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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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State prepares for possible lockdown extension

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 APR:**

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad today convened a Second Review Meeting with the State Government on the current status and Sikkim's plan of action against the spread of global pandemic COVID-19 at Raj Bhavan, a press release informs.

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang, Minister for Health, Dr MK Sharma, Chief Secretary, SC Gupta, Director General of Police, A Shankar Rao, Addl Chief Secretary to Governor Dr K Jayakumar, Principal Secretaries of Health and Labour Departments, Secretary of Health Department and other officers were present on the occasion.

The meeting began with the appraisal of latest report and action taken by the State Government in view of the ongoing lockdown and its impact on the lives of common man. Sikkim is among the three states in the country with Zero Corona positive cases as on 08 Apr, 2020, and the meeting deliberated on the possible measures and restrictions to be put in place to keep

Sikkim safe.

Chief Minister apprised that the situation is normal in the State and the government has given utmost priority on equitable distribution of relief material to the intended beneficiaries.

Despite some issues of transportation of some essential ration component and sudden rise in the number of beneficiaries during the process of distribution, government is taking all necessary steps to ease the hardships being faced by the people during lock down period.

He also informed that in view of likely extension of lock down period in the country beyond 14 April in the backdrop of sudden rise in cases of COVID-19 over the last one week, the State government is taking some necessary measures as under;

1. All educational institutions will continue to remain closed till situation normalises.
2. Buffer stock of all essential commodities including health consumables is being maintained.
3. Government will continue to keep highest vigil at the border check points and restriction of movement



will remain in force even if the neighbouring states lifts the lockdown.

4. The partial relaxation of lockdown norms if any within the State after the stipulated time will be in line with the guidelines issued by Union Government with strict compliance on social distancing.

5. Financial assistance has also been extended to Non-Sikkimese students currently residing in Sikkim and studying in Sikkim University.

6. 55 Sikkimese

students who were in facility quarantine at SICUN Assam Lingzey are being transported to their respective homes after completion of quarantine period.

7. People of Sikkim have extended full cooperation in government's efforts in the enforcement of lockdown and have shown highest degree of awareness, resilience and self-restraint.

Governor during the meeting urged the State Government to

expedite the process of setting up of Testing Lab for COVID 19 in the State so that early detection and treatment of COVID 19 patient in the event of its occurrence in Sikkim. Minister for Health informed that the process has begun and State government has given top priority in establishing the testing facility in collaboration with ICMR.

Governor further suggested that State Government should take highest precaution, strengthen

its mechanism and its preparedness to tackle COVID-19 to prevent it from entering Sikkim. This has become all the more important since there has been rapid increase of COVID 19 positive cases since the beginning of April.

He further urged the government to take the interest and welfare of vulnerable section of our society into highest priority in view of the likelihood of lockdown period getting extended beyond 14 of April.

PHED - Ensuring water supply through the lockdown

GANGTOK, 08 APR [IPR]: The lockdown has brought normal activities to a standstill, however, there are some services which are indispensable even during the most dire of circumstances. One such service is that of ensuring continuous water supply to the people.

The Department of Public Health Engineering has been highly sensitive towards the basic need of the people and has thus

deputed engineers and field staff to regularly check the supplies and ensure immediate repairs wherever required.

Apart from ensuring regular water supply, the PHED has been involved in installing temporary wash basins and taps in various public places during the lockdown period.

The Department has also installed tanks and taps at Rangpo checkpoint for the convenience of officials



and staff manning the border and ensured 24/7 water supply.

Likewise, the

Department has installed water tanks at the quarantine centres in Rangpo and Mining.

Migrant workers are guest workers: Odisha govt

BHUBANESWAR, APR 8 (PTI): Odisha government described the migrant workers as "guest workers" and said arrangements have been made for those stranded in the state due to the lockdown in the wake of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Food and accommodation have been ensured through 1,882 camps for around 56,926 such "guest workers", said Odisha governments COVID-19 spokesman Subroto Bagchi.

He said the guest workers are being provided food and other basic amenities and doctors are regularly visiting these camps.

Odisha government has opened a call centre (Shramik Sahayata)-18003456703 for guest workers who need help in the state, Bagchi said.

Apart from food and accommodation, the state government was also providing psycho-social counselling in the camps and medical services through mobile health units have also been extended in few districts. Even fruits and milk for children are also being provided in the migrant workers camps.

These migrants workers are from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar Haryana, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and other states, an official said.

Sikkim Milk working hard to provide uninterrupted supply: Sikkim Milk MD 1 litre packet production halted to focus on half-litre packets

**ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 08 APR:**

"Sikkim Milk has been successful in supplying milk as per the demand in the market even during the lockdown and there is no shortage of milk as of now," said AB Karki, the Managing Director of the Sikkim Milk today.

Speaking to SummitTIMES, Mr Karki informed that Sikkim Milk is supplying milk as per the market demand but has stopped production of its 1 litre packet milk. One litre milk packet is not available for customers in the market at the moment.

Mr Karki informed that the production of 1 litre milk [full cream] needs a larger quantity of raw milk so its production has been halted for now.

This has been done so that focus can be put on producing the half-litre packet of milk.

Sikkim Milk has also halted the production of other milk products like Churpi, Cheese, Curd and some others so as to focus only on milk production during the lock down, he informed.

The procurement of milk from milk producers has reduced slightly but it has not affected milk production severely, said Mr Karki.

Talking about the safety and precautionary measures used for the Sikkim Milk staff who have been working hard, he informed that only the important and necessary staff are working. Staff members are working

on shift basis, he informed.

He further informed that milk production needs hygienic environment and Sikkim Milk is following all the measures of hygiene and cleanliness but in view of the current situation, Sikkim Milk has adopted more strict regulations and precautionary measures to keep the staff safe and ensure production also goes well.

Regarding the challenges being faced by the Sikkim Milk, Mr Karki informed that there have been a lot of challenges but Sikkim Milk is ready to tackle the situation for next three-four months.

Sikkim Milk is facing problems regarding cow feed, milk transportation vehicle are facing technical problems

and the car repair workshops are closed.

Mr Karki urged the Government to look into the matter so as that milk supplies are not disrupted.

The Sikkim Milk MD also said that the Government and the Chief Minister have been very supportive during the entire period of lockdown and all necessary support is being received from the government.

He mentioned that the Sikkim Milk workers are tirelessly working in the service of the people of the State and the Union is taking care of all the protective and precautionary measures for its workers. "Health is first so we have taken care of the safety of our staff," he said.

Lachen Dzumsa bans trout fishing

**SANDEEP PRASAD
GANGTOK, 08 APR:**

Pipon of Lachen Dzumsa has decided to ban fishing of Trout at Yathang, Thumbuk and all places under Lachen Dzumsa from today.

Paljor Lachenpa, Pipon of Lachen told SummitTIMES over the phone that an order has been passed by the Dzumsa banning fishing in the territory of Lachen Dzumsa, adding that if anyone is found fishing in these places, strict action will be taken by the Dzumsa and fine of Rs 25,000 will be imposed against the violators.

This Dzumsa law extends to the army as well since it has been seen that army (ASC) in Yathang valley has been using bleaching powder in the river to catch fish (Trout).

Death toll due to COVID-19 rises to 149; cases climb to 5,194

NEW DELHI, APR 8 (PTI):

The death toll due to the novel coronavirus rose to 149 and the number of cases to 5,194 in the country on Wednesday, according to the Union Health Ministry.

While the number of active COVID-19 cases is 4,643, as many as 401 people were cured and discharged and one had migrated, it said.

The total number of cases include 70 foreign nationals.

According to the ministry's data updated at 9 a.m., 25 new deaths have been reported since Tuesday.

Sixteen deaths were reported from Maharashtra, two each from Delhi, West Bengal, Haryana and Tamil Nadu and one from Andhra Pradesh.

Maharashtra has reported the most coronavirus deaths at 64, followed by Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh at 13 each and Delhi at 9.

Telangana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu have reported seven fatalities each.

West Bengal has registered five deaths, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have reported four each, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan have recorded three deaths each.

Two deaths each have been reported from Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala.

Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Odisha reported one fatality each, according to the health ministry data.

However, a PTI tally of figures reported by various states as on Tuesday 9.45 p.m. showed 5,192 testing positive across the country and at least 162 deaths.

There has been a lag in the Union

Health Ministry figures, compared to the numbers announced by different states, which officials attribute to procedural delays in assigning the cases to individual states.

The highest number of confirmed cases in the country are from Maharashtra at 1018, followed by Tamil Nadu at 690 and Delhi with 576 cases.

Telangana has reported 364 COVID-19 cases followed by Kerala at 336.

Rajasthan has 328 cases, Uttar Pradesh has 326 and Andhra Pradesh reported 305 coronavirus cases.

Novel coronavirus cases have risen to 229 in Madhya Pradesh, 175 in Karnataka and 165 in Gujarat.

Haryana has 147 cases, Jammu and Kashmir has 116, West Bengal has 99 and Punjab has 91 positive patients so far. Odisha has reported 42 coronavirus cases.

Thirty-eight people were infected with the virus in Bihar while Uttarakhand has 31 patients and Assam 27.

Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh have 18 cases each while Ladakh has 14 positive patients so far.

Ten cases each have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Chhattisgarh.

Goa has reported seven COVID-19 infections, followed by Puducherry at five cases. Jharkhand has reported four cases and Manipur two.

Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have reported one case each.

"State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation," the ministry said on its website.

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LingiPayong School staff give a day's salary for CMRF

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 APR: Teaching and Non-Teaching staff members of Government Secondary School LingiPayong, South Sikkim, have donated Rs. 26,150 as contribution towards Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF).

On behalf of school family, the cheque was handed to the Manager, Sikkim State Cooperative Bank Limited (SISCO), Tadong Branch by headmaster of the school on Tuesday.

The fund was pooled in from one day wage of gross salary of regular staff whereas ad-hoc teachers and One Family One Job (OFOJ) employee also voluntarily donated Rs. 500 each towards the relief fund.

"This is the least that we could do to help the government fight this pandemic," the school headmaster said. Prior to this, faculty of vocational subjects also contributed their one day salary to CMRF through their parent department SiBIN.



NHPC Rangit extends support in fighting COVID-19

RUDRAKAUSHIK GYALSHING, 08 APR:

Rangit Power Station, NHPC Ltd, has taken various measures to deal with possible COVID-19 outbreak and help local community residing in and around Rangit Power Station.

The Power Station has distributed Personal Protective Equipments like masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, sanitizing chemicals, etc. to the locals of Nardang Ward of Hingdam, Legship GPU. Sanitization of adjoining areas like

Legship, Kewzing, etc and announcement for awareness of general public through public address system is also being carried out by the Power Station.

The Power Station has also contributed Rs. 40,000 each to District Collector (West) & SDM (Ravangla), South Sikkim to provide dry ration like rice, dal, oil etc. to 85 casual/daily wage/migrant labourers who are stuck in the Chongrang Area of West Sikkim due to the lockdown.



Junior doctors seek donations to buy protective gear

HYDERABAD, APR 8 (PTI):

Citing short supply of personal protection equipment (PPE) from the Telangana government, junior doctors in the state on Wednesday started seeking donations to buy them in the open market.

JUDA (Junior Doctors Association) president Dr K U N Vishnu said though the state government is trying to supply the PPE which consists of eyewear, skullcap covering face, N-95 mask, below knee-level gown, footwear and gloves, they are not sufficient to meet the demands.

He said the junior doctors need at least 800-1000 PPEs per day for those doctors who attend duties at Emergency Wards, ICUs (intensive care units) and COVID-19 stations.

However, they are getting about 500 per day exposing the doctors to patients.

Out of 3,000 JUDAs in the states, about 1000 are working at Emergency Wards, ICUs and COVID-19 stations. I agree the government is putting in all its efforts to supply sufficient PPEs. We are getting about 500 per day. So we started seeking

donations from the public, Dr Vishnu told PTI.

He said they have been getting good responses from people who started contributing to the cause.

According to him, the situation would become nightmarish if doctors start getting this and are confined to isolation.

Our target being -Every Healthcare worker must have adequate protection with a N-95 mask and sanitizer while on duty. We appeal to the public to donate whatever is possible to the organisation, with the assurance that total transparency will be

maintained at all levels. We will regularly update the procurement and distribution details, he further said.

Dr Vishnu said a 'Level-II' PPE acceptable to be used by the medical fraternity would cost about Rs 1000.

On April 7, a media bulletin from the state government on COVID-19 said the total number of active cases in the state has jumped to 348. The number of people who succumbed to the virus remained 11 while that of those discharged from hospitals after recovery stood (cumulatively) at 45.

CONTACT

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Singtam Hospital prepared for COVID-19



YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 08 APR:

District Hospital, Singtam, has set up a camp (flu clinic) especially for people who are suffering from fever and COVID-19 symptoms. A team of doctors and nursing staff are all geared up with safety measures and equipments to check

patients.

As precaution, the pediatric clinic has been shifted to the second floor of the trauma centre.

District Medical Superintendent, Dr Tempo Gyalsten along with ward master, Pranil Bagdas are checking and instructing people

to maintain social distancing during the OPD registration and have instructed the medical shops (located in the hospital premises for their own safety).

Meanwhile, entry of vehicle has been strictly prohibited and patients who are unable to walk have been provided a wheel chair.

Shri Dham Brindavan Sewa Samiti donates to CM Relief Fund

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 APR:

Rohit Raj Maharaj of Shri Dham Brindavan Sewa Samiti, Dodak, West Sikkim, called on Chief Minister Prem

Singh Tamang [Golay] at Samman Bhawan this afternoon and donated Rs 1,01,000 to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in order to support the

government's effort to fight COVID-19. The Chief Minister thanked the Maharaj on behalf of the government for his kind gesture and generous contribution.

Virus inspires actors, corporates, politicians into philanthropy

HYDERABAD, APR 8 (PTI):

The COVID-19 global pandemic and the nationwide lockdown have seen many prominent personalities, corporates and others in Telangana announce philanthropic measures to help the needy during the times of the ongoing crisis.

Telugu film personalities, led by star Chiranjeevi, have started an initiative CoronaCrisisCharity to aid film workers, especially daily wage earners, who need

support.

The charity initiative has received contributions from several Telugu film heroes, according to Chiranjeevi's twitter handle.

Contributions have been pouring into the Chief Ministers Relief Fund ever since the lockdown began.

GMR Group, Reddy Labs, NCC Limited and Shanta Biotech are some of the corporates who have made donations.

Telangana Municipal Administration Minister

K T Rama Rao tweeted about a woman from a BPL family at Medchal near here who chose to return half the ration that was allotted to her and asked officials to distribute the essentials among the poor.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is providing free lunch to about 45,000 people and dinner to about 15,000 people under its Annapurna meals scheme, according to a recent GHMC press release.

How Will Sikkim Cope With The Educational Loss Due To Covid-19?

BUDDHA NATH SHARMA

The state government has closed all the educational institutes within the border from 17 March till 15 April. With the given circumstances, and the statement of the Additional Chief Secretary cum Principal Secretary, Education Department yesterday, it is apparent that schools and colleges will be closed for an additional 15 days at least. In my naive approximation, this closure will be extended further keeping the students out of the classrooms for at least two months. The impact of this closure will be great and will be evident more pronouncedly in the days to come.

LAST SEMESTER STUDENTS TO BE THE MOST DEPRIVED

The most deprived among the students will be the ones in their final semester in colleges and universities. They are to face competitive examinations for their further studies during and immediately after the semester. Further, the last semester includes a course of dissertation which provides the basic exposure to the research in the subject. With students being confined to their rooms for two months, they will be losing these precious opportunities to develop in their subject. And what to speak of the handful of students studying in the Sikkim State University who were involved in protest even during corona scare. Their classes have not yet begun even.

HOW CAN STUDENTS BE ENGAGED DURING CLOSURES?

The means with which students can be kept engaged in academic pursuit even during the lockdowns is being discussed across the world. Different methods are being tried and the most

famous among them has been online classes. Zoom and google classrooms are trying to substitute the regular offline classes. Marginally rich nations like China, USA and the European countries are receiving a partial success with this method. Some countries have even used their national broadcasting channels as educational tv to cater the needs of the students. India has

also tried to transgress to the online learning. The ACS, Govt. of Sikkim was also seen

encouraging the students and teachers to participate in digital learning.

DIGITAL CLASSES CANNOT SUBSTITUTE REGULAR OFFLINE CLASSES

The shift to the digital platform has again exposed the economic inequality as developed in the world also couldn't make online classes substitute the offline mode. The students belonging to the weaker economic background simply couldn't comply with the needs of online classes. Some didn't had the money to spend in the purchase of broadband and the ones in the countryside couldn't get the required internet connectivity.

India, with a considerable number of the population living under the poverty line, is facing it difficult to even provide food and shelter to the needy. In such a backdrop, the talk of online classes will only be a cruel joke. The context of Sikkim is a bit different as compared to the whole nation. At least, majority of the college and university students have proper access to the smartphones, laptops and internet connectivity, but these are also not adequate to shift the learning to digital platform. The state's internet connectivity is very weak in the rural areas and to participate in the online classes smoothly is near to impossible. Further, the online class is proving to be a good alternative only for the PG students with a smaller number of students. To extend it to a larger UG class will be very difficult. On enquiry with students who have been constantly participating in the online classes, they have expressed happiness that they could continue their studies during the lockdowns but have also said that these online classes cannot in any means replace the regular offline mode and is substandard to it.

RESTRUCTURING OF ACADEMIC CALENDAR: ONLY PLAUSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

To encourage digital learning is a visionary step as the digital platform is certainly the way

forward, but to place it as the substitute of the offline classes during the lockdown is serious mistake. The syllabus will not be completed rigorously in the

classroom is evident already. The CBSE along with other boards have directed the schools to promote the students without examinations or examinations only for important subjects. Speculations on the colleges and Universities also promoting students without examinations are being observed. But this step would prove to be not only inefficient but also compromising with the necessary development in the quality of students and will set a bad precedent. If we desire to truly mitigate the losses to the education due to covid 19, the restructuring of the academic calendar is the only plausible option. This will include the extension of the ongoing semester and complete withdrawal or limiting of the summer and winter vacations to few days.

CONCLUSION

The covid 19 pandemic is speculated to take the world economy from already suffering recession to depression. Its effect on the education of students is also quite evident. With even the leading nations failing to bring in an inclusive shift in educational field from offline to online mode, it is quite natural that India (and Sikkim for that matter) will have to opt for the restructuring of academic calendar to mitigate the effect. Moreover, with the ensuing economic depression/ recession apparent, students from weaker section of the society will need constant economic aid from the govt. to run smooth classes in the days to come.

[The writer is a Post Graduate student]

~ 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

Have reached relief packages in East & North: SIMFED

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 APR:

Sikkim Marketing Federation (SIMFED) Limited is supplying all materials except food grains adequately despite several hurdles in transportation of goods from Dhupgurimandi to different parts of the State.

Managing Director of SIMFED, PawanAwasthy told this correspondent that in the initial period the State Government had demanded supplies for an estimated 30,000 people, however, the demand has been increasing.

This, he said, could have been the reason for delay in distribution of relief packages.

SIMFED is supplying onion, potatoes, mustard oil as part of relief packages to the people.

MrAwasthy further said that SIMFED has already completed supplying relief packages to East and North districts and will complete supply of required materials for South and West Districts by Thursday.

However, SIMFED is also procuring organic local green vegetables from rural areas like West and South districts wherein vegetable like local potatoes from



RebdiOkharey from West Sikkim and SIMFED is also directly selling vegetables to customers as notified by the District Collector.

Sikkim extends helping hand to West Bengal border towns

RANGPO, 08 APR (IPR):

Following the lockdown imposed by the Central Government, movement of private vehicles, vehicles carrying non-essential commodities and movement across check-post by foot have been restricted. We understand that the residents of Bengal-

Rangpo have started to face problems particularly during medical emergencies.

As such, in order to mitigate this problem of our neighbouring town, we have set-up 24x7 medical camp headed by doctors at the check-post gate itself. All patients are being extended

medical treatment and prescribed medicines are being made available by our team on payment (subject to availability of medicines at Rangpo).

However, in case of referral to higher institutes, patients will have to be taken to Hospitals within West Bengal.

IndiGo suspends international flights till Apr 30

NEW DELHI, APR 8 (PTI):

Amid the nationwide lockdown implemented to contain the spread of novel coronavirus in India, budget carrier IndiGo said on Wednesday it is suspending its international flights till April 30.

Air India has already suspended domestic and international flights till April 30.

"Our International operations are temporary suspended till April 30, 2020. Your money is safe in the form of a credit

shell, valid for one year from the date of the issuance," IndiGo said in a tweet on Wednesday.

India has imposed a 21-day lockdown, which is supposed to end on April 14, to curb the coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, all domestic and international commercial passenger flights have been suspended for this time period.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday said the country will remove its restrictions on flight operations once it is fully confident that the spread of coronavirus has come under control.

Cargo flights, offshore helicopter operations, medical evacuation flights and special flights permitted by Indian aviation regulator DGCA are permitted to operate during this lockdown.

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'Guru Dakshina' in times of lockdown By Tapan Mohanta

KOLKATA, APR 8 (PTI):

As the coronavirus-triggered lockdown is under way, a humble Maruti 800 car chugs along the warren of forlorn streets of South Kolkata with a sticker pasted on its windshield - 'Emergency Medicine Supply'.

It is not a typical medicine supply vehicle but a private car belonging to Anupam Sen, an alumnus of a city school who, along with some other schoolmates, is busy delivering medicines and grocery to their former teachers, some in their late 70s and 80s.

For their first phase of delivery, the 40-member ex-students' group of South Point School -- 'Pointers Who Care' -- had a list of 15 former teachers, which included 89-year-old Dipali Sinha Roy, a widow living alone near Charu Market where both daughters are settled in Europe.

"I was running out of medicines, and to my surprise, I got a call from them on March 24. They took the list of my monthly requirement of medicines and groceries," Roy, who taught Bengali language at the school, told PTI. She is hypertensive and suffers from heart ailment.

"On March 28 morning, they came and delivered everything. At a time when my children are far away and cannot come to me in such a crisis, they are my saviours," says Roy, her weak voice overflowing with gratitude.

Roy said they not

only deliver medicines but take her to doctors, and are just a call away.

For former English teacher Anindita Sen of Jodhpur Park and her husband the lockdown brought worries galore.

Anindita has high sugar levels and blood pressure, and her husband suffers from Parkinson's disease. They cannot survive without their daily dose of medicine.

"Usually, the local medical shop delivers medicines to our home. But this time they even stopped taking our phone calls. My former students came to our rescue," she said.

"Shotti gurudakshina. Anek ashirvad korlam. Paramatma tomader mangol korun (It's an act of Guru Dakshina, God bless them)," says Keka Mukherjee, the daughter of Praneeta Banerjee, another former teacher at the school.

As pestilence rampaged through many countries, the 'Pointers Who Care' anticipated trouble at home, and when it finally came, they hit the ground running.

The group, the brainchild of Nivedita Roy Burman, another alumna of the school who now teaches Geography at Shri Shikshayatan College, was formed 13 years ago initially to lend emotional support to their retired teachers living a lonely life away from their children, many of whom had settled abroad.

Starting off with a handful of former

schoolmates, the group, which got registered under the Societies Act in 2009, now has 40 volunteers taking care of 228 former teachers.

They have divided the teachers by their localities and each volunteer is in-charge of 8-10 of them.

So, when the coronavirus struck, the members with a robust network of doctors and pharmacists got active on their WhatsApp group.

"Life-saving medicines and groceries were the priority. We divided our work. Some volunteers were only engaged in calling up the teachers and taking the list. Others consolidated the list and procured the items.

"I was in charge of delivery with Rajib Sarkar and Nivedita Roy Burman," the Pointer's group secretary Anupam Sarkar said, explaining their modus operandi.

After the formation of the group in 2007, they got in touch with other alumni, many of whom are well-settled doctors in and around Kolkata, and built up a strong network.

"We found that we have specialists in almost all departments. And they were also happy to get in touch with their ex-teachers and happy to offer free treatment in an act of paying back."

In 2014, their former teacher Prithwish Kar had a medical emergency and needed hospitalisation for six weeks.

The group came to his rescue, pooling in Rs 8 lakh from school alumni.

"His medical bill was settled and what was left was enough to take care of his daily medicine requirements," Sen said, wistfully remembering his former teacher, who died in 2017.

The group meets twice a year with their former teachers and inquires about their health and well-being.

Now, this benevolence is not limited to the former teachers of South Point School.

These good samaritans are lending a helping hand to others in need.

They recently reached out to a wheelchair-bound relative of a Michigan University professor in distress.

"Dr Mausumi Banerjee, who is a professor of biostatistics, got to know about our initiative through Facebook and requested for help for her wheelchair-bound relative. We were there at their doorsteps," said Sen.

He and four other volunteers of the organisation were honoured by the West Bengal government.

Growing every day, the group hopes their volunteer base will become stronger in the coming days.

"We don't have many volunteers in north Kolkata and hopefully we will get some dedicated people who are touched by the initiative," Sen added, before bidding a goodbye and rushing to one of the former teachers in his autumn years with a bagful of supplies.

ICDS teacher provides protective gear to GMC workers



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 APR:

ICDS teacher, Yojana Thapa who also

manages garbage disposal system of Phewa Basti near ICAR Complex, Daragaon handed over a

pair of gum boots, gloves and raincoats to three GMC employees who collect garbage from the locality.

EPFO extends online service for rectifying date of birth

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 08 APRIL:

In a move to extend the availability and reach of online services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Employees' Provident Fund Organization [EPFO] has issued revised instructions to its field offices to facilitate PF members to rectify their date of birth in EPFO records, thus ensuring that their UAN is KYC compliant.

A press release from EPFO Regional office,

Siliguri informs that the date of birth recorded in 'Aadhaar' will now be accepted as valid proof of date of birth for the purpose of rectification, provided that the difference in the two dates is less than 3 years.

It is added that the PF subscribers can submit the correction requests online. This will enable EPFO to validate the date of birth of members online with UIDAI

instantaneously, thus authenticating and reducing the processing time of change requests, it is added.

The release mentions that EPFO has instructed field offices to expedite disposal of online requests, enabling PF members in financial distress, to apply online for availing non-refundable advance from their PF accumulations to tide over the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 cases rise to 158 in JK after 33 test positive

SRINAGAR, APR 8 (PTI):

Thirty-three people tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, the largest single day rise in COVID-19 cases in the Union Territory, officials said. The total number

of coronavirus cases is now 158 in Jammu and Kashmir, of which 149 are active, they said.

"Thirty-three new cases were detected today. Out of this, 30 were in the Kashmir division and three in the Jammu division," Principal

Secretary Information Rohit Kansal said.

Two patients were discharged from a hospital after recovering from the disease, the officials said.

While three patients have died, six have recovered till now, they said.

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES

REPORTERS

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Treatment

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

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 : 7028372100
- WEST : 9593297809
- NORTH : 9641957468
- SOUTH : 7407691463
- New STNM
- AMS : 9434711402

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GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

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Save the Young from Obscurity *Demand better from education*

A little over a decade ago, an obscure man, then in his mid-30s, hailing from a nondescript Andhra village, blazed a trail with his apparently crazy move. This “obscure man” was one called Narasing Lal Butt, and his “crazy move” was to claim “damages” through the human rights commission from his village school for its failure to provide him quality education. Education of even reasonable quality could have established him in life, but in his 30’s he found himself ill-equipped and under-prepared for anything worthwhile, hence the claim for damages.

Google searches lead nowhere when it comes to ferreting out what happened of his petition. Most probably nothing. In all probability, Narasing has withdrawn into his obscurity only to be occasionally invoked in publications in distant Sikkim. But his petition was obviously never really about receiving damages, and was always about holding up the mirror. A decade since, the mirror still reflects the same image of a broken education system which is still as listless and continues to mass-produce mediocrity. The litigant had sued his school for making him so, well, ‘obscure’. And although his complaint most probably secured him no reprieve, he “blazed a trail” in that he went to the human rights commission and not the consumer redressal courts. Even his incomplete education informed him well enough to recognise that education was not a commodity, but a Right, a human right.

Education, whether free, subsidized or exorbitantly paid for, should be better regulated and any lapses on this front should be seen as a violation of a whole generation’s human rights. Fact remains that too few people are paying enough attention to education. Yes, there are huge budgets, there are many schools and literacy is on the rise, but what are the schools really churning out? The success stories of Indian academics [which are only a minuscule proportion of the studying population] are fuelled by individual drive and not institutional support or grooming. To blame the teachers would be too easy, they are only part players in a system which is failing, policy interventions have remained ineffectual and uninspiring. It is worrying that education and schools continue to be seen as readying people for employment when the first priority should always have been learning. In the more worrying trends, new policies have also been destructive, trying to dismantle institutions to suit new moulds.

What the nation now needs are more Narasing Lal Butts; more people from the masses to take the policy framers and deliverers to task; to demand better. May be then things will start improving.

Three reasons why Jacinda Ardern’s coronavirus response has been a masterclass in crisis leadership

SUZE WILSON

THECONVERSATION.COM

Imagine, if you can, what it’s like to make decisions on which the lives of tens of thousands of other people depend. If you get things wrong, or delay deciding, they die.

Your decisions affect the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people, resulting in huge economic disruption, mass layoffs and business closures. Imagine you must act quickly, without having complete certainty your decisions will achieve what you hope.

Now imagine that turning your decisions into effective action depends on winning the support of millions of people.

Yes, you do have enforcement capacity at your disposal. But success or failure hinges on getting most people to choose to follow your leadership – even though it demands sudden, unsettling, unprecedented changes to their daily lives.

This is the harsh reality political leaders around the world have faced in responding to COVID-19.

As someone who researches and teaches leadership – and has also worked in senior public sector roles under both National and Labour-led governments – I’d argue New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is giving most Western politicians a masterclass in crisis leadership.

THREE COMMUNICATION SKILLS EVERY LEADER NEEDS

When it comes to assessing New Zealand’s public health response, we should all be listening to epidemiologists like Professor Michael Baker. On Friday, Baker said New Zealand had the “most decisive and strongest lockdown in the world at the moment” – and that New Zealand is “a huge standout as the only Western country that’s got an elimination goal” for COVID-19.

But how can we assess Ardern’s leadership in making such difficult decisions? A good place to start is with American professors Jacqueline and Milton Mayfield’s research into effective leadership communication.

The Mayfields’ research-based model highlights “direction-giving”, “meaning-making” and “empathy” as the three key things leaders must address to motivate followers to give their best.

Being a public motivator is



essential for leaders – but it’s often done poorly. The Mayfields’ research shows direction-giving is typically over-used, while the other two elements are under-used.

Ardern’s response to COVID-19 uses all three approaches. In directing New Zealanders to “stay home to save lives”, she simultaneously offers meaning and purpose to what we are being asked to do.

In freely acknowledging the challenges we face in staying home – from disrupted family and work lives, to people unable to attend loved ones’ funerals – she shows empathy about what is being asked of us.

The March 23 press conference announcement of New Zealand’s lockdown is a clear example of Ardern’s skillful approach, comprising a carefully crafted speech, followed by extensive time for media questions.

In contrast, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pre-recorded his March 24 lockdown announcement, offering no chance for questions from the media, while framing the situation as an “instruction” from government, coupled with a strong emphasis on enforcement measures.

Where Ardern blended direction, care and meaning-making, Johnson largely sought “compliance”.

ENABLING PEOPLE TO COPE WITH CHANGE

Ardern’s approach also strongly reflects what well-known Harvard

leadership scholar Professor Ronald Heifetz has long argued is vital – but also rare and difficult to accomplish – when leading people through change.

Ardern has used daily televised briefings and regular Facebook live sessions to clearly frame the key questions and issues requiring attention.

Also consistent with Heifetz’s teachings, she has regulated distress by developing a transparent framework for decision-making – the government’s alert level framework – allowing people to make sense of what is happening and why.

Importantly, that four-level alert framework was released and explained early, two days before a full lockdown was announced, in contrast with the prevarication and sometimes confusing messages from leaders in countries such as Australia and the UK.

PERSUADING MANY TO ACT FOR THE COLLECTIVE GOOD

The work of another leadership scholar, the UK’s Professor Keith Grint, also sheds light on Ardern’s leadership approach during this crisis.

For Grint, leadership involves persuading the collective to take responsibility for collective problems. Much of the prime minister’s public commentary has been dedicated to exactly that – and it’s been overwhelmingly effective, at least so far, with a recent poll showing 80% support for the government’s response to

COVID-19.

Grint also argues that when dealing with “wicked problems” – which are complex, contentious and cannot be easily resolved – leaders must ask difficult questions that disrupt established ways of thinking and acting.

It’s clear this has happened in New Zealand, as shown in the suite of initiatives the government has taken to respond to the pandemic, including its decision to move to a national lockdown relatively fast compared to many – though not all – countries.

Of course, not everything has been perfect in New Zealand’s or Ardern’s COVID-19 response. Ongoing, independent scrutiny of the government’s response is essential.

But as my own research has argued, expecting perfection of leaders, especially in such difficult circumstances, is a fool’s errand.

It’s never possible. Nor should we allow the “perfect” to become the enemy of the “good” when speed and enormous complexity are such significant features of the decision-making context.

Whether you’re comparing Ardern’s performance against other Western leaders, or assessing her efforts using researchers’ measures of leadership excellence, as a New Zealander I think there is much to be grateful for in how she is leading us through this crisis.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Executive Development, Massey University]

As use of digital platforms surges, we’ll need stronger global efforts to protect human rights online

CASSANDRA MUDGWAY & KATE JONES

THECONVERSATION.COM

As millions of people are moving work and social interactions online to protect themselves from COVID-19, existing online safety measures may not be enough to deal with a surge in harassment and abuse.

Concerns about rising levels of scamming and harassment prompted online safety organisation NetSafe to issue a warning to users to maintain vigilance. This abuse has included threats of violence and explicit racism and xenophobia.

Online abuse breaches several human rights. We argue that governments have obligations under international law and should establish a digital human rights charter, with special protections built in for women and children.

CYBER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Online platforms replicate culture with all its offline risks and inequalities.

Offline, discrimination against women permeates all aspects of our society, including the family, education, the workplace, the legal system and government. Discrimination manifests in different ways, including violence against women.

These unequal gender dynamics repeat online, resulting in women being subjected to sexist, misogynistic and violent content. In 2018, a UN women’s human rights expert recognised cyber violence as a specific form of violence against women.

In a 2017 Amnesty International survey, nearly a quarter (23%) of women surveyed across eight developed countries said they had experienced online abuse or harassment more than once. Of those women, 41% felt their physical safety was threatened on at least one occasion.

In New Zealand, a third of women reported being victims of online harassment. Of those who experienced abuse online:

- 75% had trouble sleeping well
- 49% felt their personal safety was at risk
- 32% felt the safety of their families was at risk
- 72% were less able to focus on everyday tasks
- 70% experienced lower self-esteem or loss of self-confidence
- two-thirds felt a sense of powerlessness.

Almost half (49%) reduced their use of social media or left platforms altogether.

The UN’s Human Rights Council identified widespread online violence against women as a significant reason for the global digital divide between men and women.

Online violence against women by (mostly) men is especially persistent on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It includes online harassment, cyberstalking, “doxing” (where private information is shared by others online) and revenge pornography.

OBLIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENTS AND ONLINE PLATFORMS

Cyber violence breaches international human rights laws, including the right to freedom of expression (fewer women are likely to share their opinions or thoughts online), the right to be free from discrimination and violence, the right to information about health (including potentially life-saving updates about COVID-19) and the right to privacy.

International human rights law applies both offline and online.

Social media platforms have created community standards to protect users’ human rights, but they may not be evolving fast enough during disruptive times such as we are experiencing now. The massive increase in use is likely to amplify the dark side of social media.

Governments around the world have been slow to use their legislative powers to regulate online platforms. The live streaming of the Christchurch mosque attacks on March 15 2019 highlighted the platforms’ failure to control the spread of hateful content.

An international agreement to eliminate violent extremist content online has been difficult to achieve.

PROTECTING RIGHTS AND LIVES ONLINE

While platforms remain global with “one size fits all” community standards, governments have different responses to restricting individual freedom of expression.

Governments should consider establishing an international charter on digital human rights, which all social media platforms could adopt. Such a charter would enable a coherent and consistent response to cyber violence, in a world that is now almost exclusively online.

There are some practical steps we can all take. These steps include reporting online violations, blocking people or groups, and closely monitoring connections.

If you are experiencing serious online bullying, harassment, revenge porn or other forms of abuse and intimidation, contact police who may take action under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015.

[Cassandra Mudgway is Senior Lecturer in Law, Auckland University of Technology; Kate Jones is Senior lecturer in Digital Marketing & Social Media, Auckland University of Technology]

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ECoR to run two parcel express trains

BHUBANESWAR, APR 8 (PTI): The East Coast Railway (ECoR) has decided to run at least two parcel express trains to ensure quick transportation of essential commodities and goods by government agencies, NGOs and traders during the ongoing lockdown in force to contain the spread of COVID-19.

One parcel express train will run between Visakhapatnam-Sambalpur-Visakhapatnam and another between Visakhapatnam-Cuttack-Visakhapatnam, both the trains will carry essential goods to different loading and unloading points, a railway official said.

Despite the 21-day nationwide lockdown, railways have taken up the challenge to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities like coal, food grains, fertilizer, petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, milk, edible oil, sugar, salt and medicine in different areas, he said.

The railways



is running parcel express trains towards different destinations of the country. Earlier, some trains have also run through ECoR jurisdiction.

Visakhapatnam-Sambalpur-Visakhapatnam parcel express train will leave Visakhapatnam at 0900 hours on April 9, 11 and 13 and arrive at Sambalpur at 1730 hours on the same day.

In the return direction, this train from Sambalpur will leave at 0900 hours on April 10, 12 and 14 to reach at

Visakhapatnam at 1730 hours on the same day.

Similarly, Visakhapatnam-Cuttack-Visakhapatnam parcel express train from Visakhapatnam will leave at 1000 hours from April 9 to 14 and will arrive at Cuttack at 1830 hours on the same day. In the return direction, this train from Cuttack will leave at 0900 hours from April 10 to 15 and reach Visakhapatnam at 1730 hours on the same day.

Apart from these parcel trains being run by ECoR, some inter-

zonal parcel trains are also running which pass through ECoR jurisdiction.

All concerned government agencies, NGOs and traders can make use of these services during the lockdown period for movement of essential goods, the ECoR Spokesperson said.

Station managers and parcel supervisors at the stations will provide the further details of the train schedule to carry essential parcel items.

Railways is also planning to increase

the frequency of the parcel express train and also to run more parcel express from different locations of the country including from ECoR jurisdiction. "Merchants and interested supplier parties may also contact parcel offices at the stations and station managers to carry their essential goods," he said.

"State government authorities and district administrations can make full use of these parcel specials to send important items to various places," he added.

J-K, Ladakh make wearing face masks mandatory



JAMMU/LEH, APR 8 (PTI): Wearing face masks has been made mandatory in the Civil Secretariat-the seat of Jammu and Kashmir government-and Leh district in the Union Territory of Ladakh, officials said on Wednesday.

An order issued by the General Administration Department (GAD) said face masks have been made mandatory for all the officers, staff and visitors in the Civil Secretariat as a preventive measure to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The Civil Secretariat is presently functional here as part of the bi-annual darbar move, under

which the government functions six months each in Jammu and Srinagar during winter and summer months.

Accordingly, all the administrative secretaries are authorised to effect the purchase of masks, so as to provide three (3) reusable masks for each employee of his/her department in the civil secretariat. The expenditure on this account shall be defrayed from the office expenses (OE) head, Additional Secretary, GAD, Rohit Sharma said.

In the event of non-availability of masks in the open market, he said, the administrative secretaries would submit

their requirements to the department of civil supplies, consumer affairs and public distribution for supply of the same.

District Magistrate, Leh, Sachin Kumar Vaishya ordered the general public as well as the government officials (both civilian and armed forces) to mandatorily wear the face masks at public places without any exemption.

In case of any violation, penal action under rules shall be taken against the violators. This shall come into force with effect from April 9, he said in his order issued in exercise of powers under section 34 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Manipur University starts online classes

IMPHAL, APR 8 (PTI): With classes suspended due to COVID-19 outbreak, all the departments of Manipur University have started online teaching, but students residing in remote areas of the state are facing problems due to poor net connectivity while attending the classes, officials said.

Manipur University Registrar Prof WC Singh in an order on April 2 had asked students and teachers to download and install Zoom app or Zoom Cloud Meeting in their laptops or smartphones for online classes.

Students were told to provide their email ids to their respective departments.

Prof Basanta Sharma, Head of Physics department told PTI that teaching a science

subject online is different from teaching an arts subject as you need to draw up diagrams and explain scientific theories by using mathematical formulas and calculations.

He also said the time slot given is 40 minutes but it often has to be extended to one hour due to technical issues particularly due to disruption in live streaming and sound.

Many students said that "poor net connectivity, particularly in rural and hill areas, is a hindrance in the interaction process."

Prof O Mukherjee, Head of Chemistry department, said: "In chemistry and physics, online teaching cannot reach up to the level of satisfaction as in humanities

subject as these two particular subjects require explanation based on mathematical calculations, drawing symbols, molecular structure, formulas."



Assistant Prof Sonia Wahengbam of Mass

Communication and Journalism department, welcomed the online teaching system and said: "it provides engagement to both teachers and students during this lockdown period."

Wahengbam said a practical problem faced by students is limited data pack.

Most of the students run out of data, as online classes consume a lot of data, a second year student said.

Student-startup develops low-cost ventilator

COIMBATORE, APR 8 (PTI): College students have claimed to have developed a prototype of a ventilator with all electronic features for just less than Rs 25,000.

The product is to be tested in Government ESI hospital here shortly

The student-startup J K Dazta Systems of

Karthik S, Gowtham and Santhakumar and team with the support of Bio-Medical and Computer Science department of the Rathinam College developed the product.

The device has the potential of meeting the huge demand for ventilators in the country and abroad.

The ventilator

was made with re-engineered design of an international open source ventilator project, a press release said.

Stating that the students started the project on March 22 and came up with the prototype in just four days, the release said.

The Intermittent Positive Pressure

Breathing Ventilator (IPPV) is now ready for testing, as ESI hospital has given permission.

The device can monitor and control of the tidal volume, breath per minute, inspiration expiration ratio adjustments and is also enhanced with pressure, flow and oxygen monitoring systems.

Since the device

is made with optimal design and features to control its operations, the team expressed hope that the ventilator would help many patients.

After the testing, the device would seek a licence from the governments for commercial production in volumes, the release said.

Bengal hill fire now under control

BANKURA (WEST BENGAL), APR 8 (PTI): A fire that broke out in the forest atop Susunia hill in Bankura district of West Bengal is now under control, a forest official said on Tuesday.

No casualty was reported from the hill which is a tourist attraction and a trekking and rock climbing destination.

The fire was noticed on Tuesday night by some local people who informed the authorities, Divisional Forest Officer of North Bankura division, Bhaskar JV, said.

"The fire in the

Susunia hill is now under control.

Personnel of the Fire Brigade and police, civic volunteers and local people are on the job," Chhatna range officer Esha Bose said.

There are 5-6 villages on the hill. Local sources said probably someone has set fire to the dry leaves deliberately or accidentally, which later went out of control.

It was a ground fire and there is no report of any major damage to the flora and fauna of the hill, the DFO said adding that the area affected by the blaze is being ascertained.

Former Mizoram Assembly speaker Hiphei dies at 82

AIZAWL, APR 8 (PTI): Former Mizoram Assembly speaker and veteran politician Hiphei died at hospital here on Wednesday morning due to prolonged illness. He was 82.

The veteran leader died around 7:30 am at the Aizawl Civil Hospital, family sources said.

He is survived by his wife and two children.

Hiphei, who is also called 'father of the Mara tribe' started his political career with Mara Freedom Party (MFP) in September 1963.

Hiphei was elected to the state assembly from Tuipang constituency (Now Palak) as Independent in 1972 when Mizoram was Union territory and was made deputy speaker.

He won the state assembly elections seven times between 1972 and 2013 from Palak.

He joined the Janata Party in 1978 and later switched over to Congress camp in 1984.

The veteran politician was elected to Rajya Sabha for two consecutive terms between 1990 and

2002.

He was the Mizoram Assembly speaker for two terms from 1989 to 1990 and 2013 to 2018.

Before the state assembly polls in November 2018, Hiphei resigned from his post, quit Congress and joined the BJP.

He contested from Palak constituency on BJP ticket but lost to Congress nominee KT Rokhaw in the 2018 assembly polls.

His body was sent to his home town Siaha from his Mara house in Aizawl for the funeral.

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Buttler’s World Cup final shirt raises 65,000 pound for hospital appeal

LONDON, APR 8 (AFP): England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler has raised more than 65,000 pound (USD 80,000) to help fight the coronavirus by auctioning off his World Cup final shirt.

Buttler’s shirt, which he wore when completing the last-ball run-out that saw England beat New Zealand at Lord’s last year, was sold to raise money for specialist heart and lung centres provided by the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals in London.

Buttler, who earlier in the showpiece match had hit a fifty and batted in the Super Over, put his long-sleeve keeping jersey up for sale on eBay a week ago.

By the time the auction closed on Tuesday, the shirt had attracted 82 bids with the winner paying 65,100 pound.

Buttler, speaking on Monday, said: “It’s a very special shirt but I think it takes on extra meaning with it being able to hopefully go to the emergency cause.

S Africa’s minister who flouted lockdown rules sent on leave

JOHANNESBURG, APR 8 (AFP): South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Wednesday placed on special leave a minister seen lunching at a friend’s house in violation of the coronavirus lockdown.

Ramaphosa has ordered a three-week national lockdown to try to brake the virus, which has infected 1,749 people, killing 13 of them, according to an official tally.

But a picture posted on Instagram on Sunday showed Communications and Digital Technologies Minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams having lunch with five other people at the home of a former deputy minister earlier that day.

“President Ramaphosa has placed the Minister on special leave for two months,” the presidency said in a statement.

Ramaphosa has “accepted the minister’s apology for the violation but was unmoved by mitigating factors she tendered,” it said.

“The nation-wide lockdown calls for absolute compliance on the part of all South Africans,” Ramaphosa was quoted as saying.

“None of us -- not least a member of the national executive -- should undermine our national effort to save lives in this very serious situation,” said Ramaphosa.

“No-one is above the law.” Last month, just two days into the lockdown, Social Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu was forced to issue an apology after she posted a video on her Instagram account, joking about how she was struggling to stay home.

I’d love to win a Test series in India: Smith

New Delhi, Apr 8 (PTI): Star Australian batsman Steve Smith believes India is one of the toughest places to play Test cricket and winning a five-day format series in the country is a major career goal for him.

“I would love to win a Test series in India,” Smith told New Zealand leg-spinner Ish Sodhi during a podcast organised by inaugural IPL champions Rajasthan Royals.

“I think as an Australian cricketer we talk about like Ashes is always big, World Cup is big but I think now India is no.1 team in the world and it is a very difficult place to play Test cricket, so I would love to win a series there,” he said.

Talking about his other targets, Smith, who is currently the world’s number one Test batsman, said: “Other than that I would not like to set too many goals, but take things day by day, series by series, just try to improve.

“It has been a pretty long year with the World Cup and Ashes, a few away one day tours. So this rest is not the worst thing but hopefully it is for a few weeks. I am pretty keen to get back to playing.”

Smith also heaped praise on India’s spin all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, describing him as a difficult bowler to face in the subcontinent.



“Jadeja in the sub-continent... why he is so good because, he hits that good length and one ball skids on and one spins, and it just all looks same out of the hand. I think consistency in length is key and then having at least one variation,” he said.

“So, I think for a leg-spinner, having a good googly, or a slider is crucial and for fingers spinners, being able to change the pace without changing the arms speed too much. I reckon there a few around the world

who do that, Jadeja is one of them. He is very difficult to play.”

Smith took over the captaincy from Ajinkya Rahane mid-season in the last edition of the IPL and he is keen to lead the Rajasthan Royals from the beginning if the cash-rich event, which has been suspended till April 15 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is held later in the year.

“Plenty going on in the world at present, but hope-

fully we can get an IPL at some stage,” said Smith, who has so far amassed 7227 runs in 73 Tests and 4162 runs in ODIs.

“The two seasons that I captained the Royals were both half seasons, Shane Watson gave me the captaincy in 2015 and then last year out of the blue, I took over at the back end of the season. Looking at having a crack at it full time and the Royals have a pretty good squad,” he said.

Smith started his career as a spinner before emerging as one of the best batsmen in the world.

Talking about his career, the 30-year-old said: “I was more of a batsman than a bowler. I played my first two Test matches as a specialist spinner which was strange. They were looking for a spinner after the Shane Warne era and I was one of the 12-13 spinners that got a go.

“I got dropped after that and for me it was about finding a way to get into Australian team and at that point of time I let my bowling slip and focussed only on my batting. But I bowl every now and then.”

With the coronavirus outbreak putting countries in lockdown mode across the globe, Smith too has been in isolation and he says he is trying to kill the boredom by playing tennis and spending time with family.

“It is not that strict yet here, so I have been able to go for a run, play tennis,” he said.

“Getting a little bit bored at times. I have a home gym, getting a fair work there at the moment and obviously Netflix and chill, that is what is happening around the world at the moment.

Tokyo Olympic flame taken off display; next stop unclear



TOKYO, APR 8 (AP): The Tokyo Olympic flame has been taken off public display in Japan. And it’s not clear when it will reappear again or where or under what conditions.

The flame arrived in Japan from Greece on March 26. After the Tokyo Olympics and the torch relay were postponed until next year, the flame was put on display in the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima. It was to remain on display through the end of April.

It was removed after several days when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday issued a state of emergency in order to combat the coronavirus, which includes limiting

large crowds.

Tokyo 2020 will now keep the flame in an undisclosed location to prevent people from gathering, Tokyo organizers said in a statement to the Associated Press.

Tokyo organizers are expected to keep the flame for the short-term. In the long-term, the flame is expected to be used by the International Olympic Committee as a promotion device and as a symbol of the fight against the pandemic.

The idea will be to keep this flame burning and showing it to the world, Michael Payne, the former marketing director of the IOC, told Associated Press in a re-

cent interview.

The flame is expected to reappear next year in Japan for the torch relay. But Payne, who no longer works for the IOC, hinted it could have a wider purpose.

The Olympic flame burning will provide a very powerful inspiration, a bright light as the world goes through these difficult times,” he said.

Prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Chinese organizers and IOC organized an international torch relay that went to about 20 countries.

The worldwide tour was met by violent protests against China’s human rights record in

Tibet and elsewhere. The flame was targeted at several stops including London, Paris and San Francisco. This forced organizers to reroute the relay to separate protesters and supporters.

The chaos at the time was described as a crisis for the IOC by then-President Jacques Rogge. The IOC subsequently canceled any future plans for a worldwide display of the flame.

Any plan next year to take the flame on a world tour, or even a tour of Japan, will depend on the evolution of the virus. The same is true for holding the Olympics amid large crowds in just under 16 months.

IPL postponement has given me more time to recover: Deepak Chahar

CHENNAI, APR 8 (PTI): The postponement of IPL 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic has come as a blessing in disguise for India medium pacer Deepak Chahar as the delay has given him time to regain full fitness from his lower-back injury.

Chahar, who plays for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL, is now eagerly waiting to make his return to competitive cricket once the situation normalises.

“I am looking forward to bowling again. For

now, the idea is to stay fit,” the 27-year-old said.

Chahar sustained a stress fracture on his lower back midway through the ODI series against the West Indies in December last year, which ruled him out of action until the end of March.

He admitted that he would have missed CSK’s first few games if the IPL 2020 had started as scheduled on March 29.

“When things are not in your control, there is little you can do. So, I

focus on what I can do during that time. I am trying to learn new things, focus on my fitness - as you know I was injured and getting back. This gives me more time to recover,” he was quoted as saying on CSK’s official website.

“Had the IPL season started on time, I would have missed the first few matches,” said Chahar, whose 6 for 7 (including a hat-trick) against Bangladesh last year was declared the ICC T20I performance of the year.

The IPL 2020, which was scheduled to be played from March 29, has been suspended till April 15 with no clarity yet on whether it would go ahead at all.

The deadly contagion has so far claimed nearly 150 Indian lives apart from causing more than 80,000 global deaths which has forced countries, including India, to go under lockdown in their bid to flatten the curve.

Chahar said it is a difficult time for all but

French footballers strike deal to reduce wages

PARIS, APR 8 (AFP): Footballers and clubs in France’s top two leagues have reached a non-binding agreement over a “temporary” pay cut during the coronavirus crisis, the national players’ union (UNFP) has said.

“We approved the recommendation this morning,” UNFP president Philippe Piat told AFP on Tuesday.

“The idea is that players defer a part of their April wages to allow clubs to cope,” during what he called a “dramatic health situation”.

Club and player representatives agreed upon a joint “recommendation” that would see footballers accept a temporarily reduced wage, which they will receive once money from TV rights is paid.

Broadcasters Canal+ and beIN Sports have for the time being suspended the payments, the clubs’ main source of revenue, after the season was put on hold last month indefinitely.

The pay cuts will be calculated on a sliding scale starting at 20 percent, with the highest earners -- those who pocket over 100,000 euros monthly -- facing a 50 per cent reduction.

Players making less than 10,000 euros will not be affected.

Under French labour law the arrangement cannot be legally enforced, although the UNFP president expects “a large majority will not go against” the agreement.

“We advise them to accept it because it is a question of saving jobs. Without this temporary effort the profession would suffer,” he said.

Several Ligue 1 clubs, including Lyon and Marseille, have already placed their squads on partial unemployment to save money, a move that means they only pay 70 per cent of salaries with the state paying the rest, albeit limited to 4,850 euros per employee.

the need of the hour is to stay safe and positive as the country battles through a nation-wide 21 lockdown imposed to curb the deadly virus.

“It is obviously a difficult time for all of us, everything coming to a standstill. Loss of business and jobs, especially for daily wage workers,” he said.

“Be safe, learn something new now that you have time. Stay positive, stay in the time,” added Chahar, who played three ODIs and 10 T20 Internationals for India.

Indian American's US pharma firm donates 3.4 M Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate tablets

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APR 8 (PTI): An Indian American-owned pharma firm has pledged to donate 3.4 million Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate tablets to some of the key COVID-19 battleground states, including New York and Louisiana, joining the war against the dreaded coronavirus which by Tuesday had taken lives of more than 12,800 people in the US alone.

Owned by philanthropic billionaire Chirag and Chintu Patel, New Jersey-based Amneal Pharmaceuticals, which is one of the largest US-based manufacturers, has also announced ramping up production of Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate at several of its manufacturing sites and expects to produce approximately 20 million tablets between now and mid-April.

Those tablets will be made available nationwide through Amneal's existing retail and wholesale customers, as well as through direct sales to larger institutions in need, the company said.

Amneal has donated two million tablets of 200mg Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate to New York, and one million to Texas to be used in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. It is ready to provide more as needed. It is also donating and providing products directly to hospitals across the country, the company said.

Amneal has also announced donation of 400,000 Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate tablets to Louisiana.

All of us at Amneal are committed to supporting our communities in the global fight against



COVID-19," said Chirag and Chintu Patel, Co-Chief Executive Officers of Amneal.

"We are working with urgency to assist the hardest hit states and hospitals around the country to benefit as many patients as possible during this critical time," they said in a joint statement, issued by the Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry.

"It is important we all work together to help solve the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis. We must come together as Louisianans and as Americans. This donation from Amneal demonstrates their strong effort to be a good corporate citizen in our nation," Landry said. Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate was first synthesized in 1946 and is in a class of medications historically used to treat and prevent malaria.

According to Louisiana State Government, Amneal's Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate tablets are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration to treat malaria, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, childhood arthritis, and other autoimmune diseases.

Hydroxychloroquine is not FDA-approved for the treatment of COVID-19; but it has been identified as a possible treatment for it, and the US government has requested its immediate availability.

This is a crucial time

in the global fight against COVID-19, Chirag and Chintu Patel said in a company press release.

With an existing supply of Hydroxychloroquine Sulphate and our ability to quickly accelerate production, we are humbled to be able to assist the hardest hit states and hospitals around the country to benefit as many patients as possible, the two brothers said.

Landry said that Amneal's donation is one step toward trying to find treatments and cures for this epidemic.

Right now, there are no silver bullets. We must remain vigilant against the spread of this virus," he said.

The Louisiana State University School of Medicine is working to launch two different clinical trials using hydroxychloroquine in relation to COVID-19.

One trial will utilize Hydroxychloroquine on those who have significant COVID-19 disease. The other trial protocol will use and test the drug as a preventative measure for those healthcare workers on the front lines battling the epidemic.

Trials will be conducted at the University Medical Center in New Orleans and at the LSU Medical School locations in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, a media release said.

China investigates party member critical of Xi over outbreak



BEIJING, APR 8 (AP): A prominent Communist party member who criticized Chinese leader Xi Jinping's handling of the coronavirus outbreak is being investigated on suspicion of a severe violation of discipline and law, a joint government-party watchdog said.

Ren Zhiqiang is a former head of state-run real estate conglomerate

Huayuan Group and a party member who has become known for his outspokenness on sensitive topics such as press censorship.

He dropped from sight in mid-March after publishing an online essay that criticized the leadership's handling of the virus outbreak that originated in December in central China. While government data show

COVID-19 apparently subsiding in China, more than 1.4 million people have been infected worldwide.

A one-sentence notice issued Tuesday by the party-government joint disciplinary watchdog body in Beijing's western district said Ren was undergoing a review and monitoring investigation but gave no details and

did not mention Ren's article or previous statements.

The article, since deleted by China's censors, is an example of the various criticisms of Xi and the party's handling of the emergency that have appeared online, the one space where Chinese can exercise a modicum of free speech, albeit under the close watch of party monitors.

Criticism has chiefly focused on allegations of early efforts to squelch news of the outbreak, the true numbers of those who have become sickened and died, and efforts by Xi and the party to portray themselves as riding to the rescue when no others could lead China out of the crisis.

Chinese police also reprimanded and threatened a group of medical workers who spread word of the threat early in the outbreak, one

of whom, a doctor, later died from COVID-19.

Ren, 69, had an early military career and his parents were both former high officials in the Communist party, leading some to call him a princeling, an oft-used reference to the offspring of the founders of the People's Republic including Xi.

That status might have provided him with some immunity from prosecution, although he appears to have crossed a line by criticizing Xi's personal leadership, whether by name or implication.

Since taking over the helm of the party in 2012, Xi has shown himself entirely intolerant of any criticism and has cracked down heavily on free media and civil society, jailing scores of journalists, lawyers and non-governmental activists on labor and other issues.

Trump announces to put a hold on WHO funding

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APR 8 (PTI): US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he would put a hold on America's funding to the World Health Organization, accusing it of becoming China-centric during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

We're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO. We're going to put a very powerful hold on it and we're going to see. It's a great thing if it works. But when they call every shot wrong, that's no good, Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference.

Geneva-headquartered World Health Organization, receives vast amounts of money from the United States.

We pay for a majority or the biggest portion of their money. They ac-

tually criticized and disagreed with my travel ban at the time I did it. They were wrong. They've been wrong about a lot of things. They had a lot of information early and they didn't want to -- they're very -- they seem to be very China centric, Trump charged during his news conference.

Trump said his administration is going to look into the US funding to the WHO.

We give a majority of the money that they get, and it's much more than the USD58 million. USD58 million is a small portion of what they've got over the years. Sometimes they get much more than that. Sometimes it's for programs that they're doing, and it's much bigger numbers. If the programs are good, that's great as far as we're concerned, he

added.

But we want to look into it, World Health Organization, because they called it wrong. They (WHO) called it wrong. They missed the call. They could've called it months earlier. They would have known and they probably did know. So, we'll be looking into that very carefully, and we're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO, Trump said.

Meanwhile, Senator Jim Risch, chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called for an independent investigation into the WHO handling of the COVID-19 response.

The WHO has failed not only the American people, it has failed the world with its flagrant mishandling of the response to COVID-19, said

Risch.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus' apparent unwillingness to hold the Chinese Communist Party to even the minimum standard of global health and transparency hindered the world's ability to blunt the spread of this pandemic. It is completely unacceptable that the world's global health organization has become a political puppet of the Chinese government, he alleged.

An independent investigation into the WHO's handling of the COVID-19 response is imperative," he asserted.

The United States is the largest contributor to the WHO.

Our valuable taxpayer dollars should go towards investments to prevent the spread of disease, not to aid and abet cover-ups that cost

lives and isolate portions of the world's population on political grounds, as has been the case with Taiwan, Senator Risch said.

A bipartisan group of nearly two dozen lawmakers on Tuesday announced Tuesday to introduce a resolution to defund the WHO until its Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus resigns and an international commission investigates the organisation's role in covering up the Chinese Communist Party's failed COVID-19 response.

The WHO helped the Chinese Communist Party hide the threat of COVID-19 from the world and now more than 10,000 Americans are dead, a number that is expected to rise dramatically in the coming weeks, Congressman Guy Reschenthaler alleged.

Tottenham and England great Greaves in hospital

London, Apr 8 (AFP): Tottenham Hotspur and England great Jimmy Greaves is being treated in hospital, the Premier League club has announced.

But there was no mention in their brief statement of whether the former striker was suffering from the coronavirus, or indeed the exact nature of the 80-year-old's current condition.

"We can confirm that our record goalscorer Jimmy Greaves is currently being treated in hospital," said a statement on Spurs' official Twitter feed on Tuesday.

"We are in touch with his family and will pro-

vide further updates in due course. Everybody at the club sends their best wishes to Jimmy and his family."

Greaves is understood to have been in poor health since suffering a stroke nearly five years ago.

A prolific goalscorer throughout his career, Greaves also played for Chelsea and West Ham, but his greatest success came at Tottenham during a golden era for the London side that saw him score a club record 266 goals in 379 matches from 1961-70.

For decades Greaves held the record for most goals scored in Europe's

top five leagues, his tally of 366 goals in 528 appearances during a career that also included a spell at Italy's AC Milan only broken by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2017.

Greaves was equally prolific at international level, scoring 44 goals in just 57 appearances for England.

He was a member of the England squad that won the 1966 World Cup on home soil but an injury in a group game against France cost him his place in the side and paved the way for his replacement, Geoff Hurst, to score a hat-trick in the final against West Germany.

UN chief suspends rotation, deployments of peacekeepers till June 30 amid COVID19 crisis

YOSHITA SINGH

UNITED NATIONS, APR 8 (PTI): UN chief has suspended the rotation and deployments of the peacekeepers until June 30 to mitigate the risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus, his spokesman has said.

"Our priorities are to ensure the COVID-19-free status of incoming uniformed personnel, and mitigate the risk that UN peacekeepers could be a contagion vector and simultaneously maintain our operational capabilities," Secretary General

Antonio Guterres Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at the daily press briefing on Tuesday.

He said to prevent and contain the risk of transmission of the deadly virus, rotation and deployments of uniformed personnel individual officers and formed, police and military units has been suspended until June 30 and the decision has been transmitted to all Troop and Police Contributing Countries, as well as to all relevant peace operations.

Dujarric said a "few, limited exceptions" may

be considered to continue to deliver on the mandate, but only in extenuating circumstances on the basis of strict conditions to prevent the spread of the virus.

He added that the UN is working closely with the troops and police contributing countries.

Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations known as the 'C34' and was given support for this initiative.

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LOUNGEWEAR CHIC! The former Bachelor contestant and model, Hannah Ann Sluss steps out with her dog in a vibrant tie dye outfit while getting some fresh air in Los Angeles.

Want to leave behind any controversy: Ratan Kahar after getting Rs 5 lakh from Badshaah

KOLKATA, APR 8 (PTI): Bengali folk artiste Ratan Kahar on Wednesday said he was happy after talking to rapper Badshah, who had weaved lines of his folk song into 'Genda Phool' music video, and is now looking forward to collaborate with him together, leaving behind any controversy or bitterness.

Kahar confirmed that he has received Rs 5 lakh from Badshah on March 6 but said that more than monetary help, he is happy to get recognised as the original lyricist of the Bengali folk song.

"Yes, my son has confirmed Rs 5 lakh from Badshah has entered my bank account. But money is not everything, I am happy as he has credited me as the composer of the lyrics 'Baro Loker Beti Lo' which he had weaved in his music video

'Genda Phool'. I want to leave behind any controversy," Kahar told PTI.

He said that Badshah had promised to visit his residence at Suri in Birbhum when the lockdown is lifted and "jointly take part in a musical programme."

Atanu Barman, who is close to Kahar and his family and one of the persons behind the media campaign over the issue, said, "Badshah had sent the amount after talking to Kahar over videoconferencing on April 3 and his family don't harbour any hurt feelings any more. But we wish Kahar's name be referred as one of the lyricists of the song, instead of merely referring it as Bengali folk song now."

On March 31, Badshah denied allegations that he used folk artiste Ratan Ka-

har's lyrics in his track "Genda Phool" without credits, saying he could not find the lyricist's name anywhere in the records.

Taking to Instagram, Badshah had said as an artiste, he would never rob another of his credit.

"Whosoever has tweeted me and all those who made this documentary and his well wishers, I want you to reach out to Ratan Kahar and tell him that I am here and he can reach out to me, I would love to help him. I have heard he is struggling financially and I want all my friends from the fraternity to support folk artistes," he had said.

As Badshah's team wanted to communicate with the singer through his local contacts, it was finally made possible on April 3.

Everything we attract into our experience is a part of our soul's journey and supports the ascension process. This includes the so-called challenges and difficulties. So embrace what's coming your way with open arms. Welcome it as an opportunity to master the given lesson. You've been preparing for years, Cancer. As for the people who are standing in the way of your progress, trust that the Universe will remove them from your path Leo: Every now and then you have to step away from a given problem in order to gain perspective. Apply this wisdom to your life when you find yourself befuddled. You'll be surprised by the creative solutions that come to you in these moments. As such, today brings with itself many a pleasant surprise; an answered prayer, if you may! Remember to give thanks often to the mysterious forces above that are working overtime to make your life *this* pleasurable. Virgo: Who are you when you don't have to wear the masks that you sometimes don in the outside world? Your time away from the matrix has been full of epiphanies, and you're now accepting your true self in a way you never have. Not everybody is going to jam at your frequency, and that's okay. Those who vibe with you will love you doubly hard. Trust that. This is also a time of completion in the Virgo headquarters given the moon has reached

its fullness.

Libra:

The world may be on lockdown, but that doesn't mean romance has to be. Once again, the cards are pointing towards a grand proposal. If you and your partner have been seeing each other for a while, you're likely to have 'the talk' or get your families involved. Single Librans could be pleasantly surprised by somebody who has certainly not been on their radar. When it comes to business dealings however, you're being asked to exercise caution. Scorpio: Maybe you were taught you're not good enough. Maybe you were made to believe you wouldn't be accepted if you chose to be your true and authentic self. Where are these unhealthy thought patterns stemming from? Could your upbringing be responsible for how you feel about yourself? Scorpio, it's time to address the childhood issues that you have carried into adulthood. Sagittarius:

Your time away from the matrix is making you rethink your social media game. No, it's not succumbing to the 'influencer game'. It's about knowing that you have something valuable to share and finding the right platform to do just that. Keep things raw and honest. Re-

member, people don't want to see an embellished version of your reality. Given you've been under house arrest for a while, you may find yourself missing your social circle.

Capricorn:

Funny how people think luck is responsible for everything! You can't discredit the role of destiny in aligning you with certain people and situations, but it is what you make of them that ultimately defines your reality. Keep this in mind now and forever, Capricorn. Not that *you* need to be reminded of the importance of putting in the work! Today, you will find multiple doorways opening up for you. Aquarius:

This is a time of chaos and uncertainty. You may find that your plans are being thrown right out the window and that you are unable to pursue the goals you had in mind. This is not the end of your world, Aquarius. "Adapt and adjust" is a mantra that will take you a long way. Some of you may find yourself dealing with loss. Pisces:

Watch out for the clouds of confusion, Pisces! There are no simple answers and not everything is as it appears right now. Instead of making a hasty decision that will not serve you in the long run, wait this one out. If you feel like somebody is handing you the raw end of the deal, take the power back in your hands.

COVID-19: Salman Khan begins process of transferring funds to daily wage workers



MUMBAI, APR 8 (PTI): Bollywood superstar Salman Khan has started the process of transferring funds into the accounts of daily wage workers of the film industry, the Federation of Western Indian Cine Employees (FWICE) said on Wednesday.

The actor had recently pledged to financially support 25,000 daily wage workers who have been badly hit by the 21-day lockdown to contain the coronavirus spread in the country.

According to B N Tiwari, FWICE, President, Salman has made an initial payment of Rs 3,000 each to the daily wage workers of the film industry, starting Tuesday.

"We had given him the final list of 23,000 workers so far, who were in dire need of financial help. He is going to transfer money in installments as he doesn't want people to misuse it. He has transferred about Rs 3,000 to every worker yesterday and he will transfer money again after some time. We are thankful to him for helping our workers," Tiwari told PTI.

A source close to Salman said the superstar will continue to support the workers until the situation improves in the country.

"We have started the process from Tuesday. We will be giving sufficient money to workers monthly, we will also give money next month and if the situation is still the same, we will continue to financially help the workers till it doesn't return to normalcy," the source said.

FWICE said Yash Raj Films have also provided a financial help of Rs 5,000 to around 3,000 workers.

"Besides Salman, a lot of people from Bollywood have

come forward to help the workers, including Ajay Devgn and Rohit Shetty, who have given Rs 51 lakh each. Boney Kapoor and Arjun Kapoor too have given money and there are few more who have offered financial assistance to the federation. We also received Rs 1.5 crore from the Producers Guild of India on Tuesday.

"The federation has received a total amount of Rs 3 crore from film industry people. We are yet to receive money from Netflix, which they had announced for daily wage earners and also from Amitabh Bachchan, who is going to provide ration to one lakh workers. He is going to provide coupons which we should receive in a day or two," Tiwari said.

He further said Bachchan's ration coupon for workers will also be given to other associations across the country, such as in Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Karnataka.

Tiwari said FWICE is in the process of making another list of needy workers and then they will begin the process of transferring money.

"The Rs 3 crore that the federation has received will be distributed among our five lakh workers in Maharashtra. We will start sending money from April 14 in phases. Those who haven't received any financial aid will be helped first. We are in the process of making a list of such workers for the same," Tiwari said.

"FWICE has also begun distributing ration to workers in suburban Andheri and Jogeshwari. So far we have distributed 5,000 packets of ration and we will give more, he added.

Legendary singer John Prine dies from coronavirus at 73

LOS ANGELES, APR 8 (PTI): American folk legend John Prine has passed away due to the coronavirus complications. He was 73.

Prine, whose coronavirus diagnosis was revealed on March 17, died on Tuesday, his publicist told Variety.

His wife and manager, Fiona, had on April 3 posted on Twitter that Prine was severely ill after being admitted into intensive care unit of a hospital.

In a career spanning over half a century, Prine churned out heartfelt and unforgettable songs like Angel From Montgomery, Sweet Revenge and In Spite of Ourselves.

He was regarded as one of the greatest by many of his peers including Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Bruce Springsteen, Bette Midler and many other music legends.

Born on October 10, 1946 in Maywood, Illinois, the singer-songwriter

emerged on the Chicago folk scene in the late 1960s, when he was discovered by country star Kris Kristofferson.

He is still remembered for his 1971 anti-war track Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore, which came at the height of the Vietnam War and is still relevant to many till date.

In recent years, he had taken a step back from music but came back in 2018 with the album The Tree of Forgiveness. It was his first LP in 13 years.

Prine was a winner of two Grammy award for best contemporary folk albums -- The Missing Years (1991) and Fair & Square (2005). He was an inductee of the Songwriters Hall of Fame and also bestowed with Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

The news of his demise sent shockwaves across the music industry, with stars like Bruce Springsteen, Kacey Mus-

graves, Bonnie Raitt, Bette Midler and others paying their tributes to the legend.

Over here on E Street, we are crushed by the loss of John Prine. John and I were "New Dylans" together in the early 70s and he was never anything but the loveliest guy in the world. A true national treasure and a songwriter for the ages. We send our love and prayers to his family, Springsteen wrote in a post on Twitter.

While Musgraves posted, Heartbroken.

Raitt, who recorded Angel from Montgomery in the 1970s, said he is feeling crushed after learning about Prine's demise.

Words can't even come close. I'm crushed by the loss of my dear friend, John. My heart and love go out to Fiona and all the family. For all of us whose hearts are breaking, we will keep singing his songs and holding him near, he wrote. Midler shared a news link about Prine, saying, He's gone.