primary and secondary health services, establishing surveillance networks, and countering the spread of misinformation.

Aid bodies and human rights organisations also released a joint press statement calling for the rights of refugees to be protected in COVID-19 responses.

In my view there are some critical steps that governments should be taking to ensure that refugees are protected as the crisis unfolds. These range from interventions on the health services front to ensuring that xenophobia doesn’t prevent people from seeking treatment.

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE?

At present, the health services made available to refugees in Africa differ from country to country depending on how much money is available. Algeria, for example, is setting up reception and accommodation centres for refugees where they will have access to routine medical checkups and to all national health programmes.

In Ethiopia, all refugees have the right to get basic health services and be treated like their host communities. And in Uganda, refugees are provided with integrated comprehensive health care packages.

Going forward, all host governments in Africa should take the following steps:

Strengthen health facilities: Inadequate health-care care systems prevent refugees from accessing diagnostic testing and medical care. This happens as a result of ongoing conflict like in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Health worker shortages have also disrupted the smooth provision of services to refugees.

In Kenya and Côte d’Ivoire, low immunisation coverage and limited access to health services among refugees and host communities have resulted in outbreaks of diseases such as measles, which are vaccine-preventable.

Provide basic anti-coronavirus support: Space, soap, and clean water are often in short supply in refugee camps and settlements. This makes it hard to take the two precautionary measures such as social distancing and hand-washing.

The UN’s refugee agency, International Organisation for Migration, World Health Organisation, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have released guidance outlining COVID-19 readiness and response considerations for refugee camps and camp-like settings.

They are calling on host countries to ensure that refugees have equal access to health services and are included in national responses to COVID-19, including prevention, testing and treatment.

Do more testing: Testing services should be expanded in African countries with large refugee populations. And screening facilities should be set up in camps and settlements. Health care workers and volunteers must also be mobilised and trained to support testing efforts, trace contacts, and identify and isolate people who may have been exposed to the virus in these settings.

Community engagement: Health authorities and their partners should engage communities and disseminate information to ensure that refugees are aware of the potential risks of COVID-19. Already, the UN refugee agency is helping local health authorities to disseminate information about COVID-19 within refugee

populations.

While this is not easy to do, it is happening in countries like Ethiopia and Sudan. In Burundi, however, humanitarian operations have been undermined by the government’s ineffective communication about COVID-19 both for the local population and for refugees.

Guard against xenophobia: Nationalism and xenophobia can interfere with the effective response to COVID-19 among refugees. If refugees are afraid to seek medical care, like in Kenya, it could become impossible to halt the spread of the COVID-19 on the continent.

Build stronger partnerships: Public-private partnerships are needed now more than ever. Host country governments and key private sector and civil society organisations need to work together. African governments should be seeking stronger partnerships with humanitarian organisations to ensure that refugees are included in national and regional responses to COVID-19.

LOOKING AHEAD

Africa should also be working on long-term solutions in preparation for future emergencies. Countries must protect and provide for refugees just as they do for nationals. There are a number of ways to do this. One would be to train health workers to meet the health requirements of refugee populations.

There is also a need to seek additional funding to address refugee needs during public health emergencies.

A holistic effort to improve living conditions among refugees will ensure sustained access to essential primary care and to reproductive and mental health services during a pandemic.

Ultimately, world crises require global cooperation. Countries must act multilaterally to protect vulnerable groups. This includes giving them fair access to health care. In this way refugees can be protected from disproportionate harm.

As Africa plans for future emergencies the needs of the most vulnerable in society must be addressed.

[the writer is Research Fellow and Lecturer at the South African Research Chair in International Law (SARCIL), University of Johannesburg]

5 jute mills in West Bengal get govt nod to resume ops

KOLKATA, APR 20 (PTI): Five jute mills in West Bengal got the approval of the state government to resume operations amid a huge pending order for packaging materials.

The industry was disappointed with a handful of mills getting approval to operate despite repeated interventions from the Centre which fears that prolonged closure may lead to a shortage of packaging materials, especially foodgrains.

The units have received permission to operate only with 50 workers, according to a mill owner.

Around 60 units in West Bengal, most of which are located in North 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Hooghly and Howrah districts, were awaiting the government's nod to resume operations from Monday and of them, only five got the approval, according to industry sources.

India Jute Mills Association (IJMA) president Raghav Gupta said operations of jute mills with such a low workforce were not

feasible and said they should be allowed to work in at least two shifts.

Meanwhile, the Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union demanded that mill owners pay all the workers irrespective of the number of people permitted to work.

The West Bengal government said it has permitted nearly 300 other enterprises to resume operations out of 1,500 applications received.

The government has rejected applications of 375 industrial units that are located in the containment or hotspot zones, Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said.

"We are also not providing passes to the labourers and people from this containment areas to go out and work," he said.

Some units in Falta Special Economic Zone in South 24 Parganas district received permission to start operations but with limited manpower, sources said.

A few units in Bantala Leather Complex near Kolkata also got approval to

start functioning, they said.

Steel TMT bar makers in the state said they do not want to resume operations until construction activities commence as they are saddled with huge stock.

Century Plyboards said they are trying to resume operations and conglomerate ITC said the company will continue to focus on manufacturing essential items.

JSW Cement resumed operations at its Salboni plant, while Vikram Solar and Jaypee Engineering were also among those to restart activities.

According to the guidelines issued by the Centre on April 15, industrial units operating in rural areas have been permitted to function from April 20 with strict social distancing norms.

Manufacturing, industrial units with access control in SEZs, Export Oriented Units, industrial estates, industrial townships have been allowed. However, it will not apply in containment zones, as demarcated by States/ UTs/ district administrations.

state, the employees came to their workplace in their own vehicles, the employees claimed.

Central government offices and PSUs were also functioning.

Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar Krishna had on Monday said that all government offices and PSUs will have to provide transportation and no private vehicle would be allowed.

Most government offices, except emergency services, in the state were closed after the lockdown came into force on March 25.

Initially, the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus was scheduled to continue till April 14.

Later it was extended till May 3.

A state government order issued on April 18 had decided to start the functioning of all its departments and the Secretariat from April 21 to ensure delivery of public services.

The state government order had said that the

head of the administrative department will ensure that officers of the rank of deputy secretary and above shall attend office regularly and other Grade-I and Grade-II officers may attend office as required from April 21.

The prescribed protocol of sanitisation and maintenance of social distancing at the offices should be followed scrupulously, it said.

The head of the administrative department will also ensure that up to a maximum of 33 per cent of the staff of Grade-III and Grade-IV categories of the department as per requirement shall attend office on rotation as and when required on need basis from April 21.

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

The machine, which can travel up to one kilometre, distributes food, water and medicine in each room, a department statement said.

The robot would be disinfected after each use, it said.

Health Minister K K Shailaja inaugurated the new venture from here recently through the robot's video facility, the statement added.

Robots have been put to use in other parts of the country to help in the health workers' fight against COVID- 19.

COVID India Seva launched

NEW DELHI, APR 21 (PTI): Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday launched the 'COVID India Seva', an interactive platform for establishing a direct channel of communication with millions of Indians during the pandemic.

This initiative is aimed at enabling transparent e-governance delivery in real-time and answering citizen queries swiftly, at scale, especially in crisis situations like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an official statement said.

Through this, people can pose queries @ CovidIndiaSeva and get them responded to in almost real time.

The @CovidIndiaSeva works off a dashboard at the backend that helps process large volumes of tweets, converts them into resolvable tickets, and assigns them to the relevant authority for real-time resolution, the

statement said.

"Trained experts will share authoritative public health information swiftly at scale, helping to build a direct channel for communication with citizens," the minister said in a tweet.

Over time, Twitter has proved to be an essential service for both the government and citizens to interact and exchange information, especially in times of need. We are happy to make a concerted online effort by adopting the Twitter Seva solution.

"It is powered by a team of experts at our end who are trained and equipped to treat and respond to each query uniquely, and at scale. This will enable us in establishing a direct channel with Indian citizens, connecting with them in real-time to provide authoritative health and public information," Vardhan said.



The dedicated account will be accessible to people be it local or national in their scope.

Whether it is for latest updates on measures taken by the government, learning about access to healthcare services or seeking guidance for someone who perhaps has symptoms but is unsure about where to turn to for help, @ CovidIndiaSeva will empower public to reach

out to the authorities, the statement stated.

"It is important to note that the ministry will respond to broader queries and public health information. This does not require the public to share personal contact details or health record details.

On the launch of the interactive platform, Mahima Kaul, Director, Public Policy, India and South

Asia, Twitter said, "We understand our role as an essential service for both the government to communicate with citizens and for the public to stay connected with each other. As #IndiaFightsCorona with social distancing, we are committed to working with the Government of India as they use the influence of social media to connect with the public at large.

13 test positive for COVID-19 in Bihar, total count 126

Patna, Apr 21 (PTI): Thirteen people tested positive for COVID-19 in Bihar on Tuesday, taking the total number of such cases to 126 in the state, a top health department official said. Principal Secretary, Health, Sanjay Kumar said of the fresh cases, seven were reported from Munger district, four from Buxar

and one each from Patna and Rohtas. Contact-tracing of the patient from Rohtas, which has reported its first case, was on, while the remaining caught the contagion from COVID-19 patients in their respective districts, he added. Other details of the patients were not immediately

known. Bihar had reported its first couple of coronavirus cases on March 22. However, nearly a quarter of the total number of cases so far in the state has been reported in the last 24 hours. On Monday, 17 people from Bihar Sharif, the headquarters of Nalanda district, had tested positive for the dreaded virus. Only 15 of the 38 districts in the

state have reported COVID-19 cases. Siwan (29), Nalanda (28) and Munger (27) account for two-thirds of the coronavirus cases in Bihar.

Forty-two patients, one-third of the total number of cases so far, have recovered, while two patients have died. The number of samples tested in the state till date is 11,999, Kumar said.

Lockdown: Assam govt offices reopen on Tuesday

GUWAHATI, APR 21 (PTI): Assam government offices reopened on Tuesday with 33 per cent employees on duty to operationalise government functioning amid continuation of the coronavirus-triggered lockdown till May 3 next. The employees reported for duty adhering to lockdown protocols and social distancing norms. They were also seated at a distance of six-feet from each other, officials said.

The protocol of sanitisation and maintenance of social distancing at the offices as prescribed in the National Directives for COVID-19 Management of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) order dated April 15 was being followed scrupulously, they said.

In Guwahati, the employees were transported to and from their offices in buses provided by the Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC).

In other parts of the

state, the employees came to their workplace in their own vehicles, the employees claimed.

Central government offices and PSUs were also functioning.

Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar Krishna had on Monday said that all government offices and PSUs will have to provide transportation and no private vehicle would be allowed.

Most government offices, except emergency services, in the state were closed after the lockdown came into force on March 25.

Initially, the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus was scheduled to continue till April 14.

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

Now, robot is part of Kerala's fight against coronavirus

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 21 (PTI): Not just in China, but in Kerala also robot is now playing a key role in the health workers' fight against COVID-19, thanks to the innovative spirit of a group of young minds and the support of the state Health Department.

Named "Nightingale-19", the robot is deployed to provide food and medicines among patients at the district coronavirus centre in Ancharakandi in Kannur district where a large

number of cases have been reported.

The special display facility, attached to it, also allows patients to communicate with health workers and their relatives if necessary, the health minister's office here said.

Designed by the students of Chemberi Vimal Jyothi Engineering College with the support of the Health Department, the remote control-operated robot can carry food and water for at least six persons at a stretch.

The machine, which can travel up to one kilometre, distributes food, water and medicine in each room, a department statement said.

The robot would be disinfected after each use, it said.

Health Minister K K Shailaja inaugurated the new venture from here recently through the robot's video facility, the statement added.

Robots have been put to use in other parts of the country to help in the health workers' fight against COVID- 19.

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La Liga, Spanish FA agree training restart protocol



MADRID, APR 21 (AFP): La Liga and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) have agreed a return to training protocol for professional players in the country after the coronavirus outbreak, the Spanish National Sports Council (CSD) has announced.

Spain's top division has been suspended since March 12 due to the COVID-19 outbreak which has so far killed more than 20,800 people, the third-highest number of deaths in the world after the United States and Italy.

"This decision remains controlled by the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and by the decisions adopted by the Ministry of Health," the CSD said in a statement.

La Liga clubs will train again "when health conditions allow it, and by following strict health protocols," it added.

According to local media reports La Liga

has already outlined a proposition which includes testing players as well as a progression from individual training to sessions with whole squads.

League chief Javier Tebas last week said play could restart as early as next month, although a fortnight extension of the nationwide lockdown until May 9 announced on Saturday appears to have scuppered those plans. During the weekend's meeting between La Liga, the RFEF and the CSD, which reportedly took more than eight hours, the trio decided television income from football would be used to save other sports.

"The La Liga presidents and the federation have committed to create a contingency fund of 10 million euros (10.86 million) to help vulnerable sports, and have invited other entities like the players union to take part," the CSD's statement said.

Footballers wearing masks during matches would be 'sensible precaution'

LONDON, 21 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Players wearing face masks during matches and training would be a "sensible precaution" to take to limit the spread of coronavirus, an epidemiologist has said. Sporting competitions including the Premier League and the English Football League are currently suspended due to the Covid-19 outbreak but are formulating plans for how they could restart should the government take the decision to relax certain restrictions, with the nation currently in lockdown until 7 May at least.

The EFL has given guidance to its clubs to consider a return to training no earlier than 16 May, and Dr Rowland Kao from the University of Edinburgh has suggested that while the effectiveness of masks is still a subject for debate, it may be an idea for

sports administrators to consider.

"Masks tend not to protect you but protect others," he said. "They prevent aerosol spray but leaves open [the risk of] fomite transmission – putting your hand to your mouth or your face and then wiping it somewhere else, like a doorknob.

"It's unclear how much protection those masks would be, but it would seem sensible to put as many precautions as you could in place. If you have got 300-500 people coming together [for a match behind closed doors], there's an opportunity for multiple infections to occur."

West Ham chief executive Karren Brady suggested at the weekend that up to 500 people would be involved in the staging of a match behind closed doors. The Premier League did not directly



respond to Dr Kao's comments on face masks, and will be guided by government advice as and when there is the possibility of training or matches restarting.

World players' union FIFPRO is in discussions over safety protocols at training and matches, including with the World Health Organisation. The WHO's current advice is that masks should

only be worn by those who are sick and showing symptoms or those caring for people suspected to have coronavirus, and are not suitable for the general public because they can be contaminated by other people's coughs and sneezes, or when putting them on or removing them.

The WHO is also concerned they may offer people a false sense of

security.

However, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control says masks may help prevent the spread of infection from people who are contagious but not yet showing symptoms, particularly in a setting such as public transport or other busy spaces.

Dr Kao said regular testing of all personnel involved in training and

the staging of behind-closed-doors matches would be vital, and that health services must be prioritised in the provision of the tests.

"Individuals involved should be tested relatively soon before any such activities occur and should be tested frequently throughout," he said. "There will be some question as to whether such tests are available. If we're talking about a substantial number of teams and a substantial number of tests, it's not clear to me at this time whether that would be viewed as an appropriate use of such testing, if we're trying to prioritise other areas. If you couldn't do the testing, it's unlikely any activity could restart."

Professional football in England has been suspended since 13 March, with a return date being kept under review.

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Seoul sees no suspicious activity in North amid Kim concerns

SEOUL, APR 21 (AP): The South Korean government said Tuesday no unusual activity has been detected in North Korea after unconfirmed reports described leader Kim Jong Un as in fragile condition after heart surgery.

The presidential Blue House says it had no information about the rumors on Kim's health. Speculation often surfaces about North Korea's leadership based on attendance at important state events. Kim, who is in his mid-30s, missed the celebration of his late grandfather and state founder Kim Il Sung on April 15, the country's most important holiday.

At his last public appearance, he presided over a political bureau meeting of the ruling Workers' Party on April 11, discussing preventive measures against the coronavirus and electing his sister as an alternate member of the bureau. However, state media reported Kim sent greetings to Syrian President Bashar Assad last week and a birthday spread to a North Korean woman who turned 100 on Monday.

We have no information to confirm regarding rumors about Chairman Kim Jong Un's health issue that have

been reported by some media outlets. Also, no unusual developments have been detected inside North Korea, Blue House spokesman Kang Min-seok said in the statement.

A US official said the White House was aware before the reports appeared late Monday that Kim's health might be precarious. The official said the U.S. had information that Kim may have undergone surgery and that complications may have rendered him incapacitated or worse.

But, the official stressed that the US had nothing to confirm the surgery had taken place or that any complications had occurred.

We just don't know, said the official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The US official would not elaborate on where the information came from or when it had been received. The White House and State Department had no comment.

The original CNN report had cited an anonymous US official who said Kim was in bad shape after an unspecified surgery. Later, another US official told the same network that the concerns about Kim's health are credible

but the severity is hard to assess.

Daily NK, an online newspaper focused on North Korea that often cites defectors or unspecified sources within North Korea, had cited anonymous sources saying Kim was recovering from heart surgery in the capital Pyongyang and that his condition was improving.

An official from Seoul's National Intelligence Service, who didn't want to be named, citing office rules, said the spy agency couldn't confirm whether Kim had had surgery.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said his government was monitoring the situation.

A political upheaval in North Korea would be unlikely even if Kim became sidelined by health problems, according to analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea.

Cheong said Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, is already exercising significant influence within the government and that most members of Pyongyang's leadership share an interest with the Kim family in maintaining the North's system.

Outside governments and media have a mixed

record on tracking developments among North Korea's ruling elite, made difficult by Pyongyang's stringent control of information about them.

In 2016, South Korea media quoted intelligence officials as saying Kim Jong Un had had a former military chief executed for corruption and other charges. But North Korea's state media months later showed Ri Yong Gil alive and serving in new senior posts.

Kim's absence from state media often triggers speculation. In 2014, Kim vanished from the public eye for nearly six weeks before reappearing with a cane. South Korea's spy agency said days later that he had a cyst removed from his ankle.

Kim, believed to be 36, took power upon his father's death in December 2011 and is the third generation of his family to rule the nuclear-armed country.

Kim met President Donald Trump three times in 2018 and 2019 and had summits with other Asian leaders as he pursued diplomacy in hopes of ending crippling sanctions and getting security guarantees. But he maintained his right to a nuclear arsenal and most diplomacy has stalemated since.

reduce their salaries.

Barcelona, Atletico Madrid and Sevilla players have all accepted 70 per cent pay cuts per month while Real Madrid players will lose 10 per cent of their annual salary, as long as the season restarts, and 20 per cent if the season is cancelled

Arsenal players and boss Arteta agree coronavirus pay cut

LONDON, APR 21 (AFP): Arsenal became the first Premier League club to agree a coronavirus pay cut with their players as manager Mikel Arteta and his stars slashed their wages by 12.5 percent.

After Southampton and West Ham announced wage deferral agreements with their players, Arsenal went one step further by securing the pay cut from Arteta and the first-team squad.

"We are pleased to announce that we have reached a voluntary agreement with our first-team players, head coach and core coaching staff to help support the club at this critical time," Arsenal said in a statement.

"The move follows positive and constructive discussions. In these conversations there has been a clear appreciation of the gravity of the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a strong desire for players and staff to show their backing for the Arsenal family."

The pay deals come after a series of negotiations over the last two weeks amid a backdrop of criticism for Premier League players over their failure to agree quick wage cuts while some top-flight teams furloughed non-playing staff to save money. The Premier League asked



clubs to put a 30 percent pay cut to players, but the English Professional Footballers' Association said that would affect tax contributions to the UK's state-run National Health Service. It was reported that Arsenal initially proposed a 12-month drop in salary for their players.

- 'FINANCIAL RISKS' - After a muted response to their request, Arsenal were able to secure the agreement thanks to Arteta's influence, according to reports. Arteta, who has recovered after contracting the virus in March, spoke to his 27-man squad in a video call on Wednesday.

He is said to have made it clear that he would not engage them in discussions about money normally, but in this case he wanted them to take a strong collective stance in supporting Arsenal through the

unprecedented financial mayhem caused by the pandemic.

There are reports that Arsenal, whose yearly wage bill is around ?230 million (286 million), will give players their money back in the event that they bridge an eight-point gap and qualify for the Champions League when football restarts.

"If we meet specific targets in the seasons ahead, primarily linked to success on the pitch, the club will repay agreed amounts," the statement said.

"We will be able to make those repayments as hitting these targets, which the players can directly influence, will mean our financial position will be stronger.

"The agreement is based on the assumption we will finish the season 2019/20 and receive the full broadcasting revenues.

"The resulting savings

will help cover some of the financial risks we have this season in relation to our matchday and commercial income."

Last week, Arsenal announced that their executive team, including the chief executive Vinai Venkatesham and the head of football Raul Sanllehi, would waive more than a third of their earnings over the next year.

Premier League chiefs believe the virus could cost them around ?1 billion if the season cannot be completed. Football is currently suspended indefinitely in England, with the UK under lockdown.

"We are proud and grateful to our players and staff for pulling together to support our club, our people and our community in these unprecedented times which are some of the most challenging we have faced in our history," the statement said.

Nadal frustrated by tennis lockdown, Federer happy with surgery recovery

Madrid, Apr 21 (AFP):

Rafael Nadal expressed his frustration that tennis players remain unable to practise due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Roger Federer revealed he was happy with his recovery from knee surgery. The Spanish government has extended the country's state of alarm until May 9, with the entire population confined to their homes except a small number working in specific sectors, leaving Nadal perplexed as to why

he can't train.

"It's true I don't understand very well because we cannot play tennis when many people are going to work and even more so in our sport, where we keep at a large and safe distance and we play on opposite sides of the court," world number two Nadal said during an Instagram Live. "But I understand that we are in a very critical situation, that the government is dealing with something unprecedented and I also understand that

the last thing they think of is who can train and who cannot train.

"I understand the situation and obviously there are many things that are not logical but you have to accept the rules."

Nadal treated tennis fans to an Instagram Live in which he spoke to both Roger Federer and Andy Murray about their experiences during lockdown. The men's and women's tours have been halted due to the virus, while Wimbledon was

cancelled last month for the first time since World War II and Nadal's favourite Grand Slam the French Open was pushed back to September 20.

"I am not playing tennis, I do not have a court at home and I miss it a little," Nadal said.

"I am sticking to my physical routines. From the gym of my academy they were able to bring me some machines when lockdown began so I try to work a little in the morning, a little in the afternoon.

Valencia players agree to coronavirus pay cuts

MADRID, APR 21 (AFP): Valencia has confirmed its first team players will accept pay cuts to limit the economic damage felt by the club from the coronavirus pandemic.

After weeks of negotiations, Valencia announced the club will also apply for the

Spanish government's furlough scheme (ERTE), which allows employers to reduce working hours and pay in exceptional circumstances.

"The club is particularly grateful for the solidarity of the first team who, by reducing their wages, will help

the club protect all its workers and their families in such difficult circumstances," said the club in a statement.

Valencia have followed an number of La Liga's leading teams in applying cuts although they have not specified by how much the players will

72 active trials underway across US on coronavirus: Trump



By LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, APR 21 (PTI): US President Donald Trump has said there are 72 active trials underway across the country researching dozens of therapies and treatments for the coronavirus and tremendous progress is being made on vaccines.

According to the President, there are therapies designed to attack the virus as well as others that would hinder its replication, reduce the rate of infection, control the immune response or transfer life savings antibodies from the blood of recovered patients.

There are now 72 active trials underway across the United States researching dozens of therapies and treatments and another 211 are in the planning stages. They are literally mobilising on therapeutics and also on vaccines, and tremendous progress is being made on

vaccines and I must say on therapeutics, Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference on the coronavirus on Monday.

From the day this crisis began, America launched a scientific mobilisation of colossal size and scale, he said.

Someday they will be able to write the true story because nobody has seen anything like it, the President said, accusing the mainstream media for refusing to cover it correctly.

If I had my choice give me the therapeutics right now because that would help people right now and we have some things that I think are working not only working but we have some incredible things that look like they could be an answer but we will know soon. Being tested, working out right now, he said.

Trump has been pushing for the use of malaria drug

hydroxychloroquine for the treatment of coronavirus patients.

On Monday he did not mention this drug, a large consignment of which has come from India.

tremendous things are happening, you will be seeing that over the weeks. We will be talking about it in the not-too-distant future, he said.

Johnson & Johnson, he said, is very well along on vaccines. Vaccines have to be tested yet, therapeutics are for now, he noted.

A lot of good things are happening on both but ultimately we also hope to prevent infection through a safe, a very safe vaccine and that will be a great thing when we have that and we will have that, Trump added.

The number of people killed in the US due to COVID-19 has reached 42,094, according to Johns Hopkins University, and more than 750,000 cases have been confirmed.

Disappointed, but will continue legal fight against extradition: Vijay Mallya

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, APR 21 (PTI): Embattled liquor baron Vijay Mallya, who lost his UK High Court appeal against an extradition order to India, has said that he is "disappointed" with the ruling but will continue to seek legal remedies as advised by his legal team.

The 64-year-old former Kingfisher Airlines boss reiterated that he has repeatedly offered to pay the Indian banks the loan amount owed by his now-defunct airline, an offer which the banks have rejected.

I am naturally disappointed with the High Court decision. I will continue to pursue further legal remedies as advised by my lawyers, Mallya said in a statement on Monday evening.

I have repeatedly offered to repay the banks in full, but sadly to no avail, he said.

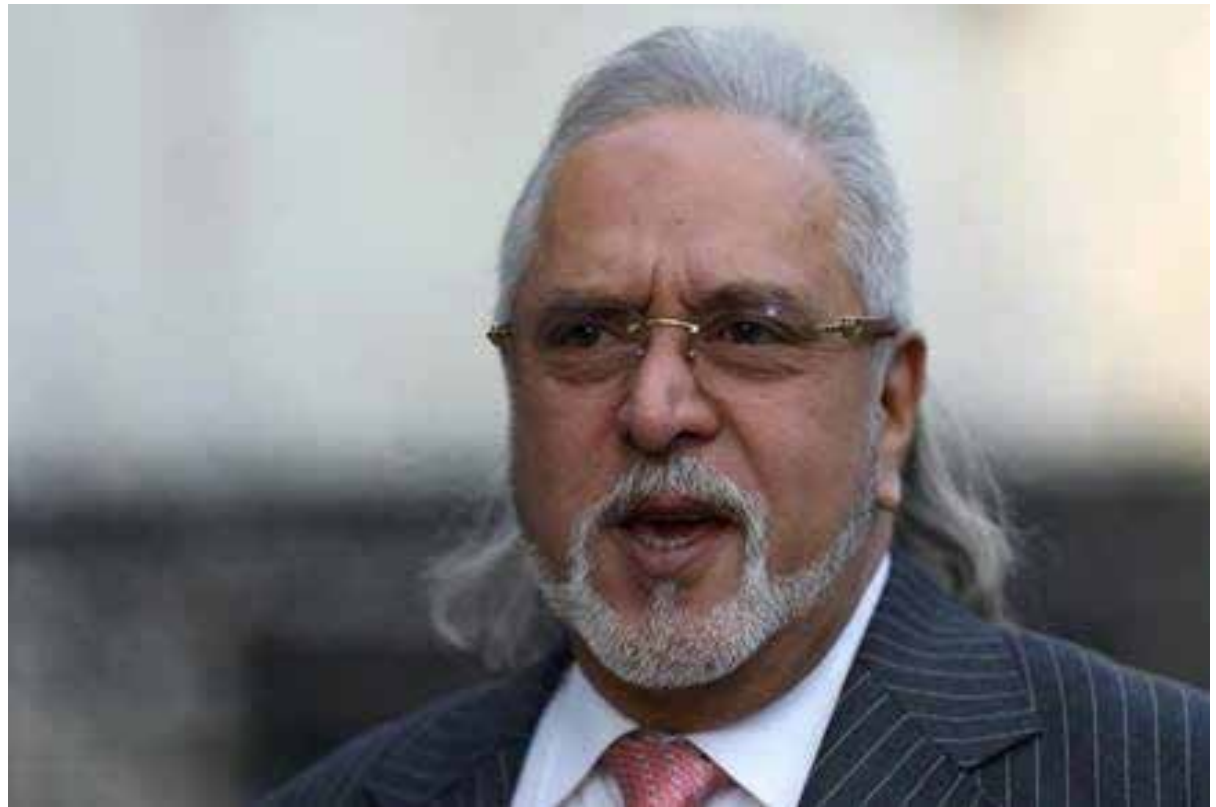
The dismissal of the appeal this week means Mallya has 14 days to apply for permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court.

As he has now indicated his intention to seek further legal measures, the UK Home Office would wait for the outcome of that appeal before it can formally certify the court order for Mallya to be extradited to India.

The businessman, who has been based in the UK since March 2016 and remains on bail after his arrest on an extradition warrant executed by Scotland Yard in April 2017, also expressed his disappointment with the media narrative which quotes Rs 9,000 crore as the amount owed in the fraud and money laundering case brought by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against him.

I am also disappointed with the media narrative which states that I must face trial in India for a fraud of Rs 9,000 crore. Please note that the allegations against me and others are specifically and only related to three tranches of borrowing from IDBI

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Bank for a total of Rs 900 crores in 2009.

This loan was subsumed along with loans from other banks within the Master Debt Recast Agreement of 2010. Following the DRT (Debt Recovery Tribunal) order for the payment of approximately Rs 5,000 crore by way of Principal and Rs 1,200 crore by way of unapplied interest making a total of Rs 6,200 crores, the banks have already recovered in cash a sum of Rs 2,500 crores, which is 50 per cent of the Principal amount, he claimed.

Mallya refers to paragraphs contained within the High Court judgment handed down by Lord Justice Stephen

Irwin and Justice Elisabeth Laing, the two-member bench at the Royal Courts of Justice in London presiding over the appeal, which refers to these specific amounts.

The judgment notes that between April and November 2009, five banks the State Bank of India (SBI), the Bank of India, the Bank of Baroda, the United Bank of India (UBI) and United Commercial Bank (UCO) extended loans to Kingfisher Airlines (KFA) totaling Rs 1,250 crore, leaving a shortfall of Rs 750 crore from the desired infusion of Rs 2,000 crore.

The KFA then approached an additional

bank, the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), to make up that shortfall.

The Requesting State, the Government of India (GoI) seeks the extradition of the Appellant (Mallya) in respect of these loans. It is said that the loans were obtained by means of a conspiracy to defraud and by means of fraudulent misrepresentations; it is further said that the Appellant engaged in money-laundering some of the proceeds of the loans, the judgment states.

In the judgment handed down on Monday, the High Court judges upheld the December

2018 extradition order of the Westminster Magistrates' Court in London and accepted that there is a prima facie case both of misrepresentation and of conspiracy, and thus there is also a prima facie case of money laundering.

Mallya's legal team had claimed that the loan defaults by KFA were the result of wider issues faced by the aviation industry at the time.

But the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), arguing on behalf of the Indian authorities, managed to establish a blueprint of dishonesty against the businessman and co-conspiring bankers.

Madagascar president launches coronavirus 'remedy'

The president of Madagascar Andry Rajoelina has officially launched a local herbal remedy claimed to prevent and cure the novel coronavirus.

"Tests have been carried out -- two people have now been cured by this treatment," Rajoelina told ministers, diplomats and journalists at the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA), which developed the beverage.

"This herbal tea gives results in seven days," he said.

Downing a dose, he said: "I will be the first to drink this today, in front of you, to show you that this product cures and does not kill."

The drink, which has been called Covid-Organics, is derived from artemisia -- a plant

with proven efficacy in malaria treatment -- and other indigenous herbs, according to the IMRA.

But its safety and effectiveness have not been assessed internationally, nor has any data from trials been published in peer-reviewed studies. Mainstream scientists have warned of the potential risk from untested herbal brews.

Rajoelina brushed aside any such reservations and said the concoction would be offered to schoolchildren, as it was his duty was to "protect the Malagasy people".

"Covid-Organics will be used as prophylaxis, that is for prevention, but clinical observations have shown a trend towards its effectiveness in curative treatment,"

said Dr. Charles Andrianjara, IMRA's director general.

The large Indian Ocean island has so far detected 121 cases and no fatality.

The pandemic has triggered a rush for herbal formulas, lemons and ginger in the belief that they can protect against the virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which has people to be vigilant about claimed cures for COVID-19, did not attend the event.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), referring to claims for herbal or tea remedies, says: "There is no scientific evidence that any of these alternative remedies can prevent or cure the illness caused by COVID-19. In fact, some of them may not be safe to consume."

New York city to form new response unit to address anti-Asian harassment amid COVID-19

YOSHITA SINGH
NEW YORK, APR 21 (PTI): New York city, the financial capital of the world that has emerged as the new epicenter of the coronavirus in the US, is forming a new response team to address the growing incidents of harassment and discrimination against Asian-Americans in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 14,000 people have died in the city and over 200,000 people have contracted the deadly virus. The number of the coronavirus

cases in the US has gone up to 787,370, while over 35,000 people have died from the disease.

The New York City Commission on Human Rights has announced the formation of a COVID-19 Response Team to handle reports of harassment and discrimination related to the outbreak.

Since February, the agency has recorded 248 reports of harassment and discrimination related to COVID-19, and over 40 per cent (105) of which identify incidents of anti-Asian harassment

or discrimination.

By comparison, during this same time period in 2019, the Commission received just five reports of anti-Asian discrimination.

The response team will consist of staff from the Law Enforcement Bureau and the Community Relations Bureau working in coordination to quickly and efficiently track and respond to the sharp increase in reports of harassment and discrimination connected to the pandemic.

"In this time of unparalleled crisis, the NYC Commission on Human Rights is dedicated to responding to and investigating reports of bias, harassment and discrimination related to the COVID-19 outbreak in our city," said Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights Carmelyn Malalis.

The COVID-19 Response Team is actively investigating discrimination in housing, public accommodation and employment on the basis of race, national origin, disability, and lawful source of income.

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SummitTIMES

The Batman' release pushed to October 2021



LOS ANGELES, APR 21 (PTI): Warner Bros Studios' "The Batman", starring Robert Pattinson as the DC superhero and directed by Matt Reeves, will now release in October, 2021.

The film's production was put on halt in mid-March due to coronavirus outbreak and the studio has now announced that movie, which was earlier scheduled to hit the theatres on June

25, 2021, will now bow out on October 1, 2021.

According to Deadline, the studio has also rescheduled superhero movies The Flash and Shazam2.

While The Flash will open on June 2, 2022, instead of July 1, Shazam 2, earlier set to release on April 1, 2022, will now come out on November 4, 2022.

Also, The Sopranos feature prequel The Many Saints of Newark, originally dated for September 25 of this year, has now been shifted to March 12 next year.

Baz Luhrmann's untitled Elvis Presley movie, starring Tom Hanks, will now hit the theatres on November 5, 2021, a month after the originally planned release.

As per the studio's new release calendar, Will Smith drama King Richard will now bow out on November 19, 2021 instead of November 25 this year.

Last month, Warner Bros Studios postponed the release of its much-awaited superhero movie Wonder Woman 1984 from June 5 to August 14.

Daisy Shah to foray into digital world

MUMBAI, APR 21 (PTI): "Race 3" star Daisy Shah is all set to make her debut on the digital platform with a new show, which she will start working on once the coronavirus lockdown is over and everything is back on track.

"The priority right now is for the world to be back on track. I have been getting offers from web for a while but nothing clicked for a while. But I was approached for a web series that really appealed to me. We will begin shooting whenever we are allowed to," Daisy told PTI.

Daisy was supposed to begin shooting for her upcoming film Bulbul Marriage Hall, presented by Salman Khan from April 24. But due to the lockdown the shoot has been postponed.

This (lockdown) is the need of the hour. It is good as it is for the safety of everyone else. Let the entire crisis get over, let everything be safe around us to get out of our houses.

The actor said the film is a rom-com and she was looking forward to begin work on it. It is going to be a funny film. This character comes naturally to me, she is upfront and determined. It resonates with me, she added.

Hilary Duff has weekly meetings for 'Lizzie McGuire' reboot

LOS ANGELES, APR 21 (PTI): Actor Hilary Duff says she is still having weekly meetings with the team about the "Lizzie McGuire" reboot set at Disney Plus.

The new series, which was announced in last August during the company's D23 Expo, was put on hiatus after showrunner Terri Minsky left the project over creative differences with the streamer.

The studio reportedly wanted a family-friendly programme, which Duff and creator Terri Minsky disagreed with.

The star said there were plans for "a lot of" familiar faces to come back, but she was unsure whether Lalaine



Bulbul Marriage Hall will be Daisy's third collaboration with superstar Salman Khan after Jai Ho and Race 3.

The 35-year-old actor said she feels blessed to have Salman's support and guidance in Bollywood.

"This time he is presenting the movie, while in Jai Ho' and Race 3' we worked as co-actors. I consider myself super blessed to have his support. There are certain things that you don't plan and it just happens, you just have to appreciate it and feel fortunate.

Daisy said besides Bulbul Marriage Hall, she has another film titled See You in Court, scheduled to release in June but it will be pushed most likely. The film is directed by Sachin Kaushik.

"We are done filming but the post production work is at standstill. I am playing a child psychologist. The film is about a 12-year-old, filing a case against his parents, who want to get divorced. It is a heavy film but it has been done in a light hearted way.

(Miranda Sanchez) and Yani Gellman (who played Paolo Valisari) would star in the reboot.

Gellman's Paolo betrayed Lizzie when he tried to set her up to embarrass his fellow pop star, Isabella Parigi, a role also played by Duff in "The Lizzie McGuire Movie".

"I'm still talking to (the team) weekly, I don't know. They were shooting and then everything was put on hold. And we're just kind of figuring out if we can make this happen.

"But there were plans for a lot of people to be in the show. So, I already know some of those things but I don't know about Paolo. I think she (Lizzie)'d probably be pretty mad



to see him," Duff told Cosmopolitan magazine.

In February, the actor urged Disney Plus to consider moving the revival series to Hulu, days after production on the show was put on hold.



IT'S SPRING! The actress, Brie Larson picks up a bouquet of fresh flowers at the farmer's market in Malibu, Calif.

Bon Jovi cancels tour amid coronavirus crisis to enable ticketholders get refunds'



LOS ANGELES, APR 21 (PTI): Bon Jovi has announced that it has decided to cancel its 2020 summer tour with Bryan Adams due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The popular rock band said it has decided to call off the tour rather than postponing it so that the ticketholders can get their money back and can use

it to pay their bills or buy groceries.

Due to the ongoing global pandemic, it is no longer feasible for Bon Jovi to tour this summer. Given these difficult times, we have made the decision to cancel the tour entirely. This will enable ticketholders to get refunds to help pay their bills or buy groceries.

"These are trying times. You've always been there for us and we'll always be there for you. We look forward to seeing everyone again on tour when we can all safely be together. We will continue to send out news and updates on Bon Jovi touring in the weeks and months to come, the band said in a statement issued to Rolling Stone.

Bon Jovi is releasing a new album, Bon Jovi 2020' on May 15, and the tour in support of the LP was scheduled to launch in June.

The group was directly hit by the coronavirus outbreak when keyboardist David Bryan tested positive in March. The musician shared on Sunday that he has fully recovered.

Aries:
As we move closer and closer to the new moon, you, dear Aries, will be waltzing with the energy of rebirth rather intimately. But that doesn't mean the road that leads to this resurrection is going to be easy. The next few days are crucial. You will have no option but to confront the dark night of the soul. You can either resist what's coming up, or surrender to the process of transformation. Remember, facing your shadows will teach you things that the light never will.

Taurus:
Look back at the trajectory of your life. Examine the so-called loss and pain. What does revisiting these incidents evoke within you? Are you overcome by a sense of relief, or do you find yourself holding onto the burden? Upon deeper examination, you will realise that Spirit had a plan for you from the very beginning. The things that didn't work out were orchestrated in a certain way so as to protect you from harm. If that doesn't call for celebration, what does, Taurus? As for the obstacles you are being faced with right now, know that they have been put in your path for a similar reason.

Gemini:
You thought the lockdown would be over by now, but here you are, staring at the world

outside wistfully through your window, wondering what sunshine and fresh air feel like against your skin. Given our circumstances, the home is becoming more important than ever before. Remember, it's not just a physical space for boarding and lodging. It's your sanctum, a place where you get to be yourself without the masks you sometimes don in the outside world. On your to-do list today: focusing on what needs to be fixed. Get together with your main crew and divide the tasks so you don't miss out on any details.

Tip: Repair work around the house needs your attention.

Cancer:
Self-communication is an important theme for you today. So what if you are not where you want to be? Trust that the road you're on will take you there. If you've been feeling like a failure, breathe into this wound, whisper words of encouragement to yourself, and acknowledge the breakthroughs you've had up until this moment. This will reinstate your faith in both, yourself and the mysterious forces. Remember, there are some things that are out of your control at this moment. The best way forward is to accept the things you cannot change.

Leo:
Separation is an illusion. You are connected to

the whole, wide Universe, Leo. Become aware of the magic that surrounds you, and the signs and symbols that bring you messages from the beyond. The song of the raven and dance of the winds are all bringing forth the answers to your questions. Are you willing to tune in and listen? Some of you may be feeling the presence of an ancestor or a loved one from the other side. If the energy feels protective rather than threatening, trust that you are on the right track.

Virgo:
The cards are bringing your attention to the physical body, one that you are learning to love and nurture in a whole new way. Perfection is an illusion. Celebrate the body you have now, and not the body you desire or consider ideal. You are exactly where you need to be and this is a beautiful place. When it comes to self-care, however, you are being asked to tune in to the needs of your vessel. What are the foods that make you feel nurtured? The rituals that raise your vibrations? Be cognisant of what makes you feel good and incorporate it into your daily life.

Libra:
Work with the cycles and rhythms of nature. Work with the cycles and rhythms of Mother Moon. While her newness is synonymous with birth and infinite possibilities, her darkness speaks of death and decay. This is a time of connecting with the wild feminine, Libra. Feel

the energies of Lilith, Hecate, and Kali around you. Their presence is giving you the power to cut toxic cords and call your power back to you.

Scorpio:
New moons are synonymous with birth and infinite possibilities. As we move towards a new cycle, you're being asked to reflect upon the seeds you desire to plant in the coming days. Don't look outside for cues, Scorpio. Only you know what is in alignment with your highest good. Follow the road map that's being drawn up by your heart. At the same time, tap into the power of the dark moon to release any residual energy that could be blocking you from manifesting that which is in alignment with your highest good.

Sagittarius:
Now is not the time to act, Sagittarius. It's time to sit back and observe, and to engage with life as if it were a play. In these moments, you will be able to see duality at its best. Nothing is inherently good or bad. It is our perception that colours our reality. Find a hint of shadow in the brightest of lights and a silver lining on the darkest of nights. Accept the loss and the pain for what it is. The sun will rise again. Trust that you are being led to a better place.

Capricorn:
We are always talking about manifestation and making space for the big stuff. Truth is, new

energy cannot enter until we have cleared out the clutter. Work with the cycles of the moon, Capricorn. The darkness urges us to confront our shadows and unhealthy attachments. So ask yourself this question: "What am I unwilling to let go of?" A physical, mental, and emotional reset is in order today.

Aquarius:
Once again, you're being asked to confront your abundance blocks; the fears related to not having enough. Look beyond the illusion, Aquarius. The Universe is abundant and provides in every way. It is our capacity to receive that determines the quality of our lives. At the same time, observe your compulsive need to hoard. Help a warrior in need if you possess the means to, and trust that everything you put into the Universe will come back to you manifold.

Pisces:
Where your attention goes, energy flows. That's just the order of things, Pisces. Instead of focusing on the given obstacle, tap into your ability to find creative solutions. Trust that there is a way out of the given dilemma. The cards are also bringing your attention to the stress and tension you could be experiencing as a result of this. A frazzled mind isn't going to help you get ahead. Focus on your breathing patterns. Take some time out to ground yourself.