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SDF wants State Govt to do better on COVID-19 preparedness

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

Sikkim Democratic Front chief spokesperson, MK Subba, today continued his party's criticism of the State Government's COVID-19 preparedness and contingency efforts. Much more needs to be done and better plans and provisions put in place for the State to rely on more than luck to keep the virus at bay, he said.

Commenting on arrangements made by the State administration so far to bring back Sikkim's students and people stranded in different parts of the country after the lockdown was not convincing enough.

He commented that just the provision to quarantine people returning to Sikkim was not enough and stressed that the need of the hour was proper screening and testing methodologies.

In keeping with the trend of demanding white papers, he also demanded today that the State government issue a white paper detailing its preparations to return after the lockdown and also detailing all that it has done to establish an advanced testing lab in the State.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Mr Subba asserted that the government should have already established a proper testing facility in Sikkim and



said that it was unfortunate that even immediate testing options like Truenat or CB-NAAT have not been explored.

He also pointed out that the State Government's plans of going with rapid testing kits was also dead in the water now that ICMR has put these tests on hold.

Wider testing was necessary for Sikkim, he stressed, while alleging that the State Government was not being serious enough on this count, not even having officially written to the ICMR

yet on this issue.

He alleged that a recent document from ICMR has revealed that there has been no correspondence from the State government or demand to set up a testing lab in Sikkim. This, he stressed, was highly careless and reckless of the State government.

Continuing on this line, he also claimed today that as per laid down rules, a COVID-19 hospital should be situated away from the main hospital which has not been the case in Sikkim where the COVID-19

wards have been apportioned out of the existing STNM Hospital.

Commenting on economic cost of the pandemic and how it was affecting the people, Mr Subba pointed out that people across the board were dealing with a financial crisis in the market as well as in their personal lives.

And yet, the State government has not taken any initiative to provide economic relief to the common people.

He said that the State government should announce

at least a Rs 3,000 crore State Disaster Relief Fund to reach relief to the common people of Sikkim.

He further demanded that the State government immediately announce an unemployment allowance and argued that just providing food packets to the COVID-19 warriors was not enough and that the State government should announce a doubling of their salaries.

He also urged the government to provide a Rs 1 crore insurance cover to frontline workers.

Traders seek clarity on reopening of shops, urge states to issue guidelines

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): With the Centre allowing reopening of neighbourhood and standalone shops, traders on Saturday sought more clarity for easier implementation of the order and urged states to issue necessary guidelines, without which shop owners would not be able to resume work.

The Retailers Association of India (RAI) said the government's order to allow reopening of shops is open to interpretation as terms like "market complexes" are not easily understood.

The retail industry body said keeping in mind the current environment and lessons learnt by keeping essential retail open through the lockdown, "we would recommend that the government open up all channels of retail on a date that it feels safe with the social distancing norms clearly defined", while also asking for malls to be allowed to open.

The government on Friday night allowed opening of neighbourhood and standalone shops, including those located in residential complexes within municipal areas, but at a 50 per cent strength and after taking necessary precautions.

However, the order, signed by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, made it clear that shops in market places, multi-brand and single-brand malls located in municipality areas shall continue to remain closed till May 3.

"We feel the current circular is open to interpretation and needs more clarity for easier implementation - terms like market complexes are not easily understood," RAI said in a statement.

Domestic traders' body CAIT said shopkeepers would not open their stores till states issue necessary guidelines.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said that shop owners are now waiting for necessary guidelines from state governments.

"In pursuance of the order of the home ministry, the state governments have to issue necessary order to implement the order of the central government.

"Traders shall have to wait for the orders of states and after that only, they will be eligible to open the shops by complying (with) the norms of health safety and social distancing," CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said.

He also urged Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri to make a clear plan and advise all states to take necessary steps for sanitising the markets and shops.

Khandelwal added that only such shops which are registered under the Shops and Establishment Act and fall within the territory limit of a municipal corporation or municipality would be allowed to open.

He appealed to the traders not to open their shops and wait for the order of the respective states.

"Since trade and Shops and Establishment Act is the state subject, only states governments are empowered to take the decision," he added.

Meanwhile, a shop owner from Wardha district in Maharashtra, Vishal Mehta, said "we have not yet opened the stores as we are waiting for order from state government."

In a statement, Amazon said e-commerce offers the safest way for sellers/retailers to serve the needs of citizens while ensuring social distancing.

"We are committed to keep citizens safe and urge the government to enable e-commerce to play its role in the joint fight against the pandemic by allowing the supply of all goods that people need over a prolonged period," it said.

Prolonged lockdown may push millions into margins of subsistence -Ex RBI Gov Subbarao

HYDERABAD, APR 26

(PTI): A prolonged lockdown may possibly push million of Indians into the "margins of subsistence", former RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao said on Sunday while expecting a 'V' curved recovery once the COVID-19 crisis ends and the turnaround in India to be faster than some economies. He was participating in a webinar on "History repeats - but differently- Lessons for the post Corona World," organised by the Manthan Foundation here, in which former Deputy Governor of RBI Usha Thorat took part.

"Because most analysts believe that this year India will actually have negative growth or growth will contract. We must remember that even ahead of the crisis two months ago our growth slowed. Now it has completely stopped.

Last year growth was five per cent. Just imagine, five per cent growth last year and we are going to negative or zero growth this year, a decline of five per cent growth," he said.

"It is true that India is going to perform in this crisis better than most other countries.

But that is no consolation.... Because we are a very poor country and if the

crisis persists and if the lockdown is not lifted soon enough, it is quite possible that millions of people will be pushed into the margins of subsistence, he said when asked about his views on the present situation.

Subbarao said that as predicted by analysts, India will have a V shaped recovery which is far better than most of the other countries. "And why do we expect a 'V' shaped recovery? Because unlike in a cyclone or in an earthquake, this is not a natural disaster constraint.

No capital has been destroyed. Factories are standing. Our shops are still standing. Our people are ready to work as soon as the lockdown is lifted.

So it is quite possible the recovery will be V shaped and while we have a V shaped recovery, I think India has a better chance than most of the countries," he opined.

According to him, India's recovery was faster than many other countries after the 2008 global financial crisis.

On IMF's prediction that India may grow at 1.9 per cent during the current year against about five per cent in the last fiscal, Subbarao said many analysts feel that the prediction is outdated and the growth in GDP may slip into negative.

Lepcha organisations mourn passing away of Dorjee Wangdi Kunchudyangmu

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 APR:

Lepcha organisations of Sikkim - Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum and Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shejum - have expressed deep sorrow and pain on the passing away of Dorjee Wangdi Kunchudyangmu on 25 April.

"The organisation is deeply aggrieved with the news of such an irreparable loss of such a personality whose contribution to the Lepcha community is immense and unparallel in the modern day history of Lepchas," a press release issued by Lobsang Chopel Lepcha of the Tarjum today conveys.

The release goes on to add that the late Mr

Kunchudyangmu was "greatly responsible" for rejuvenating a stronger sense of community among the Lepchas.

"Through his songs and dances, he awakened the Lepcha masses towards the glory of the Lepcha community and his undying love and message of unification in his songs like 'Lyang Arey Sa' still resonate in the hills of Renjyonglyang, Darjyulyang and some parts of Prolyang and Karkolyang," the release adds.

The organisations "strongly feel" that the void left behind by his passing away will be difficult to fill and have appealed to all Lepchas to offer prayers for his safe passage to the heavenly abode.



14 BSF personnel quarantined in Chhattisgarh

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): Fourteen

Border Security Force (BSF) jawans have been quarantined in Chhattisgarh for suspected coronavirus infection after they returned from Agra, officials said on Sunday.

Their samples have been sent for testing and the reports are awaited, a senior official said.

The troops, onboard a truck of the force, had reached Bhilai town in the central Indian state on

Saturday after staying at a police line in Agra for 20 days. "As per information, the cook of the local police in the Agra camp has been found positive for COVID-19 infection," the official said.

All the 14 personnel were tested upon their arrival and subsequently two of them sent to an isolation facility in Durg district, while the rest quarantined at a centre of the Bhilai Steel Plant, he said.

Officials said the police cook could have passed on the infection to the BSF troops, who are deployed in the anti-Naxal operations grid of Chhattisgarh.

They also raised concerns over the movement of the troops during the lockdown period and said all such activities have been strictly banned by the force headquarters. Such isolated instances may lead to serious consequences in the

paramilitary, they said.

BSF Director General (DG) S S Deswal had recently issued a stern warning to his commanders and personnel, saying strict action will be taken if any of them violates the COVID-19 medical protocols.

The BSF is primarily tasked to guard Indian borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain of the country.

Man posts COVID patient's pic in whatsapp; arrested

BENGALURU, APR 26 (PTI): A 24-year-old

man has been arrested in Vijayapura district in Karnataka for posting the photograph of a COVID-19 girl patient as his whatsapp status photo with a derogatory message, police said.

Anil Rathod on Saturday posted the picture of the girl student as status message with a caption, "Bad News Student got Positive"

By putting her photograph as his whatsapp status message, he tried to create fear among the masses and intentionally defamed her by making her photo go viral, the police said in a statement.

It is an offence to reveal the identity of the COVID-19 patients by taking the photograph and putting it in the public domain, the police said.

Rathod has been booked under for spreading rumours and causing panic, they said.

Firemen distribute relief to 12 families in Rangpo

SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 26 APR:

Fire & Emergency Services officers

stationed at Rangpo provided relief materials to 12 families in need in the area today. The relief

package comprised of 10Kgs rice, 2Kg Potato, 2Kg Onion, 1Ltr Oil, 1Kg Salt, 1Kg Dal and Masala packets.

The families who received the relief materials thanked the Fire Station of Rangpo for the initiative.

SBJM provides lunch to 'Frontline Warriors'

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 APR:

Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch [SBJM] central body in collaboration with Ranipool Branch, 5th Mile Tadong Branch and Vajra Branch distributed packed-lunch to government personnel working on ground to keep Sikkim safe from COVID-19. The Manch is also providing essential supplies to families in need to help them weather the ongoing lockdown. The group also recently contributed Rs 2 lakh towards the Chief Minister Relief Fund.

FPIs pull out Rs 10,347 cr from capital markets in April so far

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI):

Remaining risk-averse amid the coronavirus pandemic, overseas investors have withdrawn net Rs 10,347 crore from Indian capital markets in April so far.

Between April 1-24, foreign portfolio investors (FPI) pulled out a net sum of Rs 6,822 crore from equities and Rs 3,525 crore from the debt segment, depositories data showed.

The total net outflow stood at Rs 10,347 crore.

However, the quantum of outflows has reduced from March, when FPIs had withdrawn a record Rs 1.1 lakh crore on net basis from Indian markets (both equity and debt).

"The sharp drop in the quantum of net flows could be attributed to India gaining prominence among foreign investors for doing well with regards to containing the COVID-19 pandemic from spreading aggressively," said

Himanshu Srivastava, senior analyst manager research, Morningstar India.

In addition to that, measures announced by the government and the RBI periodically to revitalize the sagging economy would also be resonating well with investors, he added.

However, he cautioned that the sentiments continue to be negatively tilted and FPIs would largely adopt a wait-and-watch approach with more focus on taking short-term tactical bets.

Emerging markets are considered to be riskier investment destination and more prone towards crises of this magnitude. With low risk appetite, foreign investors drift towards safer investment avenues and safe havens such as USD and gold.

As per Srivastava, though the slowdown in the quantum of net outflow is a positive indicator, it would

be early to consider it as a precursor to a change in trend.

The scenario

continues to be grim as far as COVID-19 pandemic is concerned. The world is staring at a global economic slowdown and a prolonged fight against coronavirus. The degree of damage that it can have on the global economy, businesses and markets worldwide is yet to be accurately ascertained, he added.

Considering the domestic situation, Sousthav Chakrabarty, CEO and director of Capital Quotient said "all in all, one needs to keep a keen eye on daily FPI and DII (domestic institutional investors) movements. With issues such as those related to Franklin Templeton, faith in large institutions and listed avenues for parking funds has been shaken, and this too will contribute to higher volatility going forward. There is still much pain to be overcome before we see greener pastures.

Narayanasamy accuses Bedi of choking COVID-19 work

PUDUCHERRY, APR 26

(PTI):

In continuing turf war between Puducherry Lt Governor Kiran Bedi and the Congress government, Chief Minister V Narayanasamy on Sunday took up with the Centre her alleged "unauthorised interventions" in the administration and 'choking' of work to control spread of COVID-19.

He raised the issue when Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to him over phone to acquaint himself with the present COVID-19 situation in the Union Territory, Narayanasamy told reporters here.

Earlier, he had levelled similar allegations against Bedi when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to him review the coronavirus situation on April 12.

He had then told Modi that Bedi was hindering implementation of government's rice scheme for the above poverty line families during the lockdown, a charged rejected by her.

Reacting to it, Bedi had said the chief minister "misinforms and tells lies so often which is unfortunate."

On Sunday, Narayanasamy told reporters here he told Shah that the UT government was taking "relentless steps" and also informed him about the dedicated services of doctors and others in keeping spread of the infections at bay.

He apprised him of the "utterly unauthorised and unnecessary intervention" by Lt Governor in the work done by the government machinery.

"I also told the Home Minister that Bedi had been causing confusion and chaos in administration by her intervention and also by issuing newer and newer instructions to officials," the Chief Minister said adding he had sought Shah's immediate intervention to put an end to the matter.

Shah assured he would take appropriate steps in response to the

plea, Naryanasamy, who had been at loggerheads with Bedi on various issues since her posting here, said.

Narayanasamy also said Vice President M Venkiah Naidu spoke to him on Saturday and appreciated the "good work" Puducherry had been doing to protect the people after he briefed him about the measures being taken.

The Chief Minister said those going out of Puducherry to attend funeral of their kith and kin or for any other emergency purpose should on return remain in quarantine for 14 days.

He urged the Centre to make arrangements for evacuating people, including students and businessmen, from the union territory, who had been stranded in foreign countries.

Narayanasamy said migrant workers in Puducherry also wanted to go back to their native place and sought operation of special trains to facilitate their return.

SikkimSCAN

Delhi lockdown won't be relaxed beyond what Centre permits: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, APR 26

(PTI):

The lockdown in Delhi will not be relaxed beyond what the Union home ministry has suggested in its guidelines, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday and added that his government's focus is on bringing down COVID-19 infections in the city.

Addressing an online media briefing, the chief minister said, "We are going through difficult times. We will have to continue our efforts to reduce the number of COVID-19 infections in Delhi."

He said his government was implementing the Centre's guidelines on opening of neighbourhood and stand-alone shops during the lockdown till May 3.

No markets and malls will be allowed to open in the national capital and all shops in COVID-19 containment zones will remain shut, the chief minister added.

"The Delhi government will maintain status quo and will not relax lockdown restrictions till May 3, except those permitted by the Union home ministry," he said.

Kejriwal said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the nationwide lockdown would last till May 3, and added that there was a need to see what decision the Union government took on it.

"We will decide our future course of action and set our direction once the Centre takes decision on whether



ongoing lockdown be extended or not," he said. "If we must follow lockdown rules, we can get rid of coronavirus," he said.

The chief minister said the novel coronavirus doesn't discriminate between religions.

"We need to work together. Plasma of a Muslim can be used to treat a Hindu patient and vice versa," he added, referring to plasma therapy to deal with the deadly virus.

Kejriwal said that

positive indication has come out from plasma therapy.

The chief minister cited improvement in condition of a critical patient at the LNJP Hospital following plasma therapy.

He appealed to those recovered from COVID-19 to come forward and donate their plasma.

"We all, be it Hindu or Muslim, must be united in this fight against COVID-19. I request everyone not to hate anybody from other religions.

"The person you misbehave with might be the one to come forward some day and donate plasma to save your life," Kejriwal said.

He said it had been eight weeks since coronavirus cases were reported in Delhi, and asserted that the situation seemed to be gradually improving.

"In the seventh week, 850 new cases were reported, while 21 people died and 260 recovered from the COVID-19.

"But, in the eight week, 622 cases were reported, while nine people died and 580 people recovered from the dreaded virus in the national capital," the chief minister said.

The total number of coronavirus cases in Delhi stood at 2,625 on Saturday, with 111 new cases and one death being reported in a day.

Till Saturday, there were 95 containment zones in the city. The death toll from COVID-19 is now 54.

Over 200 Europeans stranded in India evacuated



KOCHI, APR 26

(PTI):

More than 200 Europeans mostly Swiss nationals stranded in India, following the nationwide lockdown were evacuated by a special plane of Swiss International Airlines, Kerala Tourism department said here on Sunday.

The plane took off from Kochi late Saturday night and landed at the Zurich airport on Sunday morning (10 am IST), it said in a release here.

Besides the 164 passengers who had boarded from Kochi, the flight carried 49 others from Kolkata from where it had a stopover in the Kerala city.

Earlier, a Cochin International Airport spokesman said the aircraft had arrived here

after picking up 62 Swiss nationals stranded in Kolkata.

This is the fourth flight that repatriated tourists from the state to Europe since the international airports were closed on March 23 to contain spread of Covid-19 disease.

At the airport here, Swiss Consul-General to India (Bangalore) Sebastien Hug oversaw the repatriation mission along with Syed Ibrahim, Honorary Consul of the German Honorary Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram.

Besides 115 Swiss citizens, the flight carried tourists from Germany, Austria, Norway, Denmark and France.

Most of the passengers from Kochi were tourists in

Kerala, while the others were brought in from neighbouring states, the release said.

Kerala had earlier facilitated the return of 268 tourists to the UK when a London-bound British Airways departed from Kochi on April 15.

Prior to it, an Air India aircraft with 232 passengers had left for Germany on March 31, and, four days later, a flight to France (112 people).

Kerala Tourism Minister Kadakampally Surendran said most of the foreign tourists stuck in the state have been repatriated.

There were messages from the returned guests appreciating the excellent arrangements that the government had made

for their care and health during their stay after the lockdown.

Secretary of Kerala Tourism, Rani George said most of the guests who returned had used the registration portal of the Swiss consulate, while others sought the help of the Kerala Tourism's help desks.

All the returnees were transported to the airport from different places by the tourism department.

"Providing them care is always our top priority," she said.

Director of Kerala

Tourism, P Bala Kiran said the tourism help desks would continue to function and any tourists who are still held up in the state could seek their assistance.

"Our focus now will be to prepare to receive the tourists immediately once the situation normalizes," Kiran said.

A team of Kerala Tourism officials, led by Joint Director Raj Kumar, had worked for the transportation and repatriation of these foreigners by completing the mandatory requirements.

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Resource-Rich, People-Poor

The rent-seeking mentality needs to end

An economist, while commenting on the reasons which hold back entrepreneurial success in these parts, blamed it on the rent-seeking mentality of the people. “Locals” of the region, he pointed out, might earn well, but invest very poorly, he explained. They will build a top-class hotel, but are more likely to give it out on lease rather operate it themselves and grow in the industry. This was also why the “security” of government service was more aspired for than the independence, possibly better money and more job satisfaction that private enterprise or the private sector might have to offer. The attitude continues even into government service where they prefer to remain anonymous pens pushing files when they could leverage their education and knowledge of the land to set new standards of governance.

In a sense then, they reflect the irony of their geography. The Himalaya is a belt that is rich in resources, but peopled by a population that is poor. As a mountain range, it is the Himalayas that shelter the subcontinent, bring it rain and mark its frontier. As for resources, the mountains abound in glaciers which feed not only the rivers which have sheltered successive civilizations through the ages, but are also now the only alternative energy source available for mainstream India to power its development. The nation desperately requires more power and the only viable option as of now, definitely less ruinous than the fossil fuel option, is the hydel potential of the Himalayas. But look at the ground realities - the entire Himalayan belt from Kashmir to the northeast is debilitated by strife and poverty. Sikkim remains an oasis of peace, but is also untouched by an economic boom. Delhi controls the purse-strings and thus by extension, also the aspirations of the people. The promoters of hydel power offer it up as the great deliverer of all economic woes. They promise infrastructure, employment and earnings from sale of surplus power as the channels which will usher economic boom. This might be true on paper, but the real picture often differs. Infrastructural development in these regions are almost always limited to certain pockets and are themselves mired in corruption. Rarely do the roads outlast the commissioning of the projects for which they were primarily expanded. Jobs, real jobs, not the low-paying ones, remain scarce for locals and the hydro-earnings are yet to be quantified. Because most of the areas that possess the rivers with hydel potential don't possess a strong enough voice in New Delhi, they cannot strike a good enough bargain for themselves and the street-smart organizations that 'develop' the projects magnify the fine print the moment they have inked the deal. The ongoing attrition between affected people and already commissioned hydel projects is just one such example.

The resources could have been better harnessed than the leasing out approach that is common to the region. Commissioned projects could have been studied in closer detail and better benefits and deals struck. Human resource could have been, still can be, groomed to meet the future requirements. CSR regulations could have been studied better to ensure more than hand-washing awareness camps or another free health camp. And it is not just about hydel resources; Sikkim could pause, take stock and then marshal its resources better on its own.

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Deaths and desperation mount in Ecuador, epicenter of coronavirus pandemic in Latin America

DENNIS ALTMAN & JUAN CARLOS VALAREZO

THECONVERSATION.COM

Dead bodies are lying at home and in the streets of Guayaquil, Ecuador, a city so hard-hit by coronavirus that overfilled hospitals are turning away even very ill patients and funeral homes are unavailable for burial.

Data on deaths and infections is incomplete in Ecuador, as it is across the region. As of April 22, Ecuador – a country of 17 million people – had reported almost 11,000 cases, which on a per capita basis would put it behind only Panama in Latin America. But the true number is likely much higher.

The government of Guayas Province, where Guayaquil is located, says 6,700 residents died in the first half of April, as compared to 1,000 in a normal year. A New York Times analysis estimates Ecuador's real coronavirus death toll may be 15 times the 503 deaths officially tallied by April 15.

In a pandemic that has largely hit wealthy countries first, Ecuador is one of the first developing countries to face such a dire outbreak.

Wealth is no guarantee of safety in an epidemic. Italy and the United States have both run short of necessary medical equipment like ventilators and dialysis machines. But experts agree poorer countries are likely to see death rates escalate quickly.

Our own academic research on Ecuadorean politics and human security in past pandemics suggests that coronavirus may create greater political and economic turmoil in a country that already struggles with instability.

ECUADOR'S SWIFT RESPONSE

The coronavirus outbreak in Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and economic engine, began in February, apparently with infected people returning from Spain.

Its rapid escalation prompted panicked officials to impose social isolation quickly as a containment strategy. Ecuador's restrictions on movement are strict and getting stricter.

Ecuadorians may not leave their homes at all between the hours of 2 p.m. and 5 a.m. Outside of curfew, they may only go out to get food, for essential work or for health-related reasons, wearing masks and gloves.



Public transport is canceled.

In Quito, Ecuador's capital, people may only drive one day a week as determined by their license plate.

This is the second time in a year Quito residents have found themselves under lockdown. In October 2019, a nighttime curfew was established quell massive protests against austerity measures that were imposed in exchange for a large loan from the International Monetary Fund.

The protests, led by indigenous groups, dissipated after President Lenín Moreno backed away from austerity – but not before at least eight people were killed.

LATIN AMERICA'S LOOMING EPIDEMIC

Ecuador has been more proactive in responding to the epidemic than many neighboring countries.

In Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro has largely downplayed the severity of the coronavirus, despite thousands of new COVID-19 infections reported every day. In Venezuela the power struggle between the government of Nicolás Maduro and the opposition government of Juan Guaidó impedes any coordinated pandemic response.

Most Latin American leaders who have taken decisive action against coronavirus see stay-at-home orders as the only way to avoid collapse of their fragile, underfunded health systems.

Panama is limiting outings based on gender, allowing men and women to leave their homes three

days each. Everyone stays home on Sundays.

El Salvador's president sent soldiers to enforce a 48-hour full lockdown of the city of La Libertad that prohibited residents from leaving home for any reason – including to get food or medicine.

It's unclear how such restrictions can persist in a region with considerable poverty and social inequality. Large numbers of Latin Americans live day-to-day on money they make from street trading and other informal work, which is now largely banned. Hunger threatens across the region.

LIMITS OF ECUADOR'S RESPONSE

In Ecuador, where the average annual income is US\$11,000, the Moreno government is giving emergency grants of \$60 to families whose monthly income is less than \$400. It has opened shelters to get homeless people off the streets and commandeered hotels to isolate the infected.

An active network of community organizations is also working to provide basic food and shelter to the needy, which includes most of the quarter million Venezuelan refugees who entered Ecuador in recent years.

Despite its active coronavirus response, Ecuador is unlikely to cope well if the epidemic spreads quickly from Guayaquil into the rest of the country.

Ecuador has a quarter as many ventilators per person as the

United States. Testing for COVID-19 is scarce and has largely been outsourced to private corporations, making it prohibitively expensive.

President Moreno's expulsion of 400 Cuban doctors from Ecuador last year – part of his emphatic shift rightward for Ecuador – has left big holes in its already understaffed hospitals.

Ecuador's economy is in crisis after the collapse in oil prices and tourism. And while last year's deadly protests are over, politics – and political unrest – continue to polarize the nation.

On April 7 Ecuador's highest court sentenced the popular but divisive leftist former President Rafael Correa to eight years in prison on corruption charges. Correa, who now lives in Belgium, says the charges are fabricated to ensure he cannot run for office again. His conviction increases political divisions during a crisis that calls for unity.

Ecuador's death rate is starting to slow after more than a month of lockdown. But the specter of COVID-19 victims lying unburied at home, in hospital hallways, and on the streets, hangs as a specter across Latin America.

Guayaquil is a grim forecast of how this pandemic kills in the less wealthy world.

[Dennis Altman is Professorial Fellow in Human Security, La Trobe University; Juan Carlos Valarezo is Professor of International Relations, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador]

Why is used clothing popular across Africa?

DAN BANIK

THECONVERSATION.COM

The sale of used clothing is a billion-dollar global industry. According to some estimates, almost 70% of garments that are donated globally end up on the African continent.

This happens through a complex global supply chain, where donated items that cannot be sold in thrift shops in high-income countries are resold in bulk to commercial textile recyclers. The garments are then sent to sorting centres, often located in the Middle East or Eastern Europe. These are then graded and sorted into bales. The bales are in turn resold to wholesalers on the African continent.

East Africa alone imports over \$150 million worth of used clothes and shoes, largely from the US and Europe. In 2017, USAID estimated that the industry employed 355,000 people and generated \$230 million in government revenue. It also supported the livelihoods of an additional 1.4 million in the East Africa Community bloc.

But scholars have also highlighted the complexities of this billion-dollar industry and how these commodity chains perpetuate poverty. This has led to a pushback. In 2016, the leaders of Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi issued a communiqué outlining a major tariff increase on imported used clothing. The plan was to ban all imports of used clothing by 2019. But the international trade disputes that followed led most countries to back out from implementing the ban.

The pushback rested on two broad sets of arguments. First, there is a widespread belief that the popularity of used clothing contributed to the collapse of the domestic textile industry in many parts of Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Second, the continued use of used clothing is portrayed as undignified and eroding African pride.

Nevertheless, used clothing continues to enjoy unrivalled popularity in many countries.

We sought to establish why by studying the phenomenon in Malawi, where used clothes are known as “kaunjika” (meaning “clothes sold in a heap”). It is a popular and resilient business.

We found that there were important economic and social pull factors behind the popularity of used clothing. We also found little support for the viewpoint that wearing used clothing is an attack on the dignity of African citizens.

THE PULL FACTORS

Between March 2018 and February 2020, we visited local markets and shopping malls and interacted extensively with street vendors, shop keepers, wholesalers and consumers in Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe.

Our goal was to better understand the widespread popularity of used clothing in Malawi. We were able to identify a number of common factors.

QUALITY: Used clothes and shoes sourced from high-income countries were considered to be of far better quality than brand new items available in local markets. Customers were often willing to pay a higher price for used merchandise than comparable new items.

Clothing labels indicating where items were produced were viewed as less important than the source of the donation. For example, kaunjika sourced from China was popular with vendors and customers because of sizes and styles that were more compatible with local preferences. Many vendors also claimed that when compared to clothing produced in China for African markets, clothing that had been produced for the Chinese themselves or for Western markets was of better quality.

AFFORDABILITY: Many Malawians cannot afford even the cheapest new garments sold in local stores. Used clothing can be sold at higher prices than new items, mostly to middle income consumers in urban areas. But items that are not considered to be of good

quality or style continue to trickle down the supply chain. These items are then sold by vendors operating in more rural areas where consumers with lower purchasing power have even fewer alternatives.

FASHION TRENDS: Malawian consumers cited fashion trends and the “uniqueness” of imported used clothing as important factors for buying kaunjika. This was particularly the case for the younger generation who had been exposed to international trends and popular culture through social media. People crave “the latest fashion” often not available in the local retail stores.

LOW START-UP COSTS: The buy-in costs for local vendors of used clothing were very low. This created economic opportunities in the informal economy for groups with limited resources to access start-up capital. Several vendors told us that despite starting their businesses with limited funds, they had gradually been able to expand their operations and create employment opportunities.

And although the informal sector is characterised by numerous challenges – poor working conditions, lack of social protection, child labour and loss of tax revenue, to name a few – kaunjika appeared to offer a much needed way for many to earn a living.

USED CLOTHING AND SUSTAINABILITY

A recent report predicts that the global second-hand clothing market is set to double to \$51 billion in the next five years, exceeding fast fashion within a decade.

It is still too early to tell how changing consumption patterns in high-income countries will affect used clothing markets around the world. But what appears certain is that the Malawian consumer, like many on the African continent, will continue to demand access to the same quality, styles and brands as the rest of the world, even if it means buying used clothes “sold in a heap”.

[the writer is Professor of political science and Director of the Oslo SDG Initiative, University of Oslo]

NTPC to procure fuel cell buses, cars for Delhi, Leh



NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): State run power giant NTPC on Sunday said it has invited expression of interest for procuring 10 hydrogen fuel cell based electric buses and an equal number of such cars.

These environment friendly vehicles would be used in Delhi and Leh.

"NTPC Ltd, has invited Global Expression of Interest (EoI) to provide 10 Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FC) based electric buses and an equal number of Hydrogen Fuel Cell based electric cars in Leh and Delhi," a company statement said.

According to the statement, the EoI has been issued by NTPC's wholly-owned subsidiary NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam (NVVN) Ltd.

The move to procure hydrogen fuel cell based vehicles is first of its kind project in the country, wherein a complete solution from green energy to fuel cell vehicle would be developed, it said.

The initiative, which has been undertaken with the support of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, will also harness renewable energy for generation of hydrogen and develop its storage and dispensation facilities as part of pilot projects at Leh and Delhi.

The move to launch hydrogen powered vehicles aims at decarbonising mobility segment.

NTPC has been taking various technology initiatives to provide complete e-mobility solution for public transport, including creation of public charging infrastructure and providing electric buses to state/city transport undertakings.

In this regard, 90 public charging stations in various cities and battery charging and swapping station at Faridabad for electric 3-wheelers have already been commissioned.

Similarly, e-bus solution for Andaman & Nicobar Administration is under implementation, it added.

Senior govt doctor, another man die of COVID-19 in Bengal



KOLKATA, APR 26 (PTI): A senior government doctor involved in the fight against COVID-19 and a 34-year-old man, both diagnosed with the disease, died at a hospital here on Sunday, sources at the facility said.

The 60-year-old doctor, posted as assistant director health services (equipment and stores), was initially admitted to Beliaghata Infectious Diseases hospital and later shifted to a private hospital in Salt Lake on April 18, where

he succumbed to the disease.

"After he tested positive for COVID-19, he was first taken to Beliaghata ID hospital and then to the Salt Lake private hospital. The doctor was suffering from respiratory distress and other co-morbidities and had been on ventilator since he was admitted to the hospital. He died at 1.20 am on Sunday," sources told PTI.

Another patient from the city's Garden

Reach area, who had tested positive for the disease earlier in the week, also died around 7 am at the same facility.

"The 34-year-old man was admitted to the hospital on April 23. He, too, had breathing problems and was put on ventilator. He died today morning," they added.

After several calls made to senior government officials for more information on the two fatalities went unanswered, an official insisting that he not be

named, said, "The reason behind the death of the ADHS is still under investigation".

West Bengal has reported a total of 541 COVID-19 cases so far. Of them, 18 have succumbed to the disease, according to the state health department.

The state government has constituted an audit committee of doctors which ascertains whether a patient of COVID-19 has died because of the

coronavirus disease or a pre-existing ailment.

According to Union health Ministry, the number of COVID-19 stricken patients in the state stands at 571.

Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said on Friday that the audit panel has certified that only 18 of 57 fatalities were caused "directly due to the disease".

The rest 39 deaths were caused by other severe health conditions called comorbidities in medical parlance.

4 more test positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, total cases rise to 33

PORT BLAIR, APR 26 (PTI): Four more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, taking the total number of cases to 33, an official said on Sunday.

All the four persons had come in contact with a COVID-19 patient and his family in Bambooflat area in south Andaman district, he said.

Last week, a 39-year-old police radio operator had tested positive for COVID-19 in the locality, which has now been declared a hotspot.

Of the total cases reported in the Union Territory, 22 are active now, the official said.

More than 100 samples have been sent to the Regional Medical Research Centre here for tests on Sunday morning, the official said. It includes the samples of 10 coronavirus patients, whose samples had tested negative in the previous test.

If the 10 samples test negative again, the persons will be released from the guest house where they have been quarantined, he said.

Till Saturday, a total of 2,741 samples had been sent for tests, and of these, results of 2,617 had come, the official had said.

The health department has so far received 3,800 rapid test kits from the Centre, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has set up an isolation centre at the GB Pant Hospital with 50 beds, and a total of 961 people are now in quarantine centres, the official said.

29 test positive for COVID-19 in J-K; total now 523



of cases reported in the Union territory, 466 are from Kashmir and 57 from Jammu.

While 137 patients have recovered, six have died due to the disease, the officials said.

More than 66,000 people are under surveillance, including those who are either in government-established quarantine facilities or in home-isolation.

Till date, 66,343 travellers and

persons in contact with suspected cases have been enlisted for surveillance

which include 6,324 people in home-quarantine, including facilities operated by the government, 263 in hospital quarantine, 376 in hospital isolation and 10,974 under home surveillance. Besides, 48,400 people have completed their surveillance period, the officials added.

Cook at pvt hosp in Kolkata tests positive for COVID-19

KOLKATA, APR 26 (PTI): A cook at Belle Vue Clinic, one of the city's top hospitals, tested positive for COVID-19, following which the medical facility shut down one of its kitchens, and placed his co-workers under home quarantine, a senior official at the facility said on Sunday.

The cook, in his early 50s, was admitted to an isolation ward of the private hospital as he complained of uneasiness and exhibited symptoms of COVID-19, he said.

After test results confirmed he had contracted the disease, the Belle Vue Clinic employee was immediately shifted to Beliaghata ID hospital on Saturday, the official said.

A doctor and three



nurses who treated him at the private facility have been put in home isolation, he said.

"The doctor and the three nurses had used protective gears while treating him, but as a precautionary measure all three have been sent on 14-

day home quarantine.

"We have two kitchens, one of which has been sent shut down," he said, adding that the isolation ward at the hospital, where the cook had stayed, was being disinfected.

West Bengal has

reported a total of 541 COVID-19 cases so far. Of them, 18 have succumbed to the disease, the state health department has said.

According to the Union health Ministry, the number of COVID-19-stricken patients in the state stands at 571.

12 killed in lightning strikes in Bihar

PATNA, APR 26 (PTI): Twelve people were killed in lightning strikes in three districts of Bihar on Sunday, disaster management officials said.

Nine persons were killed in Saran district while two died in Jamui and one in Bhojpur, they said.

Eight people were also injured in Saran district and they are being treated at Chhapra Sadar Hospital, Superintendent of Police Hari Kishore Rai said.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar condoled the deaths and announced an ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh

to the families of each of the deceased, an official release said.

He prayed for the speedy recovery of those injured.

"The loss of lives was comparatively less as people were indoors due to the lockdown," Kumar was quoted as saying in the release.

The chief minister urged the people to remain alert at times when the meteorological department has forecast bad weather and pay heed to advisories issued by the Disaster Management Department, it added.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

I was lacking in basics last season, was 100 percent sure of success in this IPL: Kuldeep

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): India spinner Kuldeep Yadav says he was “lacking in the basics” last season owing to playing one too many games, leading to an IPL that could have been better than how it turned out.

He said he didn't plan enough last time and having learned his lesson, the chinaman bowler was “100 percent sure of success” in IPL 2020 whose fate hangs in balance because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I was fully prepared for this IPL 2020 and I had planned a lot. I was 100 percent sure that this IPL would be a success,” Kuldeep was quoted as saying in Kolkata Knight Riders website.

Asked about last season, Kuldeep spoke about why he struggled to get going.

“When I came into IPL, I didn't give myself enough time to train. The biggest learning from 2019 was that I did not plan for the season.

“There was a lot of cricket in 2019, especially international cricket. I joined the team just three days before the IPL started. So the planning wasn't good. The involvement wasn't good either. And that is very important,” he said.

“I don't think the last IPL was all that bad for me. I bowled very well. But a leg-spinner's success is based on the number of wickets he picks. I didn't manage to pick many wickets, but my economy was good.”

The lack of wickets dented his confidence, the spinner said.

“When you don't pick wickets your confidence drops a bit. Then there was a game where I went for a lot of runs. So my confidence level dropped,” Kuldeep admitted.

“I was lacking in the basics. Playing a lot of cricket affects your basics.

“If you are in regular touch with your coach then your basics won't be affected.”

He heaped praise on former KKR captain Gautam Gambhir and bowling consultant Wasim Akram, saying they had a “big influence” on his career in his early years at the Knight Riders.

“Gauti bhai (Gambhir) had a huge influence on me from the start of my stint at KKR. He always spoke to me a lot. Not only during the time he was at KKR, but even after that, over these last two years,” Kuldeep said.

“He always kept me motivated. When you get that kind of confidence from your captain, it becomes a huge plus point for any player. It helps you remain confident, and that translates into good performances.”

The chinaman bowler said former Pakistan captain Akram helped him more with the mental aspect of the game.

Sports in times of COVID-19: Top Indian stars foresee new normal once pandemic mayhem ends

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): Will the fans rush back? Will training abroad be as hassle-free as it used to be? What about contact sports where social distancing can't really be practised? In a nutshell, will sports and watching sports ever be the same again in a world scarred by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Seeking answers to these questions, PTI sports team reached out to some of India's biggest sportspersons -- current and former -- who gazed into the crystal ball and predicted the future of sports once the action resumes.

The responses were a mix of trepidation and optimism. Here's a peek into their thoughts:

SACHIN TENDULKAR (One of India's greatest cricketers):

No doubt the world is going through the biggest challenge in our lifetime. I think players will be wary for some time when it comes to using saliva (to shine the ball). It will play on their minds.

High fives and hugging your teammates will be avoided for some time. This is what I would like to believe. They will be conscious to begin with and may maintain social distancing.

ABHINAV BINDRA (India's first and only individual Olympic gold-medallist):

Sport is a tool that unites people and brings joy to thousands of participants and viewers across the world. While aspects of heightened safety protocols will be integrated for the

foreseeable future, the want and attraction of sport will not diminish.

As the general populous has become more conscious of their health and their physical well-being, avenues to use sport to improve fitness will grow.

The post-COVID-19 world could be a blessing in disguise for India. There may not be so much foreign exposure and this may allow India to build proper sporting infrastructure.

BAJRANG PUNIA (World silver-medallist wrestler):

Wrestling is a contact sport. When wrestling will resume, there is no way you can avoid physical contact. But I don't think there would be any hesitation. I don't see any change happening.

The only thing that can happen is that the sport will become more intense. All athletes will return after a long time. They are not used to such long breaks. All of us are analysing our weaknesses and strengths, so when tournaments will resume, the competition will be intense.

MC MARY KOM (Six-time world champion and an Olympic bronze-medallist):

We are all hoping and praying desperately for things to go back to normal but can they ever? Of course not. This virus is an enemy that no one even understands completely. Sports will change. Mine is a contact sport and I am personally worried how we are going to deal with



it. For the time being, I don't see any sparring happening in training at least, I would be totally against it.

I believe training itself will become very individualistic. As for the fans, they will come back to watch, I don't see a problem there. But yes, the standard of hygiene at tournaments will go up to another level.

I believe once a vaccine is developed, things can go back to how they were before but until then, travelling will be less frequent, training will not exactly be a team thing and tournaments, I don't know how they will resume.

VIJENDER SINGH (India's first and so far the only male boxer to win an Olympic medal):

I don't think it would be all that easy to bring back the fans, it shouldn't be because I believe people should be wary but India is an unpredictable country, kuch bhi ho sakta hai yahan (anything is possible here). People have been at home for so long, they might just head to the stadium at the first opportunity.

Logic demands that they become more cautious. Athletes will be more cautious certainly, training abroad won't be all that easy, less tournaments will happen and whenever they happen, I am not sure what the participation would be like.

BHAICHUNG BHUTIA (Former India football captain):

In today's age, when

television and digital platforms have become so important part of our lives, I don't think the lack of spectators in stadiums will have much of a bearing as far as business is concerned. I see the TV and digital gaining from this.

Sports events will gradually come back to what they were before. They can be held behind closed doors for now. Till the time a vaccine is out, I don't think they can have people inside as it involves a lot of risks.

B SAI PRANEETH (First Indian male badminton player to win a world bronze medal in 36 years):

We have to travel a lot and I think everybody will be scared to travel to countries like China,

Korea and even the European countries even if the international calendar resumes.

The fear of contracting the virus will always be there at the back of your mind, even when you are eating in any restaurant or even playing. I don't know how even playing would be possible considering the fact that during a match the shuttle is touched by the players and by the service judge.

Also while playing, you change your shirt which is soaked with sweat, so I believe only after we have vaccination, play can start but even then, you will see people wearing masks and trying to avoid crowded places to be safe.

MAHESH BHUPATHI (Multiple-time Grand Slam winning former tennis player):

Sport won't change. Things will be normal once COVID-19 goes away.

JEJE LALPEKHLUA (Top Indian footballer):

It will take a bit of time to get back to normal but once things are normal, we would not be scared to take part.

While travelling and moving between flights, hotels, and cities we just need to be more careful and take care of ourselves and others.

JOSHNA CHINAPPA (Top squash player):

I think I will have to be extra careful on flights as those are the main transporters of germs around the world. There will be a new normal for sure. Passing the airport's will also get much harder.

My first instinct after the game is to shake hands with the opponent but now things might change there also.

SARDAR SINGH (Former men's hockey team captain):

From the point of view of Olympic preparations, the plus point is the team will get more time to prepare for Olympics but the negative is it will have revisit it plans.

Once sports resume, social distancing is going to be the new norm and it remains to be seen how it is implemented in contact sports like boxing, wrestling or for that matter hockey and football where close tackles and body contact are common.

Olympic hopeful Eleanor Davis puts Tokyo ambition on hold to save lives

SEAN INGLE

LONDON, 26 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Eleanor Davis had intended to spend Sunday on a 42,000-step journey towards Team GB's squad for the 2020 Olympics.

Instead, at 8.55am, when the London Marathon elite women's race was due to start, Davis will be on a Covid-19 ward saving lives. “It's gutting that the race has been cancelled,” says Davis, a doctor at Stepping Hill hospital in Stockport. “But there are more important things going on.”

In December, the 31-year-old put years of injury niggles behind her by running a 2hr 33min marathon in Valencia – putting her in the UK's top 10 last year – and believed she was on course to go under 2:30 in London. That would have given her a live shot at securing one of the three places for Tokyo. But when the virus spread, she volunteered for extra shifts and put her ambitions on hold.

“I'm working more hours than I normally would, mainly on the coronavirus wards,” she says. “It's been difficult. I have seen some heartbreaking days, but there are also some uplifting moments as well. There are also some difficult phone calls you have to make. But for

every difficult phone call there is a nice one when I am ringing to say the patient is getting better and we are hoping to discharge in a few days. I have also seen some care and compassion that I will take with me for the rest of my career, so it's not all bad.”

However, Davis feels she is likely to get the virus at some point, especially as her wife is also an A&E consultant. “I am generally not fearful when I am in hospital,” she says. “I am fit and healthy, but I know it doesn't always discriminate.

“From personal experience there have been no problems with PPE but I guess each day I do wake up feeling quite lucky that I am still well considering I have had so much exposure. My wife is an A&E consultant so our house is probably quite a hot spot. I worry a bit because it can be so harsh on the respiratory system and how I might recover to get back into running. I am kind of expecting to get it at some point.”

After Davis finishes her shift, she will join other elite British women marathoners in running 2.6 miles as part of the 2.6 Challenge, which intends to get as many people as possible to dream up an activity based around the numbers 2.6 or 26 and

to fundraise or donate to their chosen charity – via twopointsixchallenge.co.uk – as part of efforts to save charities that risk going under during the lockdown.

Davis, who is running for the mental health charity Mind, admits she has had a few low days herself recently. “But I don't think there are many who won't be struggling with their mental health through this. So it is a charity that a lot of people can relate to and might need help from in the future.”

Last year, the London Marathon raised £66.4m for charity, making it Britain's biggest single-day fundraising event. The race director, Hugh Brasher, is urging the public to join figures such as Gareth Bale, Sir Steve Redgrave and Jessica Ennis-Hill in order to help the £1.5m already raised grow rapidly.

“We are trying to highlight a vitally important issue, that the charities that underpin our society are in dire straits and need our help,” Brasher says. “We have lots of sporting stars and celebrities on board and the hope is that lots of incredible and crazy activities will

take place, under social distancing rules, of course, to raise money.”

This was supposed to be the 40th edition of the London Marathon, which was set up in large part due to the drive, vision and energy of Hugh's father, Chris, then the athletics correspondent of the Observer, and his friend John Disley. In the first race in 1981 there were 6,255 finishers, 5% of whom were women, little fundraising and nobody in fancy dress. Now, thanks to their vision, 45,000 people run it with millions watching on TV and donating to support charities. As the former Observer editor Donald Trelford puts it: “there was something of the great Victorian” about Brasher. “He had a kind of manic energy, and a bustling single-mindedness that brook no opposition.”

His son agrees. “Impossible wasn't a word he accepted,” Hugh says, laughing. “If a door was shut he would bulldozer it down or try a different one.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a unique challenge to the organisers but Brasher Jr still hopes to hold the event as normal, in October, although he says they are planning 10 other options, including staging an elite-only race.

‘Dhoni always takes responsibility when team loses’

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): He has played most of his cricket under MS Dhoni and pacer Mohit Sharma says the revered former India skipper is a true leader who does not back off when it comes to taking responsibility in challenging times.

The 31-year-old pacer has played under Dhoni both at Chennai Super Kings and the Indian team. He was to play for Delhi Capitals this season but the lockdown has postponed the league indefinitely. “His humility and sense of gratitude is what sets him apart from other players I have played with. In sport, there's a difference between a captain and a leader - I believe he's a true leader,” Sharma said during an Instagram session organised by the Delhi franchise.

“When the team wins, you'll never find him anywhere prominently, but when the team loses, he's always right in front, taking responsibility - that's the sign of a leader and why I admire him so much.”

The coronavirus-forced lockdown has delayed his return to competitive cricket after a back surgery but Sharma says whenever the IPL is played, his side will be a strong contender for the title.

Sharma was out



of action for about 10 months due to a back injury, which troubled him for two years.

“I finally decided to get myself operated, and after completing the rehab in the past three months, I was really looking forward to playing for the Delhi Capitals this season,” he said.

“I think it is a huge opportunity for our team. We have a fantastic group of players with a very strong Indian core, and I believe our team has the right players in all departments who can help us in challenging for the trophy. So I feel our fans can expect huge things from the team.”

Sharma said he was not sure if he would be able to return to competitive cricket because of the surgery and is now looking forward to learn a few things from Australian legend Ricky Ponting, who is the coach of Delhi franchise.

“I'm still excited to represent the franchise. I feel it's a young team with a solid Indian core,

and I know most of the players here - like Shikhar Dhawan, Ishant Sharma, Amit Mishra, Harshal Patel - both on and off the field very well.

“It would also be a golden opportunity to work and learn from Ricky Ponting - all the players only have praises for him. I hope the team does exceedingly well when the IPL happens, and we can give the Delhi fans great joy,” Sharma added.

On being asked about the speculation around legalising ball tampering, Sharma said, “It will be interesting to see what decision is made. Every bowler has their personal choices in this matter. I don't use a lot of saliva for shining the ball, in fact, these days umpires don't let bowlers use too much saliva.

“I would be okay with using sweat as well to shine the ball.”

Sharma said he is training for five days in a week, with focus on recovery on the other two days.

Global death toll tops 200,000 as some virus lockdowns eased

ATLANTA, APR 26 (AP): As the global death toll from the coronavirus surpassed 200,000, countries took cautious steps toward easing lockdowns imposed amid the pandemic, but fears of a surge in infections made even some outbreak-wounded businesses reluctant to reopen.

The states of Georgia, Oklahoma and Alaska started loosening restrictions on businesses despite warnings from experts that such steps might be premature.

Shawn Gingrich, CEO and founder of Lion's Den Fitness, decided after the Georgia governor's announcement that his Atlanta gym would remain closed for now.

We've sacrificed so much already, Gingrich said. I feel like if we do this too soon, we'll see a spike in cases and we're back to square one.

Others were eager to get back to business, with precautions.

Russ Anderson, who owns four tattoo studios in south Georgia, said he couldn't get up out of my chair quick enough when restrictions were lifted. His main shop served 50 or 60 customers Friday when it reopened, with customers and tattoo artists wearing masks, he said.

The worldwide death toll was over 202,000, according to a count by John Hopkins University from government figures on Saturday. The actual death toll is believed to be far higher.

India reopened neighbourhood stores that many of the country's 1.3 billion people rely on for everything from beverages to mobile

phone data cards. But the loosening didn't apply to hundreds of quarantined towns and other places hit hardest by the outbreak that has killed at least 775 people in the country where many poor live in slums too crowded for social distancing.

Shopping malls also stayed closed nationwide. Still, for owners of small stores, being allowed to open again brought relief.

India also allowed manufacturing and farming to resume in rural areas last week to ease the economic plight of millions left jobless by the March 24 lockdown.

The restrictions have allowed people out of their homes only to buy food, medicine or other essentials.

Elsewhere in Asia, authorities reported no new deaths Saturday for the 10th straight day in China, where the virus originated. South Korea reported just 10 fresh cases, the eighth day in a row its daily increase was under 20. There were no new deaths for the second straight day.

Underscoring the unknowns about the virus, the World Health Organization said there is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from COVID-19 cannot fall sick again.

Some countries extended or tightened restrictions, confirming a pattern of caution.

Sri Lanka had partially lifted a monthlong daytime curfew in more than two thirds of the country. But it reimposed a 24-hour lockdown countrywide until Monday after

a surge of 46 new infections, its highest daily increase.

Norway extended until at least Sept. 1 its ban on events with more than 500 participants.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced that Spaniards will be allowed to leave their homes for short walks and exercise starting May 2 after seven weeks of strict home confinement, though he said maximum caution will be our guideline.

We must be very prudent because there is no manual, no roadmap to follow, he said.

Belgium sketched out plans for a progressive lockdown relaxation starting May 4 with the resumption of nonessential treatment in hospitals and the reopening of textile and sewing shops to make face masks.

In Italy, where restrictions also will be eased May 4, authorities warned against abandoning social distancing practices as millions return to work. Free masks will be distributed to nursing homes, police, public officials and transportation workers. Workers painted blue circles on Rome's subway platforms to remind people to keep their distance when commuters return.

The country continues to have Europe's highest death toll, with 26,384. The 415 deaths registered in the 24-hour period that ended Saturday evening was the lowest toll since Italy registered 345 on March 17, but only five fewer than Friday.

Britain held off on

changes to its lockdown as the virus-related death toll in hospitals topped 20,000. The figure doesn't include deaths in nursing homes, likely to be in the thousands.

In France, the government prepared to ease one of Europe's strictest lockdowns from May 11. The health minister detailed plans to scale up testing to help contain any new flare-ups.

Testing shortages also are a problem in Brazil, Latin America's largest nation, which is veering closer to becoming a pandemic hot spot.

Officials in Rio de Janeiro and four other major cities warned that their hospital systems are on the verge of collapse or already overwhelmed. In Manaus, the biggest city in the Amazon, officials said they have been forced to dig mass graves in a cemetery. Workers have been burying 100 corpses a day triple the pre-virus average.

A survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found Americans overwhelmingly support stay-at-home measures and other efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.

In Texas, where retailers are allowed to sell items for curbside pickup, Allison Scott said most customers of her women's clothing store in a Dallas shopping mall seem to feel more comfortable having their purchases shipped.

I want to be open more than anything but I don't think that society is ready to come out either, she said.

The deal requires the approval of both parties on key appointments, including the attorney general and the state prosecutor, granting Netanyahu veto power over the officials who hold sway over his legal fate.

The agreement delivered Netanyahu a significant boost as he fought to hold on to power while fending off the corruption charges. His party will gain influence over judicial appointments, which could help Netanyahu if his case reaches the Supreme Court.

Protesters, wearing face masks, waved Israeli flags and signs calling out Netanyahu for corruption.

Netanyahu and former military chief Benny Gantz, leader of the Blue and White party, signed the power-sharing agreement after weeks of negotiations for what they termed a national emergency government meant to steer the country through the coronavirus outbreak.

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Another indicator of community transmission of the coronavirus would be the numbers from the Health Ministry's surveillance programmes. Such random testing of flu-like illnesses in the community aims to pick up cases that otherwise would not have been detected.

The key is to look at the sentinel surveillance data from the influenza-like illness surveillance done in polyclinics and general practitioner clinics to see how much coronavirus is circulating in the community, as well as pneumonia surveillance in hospitals, said Prof Tambyah.

COVID-19 cases in Wuhan hospitals to zero for 1st time: official

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING/WUHAN, APR 26 (PTI):

The number of hospitalised COVID-19 patients in China's Wuhan, where the virus first emerged before turning out to be a pandemic, on Sunday dropped to zero for the first time, marking yet another milestone for the city which was opened up on April 8 after a 76-day lockdown.

The result has been achieved with the hard efforts of medical workers in Wuhan and those who were dispatched to assist the city in the fight against the virus from across the country, said Mi Feng, a spokesperson for China's National Health Commission (NHC).

The last patient in Wuhan was cured on Friday, reducing the number of coronavirus patients in the city to zero, Mi said, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The health commission of Hubei province, whose capital is Wuhan, said that no new confirmed cases or new deaths due to COVID-19 were reported on Saturday.

It said that 11 coronavirus patients were discharged from hospital after recovery in Wuhan.

Hubei has so far reported 68,128 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 50,333 in Wuhan.

Hubei and Wuhan were in the thick of the coronavirus outbreak since early January this year, bearing the brunt of it.

China officially said that the coronavirus was noticed in late December in Wuhan but announced severe measures like the lockdown of 56 million-strong province from January 23, which drew criticism from the US and other countries that it acted late, leading to its spread globally.



There was a controversy about whether the virus, with the ability to transmit from human-to-human, emerged from the Huanan Seafood Market of Wuhan or escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) as alleged by the US.

China has said that the coronavirus origin is a matter of science and it should be left to science and medical community to reach a conclusion.

China also revised the death toll in Wuhan by 50 per cent amidst criticism that it is underreporting the cases.

Local municipal authority said as of April 16, the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Wuhan was increased by 325 to 50,333 and the number of fatalities up by 1,290 to 3,869.

The revised figure raised

China's overall COVID-19 death

toll to 4,632. The total number

of cases as of Thursday stood at

82,692.

Chinese Foreign Ministry

officials said the revision was due

to some late reports, omissions

and inaccurate information in

the initial stages.

Officials said that over five

million residents of Wuhan

travelled out before the lockdown

to avail the Chinese New Year

holidays starting from January

24 which was cited as a possible reason for the spread of the virus in China and the world.

China has highlighted the strong measures it has taken in Hubei like prolonged lockdown besides building 14 temporary hospitals and deployment of 42,000 medical personnel to contain the virus.

The lockdown was lifted on April 8 after the virus cases abated.

The 11 million-strong Wuhan city has not yet become fully normal due to the steady increase in asymptomatic cases.

By the end of Saturday, the province had 572 asymptomatic cases under medical observation, after 19 new such cases were reported on Saturday, the local health commission reported on Sunday.

Asymptomatic cases refer to the people who test positive for the coronavirus but develop no symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat. They are infectious and pose a risk of spreading the virus to others.

More than 200,000 people globally have died of the new coronavirus, including more than 50,000 in the US. It has infected nearly three million people across the world.

Thousands demonstrate against Israeli coalition deal

TEL AVIV, APR 26 (AP): Several thousand Israelis demonstrated against a unity government deal reached last week that leaves Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in power as he prepares to go on trial for corruption charges.

The protesters on Saturday oppose having Netanyahu as prime minister as long as he is a criminal suspect. The protesters say the unity government agreement, which gives Netanyahu influence over the appointment of judges and legal officials,

crushes democracy and is meant to rescue Netanyahu from his legal troubles.

Netanyahu is scheduled to face trial next month on charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes. He denies the charges.

The protest filled central Tel Aviv's Rabin Square, although demonstrators maintained distance from each other in line with health regulations in place for weeks meant to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

Protesters, wearing face masks, waved Israeli flags and signs calling out Netanyahu for corruption.

Netanyahu and former military chief Benny Gantz, leader of the Blue and White party, signed the power-sharing agreement after weeks of negotiations for what they termed a national emergency government meant to steer the country through the coronavirus outbreak.

The agreement delivered Netanyahu

Coronavirus cases cross 3000-mark in Singapore, foreign workers worst-affected

BY GURDIP SINGH

SINGAPORE, APR 26 (PTI):

Coronavirus cases in Singapore crossed the 13,000-mark on Sunday after 931 positive cases were confirmed with majority of them continued to be foreign workers, including Indian nationals, living in dormitories.

The vast majority of the news cases are work permit holders residing in dormitories for foreign workers, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said in its preliminary release of figures.

Foreign workers' dormitories have been locked down as the government struggles to curb the second wave of

the COVID-19 outbreak.

Fifteen of the new cases confirmed on Sunday are Singaporeans or permanent residents being foreigners. The total number of coronavirus cases is 13,624 as of Sunday noon.

"We are still working through the details of the cases, and further updates will be shared via the MOH press release that will be issued tonight," the ministry said.

Meanwhile, five weeks from now, if the number of daily COVID-19 cases in the community falls to single digits and the situation in the foreign worker dormitories improves, circuit breaker measures in Singapore

may ease gradually, reported Channel News Asia, citing experts.

Key indicators of whether Singapore is in a position to consider such a move include the number of new community cases falling to single digits per day and a very clear decline in new cases in the dormitories, said Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health dean Teo Yik Ying.

Besides a fall in the total number of cases, the number of unlinked cases should go down to near zero, added Professor Paul Tambyah of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of

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SWINGING GOOD TIME! The couple, Camila Cabello & Shawn Mendes enjoys some romantic time chilling on a swing in Miami.

Lockdown has increased viewership of digital content: Rajeev Khandelwal

MANIK GUPTA

NEW DELHI, APR 26 (PTI): Actor Rajeev Khandelwal, who has been appearing on different OTT platforms, believes coronavirus-driven lockdown has given a “massive surge” to viewership for the digital entertainment space as more and more viewers are embracing the medium.

Back in limelight with his Voot Original Show “Marzi”, the actor on Sunday will make his debut in tele-theatre with legal drama “Court Martial” by Zee Theatre. It will have its premiere on television as well as the OTT platform.

“There is a massive surge in viewership for digital content now. I am getting calls from people who I never thought would ever switch to this platform but then they have no choice. For example, I got a call from my aunt who lives in a small town like Alwar, she was watching my show on digital,” Khandelwal told PTI.

Khandelwal, who made his digital debut with ALT Balaji’s “Haq Se”, said earlier there were talks of how digital would change the world of entertainment in a year or two, but because of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown, “the whole thing has changed within one month only”.

“I am glad that most of my shows, and now this play, are in digital and will get a bigger audience,” he added.

Having made a name for himself, first in television, then movies and now in digital, Khandelwal said he has always been very “fearful” and “nervous” of doing theatre and would “create excuses” for himself for not performing on stage.

“I would love watching plays but could never push myself to do one, always saying ‘nahi ho payega’ (won’t happen). In fact, it was during my first few visits to Bombay I had gone to Prithvi theatre to watch a play, there when I saw the stage and hall filled with the audience, I said to myself ‘I Don’t think I can do it’” he said.

But “Court Martial”, thanks to its “fantastic script” and the fact that many veteran NSD actors had performed it in the past, made the 44-year-old actor shed his inhibitions for good.

The teleplay, which was written by renowned playwright and novelist Swadesh Deepak in 1980s, follows the unusual trial of a junior-ranked army man convicted of murdering his senior officer.

Khandelwal will be seen in the role of Bikash Roy, an defence lawyer who goes deep into the shocking details behind the assault.

“Here the whole package was very tempting and the last nail in the coffin was it was Army based and I come from an



Army background, my dad was in the Army and my brother is in the Army, so I was like the entire universe is conspiring to drag me into this play, he explained.

That said, teleplay is still different from a traditional play. Unlike theatre, it is adapted for television and is done without a live audience.

When asked Khandelwal he didn’t deny any of it and said it was due to this reason that he got his “high” on the job not on the day when it was shot but the day before that.

“The day before the original shoot we performed the whole play 90 minutes without any cuts in front of our director, creative team, channel people. I was so happy, I was like ‘yeh kar daala isko bhi’.

“Also, we got a standing ovation. But more than that I in my head knew that I had done well and was finally through with this fear of stage and remembering long dialogues,” he added.

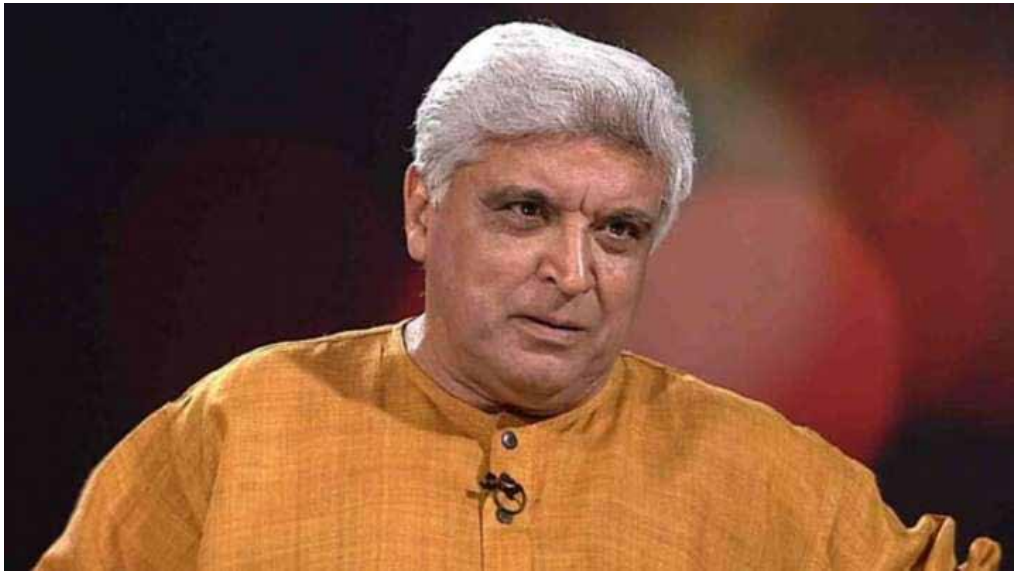
The actual shoot, he said, was done with three pre-decided cuts -- 30 minutes each.

Elated with the whole experience of doing the play, the actor said “ab sher ke muh khoon lag gaya hai” and he is looking forward to doing more plays in near future.

“Now since I have spent a considerable time with this play, I guess it is only ideal that I take this play to different cities, perform it in theatres in front of a live audience and take their feedback. Also, I am open to new scripts,” he said.

Khandelwal is presently at his holiday home in Goa, growing vegetables, reading “Homo Sapiens” by Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari and watching “Money Heist” on Netflix.

Javed Akhtar makes Instagram debut



MUMBAI, APR 26 (PTI): Veteran writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar has joined photo-video sharing social media platform Instagram.

His wife, veteran actor Shabana Azmi, welcomed him on the platform.

“So finally you’re on insta! Welcome, she wrote on her page alongside a photograph of Akhtar, which also acts as his display picture.

The writer’s Instagram page, as of now, has more than 5,000 followers.

Actors Dia Mirza, Aditi Rao Hydari and Divya Dutta welcomed Akhtar, who is yet to post anything on his page.

The writer, however, is active on Twitter, where he often shares his opinions on politics, history and topical issues.

Karan Johar apologises for showing ‘insensitivity’ through posts amid lockdown



MUMBAI, APR 26 (PTI): Filmmaker Karan Johar on Sunday said he is apologetic for his social media posts, many of which may have come off as “insensitive”, at a time when the world is fighting the coronavirus outbreak.

Johar’s post came as a reaction to Australian comedian Greta Lee Jackson’s parody video of “normal” people -- two round-the-clock working doctors, an unemployed person to a man who was rendered homeless after his landlord refused to decrease the rent -- taking a jibe at celebrities posting videos from the comfort of their homes about their day.

The video called out American popular host Ellen DeGeneres for “broadcasting from her mansion”, Australian presenter Amanda Keller for “dancing around her massive kitchen” to Australian news anchor Samantha Armytage for talking to her audience from her “sprawling rural property” and saying, “we are all in this together”.

The two minute-long clip shared on Twitter mocked the ignorance of the celebrities and ended with the quote, “We are so glad you are ok. You are the

true heroes. Give us your money.”

Sharing this video on the microblogging site, Johar wrote, “This hit me hard and I have realised many of my posts may have been insensitive to many.”

“I apologise profusely and wish to add none of it was intentional and came from a place of sharing but clearly may have lacked emotional foresight. I am sorry,” he added.

The filmmaker has been uploading videos on Instagram with his twins, Roohi and Yash, amid the lockdown.

Earlier, director Farah Khan expressed her displeasure with tone-deaf Bollywood celebrities uploading their workout videos from home amid the pandemic.

“It’s my humble request from all the ‘celebrities’ and ‘stars’ that please stop making your workout videos and bombarding us with it. I can understand that you all are privileged and you don’t have any other worries in this global pandemic except for looking after your figures. But some of us, most of us have bigger concerns during this crisis,” Khan had said.

ARIES:

Statutory warning: chaos and commotion are going to be a constant. Things are unlikely to go according to the plan, and no, a false sense of optimism will not help you salvage the situation. Your killer instinct, however, will. Stay centred despite the many storms and act from a space of awareness. At the same time, don’t buy into the illusion that you can do it all alone. You will need your fellow warriors in time of crisis. Maintaining good relationships will prove to be beneficial.

TAURUS:

Taurus season is ushering in a new chapter of wealth and prosperity into your existence. The truth is, you haven’t always enjoyed a healthy relationship with money, but you’re transmuting the lack mentality and making space for abundance. The Universe is applauding your breakthrough and wants you to manifest your best life. Your willingness to receive will prove to be the real game-changer here. As such, spending time with the fam and sharing the bounty will continue to be a big theme for you.

GEMINI:

Creative visualisation is the name of the game, Gemini. You’re tapping into the energy of the waxing moon to manifest miracles. Know that you are being supported in every

way. Leave the complex questions like ‘how’ and ‘why’ to the Universe. For some, this may be a time of soulmate reunion. You are becoming aware of your divine counterpart. Continue to vibrate at the frequency of love. What is meant to be yours will flow into your experience.

CANCER:

This weekend is about nurturing both the yin and the yang aspects of yourself. Continue to face your true north, but let go of that goal-oriented approach. As you do, eat, pray, love, and dance a little. Make yourself some mac and cheese and watch your favourite rom-coms. Living in the present will help you open the door to joy. Some of you may find yourselves reflecting on the past and the unhealthy ties that are holding you captive. Don’t feel the need to cut the cords immediately. There’s nothing like distance to gain some perspective.

LEO:

What do you desire from this union, Leo? How do you see yourself living the rest of your life together? Believe in what you are manifesting with all your heart and leave the ‘how’ and ‘what’ to the Universe. We make space for miracles when we co-create with the mysterious forces above. Of course, that doesn’t mean you are going

to leave everything to chance. Know when to intervene and take charge. If a certain somebody has been on your mind, take the first step now.

VIRGO:

Often, we shy away from speaking our truth for the fear of being rejected. This is a limitation created by your mind, Virgo. You’re being asked to transmute this negative belief and find the courage to be assertive. Remember, those who respect you and value your presence, will be happy to meet you halfway. For some of you, this may be a time of breaking the silence. If there is something that needs to be said, reinitiate the conversation.

LIBRA:

Food for thought courtesy Perks of Being a Wallflower: “We accept the love we think we deserve.” What are these words awakening within you, Libra? Understand how our idea of love is deeply connected with how we perceive ourselves and our self-worth. If you find yourself questioning the other’s role in your life and whether you truly deserve them, take this as a sign that something within you needs to be healed. Stop undermining your power, wild one. The time to readjust the

scales is now.

SCORPIO:

Money, success, power, and recognition—this is a big day in the Scorpio HQ, and your bank account couldn’t be happier. There’s no refuting your entrepreneurship skills, given what you have been able to manifest for yourself. But could there be a chance that you have started to play it almost too safe? Change things up a little. Allow yourself to take calculated risks. Say yes to the big opportunities coming your way!

SAGITTARIUS:

Oh, the perils of operating from your miniscale, three-dimensional self! Why are you letting the so-called limitations get the better of you, or repeating the old story? Sagittarius, your life is testimony to the seed of infinite potential within you. It’s time to nurture what you have been given with love and care. There are big things opening up for you right now. Act from a space of courage. Align yourself with miracles. Know that Spirit is co-creating with you, now and in every moment.

CAPRICORN:

Given the pandemic, your business may be slower than usual. Don’t go into panic mode, Capricorn. Everything is unfolding as it is meant to. The lesson you’re being asked to

integrate, however, is entirely personal to you. Where you are being asked to exercise your discretion is what you put your coins on. Adopt a minimal approach with your shopping cart. Focus only on your needs for now. There will be plenty of opportunities to indulge yourself later on.

AQUARIUS:

“In the end, only three things matter: how much you loved, how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go of the things not meant for you.” Take a moment to reflect upon these golden words shared by Buddha. If you have been holding on to something that isn’t yours, find the courage you need to let it go. Know that the Universal design is flawless. If something is being taken away, it is because you’re being asked to create space for that which is in alignment with your highest good.

PISCES:

Ease into the flow, Pisces. Everything is taking place in divine time. Listen to the voice in your head that’s reiterating that you are in alignment with the grand plan. This day also brings with itself news of success and breakthroughs. The Universe works in mysterious ways. Trust that you will find a solution to something you have been struggling with.