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Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM writes to counterparts calling for collaborations against nCoV and support for stranded people

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 29 MAR: Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] wrote to his counterparts all over the country calling for a joint effort to fight COVID-19.

In his letter, Mr Tamang said that Sikkim has joined hands with the nation and was adopting every necessary measure to contain the spread of Novel Coronavirus ensuring the safety of not only its own people but also citizens across the country and was extending relief as the situation demanded.

Mr Tamang also mentions in his letter that a large number of students, workers, pilgrims and professionals from Sikkim were currently in other parts of the country and could be facing difficulties, for which Sikkim looked upon the respective state governments to extend support.

He adds that CMs of other states can rest assured that if any of their people were similarly stranded in Sikkim, they will be provided all necessary support and guidance in this hour of need. He has also invited them to contact his Secretary, SD Dhakal, for any such assistance.

He concludes his letter with the hope that a joint effort will overcome the virus and the disease it afflicts people with.

UD&HD Minister urges migrant laborers not to flee, assures relief package

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 29 MAR: UD&HD Minister Arun Uprety today appealed to all Sikkimese, especially the labourers and working class, to remain calm and patient at this juncture and not give in to the urge to flee. He made this appeal in light of increasing reports of migrant labourers leaving the State, mostly on foot like elsewhere in the country, worried by the situation created for them by the lockdown due to which they are out of a job overnight and lack the safety net that many others enjoy.

The Minister assured that the State Government will extend all required assistance to keep them provided-for for the duration of the lockdown. It may also be mentioned here that the Centre today directed state governments to seal their borders even down to the district level to discourage such exodus and take care of the labourers stranded away from home.

The Minister also appealed to the people to not to venture out unless absolutely necessary and reiterated that migrant labourers have faith in the Sikkim Government and not flee in panic.

He also called on them to get in touch with their nearest councilor [for those residing in urban areas] or the police so that relief packages can be reached to them.

Aid and relief will be reached without discrimination, he assured.

He also informed that the State Government was preparing a list of labourers and working class people in Sikkim and assured that from Monday onwards, relief packages will be reached to them.

He also expressed gratitude towards the front-line health workers, Municipal Corporation and police personnel for their service.

Centre asks states to seal state, district borders to stop exodus of migrants

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): The Centre on Sunday asked state governments and Union Territory administrations to effectively seal state and district borders to stop movements of migrant workers during lockdown, officials said.

During a video conference with Chief Secretaries and DGPs, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba and Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked them to ensure that there is no movement of people across cities or on highways as the lockdown continues.

"There has been movement of migrant workers in some parts of the country. Directions were issued that district and state borders should be effectively sealed," a government official said.

States were directed to ensure there is no movement of people across cities or on highways.

Only movement of goods should be allowed. District Magistrates and SPs should be made personally responsible for implementation of these directions, the official said.

Adequate arrangements for food and shelter of poor and needy people including migrant labourers be made at the place of their work, the official said.

CM connects with people on Facebook; Details gov't's preparedness for COVID-19

GANGTOK, 29 MAR [IPR]: Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] took to his official Facebook page today and posted a video message to the people of Sikkim and detailed steps taken by the State Government to keep Novel Coronavirus at bay and the State's preparedness in case of any exigency.

Following are highlights of his address:

1. Covid-19 is a global pandemic and the entire country is in a state of lock-down since the midnight of 24th March, 2020. Not only India, most of the countries in the world are going through similar crisis and have enforced severe restrictions on movement of

people within and outside the territory. With this in view, the people of Sikkim should abide by the single most effective way of prevention of Covid-19, that is, by staying home and ensuring social distancing.

2. The Government understands that people are undergoing hardships and severe challenges due to lock-down. However, nothing comes above human life and safety, hence social distancing for now is the only available solution to prevent the spread of the Virus. It is therefore imperative that all government guidelines and orders are followed in letter and spirit and social distancing is maintained.

3. The people of Sikkim did exceptionally well to follow 'Junta Curfew' last Sunday (the 22nd of March), and people are sincerely following the lock-down order, except a few cases where people are seen flouting the order.

4. The service being rendered by the entire medical fraternity, police, Government officers, District Collectors and their team, and NGOs is highly commendable.

5. The State Government is fully prepared to fight the epidemic. People should not pay heed to different opinions floating in the digital media, and repose their trust on the Government. The Government

was alert enough to perceive a certain threat from the deadly virus as early as 27th January, 2020. The Health Department was immediately directed to start the screening at the inter-State and international borders, and the same started from 28th March, 2020 in two borders. Sikkim was perhaps the first State to initiate action against Covid-19, much before any other State.

6. Precautionary measures were enforced such as restriction on foreign and domestic tourists, sealing of two check-posts in West Sikkim, and suspension of trade through Nathu La border. Only two check-posts, namely Rangpo

and Melli were open for transportation of men and material, and thorough screening was initiated in these two check points.

7. The State of Sikkim is fully prepared medically to deal with any situation that may arise due to the spread of Covid-19.

The State has a fully equipped 166-bedded Isolation facility in STNM Hospital Sochakgang, 20-bedded Isolation facility in CRH Manupal, 5-bedded Isolation facility in Ayush Hospital, Gyalshing, and 41-bedded Isolation facility in Army Hospital, Libing.

Turn Pg 2

Sikkim Police sets up Crisis Response Command to address any nCoV emergency

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 29 MAR: In an anticipatory move, Sikkim Police to ensure that it was adequately prepared for any law & order or humanitarian eventuality thrown up by the Novel Coronavirus situation, has set up a Crisis Response Command [CRC] for COVID-19.

Housed at the Police Headquarters, the CRC is expected to respond to and tackle any COVID-19 related emergency situation and is headed by Sikkim Police IGP Avichal as the Crisis Respond Commander assisted by Deputy Inspector Generals of Police Sonam T Bhutia and DB Giri as Deputy Crisis Respond Commanders and

five Superintendents of Police as Assistant Crisis Respond Commanders. The CRC has four groups and seven cells.

Addressing a press conference here today, DIG Sonam T Bhutia, who is also the spokesperson for Sikkim Police, explained that the CRC has been set up in public interest and was presently in planning stages, fine tuning its projected operations.

Pointing out that the nCoV situation was under control in the State, he said that the CRC will swing in to action if the situation gets out of hand and reach relief immediately to the people in the State.

The DIG informed that the CRC

will be constantly monitoring the situation and will be accessible to the general public 24x7 through its Facebook page and Twitter handle for interactions and to take their feedback and suggestions.

His colleague, Deputy Crisis Respond Commander, DIG DB Giri, in turn mentioned that cases of COVID-19 have been increasing in the country and could become more severe in the days to come. It is to be prepared for any eventuality that Sikkim Police has set up the CRC not only to maintain the law and order but also to respond to any allied situation that could develop in the State.

He stated that the CRC has also

been sensitizing police personnel deputed on the frontlines to ensure their full safety.

"We have been taking regular updates on the situation from SHOs and Police Outposts across the State to ensure that essential commodities are available to the people and to ensure that the COVID-19 protocol is being followed across the State," he said.

The DIG mentioned that the CRC would go out to the field in the coming days to check against black-marketing and price rise.

CRC can be contacted 24x7 through the Police Control Room at 03592-221152.

SDM inspects PHCs, review stock of essential commodities in Yuksam-Tashiding

PRITAM LAMA

GYALSHING, 29 MAR: Yuksam SDM, Tshering T Bhutia, undertook an extensive tour of Yuksam and Tashiding to inspect the quarantine facilities established there and preparations by the Health Department to combat the spread of Novel Coronavirus infection.

The SDM was accompanied by Chongrang-BDO Subash Chandra Subba, Tashiding PHC Medical Officer besides the Tashiding Police outpost

in-charge and officials of health and civil administration.

The SDM inspected the separate flu OPDs established in the Primary Health Centres, quarantine wards and reviewed the staff strength in place to deal with any exigency and also reviewed preventive measures taken to contain the spread of nCoV.

While inspecting the quarantine ward at Tashiding Yatri Niwas, the SDM directed the health officials to also va-



cate all the unnecessarily occupied spaces in the respective health cen-

tres so that more space can be freed up to establish quarantine wards to

meet any exigency. Moreover, the SDM directed them to reduce

the daily OPs to avoid avoidable crowding and directed them to make the people aware about preventive measures required to combat Covid-19.

Later, the SDM also inspected the fair price shops and groceries in Tashiding and surrounding villages under Yuksam-Tashiding Subdivision.

He also visited the Food Godown at Chongrang and reviewed the stock and supply position of essential commodities.

No dearth of veggies if transportation is arranged, vendors at Gyalshing haat assure

RUDRA KAUSHIK

GYALSHING, 29 MAR: Organic vegetable vendors of Gyalshing bazaar today assured that there will not be any shortage of vegetables if proper transport facilities were ensured.

They inform that organic vegetables were abundantly available in the villages of West Sikkim, but owing to the lockdown which has restricted vehicular movement, they are being unable to bring the vegetables to town.

Today was Haat day in Gyalshing.

An organic haat was set up recently near IDMST building (Shop-

ping Complex) and the Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat, in coordination with Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), had made arrangements for supplies to be brought in.

The stocks, however, ran out by early afternoon as the haat drew heavy footfalls.

On a more positive note though, despite the shortage of vegetables, prices remained reasonable at the haat today.

Social distancing measures were also maintained at the haat by Sikkim Police.

What was unfortunate though is that a rumour that the lock-



down would continue for longer than announced gained ground

in the district and led to some panic buying. Meanwhile, the in-

charge of Gyalshing food godown, Prakash Pradhan, informed that

the district had 14 food godowns all of which were adequately stocked.

Banks to remain open in Punjab on Mar 30-31

CHANDIGARH, MAR 29 (PTI): The Punjab government on Sunday announced that banks would remain open on March 30 and 31 to facilitate people in their financial transactions, amid the curfew restrictions due to coronavirus pandemic.

On the directives of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, the state home department has issued an advisory regarding operation of bank branches during curfew on 30th and 31st March, 2020, and beyond, said a government release.

From April 3 onwards, all bank branches shall be open for two days of the week, on a rotation basis, it said.

The deputy commissioners (DCs) of the state have been asked to extend necessary support and ensure other requisite items during relaxation to the banking staff, the release said.

According to an advisory, it has been decided that all the bank branches, ATMs, banking correspondents (BCs), cash in transit and cash replenishment agencies, IT and engineering support vendors for banks shall be operational on March 30 and 31.

Hence, all the deputy commissioners have been directed to provide necessary support by means of issuance of passes and other requisite relaxation, it said.

On March 31, a special clearing of all government cheques will be conducted.

Though April 1 is a non-public dealing day for the banks, the DCs have been asked to provide requisite passes to the bank staff on that day too, the release said.

From April 3 onwards, the operation of bank branches, ATMs, BCs, cash in transit/cash replenishment agencies, IT and engineering support vendors for banks shall be regulated, with skeletal staff, it further said.

The banks would ensure that the ATMs are operational round-the-clock and BCs provide services in rural areas with the security staff, and are instructed to ensure social distancing and hygiene.

Further, while implementing the above for opening of the banking establishments in line with the business continuity plan, the existing instructions regarding skeletal staff, social distancing and hygiene and all the instructions issued by home department/health department shall have to be strictly complied with, the release stated.

The state government added that the latest order is in line with those issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 24 for closure of all commercial and private establishments which include banks and ATMs.

This was followed up with orders from the Ministry of Finance and Reserve Bank of India on 27th March, 2020, the release added.

SiCA to donate to CM's Relief Fund

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 29 MAR:

The apex council of Sikkim Cricket Association has decided to contribute to the Chief Ministers Relief Fund to help the State fight COVID-19.

"The donation is in appreciation for all the initiatives taken under the leadership of Honourable Chief Minister of Sikkim and in recognition for all the noteworthy work by the frontline corona fighters from the

Medical fraternity, Police, Safai Karmachari and the Government officials," a SiCA press release quotes its president, Lobzang G. Tenzing, as saying.

This is line with the decision of the Board of Control for Cricket in

India (BCCI) and other cricket associations of India to contribute towards strengthening the nation's disaster management capacities and encourage research to combat COVID-19 and protect Indian citizens.

PM seeks nation's forgiveness for tough decisions, says India will surely defeat coronavirus

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday sought the nation's forgiveness for imposing a monumental lockdown on the country, but said "we have to win ... and we will definitely win the battle" against the unprecedented menace of coronavirus that has claimed 25 lives in India so far.

In his monthly Mann ki Baat radio address to

the nation, Modi also praised the front-line workers in the fight against the virus as well as countless workers in the essential services who are ensuring the country doesn't come to a complete standstill in the 21-day lockdown announced on March 24.

"I seek forgiveness .. I am sure you will forgive me that you had to undergo so much

trouble. Some people will say what kind of prime minister is this but these are special circumstances. You had to undergo problems I understand but there is no other way out to fight the coronavirus," he said. "But this is a battle for life and death."

"Coronavirus is bent on killing people therefore entire humanity must unite and resolve to eliminate it," he said

in the address that lasted more than 30 minutes and featured two former coronavirus patients and a doctor.

Modi reminded people that "we have to maintain social distance, not emotional and human distance" as he urged people to utilise the time spent at home in re-engaging themselves in old hobbies an reconnecting with old friends.

Kerala couple praise facilities at govt hospital after recovering from coronavirus

KOCHI, MAR 29 (PTI): A Kerala couple who spent 21 days in a government medical college hospital fighting novel coronavirus infection, on Sunday hailed the medical care provided at the facility and said they were grateful to the doctors and nurses who brought them back to life.

"All should cooperate with the government and the Health Department in the implementation of lockdown," said Robin from Chengalam in Kottayam district.

He and his wife were discharged from the isolation facility of the Kottayam Medical College

Hospital on March 25 after 21 days of treatment.

They got the viral infection from the parents of Robin's wife came from Italy.

"Follow everything the government and health authorities are telling you. They are working day in and day out to prevent the spread of the virus," Robin along with his wife, told various television channels from their home.

He said he does not think that the COVID-19 disease is deadly.

Sharing their experience within the four walls of the isolation fa-

cility of the Government medical college hospital, Robin showered praises on the nurses and doctors, saying they did such an amazing job instilling confidence in them.

"Initially, we were scared because the newspapers and media were filled with stories of COVID-19 deaths from various countries. We could overcome from this mental trauma with the help of the doctors and nurses of the hospital," he said.

He said the 21-day long stay at the hospital changed his perception about the government fa-

cilities in the state.

"Our general thinking is that the government hospitals are having their own limitations. But that perception is proved wrong. We got world class treatment from the Kottayam Medical College hospital", he said.

Robin said he was happy as his neighbours and friends with whom he had contacts were not transmitted the virus.

He also said they felt sad when the people blamed his in-laws who came from Italy for spreading the virus in Ranni in Pathanamthitta district.

Karnataka CM briefs opposition on COVID-19 situation

BENGALURU, MAR 29 (PTI): Seven new cases of coronavirus have been reported in Karnataka taking the total number of infections to 83, the state Health Department said on Sunday.

The number includes three deaths and five patients who were discharged after treatment earlier.

Seventy five COVID-19 positive patients are in isolation at designated hospitals

and are stable, itsaid in an update.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Sunday held an all-party meeting and apprised the leaders about the measures taken by the government to contain the coronavirus

in the state.

At the meeting, Yediyurappa said there was no shortage of testing kits, medicines and face-masks.

"If there is a need, we will import more (testing kits) from vari-

ous places. We will distribute testing kits to all the district and Taluk hospitals," he said.

The chief minister also said that the government has decided to provide life cover to police and civil workers

who are on the job to halt the spread of the virus.

The government apprised the opposition leaders that it has taken extra precautions to maintain supply of food grains through Public Distribution System.

CM connects with people...

Likewise, there are 55 ventilator units (38 for adults and 17 for children) in STNM Hospital Sochakgang, 2 units in CRH Manipal, and 2 units in Army Hospital, Libing. Similarly, STNM Hospital Sochakgang has 8 ICU Units, and the Government will come up with more ICU units in days to come.

8. The Government has established Quarantine facilities in the following places:

i. SIRD Karfector, South Sikkim - 20 bedded facility. SDM Jorethang, Shri R.B. Bhandari has been designated as the in-charge of the quarantine facility and he can be contacted on his mobile number 9832014743.

ii. Mines and Geology infrastructure in Mining near Rangpo - 25 bedded facility. Dr. Nagendra Gurung (ph: 8348148999), and Dr. Diki Wangmu (ph: 9735985733) are designated the in-charges of the facility.

iii. Power Guest House, Naya Bazar - as a stand-by arrangement. SDM Shri Hemant (9832556777) has been designated the in-charge.

iv. New Tourist Guest House/Lodge, Rangpo - 16 bedded facility. Dr. Nagendra Gurung and Dr. Diki Wangmu will be in-charge of the facility.

v. SICUN Training Centre, Assam Lingzey - 48 bedded facility, to be supervised by Dr. Nagendra Gurung and Dr. Diki Wangmu. The 58 students who were studying in different parts of the country and were brought back by the Government are currently kept in this quarantine centre with all necessary facilities. They will be sent back to their homes after completing quarantine for 15 days. The entire expenses is being borne by the Government.

9. The State Government is fully equipped logistically to tackle the pandemic. The following is the details of the logistics available with the Government:

i. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) - 1220 numbers is available to be used when the need arises.

ii. N95 Masks - 1067 available.

iii. Triple Layer Masks - 96100. The Government is in touch with various agencies in the country to procure more Masks as per the requirement.

iv. Gloves (Non-Sterile) - 13600

v. Gloves (Sterile) - 5000

vi. Viral Transport Media (VTM) - 300. One VTM unit can transport 50 test samples. Therefore, 300 units can transport 15000 samples for test, which is adequate.

vii. Hand Sanitizers, Gloves, Masks and other such items are actually meant for the Health fraternity and frontline workers, therefore priority should be given to them.

10. The Government is fully equipped with regard to food grains and other essential commodities. The present stock in the food go-downs in the State is enough to feed the entire population of Sikkim for three months. North Sikkim has 273.9 metric tonnes of Food Grains: East District has 1017 MT; South District has 581.2 MT; West District has 666.9 MT

Therefore, the total quantity of food grains available with the State is 2539 Metric Tonnes.

11. Students and working professionals from Sikkim who are still stranded in different parts of the country are advised to stay put wherever they are. The Government is in touch with the respective State Heads and the administration, as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, to ensure that they receive the required facilities. Some financial incentive from the Government of Sikkim will also be provided to such students to help them sustain this difficult time. The Chief Minister's Office, the office of the Chief Secretary, DC offices, health Department, and all essential services are fully functional in the State to ensure that all required service to provided to the people, both within and outside the State.

12. The State Government is fully prepared. What is needed at this stage is support and cooperation from the people of Sikkim. People should strictly abide by all the directives being issues by the Government to prevent the virus from entering the State. There should be no room for any negligence on the part of the people. We just have to follow the simple instruction to stay home and observe social distancing. People of Sikkim are law-abiding and their support is solicited during this difficult time.

13. The Government has announced economic package for the economically-weaker section, regardless of their identity credentials. This is an immediate relief being provided to the needy, especially daily wage workers and migrant labourers who are severely hit by the lock-down. The economic package also applies to workers of Temi Tea factory, and also to the workers who work on the roads. The economic package does not apply to regular Government employees, and employees working on Adhoc, Consolidated, Work Charge, MR or OFOJ employees, as they would be getting their monthly salaries to support themselves.

14. The gesture by some house owners to waive off the house rent of tenants who are daily-wage earners is commendable and praiseworthy.

15. Anyone willing to contribute to the CM's Relief Fund voluntarily are welcome. Regular Government employees can voluntarily contribute their one-day salary. It is just a suggestion and there is no binding.

Likewise, individuals or organizations, public representatives can voluntarily contribute to the Prime Minister's Care Fund to tackle the current situation faced by the country.

The Chief Minister also answered some of the questions put forth by people from different parts of the State. Most of the questions were on the State's preparedness and measures taken by the State Government to address the challenges being faced by the people due to the nation-wide lockdown of 21 days.

The Chief Minister informed that he would regularly use this medium to connect with the people and share the latest updates and actions being taken by the State Government.

COVID-19: GoM reviews situation in the country

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): A Group of Ministers chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday carried out a comprehensive review of the situation arising out of coronavirus pandemic including treatment of affected people and supplies of petroleum products and essential commodities across the country.

The meeting also deliberated on the issue of a vast numbers of migrant workers taking journeys on foot for hundreds of kilometres in various parts of the country to reach home from urban centres after the 21-day nation-wide lockdown came into force.

Sources said the GoM reviewed the entire situation arising out of COVID-19 pandemic across the country.

Home Minister Amit Shah, Consumer Affairs and Food Minister Ram

Vilas Paswan, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar attended the meeting.

HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Zubin Irani, Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy and Railways Minister Piyush Goyal also participated.

The sources said petroleum products are available in adequate quantities across India and that transportation of essential commodities by train, air and road is going on without any difficulty.

They said any issue arising locally is being resolved.

Holy Week celebrations to be held without the faithful, livestreamed in view of lockdown

KOCHI, MAR 29 (PTI): The The liturgical celebrations of the Holy Week from April 5 would be low-key and held without the presence of the faithful and would be livestreamed in view of the lockdown as part of measures to prevent spread of coronavirus, the Syro-Malabar Church has said.

"We are in the 21-day lockdown announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The celebrations of the Holy Week should be limited in respect of the restrictions imposed by the state government and the civil authorities," the Syro-Malabar Church said.

"On the basis of the restrictions imposed for the assembly and movement of people, to contain this pandemic, it is decided that the rites of the Holy Week should be celebrated without the presence of the faithful," guidelines issued by Church head Cardinal George Alencherry said.

"As far as possible live streaming of the liturgical celebrations should be done for the benefit of the faithful," according to the guidelines issued on Saturday.

The church said the ritual of washing of feet is to be skipped on Maundy Thursday.

Urging the faithful to limit the breaking of bread within individual families, it directed that there should be no common breaking of the bread either in ward groups or as a community.

"On Good Friday no public veneration of the Cross or Way of the Cross should be held. These may be scheduled on a later occasion; like September 14, for instance," the influential Syro-Malabar Church said.

The Blessing of Water need not be held and this can be done at a later time, it said.

"The Easter rituals need not be held at night.

Offering mass in the morning will suffice", it said and added that the Holy Week should be a time of incessant prayers in families.

Directing the Bishops to celebrate the liturgies in the Cathedral and the priests in their respective parishes, the guidelines, however, insisted that care should be taken that there are not more than five people at any time.

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Transport Deptt donates Rs 15 lakh towards CM's Relief Fund

GANGTOK, 29 MAR [IPR]: Transport Minister Sanjit Kharel, accompanied by Transport Secretary, Raju Basnet, called on the Secretary to the Chief Minister, SD Dhakal, this morning at Samman Bhawan.

Minister Kharel handed over a cheque of Rs 15 lakh as a donation towards the Chief

Minister's Relief Fund in order to support the government's efforts in fighting the global crisis of COVID-19.

The Secretary Mr Dhakal, on behalf of the government, expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards the Transport Department for their kind gesture and generosity.



Mizoram COVID-19 patient's kin discharged after testing negative

AIZAWL, MARCH 29 (PTI): The wife and two children of the lone COVID-19 patient from Mizoram were discharged from a state-run hospital here after they tested negative for the disease, a health official said on Sunday.

The trio was admitted to the isolation ward of the Zoram Medical

College (ZMC) after the pastor, who returned from the Netherlands, tested positive for COVID-19 on March 25, he said.

The samples of the woman and the two children were sent to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital for tests and reports have come negative, the official said.

They will be placed under home quarantine and the local task force on COVID-19 will monitor them, he said.

The condition of the COVID-19 patient is improving and he is out of critical state, health officials said.

The health department has traced other persons who came in

contact with him, they said.

One person was on Saturday admitted to the isolation ward of ZMC after he exhibited coronavirus-like symptoms, the officials said.

Samples of 12 persons have been sent to Silchar for tests and results are awaited, they added.

Kalyan Jewellers to spend Rs 10 cr to provide food, essential items to needy

MUMBAI, MAR 29 (PTI): Kalyan Jewellers has said it will set aside Rs 10 crore towards fighting the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

The company will partner with local and government bodies to ensure that the funds are allocated in a meaningful and efficient manner, ensuring availability of supplies and providing food and

other essentials to the vulnerable sections of society, Kalyan Jewellers said in a statement on Saturday.

"The situation created by COVID-19, and the tremendous impact that the pandemic has had on humanity globally, is unprecedented. These have proved to be very challenging times, and our Central and state governments

are doing everything they can to combat this," Kalyan Jewellers Chairman and Managing Director T S Kalyanaraman said.

"We understand the magnitude of this crisis, and would like to extend our humble contribution of Rs 10 crore towards the fight against COVID-19," he said.

Early last week, Kalyanaraman, in a letter addressed to employees of Kalyan Jewellers, had said that there would be no salary cuts in non-operational showrooms.

The company also committed to pay full salaries for March and April to all of its over 8,000 employees, regardless of the impact on Kalyan Jewellers' overall business.

"We are happy to inform that our online claim filing facility for Covid-19 withdrawals has been successfully launched at 11 am today (Saturday). IT (information technology) division of the EPFO has devised a system of auto settlement of claims through our centralized server in respect of all such members whose KYC (know your customer) data is fully updated and compliant.

"It is going to be a paradigm shift in claim settlements that will be possible to settle within 3 days. This facility will stop manual intervention. The EPF claims will be settled fully online," an official said.

Labour Min allows EPF withdrawal amid lockdown

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): The labour ministry has allowed over 6 crore subscribers of retirement fund body EPFO to withdraw an amount not exceeding their three months basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account in view of the lockdown to fight COVID-19.

Besides, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) also introduced online claim settlement facility without manual intervention on Saturday morning for all KYC complaint subscribers during the lockdown.

The ministry has issued a notification in this regard on March 28, 2020 to amend the Employees' Provident Fund

Scheme 1952, a labour ministry statement said.

The decision is taken in view of lockdown across the country to fight COVID-19.

The notification permitted non-refundable withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to the credit of their EPF account, which ever is less, the ministry said.

The COVID-19 has been declared pandemic and therefore employees working in establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952 are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable ad-

vance.

A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been inserted in the EPF scheme, 1952.

The amended Employees Provident Fund (Amendment) scheme, 2020 has come into force from March 28.

Following the notification, EPFO has issued directions to its field offices for promptly processing any applications received from members to help them fight the situation.

In its communication, EPFO has stated that officers and staff must process claims of EPF subscribers promptly so that relief reaches the worker and his family to help them fight with COVID-19.

USFDA and will undertake all necessary steps to resolve these issues and to ensure that the regulator is completely satisfied with the company's remedial action," it added.

The company remains committed to being cGMP compliant and in supplying high-quality products to its customers and patients globally, Sun Pharma said.

USFDA classifies Sun Pharma's Halol facility as official action indicated

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): Drug major Sun Pharmaceutical on Sunday said the US health regulator has classified its Halol facility in Gujarat as Official Action Indicated (OAI).

The United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) had inspected the facility from December 03-13, 2019 and had issued eight observations, the company

had earlier said in a regulatory filing in December.

"The company has received a communication from the USFDA indicating that the Halol facility has been classified as OAI," Sun Pharma said in a BSE filing.

The OAI classification implies inter-alia that the USFDA may withhold approval of any pending product applications or supple-

ments filed from this facility till the outstanding observations are resolved, it added.

Sun Pharma continues to manufacture and distribute existing products for the US market, thereby not likely to have any adverse impact on current business from the facility, the drug major said.

"Sun Pharma continues to cooperate with the

USFDA and will undertake all necessary steps to resolve these issues and to ensure that the regulator is completely satisfied with the company's remedial action," it added.

The company remains committed to being cGMP compliant and in supplying high-quality products to its customers and patients globally, Sun Pharma said.

Bengaluru Municipal corporation opens 31 fever clinics

BENGALURU, MAR 29 (PTI): The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, the metropolitan municipal corporation of Bengaluru on Sunday started 31 fever clinics in Bengaluru.

Working on a war-footing, the BBMP set up these clinics a day after announcing the launch of these hospitals.

These clinics will work all the week days including government holidays from 9 am to 4.30 pm where the

fever test camp will be held, the BBMP said in a press release.

The BBMP said these clinics have been equipped with all the necessary equipment and adequate number of doctors and paramedics.

"Fever clinics are being set up in Bengaluru under the guidance of Special Commissioner Dr Ravi Kumar Surpur which will help ramp up infrastructure and there-

by increase the number of First Response Clinics during the lockdown," the BBMP said in a statement.

It also said drugs and medicines, protocols, staffing, sanitization and surveillance were issues focused on during the video conferencing with 187 BBMP Health Centres.

The Palike also said that seventeen hotels have been identified in the city to quarantine the sus-

pected COVID-19 patients. Air-conditioners will not be used in these hotels.

Payments will be made to these hotels based on the occupancy of patients.

The BBMP also set up a war room to deal with the coronavirus patients. The doctors deployed have been trained on how to handle patients walking in with #Covid19 symptoms, Palike said in a press release.



LONG WALK: With the lockdown ensuring that there is no transportation available, farmers with surplus vegetables in their pockets, are undertaking long walks to reach customers in urban areas. This photograph from Bardang on Sunday morning is illustrative of the miles that many other farmers are measuring too to sell their produce. [from YOGEN THATAL, Singtam]

Trolls exploit Zoom privacy settings as app gains popularity

ALEX HERN LONDON, 29 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:

Working and socialising from home has brought new risks to everyday life, as webcam meetings and chatroom cocktail hours contend with privacy invasions, phishing attacks and "zoombombings" - uninvited guests abusing the popular video service to broadcast shocking imagery to all.

Public Zoom hangouts have become a popular way to spend time for isolated remote workers, who are joining calls with names such as "WFH Happy Hour" to spend time in the company of others.

But the default settings of the service are configured in the expectation of trust between participants, meaning trolls can wreak havoc. Some zoombombers have used the screen-sharing feature to broadcast pornography and violent imagery. Others have revelled in the opportunity for exhibitionism, while security experts have said the file transfer feature that is switched on by default could be used to spread malware.

During one WFH Happy Hour last week, for instance, a troll joined the group and, using the screen-sharing feature, aired a pornographic clip

to the call's 40 participants. Because the call was public - so that anyone wanting some company in the evening could swing by, replicating a welcoming pub - the anonymous user simply rejoined and continued to broadcast, eventually forcing the hosts, Hunter Walk and Casey Newton, to close the event.

Newton, a journalist, told TechCrunch shortly afterwards: "I want to apologise to all our attendees - including my parents, Jim and Sally, who joined WFHappyHour today for the first time. Today we all learned an important lesson about disabling screen-sharing and saw once again the importance of good content moderation."

Other zoombombing instances have been more malicious. Ruha and Shawn Benjamin told NBC News of their experience when a racist troll - wearing nothing but a thong - gatecrashed their reading session for children stuck at home and began repeating the N-word multiple times. "Then we knew it was a malicious, targeted thing. My husband and I are both African American," Ruha Benjamin said.

Other aspects of the service have also come under criticism. One Zoom feature allows

hosts to tell if guests are looking at a window other than the Zoom chat - perfect for bosses who want to ensure their employees are paying attention, but an unexpected invasion of privacy for many. On Thursday, Vice News reported that the service's iOS app was sending some analytics data to Facebook, even if users did not have a Facebook account.

The company said in a statement: "We have been deeply upset to hear about the incidents involving this type of attack. For those hosting large, public group meetings, we strongly encourage hosts to change their settings so that only the host can share their screen. For those hosting private meetings, password protections are on by default and we recommend that users keep those protections on to prevent uninvited users from joining. We also encourage users to report any incidents of this kind directly to our support so we can take appropriate action."

In a blogpost addressing the rise in zoombombings, the company said: "Like most other public forums, it's possible to have a person (who may or may not be invited) disrupt an event that's meant to bring people together." It of-

fered a list of tips on how to prevent them, such as not posting links on public social media when possible.

Colin Tankard, the managing director of Digital Pathways, a cybersecurity company, said the technical security of Zoom was strong and protected callers against eavesdropping. He said: "The security risks using such services hinge more around how secure your password is in gaining access to your conference dashboard, as if weak passwords are used, a hacker could copy the meeting ID and then connect during the call hiding their identity or appearing as a valid caller."

But none of the concerns have hurt the fortunes of Zoom Video, the company behind the software. It has become so popular in the last two weeks that on Thursday the US Securities and Exchange Commission suspended trading in stocks in Zoom Technologies, an unrelated company but one with the stock market ticker ZOOM. Zoom Video's is actually ZM.

That same day an app called Zoom became the third most popular paid app on Apple's App Store. That Zoom is a £3.99 magnifying glass app. The chat service Zoom is free.

'Chanakya' is a work in progress: Neeraj Pandey

MUMBAI, MAR 29 (PTI): Director Neeraj Pandey says despite the 21-day lockdown in the country to contain the spread of coronavirus pandemic, the team of his next, "Chanakya" is working on the Ajay Devgn-starrer while practising social distancing.

Ajay is set to play the eponymous role in "Chanakya", a historical drama on the master economist and royal advisor to the first Mauryan emperor Chan-

dragupta.

The movie will mark the first collaboration between Ajay and Neeraj, known for films such as "A Wednesday", "Baby" and "MS Dhoni: The Untold Story".

Neeraj said though the crew can't have meetings for the time being, they are constantly having discussions about the project over the phone or mail.

"It is a work in progress. There is discussion on anything and every-

thing. All the various heads of departments are regularly in touch from VFX, concept, costume, art, production design to location, etc.

"There are so many things that we have to discuss about how the script will be approached and the like. There is tons of work," the filmmaker told PTI.

With all production activity currently suspended in Indian entertainment industry due to the COVID-19

pandemic, Neeraj said it is too early to suggest that the shoot of "Chanakya" will also be affected.

"It is very early to say. Let's see how things pan out in the near future and then we will see. All I can say is that the script is locked," he added.

Neeraj is currently promoting Hotstar Special series "Special Ops", an action spy thriller which he has co-directed with Shivam Nair.

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In Times of Crisis

Leaders will rise, empathy tested

These are not normal times. In fact, we are currently in an unprecedented time. A generation will be tested, its leadership presented an opportunity to delivery and earn real respect and evidence presented on whether empathy is a real emotion or a self-promoting act for "normal" times.

Truth be told, the leaders and their executive arm are not faring too well, still unable to shed their colonial/feudal attitudes, still talking down to the people, still in a bunch about enforcing when they could have explored collaborations with much more success. To excuse the obvious unpreparedness of the decision-makers to the unprecedented nature of the situation is cruel to the millions of Indians who no one accounted for when the announcement of a nationwide lockdown focused more on showboating than communicating. Make no mistake, given the years of disinterested development of governmental healthcare network, we have no option but to attempt a lockdown. Agreed, it is also a very difficult decision and not too many leaders would have been able to take it. These facts are undeniable; what is inexcusable though is that despite the months of prep-time that the virus offered us, no plan was drawn up to address the panic or reassure the disadvantaged. This lack of planning is threatening to unravel everything that the lockdown and social distancing protocols seek to achieve. The only hope for the country is that these millions are so destitute that they would not have come within spittle range of those who could have contracted the virus in their foreign travels or from their social circles. That, and the possibility that the virus will not weather the summer too well. Absent these potential saviours, not only has the lack of planning forced an exodus for the virus to ride into areas with near absent healthcare net, but also reminded the underprivileged that in times of crisis, they are almost never ever factored into the projection models. It is not enough to tell them that essential commodities will be available if the risk of khaki violence followed them everytime they ventured out. Interestingly, in Sikkim's case, even though the boots on the ground appear to have recognized the need for people to occasionally step out even for no reason [clearly because they live the same lives], the senior brass continues to talk strict action and about orders from Delhi. The latter attitude is almost offensive coming as it does from officers whose primary task should be to protect & serve the people here, not click their heels at every, frequently amended and routinely course-corrected order from Delhi.

This is the time when leaders can prove themselves. Prove themselves by proving that they know the people they represent, how they can be taken on board, how they can be served, how they can be reassured, even kept in line if required and how their unique situations and problems addressed. Take Gangtok or Sikkim's tourist towns for instance. These urban spaces, because of their floating population require a better lockdown than the rural areas which are by and large more homogenous and more self-sufficient. The planners should have scoped out the social hierarchy of these towns and customized plans on how to convince each strata and how to ensure that they did not "suffer." Nothing like that was attempted and a broadstrokes lockdown clamped down here. This section has already spoken about the challenges of those cramped in unhygienic accommodations, but some thought could have also been spared for the many students and even working people who have made arrangements in neighborhood canteens for their meals. Gangtok now has a substantial number of such people. This is not to say that they are starving, but addressing their realities in the planning would have included them as participants in this whole exercise instead of distancing them and forcing them to find ways to dodge the lockdown. And please, let's not call this a "curfew" because a curfew is always enforced whereas a lockdown stands the chance of being supported which is also the only way it will be effective.

The society's empathy is also going to be tested in the coming days in how it responds to developments. Assam Lingzey has already shamed Sikkim with how it reacted when Sikkimese scholarship students were being brought to their village to be quarantined. Sikkim has stayed without a COVID-19 positive case so far, and let's hope that is how things remain, but in the event that such patients are found, Sikkim will be tested by its response. People here have rightfully railed against the racism being faced by Northeasterners in the plains. They should remember what being at the receiving end of racism feels like in how they themselves respond to Novel Coronavirus and how they react in the unfortunate event that someone does test positive for nCoV here...

How to model a pandemic

CHRISTIAN YATES

THECONVERSATION.COM

Disease has afflicted humans ever since there have been humans. Malaria and tuberculosis are thought to have ravaged Ancient Egypt more than 5,000 years ago. From AD 541 to 542 the global pandemic known as "the Plague of Justinian" is estimated to have killed 15–25% of the world's 200-million population. Following the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the native population dropped from around 30 million in 1519 to just three million 50 years later. Today we are battling to control the spread of COVID-19, which has the potential to cause the most deadly pandemic in human history.

There is, however, a little known but highly successful field of science working in the background to unpick the mysteries of infectious disease. As I explore in *The Maths of Life and Death*, mathematical epidemiology is playing a crucial role in the fight against large-scale infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

With basic mathematical models, researchers can begin to forecast the progression of diseases and understand the effect of interventions on disease spread. With more complex models, we can start to answer questions about how to efficiently allocate limited resources or tease out the consequences of public health interventions, like closing pubs and banning gatherings.

Insights from mathematical modelling are vital to ensuring that authorities can prevent as many deaths as possible. As the COVID-19 pandemic escalates, here's a look inside the modelling that experts use to try and stay one step ahead of the virus.

THE S-I-R MODEL

One of the simplest mathematical models of disease spread splits the population into three basic categories according to disease status. People who have not yet had the disease are labelled "susceptibles". Everyone is assumed to be born susceptible and capable of being infected. Those who have contracted the disease and are capable of passing it to susceptibles are the "infectives". The third group are euphemistically referred to as the "removed" class. These are the people who have had the disease and recovered and are now immune, or those who have died. These "removed" individuals no longer contribute to the spread of the disease.

This is referred to as the S-I-R model. From dengue fever in Latin America to swine fever in the Netherlands and norovirus in Belgium, the S-I-R model can provide vital lessons for how to prevent diseases spreading.

This model illustrates the importance of social isolation for those infected. By staying at home until fully recovered, you effectively take yourself from the infected class straight to the removed class without spreading the virus. This simple action can reduce the size of an outbreak by reducing the opportunities for the disease to pass to susceptible individuals.

Whether an outbreak spreads or dies out is largely dictated by a single number which is unique to that outbreak – the basic reproduction number.

Think of a population that's completely susceptible to a particular disease – much like the global population in December 2019, at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. The average number of previously unexposed individuals infected by a single, freshly introduced disease carrier is known as the basic reproduction number, and often denoted R_0 (pronounced "R-nought" or "R-zero").

Coronavirus has not suspended politics – it has revealed the nature of power

DAVID RUNCIMAN

THEGUARDIAN

We keep hearing that this is a war. Is it really? What helps to give the current crisis its wartime feel is the apparent absence of normal political argument. The prime minister goes on TV to issue a sombre statement to the nation about the curtailment of our liberties and the leader of the opposition offers nothing but support. Parliament, insofar as it is able to operate at all, appears to be merely going through the motions. People are stuck at home, and their fights are limited to the domestic sphere. There is talk of a government of national unity. Politics-as-usual has gone missing.

But this is not the suspension of politics. It is the stripping away of one layer of political life to reveal something more raw underneath. In a democracy we tend to think of politics as a contest between different parties for our support. We focus on the who and the what of political life: who is after our votes, what they are offering us, who stands to benefit. We see elections as the way to settle these arguments. But the bigger questions in any democracy are always about the how: how will governments exercise the extraordinary powers we give them? And how will we respond when they do?

These are the questions that have always preoccupied political theorists. But now they are not so theoretical. As the current crisis shows, the primary fact that underpins political existence is that some people get to tell others what to do. At the heart of all modern politics is a trade-off between personal liberty and collective choice. This is the Faustian bargain identified by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the middle of the 17th century, when the country was being torn apart by a real civil war.

As Hobbes knew, to exercise political rule is to have the power of life and death over citizens. The only reason we would possibly give anyone that power is because we believe it is the price we pay for our collective safety. But it also means that we are entrusting life-and-death decisions to people we cannot ultimately control.

The primary risk is that those on the receiving end refuse to do what they are told. At that point, there are only two choices. Either people are forced to obey, using the coercive powers the state has at its disposal. Or politics breaks down altogether, which Hobbes argued was the outcome we should fear most of all.

If a disease has an R_0 less than one, then the infection will die out quickly as each infectious person passes on the disease, on average, to less than one other individual. The outbreak cannot sustain its own spread. If R_0 is larger than one then the outbreak will grow exponentially.

EXPONENTIAL EXPLOSION

Early estimates of the basic reproduction number for COVID-19 put it somewhere between 1.5 and 4, with a value of at least 2 in December and January. With a basic reproduction number of 2, the first person with the disease spreads it to two others, who each, on average, spread the disease to two others and then to two others each, and so on.

This exponential growth is characteristic of the initial phase of the infection. If the spread was allowed to continue like this, ten generations down the chain of progression, over 1,000 people would be infected. Ten steps further on, the toll would rise to over one million.

In practice, the exponential growth predicted by the basic reproduction number is rarely sustained beyond a few generations. Outbreaks eventually peak and then decline due to the decreasing frequency of contacts between infectives and susceptibles.

Even when there are no infectives left and the outbreak is officially over, some susceptibles will remain. The S-I-R model can provide an estimate of the final epidemic size – the number of people infected at the end of an outbreak if no remedial action were taken. At the lower end of the estimates for COVID-19, a reproduction number of 1.5, means that 58% of the population would become infected. At the higher end of the estimates, with an R_0 of 4, the S-I-R model predicts that only 2% of people would remain uninfected if no action is taken.

ONE CRUCIAL NUMBER

The basic reproduction number is helpful for understanding almost any outbreak because it wraps up all the subtleties of disease transmission into a single figure. From the way in which the infection develops in the body, to the mode of transmission – and even the structure of the societies within which it spreads – it captures all the outbreak's key features and allows us to react accordingly.

R_0 can typically be broken down into three components: the size of the population, the rate at which susceptibles become infected (often known as the force of infection), and the rate of recovery or death from the disease. Increasing the first two of these factors increases R_0 , while increasing the recovery rate reduces it. The bigger the population and the faster the disease spreads between individuals, the larger the outbreak is likely to be. The quicker individuals recover, the less time they have to pass on the disease to others and, consequently, the easier it will be to bring an outbreak under control.

Then there's the effective reproduction number. This is the average number of secondary infections caused by an infectious individual at a given point in the outbreak's progression. If, by intervention, the effective reproduction number can be brought below one, then the disease will die out.

CASE FATALITY RATE

Although crucial for disease control, R_0 does not tell us how serious a disease is for an infected individual. The proportion of infected people who ultimately die from a disease is known as the case fatality rate.

An extremely infectious disease such

as measles, with an R_0 of between 12 and 18, has a relatively low case fatality rate compared to the 50–70% of Ebola patients who will eventually die of the disease. As a result, measles is typically considered less serious than Ebola even though Ebola has a much smaller R_0 of around 1.5. Early estimates indicate that the case fatality rate of COVID-19 is between 0.25% and 3.5%.

It's important to remember that the case fatality rate isn't fixed – it depends on the responses of society and individuals to the disease, as well as on the demographics of the population it infects. For example, case fatality rates for COVID-19 appear to vary significantly with the age of the patient, with the elderly being worst affected.

Perhaps surprisingly, diseases with high case fatality rates tend to be less infectious. If a disease kills too many of its victims too quickly then it reduces its chances of being passed on. Diseases which kill most of the people they infect and also spread efficiently are very rare, and are usually confined to disaster movies.

Although a high case fatality rate significantly raises fears during an outbreak, diseases with high R_0 but lower case fatality (think COVID-19 in comparison to Ebola) may end up killing more people by virtue of the larger numbers they infect.

CONTROLLING AN OUTBREAK

One of the most effective options for reducing disease spread is vaccination. By taking people directly from susceptible to removed, bypassing the infective state, it effectively reduces the size of the susceptible population.

But vaccination is typically a precautionary measure that is used to reduce the probability of outbreaks happening in the first place. Once outbreaks like the current COVID-19 pandemic are in full swing, it's often impractical to develop and test a vaccine in a useful timeframe.

Quarantine and isolation can efficiently reduce the transmission rate and, consequently, the effective reproduction number. Isolating infective patients reduces the rate of spread, while quarantining healthy individuals reduces the effective susceptible population.

Both actions contribute to decreasing the effective reproduction number, which is why social distancing and self-isolation are such important strategies for tackling COVID-19.

HERD IMMUNITY

One idea that the UK government seemed to be toying with in the early days of their response was that of herd immunity – the concept that a large population of immune individuals can slow or even halt the spread of the disease. Surprisingly, this community effect does not require everyone to be immune to the disease for the whole population to be protected. By reducing the effective reproduction number to less than one – ensuring that infected people contact as few susceptible people as possible – the chain of transmission can be broken and the disease stopped in its tracks. Crucially, herd immunity means that people who are immunocompromised, the elderly, pregnant women and other high-risk demographics can benefit from the protection afforded by other people's immunity.

The fraction of the population that needs to be immune to protect the rest varies depending on how infectious the disease is. The basic reproduction number, R_0 , holds the key to how large that proportion is. The higher the basic reproduction number, the higher the immune proportion of the population

needs to be. For example, for a disease with a basic reproduction number of 4, the S-I-R model predicts that three-quarters of the population must be immune. If R_0 is as low as 1.5 then potentially only one-third of the population needs to acquire immunity to protect the remaining two-thirds.

If a vaccine is available, then herd immunity can be achieved by vaccinating a sufficiently high proportion of the population (that said, we have only ever managed to completely wipe out one human disease – smallpox – through vaccination).

When a vaccine isn't available, the only way for people to acquire immunity is to become infected with the disease and recover. Given the case fatality rate of COVID-19, this would entail the deaths of many thousands of people. Unsurprisingly, the UK government backtracked on their proposed policy.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF MODELING

In reality, the simple S-I-R model is not complex enough to capture the subtleties of many infectious disease outbreaks. But for diseases which confer no immunity on their victims, a simple adaptation of the S-I-R model can help.

As is typical of some sexually transmitted diseases, gonorrhoea has no removed population at all. Once recovered from gonorrhoea, patients can be infected again. Since no one dies from the symptoms of gonorrhoea, no one is ever "removed" from the population. Such models are typically labelled S-I-S, mimicking the progression pattern of an individual from susceptible to infective and back to susceptible again. Since the population of susceptible people is never exhausted, but renewed as people recover, the S-I-S model predicts that diseases can become self-sustaining or "endemic".

Whether a single infection with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) was enough to provide immunity was one of the main worries for scientists at the beginning of the outbreak. Could the novel virus circulate indefinitely in the population? Although there have been several reports of people catching the virus for a second time, there is also good evidence to suggest that recovered COVID-19 patients become immune.

Another problem with the novel coronavirus is that there is typically an asymptomatic period at the start of the disease. During this time, people can harbour the virus and infect others without showing symptoms themselves. That means we need to add another class of people to the model. These are people who, once infected, are capable of passing on the disease while displaying no symptoms – the so-called "carrier" class. This changes the S-I-R model into an S-C-I-R model. The carrier class is vital for representing diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which have long infectious periods with no obvious symptoms.

The state-of-the-art models that are currently being used to inform government policy are even more complicated. Unfortunately, even the most detailed and realistic of mathematical models is not capable of predicting when the current pandemic will be brought to heel.

But it is certain that, when we eventually wrest control of the situation, mathematicians and their models will have played a significant role in the way in which the drama panned out.

[The writer is Senior Lecturer in Mathematical Biology, University of Bath]

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one, though some are better at playing catch-up than others.

Autocratic regimes such as China also find it hard to face up to crises until they have to – and, unlike democracies, they can suppress the bad news for longer if it suits them. But when action becomes unavoidable, they can go further. The Chinese lockdown succeeded in containing the disease through ruthless pre-emption. Democracies are capable of being equally ruthless – as they showed when prosecuting the total wars of the 20th century.

But in a war, the enemy is right in front of you. During this pandemic the disease reveals where it has got to only in the daily litany of infections and deaths. Democratic politics becomes a kind of shadow boxing: the state doesn't know which bodies are the really dangerous ones.

Some democracies have managed to adapt faster: in South Korea the disease is being tamed by extensive tracing and widespread surveillance of possible carriers. But in that case, the regime had recent experience to draw on in its handling of the Mers outbreak of 2015, which also shaped the collective memory of its citizens. Israel may also be doing a better job than many European countries – but it is a society already on a permanent warlike footing. It is easier to adapt when you have adapted already. It is much harder when you are making it up as you go along.

In recent years, it has sometimes appeared that global politics is simply a choice between rival forms of technocracy. In China, it is a government of engineers backed up by a one-party state. In the west, it is the rule of economists and central bankers, operating within the constraints of a democratic system. This creates the impression that the real choices are technical judgments about how to run vast, complex economic and social systems.

But in the last few weeks another reality has pushed through. The ultimate judgments are about how to use coercive power. These aren't simply technical questions. Some arbitrariness is unavoidable. And the contest in the exercise of that power between democratic adaptability and autocratic ruthlessness will shape all of our futures. We are a long way from the frightening and violent world that Hobbes sought to escape nearly 400 years ago. But our political world is still one Hobbes would recognise.

[The writer is professor of politics at Cambridge University]

Three more test positive for COVID-19 in West Bengal

KOLKATA, MAR 28 (PTI): Three women from two different parts of West Bengal on Saturday tested positive for COVID-19, taking to 18 the total number of people suffering from the disease in the state, a senior official of the state health department said.

Two women, aged 76 and 56 years, are residents of Egra in south Bengal's East Midnapore district while the third, a 54-year-old, is from Kalimpong in Darjeeling district of north Bengal.

Neither of the two women from Egra have recently travelled abroad or to any other state, the official said, adding that it was being ascertained whether the third woman had any recent travel history.

The two women from East Midnapore district are relatives of an elderly man from Nayabad, who also tested positive for COVID-19 and is currently undergoing treatment at a private hospital here,



he said.

They had attended a wedding ceremony in Egra where the elderly man was also present. They were at present kept at an isolation ward of a hospital in Egra.

"We have come to know that some foreign returnees had attended the wedding ceremony. That means the contamination happened from the people who came from abroad," he said.

The two women may be brought to Kolkata on Sunday.

Though details about the third woman from Kalimpong were not re-

vealed by health department officials, it was learnt that she was kept in quarantine at the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital.

Meanwhile, the health condition of the 66-year-old man, who had earlier tested positive for COVID-19 and was put on ventilator support, was stated to be "very critical" at the private hospital here where he is undergoing treatment.

His family members, including a six-year-old granddaughter, have been kept under

quarantine at another state-run hospital in the city.

On Saturday morning, health officials brought five members of a family including a nine-month-old baby to the city's Beliaghata ID hospital from a sub-divisional hospital in Nadia district. They tested positive on Friday.

Eight other persons, who came in contact with these five, were also brought to the city from Tehatta and kept at the quarantine centre in Rajarhat, the official added.

The health officials also began a search in

Tehatta for all those who came in contact with these five coronavirus-infected people who also included two children.

"We got in touch with the Railways and asked them to give us details of the passengers who travelled in the adjoining bogeys of the Rajdhani Express on which they travelled recently from New Delhi to Kolkata," the official said.

District health officials are also looking for their co-passengers in an e-rickshaw and the domestic help working at their home in Tehatta, he added.

"We are trying to spot everyone who came in contact with these people who had held the baby and played with the children. We are also talking to the local people to find out which shops they had visited," the official added.

The state has reported 18 COVID-19 cases so far, of which one died.

Assam Police launches district-wise COVID-19 helplines

GUWAHATI, MAR 29 (PTI): Assam Police on Sunday announced a series of helpline numbers across all districts, in addition to a central control room facility to address issues arising out of the prevalent situation.

For 34 districts and sub-divisions across the state, the Assam Police released a batch of landline, mobile, WhatsApp and toll-free numbers, besides that of the district disaster management authorities.

"To ensure uninterrupted services, the Government & Police have launched District & State Level Helpline

Numbers.

Everyone is requested to kindly reach out to these numbers for any assistance. Together, we shall overcome," the Assam Police tweeted.

The WhatsApp number of the state-level central control room is 9435215029, it added.

The central helpline numbers of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority are 1077, 1079 and 1070.

Markets, offices and other commercial establishments were mostly shut and vehicles remained off the roads across Assam on Sunday, the fifth

day of the nation-wide lockdown imposed to check the spread of the coronavirus.

However, at many places people defied the lockdown and ventured out of their homes, prompting the police to use force.

Apart from baton charging, police resorted to making the violators do squatting, frog jumping, push-ups and other forms of physical exercises on the roads.

At several places, police distributed rice, vegetables, medicines and other essentials among the needy people.

SpiceJet pilot tests positive for COVID-19

DEEPAK PATEL NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): SpiceJet said on Sunday that one of its pilots who did not fly any international flight in March has tested positive for the coronavirus.

"One of our colleagues, a first officer with SpiceJet, has tested positive for COVID-19. The test report came on March 28. He did not operate any international flight in March 2020," a spokesperson of the airline told PTI.

"The last domestic flight that he operated was on March 21 from Chennai to Delhi

and since then he had quarantined himself at home," the spokesperson added.

As a precautionary measure, the spokesperson said, all crew and staff who had been in direct contact with him have been asked to self-quarantine by staying at home for the next 14 days.

More than 970 people have tested positive for the virus and 25 of them have died because of it till now in India, according to health ministry data.

The spokesperson said, "All measures are being taken to provide appropriate medical care

to him. Safety of our passengers and employees is our topmost priority."

India is currently under a 21-day lockdown till April 14 to stop the spread of the COVID-19, and consequently, all international and domestic flights have been suspended for this period.

"We have been diligently following the guidelines issued by the WHO and the government of India. All our aircraft are being disinfected thoroughly since the end of January and the disinfectants used are as per the WHO standards," the spokesperson said.

Bengal varsities willing to provide campuses for setting up quarantine centres

KOLKATA, MAR 29 (PTI): Amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, several government-owned and private universities in West Bengal have said they would readily provide their campuses to the state administration for setting up quarantine centres and isolation wards.

Adamas University, on the outskirts of the city, has recently offered a portion of its campus for setting up a 1,000-bed temporary hospital.

Calcutta University

Vice Chancellor Sonali Chakraborty Banerjee told PTI that the institute has not received any such request from the state government, but, if approached, "we are ready to provide our campuses for the cause".

She pointed out that university students, stuck in their hostels in the wake of the lockdown, are being taken care of by the authorities in accordance with the safety guidelines.

"Our teachers are holding classes online.

It is a new experience... we are trying to ensure it is done in a seamless manner. I am talking to the pro-VC and the registrar for setting up a dedicated portal," she said, elaborating how CU was handling the situation.

A top official of the Jadavpur University also said that it would not mind making arrangements if the government wanted to use any of its buildings.

"Our priority should be saving lives at this

hour.

Classes can resume once we tide over this crisis," he said.

Echoing him, Father Felix Raj, the vice chancellor of St Xavier's University said he would be

more than happy to be of any assistance to the administration

The Jesuit-run organisation is doing its bit to help people in need and "we are ready to do more if asked of us", he added.

French chefs cook up antidote to virus confinement

PARIS, MAR 29 (AFP): Frustrated at stay-at-home confinement, France's celebrity chefs are cooking up an antidote to the gloomy days of pandemic and quarantine with the help of television and social networks.

"Today it's not chef Lignac talking, it's Cyril who like all French people has to do his shopping near where he lives," says Cyril Lignac, the nation's current gastronomic media star.

On prime-time television, he sports a T-shirt to prepare dinner from his home on his new show "Everyone in the Kitchen".

The show focuses on everyday cooking and the travails of the public in a time of national emergency. The coronavirus crisis has enabled chefs "to play a different tune in the kitchen", he tells AFP. "It's very interesting to improve people's daily lives by cooking just from the cupboard and the fridge."

The show, which opened on France's M6 channel on Tuesday, is scheduled to last only as long as the public's confinement in their own homes. Lignac says he wants to help his compatriots by proving how easy, good and well-priced it can be to cook at home.

Other chefs are following a similar path. "There are no tricks," says Paris chef Amandine Chaignot during an online class explaining how

to prepare asparagus. "I have a tiny kitchen, if I can do it, you can too."

Chaignot may be more used to serving up prestigious banquets but here she's whipping up a dish with one pot -- asparagus and eggs bubbling away before runny yolks are mixed with butter and poured over chopped-up white stalks.

Her video was made for mates who often eat in restaurants, she says.

"You can miss so much if you tell yourself 'I don't know how to do the simplest of things,'" she tells AFP. "It has to be easy, quick and not involve a lot of equipment or ingredients you cannot source."

In the Mediterranean city of Marseille, two-star Michelin gourmet Alexandre Mazzia describes himself as a "dad" who does homework, sport and cooking with his children.

In a rare moment of downtime, he posted on social media some recipes adapted to a time of quarantine.

They include a chocolate cake that is "made like an omelette" with no need to whip up egg whites or sift flour, and a green Puy lentil salad that swaps kumquat for green apple and cashews for any nut.

"I received 350 text messages asking me what to do with Puy lentils," says the award-winning chef.

Triple Michelin star Christophe Bacquie has also taken to social media to help the nation to get cooking.

He wants to put Mediterranean tastes on our plates -- endives in orange, honey and rosemary, lemon and olive oil cake.

"It was my wife who convinced me to go on Instagram," he says.

With the markets closed, he says, shoppers are unlikely to find such things as a John Dory fish to cook with asparagus.

Instead, go for a traditional dish like potato galette without eggs or flour, Bacquie says.

"We use what we have," says Bacquie. "Everyone is confined, we have a duty to lead by example."

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SummitTIMES

Hunger Games? Tennis foot soldiers struggle in time of virus

PARIS, MAR 29 (AFP): With careers spent scratching around dusty outposts, sometimes with "just USD 100" in their pockets, tennis' unheralded army of foot soldiers claim they are struggling to afford food after being made unemployed overnight by the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, Georgian player Sofia Shapatava is pleading with the International Tennis Federation (ITF) to dig deep and help out the hundreds of players who lost their livelihoods when the men's and women's tours went into a three-month lockdown.

"Players lower ranked than 250 will not be able to buy food in two-three weeks' time," warned Shapatava, who is not optimistic the ITF will look favourably on

her plea.

"I honestly don't think so," she told AFP.

"They replied that their plate is full and they will come back to me as soon as they can. But after that email they did not reply with anything," Shapatava, the world number 371, is a 16-year veteran of the tour.

But she plays mostly secondary ITF events, a world away from the gilded Grand Slam world inhabited by multi-millionaires Serena Williams, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

Shapatava has banked USD 354,000 in career prize money from almost 1,500 singles and doubles matches.

Barely USD 3,000 has come her way since the turn of the year after events in

Andrezieux-Bouthion in France, Midland in Michigan, Nicholasville in Kentucky and the Californian venue of Rancho Sante Fe.

However, compared to many, the 31-year-old is well-off.

There are comfortably over 1,000 players in the WTA rankings. The men's ATP Tour has just as many.

Amongst a batch of women currently locked in the lowest rank of 1,283 is 27-year-old Ksenia Kolesnikova of Russia.

In 2020, she has officially made just USD 68.

Many players outside the lucrative top 100 traditionally supplement their meagre incomes by coaching or playing in European club leagues.

However, those reli-



able revenue streams dried up after governments worldwide banned large gatherings to combat the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

"I started the petition to help tennis players to be heard by ITF, after I talked to many of the people I know and about their

plans for the next three months and I realised that some people won't even be able to have food," claimed Shapatava in her online blog.

"My problem is that my sport will die as it is, it will die, because players who are ranked lower than 150 in the world will not be able

to play." Coronavirus has brought all tennis to a standstill until June 8 at the earliest.

The entire claycourt season has been wiped out with the French Open shifted to September-October instead of its traditional May-June slot.

Wimbledon could follow suit next week when organisers may postpone

or even cancel completely the grasscourt Grand Slam event scheduled to start on June 29.

Britain's Tara Moore, the world 233, has made just USD 2,500 this year but her career earnings stand at USD 473,500, boosted by lucrative wildcards into the main draw at Wimbledon.

In 2016, she made the second round at the All England Club and pocketed a welcome USD 62,000.

"There are more important things like life and death, but a lot of players from smaller countries, (are) unable to earn any income, unable to claim benefits as they are considered 'self-employed,'" wrote the 27-year-old Hong Kong-born Moore in support of Shapatava's petition.

"It will be tough for

many players to survive the next couple of months." Former world number 15 Alla Kudryavtseva sympathised with the plight of the current crop.

The 32-year-old Russian, who famously dumped Maria Sharapova out of Wimbledon in 2008, made over 3 million in her career, accrued mostly from success on the doubles court.

"I have savings, I'm not worried. What about those juniors that chose tennis as their career and are making the transition to pros? Who didn't have a chance to save anything yet? Who potentially invested money in themselves? They are not student loans."

The ITF did not respond to requests for a comment.

How will football return after this unplanned hiatus?

JAMES READE & CARL SINGLETON
THECONVERSATION.COM

As many of us fill the void in live sport by watching repeats of the FA Cup Quarter Finals, or dipping into documentaries on Maradona and Sunderland FC on streaming services, we are all wondering when will football be back, and importantly, how will it return?

Will league seasons and competitions be completed or shortened? Will champions, qualification, promotion and relegation still be determined fairly on the pitch? Or by some statistical equation? Will games resume without spectators, or take place in cavernous empty stadiums? None of the answers to these questions are clear, not least because most competition organisers are delaying making these difficult decisions.

In an ideal world, all matches would be played, results logged and final tables computed, with all the outcomes playing out as if there was no delay. In reality, there are significant constraints on this happening. The UEFA Euro 2020 championship, due to be held this summer, has already been moved to 2021, removing one such constraint. But teams have also highlighted the thorny issue of many of their players' contracts expiring at the end of June or July. The conventional start of the 2020 to 2021 European football season in August is also threatened.

STATISTICAL MODELLING

Other sports have long found ways

to deal with external forces restricting play. In limited overs cricket, the weather frequently intervenes and the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method is applied to try and ensure there is still a winner.

This statistical approach factors in the remaining resources of each team, in terms of their batsmen not yet out and the number of balls yet to be bowled after any delay, to set a revised winning target for the chasing team. Such an approach could be taken with football, even down to generating the exact scorelines of games that were never played, using statistical modelling.

The best methods to model and forecast scorelines have been extensively researched. Simulation methods can be employed to project outcomes to the ends of league seasons, based on all the play that has come before. As an example and based on one common approach, we have produced a set of outcome probabilities for the end of this season's English Premier League, based on all the play that came before the suspension.

We've made a heatmap to show the likelihood of different outcomes. Cells go from white (no chance), through yellow and orange to red. The redder a cell, the more likely that that team finishes there.

Some things are obvious and confirmed by our statistical model. Liverpool will win the Premier League with Manchester City coming second and Leicester City third. But qualification



for the European competitions and who gets relegated still have huge uncertainty. If league seasons do not play out in full, given the financial implications for individual teams of whatever decisions are made, then lengthy and expensive challenges in the law courts are sure to follow.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

There seems little alternative to playing out the remainder of the season. Recent research suggests that the spread of the virus did negatively affect attendances around Europe's top leagues. As such, it seems that COVID-19's spectre may haunt

the remaining days of the season.

In the English Premier League, each domestic death related to the virus reported on the previous day led to a 6% fall in matchday attendances. But would fans actually stay away in the event of a resumption of play? Other evidence suggests that this might not be the case. After the only two other major disruptions in English football of comparable scale, the two world wars, attendances soared, implying a pent up demand to watch football.

This latter argument seems particularly powerful for lower league teams, which are much more reliant on matchday re-

ceipts than television money. Some of the larger clubs currently playing in the English lower leagues, with significant wage bills normally covered by a strong fan base, are already struggling. Leeds United and Ipswich Town are examples. These lower division clubs, unlike the Premier League big hitters, will be desperately reliant on the football authorities, and most likely the government, to support them through what could very well be a dramatic economic downturn.

Match outcomes are also affected by playing behind closed doors. Research suggests that referees favour the home team less behind closed doors. Our own research, updated to include the early weeks of the pandemic in Europe, supports this conclusion as well, showing that away teams are awarded half a yellow card less when playing behind closed doors. We also find some evidence that away teams miss fewer penalties in empty stadiums.

Both from a financial and a sporting perspective, it is difficult to find any argument for anything other than completing the current football season once the virus is beaten, whatever this means for future scheduling sacrifices. If necessary, the start of the next season should be postponed, possibly with fewer matches and with domestic cup competitions skipping a year.

[James Reade is Associate Professor of Economics, University of Reading; Carl Singleton is Lecturer in Economics, University of Reading]

How the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics could heal a post-coronavirus world

BRUCE KIDD
THECONVERSATION.COM

The rescheduled Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics should bring the world back together in a reinvigorated spirit of Olympism — the ideal that sport should be conducted at the service of humane social development, international understanding and peace.

While it's often forgotten today in the preoccupation with medals and marketing, Olympism is the body of ideas that provides the essential rationale for the modern Olympic Movement. It was first articulated by Olympic founder Pierre de Coubertin in the late 19th century.

When I was chair of the Olympic Academy of Canada, we set out seven different aspirations of Olympism, including the beliefs that sport should be educational and that athletes and organizers should pursue excellence in all areas of their lives. We taught that the overarching goal of Olympism is international understanding, the commitment to respect and afford dignity to all people, regardless of political, religious and social differences.

DEVELOP RESPECT THROUGH SPORT

Coubertin developed his ideas for the modern Olympics at a time when the European powers were rapidly arming themselves for the catastrophe that became the First World War. He strategized that through international sport, and the co-mingling of athletes and spectators, people could develop respect for each other and hopefully create social networks that could work against groups that were promoting war.

At this time of new manifestations of xenophobia, when the border closings required to block the spread of the coronavirus have unleashed new hatreds in many parts of the world, the spirit of Olympism is needed more than ever before. The rescheduled Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics should be planned as celebrations and affirmations of internationalism and intercultural understanding.

I am confident that the Japanese Olympic organizers can do exactly that — they did it before in 1964. I know from personal experience.

I competed in the 1964 Olympics

in Tokyo. The Games were staged as the culmination of a multi-year plan to rebuild Tokyo and Japanese society after the devastation of the Second World War, two atom bombs and the subsequent U.S. occupation.

REVITALIZED SPORTS ACROSS JAPAN

The organizers built beautiful new stadiums and parks, opened new highways and introduced dramatic new technology like colour television and the high-speed bullet train, put into service with initial speeds of 320 km/h. They revitalized sports, physical education and workplace fitness and recreation right across the country.

What I most remember was the pervasive spirit of Olympism. Every scoreboard proclaimed Coubertin's famous quote about human effort:

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."

The organizers provided opportunities for every athlete to visit a Japanese family for dinner and learn

about Japanese culture.

A NEW STANDARD FOR ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The opening ceremonies were breathtaking, setting a new standard for artistic expression, employing fireworks, jet planes tracing the Olympic rings in the sky, thousands of balloons and pigeons and music — all for the first time.

I particularly remember the re-broadcast of a speech by Coubertin that was first played at the 1936 Olympics, a year before his death. I was most moved by the arrival of the Olympic Torch. It wasn't a celebrated athlete who ran up the steps to light the cauldron but 19-year-old Yoshinori Sakai, who had been born in Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, the day the atom bomb destroyed the city.

Wherever you went in Japan, someone would approach you, bow and say: "No more Hiroshima!" I felt very proud to be part of a movement that contributed to healing, regeneration and intercultural understanding.

In recent years, that spirit has been lost in the global medal race and the understandable concern

about costs, performance enhancing drugs and security.

Instead of going to an Olympics to engage with athletes from other countries and learn about another culture, athletes fly in for their events, compete and go home.

FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE DOMINATES

As long ago as the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, I did a study of the extent to which Canadian athletes participated in the Olympic spirit, and found that very few did. "I could have competed in Don Mills (a section of Toronto) for all that I learned about Korea," one prominent athlete told me.

The focus on performance to the exclusion of everything else is even stronger today.

Many athletes seek something greater than sport in the Olympics. Double Olympic champion Rosie MacLennan tells me that all the time. That sentiment was the basis for the overwhelming call by Canadian athletes for a postponement of the 2020 Olympics on the grounds that sport should put its needs aside in the interests of a united fight against the pandemic.

That's why so many athletes volunteer for charities and community service both during and after their careers.

I am confident that if the Tokyo Games were repositioned as a celebration of Olympism, it would not take away from the athleticism of the Games.

To be sure, the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee face daunting logistical challenges in rescheduling the Games, but if they provide the leadership, they have the power and the experience to re-invigorate the spirit of Olympism at the Games. They already do this in the Youth Olympic Games, where several days are devoted to intercultural exchanges, and at the International and National Olympic Academies.

When the pandemic runs its course, we need to rebuild our all our societies in a humanitarian way. The IOC and IPC can inspire that commitment with Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics devoted to Olympism.

[the writer is Professor of Kinesiology, University of Toronto]

Using this break to sharpen my skills for Australia tour: Hanuma Vihari

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI): Confined to his home due to the nationwide lockdown, India cricketer Hanuma Vihari says he will use the time to "sharpen" his skills for the Australian tour, scheduled towards the end of the year.

As with other sports across the world, cricket has also come to a standstill because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has so far claimed over 30,000 lives while infecting more than 6.5 lakh people.

"I am going to use

this time to focus on my fitness, sharpen my skills for county cricket as well as for the Australia tour in late 2020," Vihari, who was part of India's last tour of New Zealand, was quoted as saying by 'ESPNCricinfo'.

Though there is a lot

of uncertainty over when sport will resume, the middle-order batsman said he has his "fingers crossed".

"Mentally I am trying hard to keep myself positive and busy. My challenge is: there is no cricket for the next three to four

months. I do have a summer to look forward to having signed with a team in the English County Championship, where my contract starts from late August. Fingers crossed about that."

Vihari added that this forced break will ensure he

is home for his first marriage anniversary, which might not have been the case otherwise thanks to a busy cricket calendar.

"One good thing that will come out of this break is: I will be able to celebrate my first wedding anniversary with my wife on

May 19. In normal circumstances I might have been busy with cricket. So at least one person is not complaining too much!"

With nothing much to do at home, he said he has been repeatedly watching clippings of the 2005 Ashes. "A few days

into this enforced break because of the pandemic, I have begun to realise all the implications: I cannot go out, meet friends or do anything, pretty much. But that is the need of the hour - you have to isolate yourself and make sure things settle down.

Very idea of using disease as weapon is viewed with repugnance: UN chief

YOSHITA SINGH

UNITED NATIONS, MAR 29 (PTI): The very idea of "using a disease as a weapon" is viewed with repugnance but the international community must remain vigilant as scientific advances are reducing technical barriers that earlier limited the potential of biological weapons, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The UN chief, in his message on the 45th anniversary of the Biological Weapons Convention's entry into force, said that all countries should reaffirm their unequivocal rejection of the use of disease as a weapon, as well as their commitment to a robust international health security architecture that guarantees the maintenance of peaceful and healthy societies around the world.

March 26 marked

the 45th anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention, the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

"Today, the norm against biological weapons remains strong, and the potential of using disease as a weapon is viewed with repugnance. However, the international community must remain vigilant. Scientific advances are reducing technical barriers which earlier limited the potential of biological weapons," Guterres said on Saturday.

Guterres said during the intervening years, the Biological Weapons Convention made an important contribution towards collective efforts to eliminate such threats.

The anniversary comes as the world is



grappling with the coronavirus pandemic.

The outbreak, which began in China, has now spread to almost every country in the world. Globally, there are 652,079 confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 30,000 people have died of the disease. At more than 116,000, the US now has the highest number of coronavirus cases in the world, more

than Italy and China, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre.

India, in its message for the 45th anniversary, said that the global economic and social implications of the pandemic, caused by COVID-19, have underlined the need for international cooperation, including institutional strengthening of the

World Health Organization (WHO).

The UN chief called on States Parties to urgently update the mechanisms within the convention for reviewing advances in science and technology, and to work together to improve biosecurity and biopreparedness so that all countries are equipped to prevent and respond to the possible use of biological

weapons.

The convention's Ninth Review Conference in 2021 is an opportunity to address these and other issues, and to consider how to adapt this landmark convention to future challenges, Guterres said, urging States Parties to think creatively about the future evolution of the convention and how to uphold its central role in preventing the misuse of biology for hostile purposes.

Forty-five years after its entry into force, the Biological Weapons Convention has the support of 183 States Parties. It continues to grow, with more than 20 states having joined in the past 10 years, demonstrating its continued relevance, the UN Secretary General added, calling upon the 14 governments that have not yet joined the convention to do so without any delay.

Israel's Netanyahu, Gantz see 'significant progress' toward unity govt

JERUSALEM, MAR 29 (AFP): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his erstwhile rival Benny Gantz on Sunday announced "significant progress" in talks towards forming an emergency unity government amid the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Gantz, whose now fractured centrist Blue and White alliance had positioned itself as the alternative to Netanyahu in three inconclusive elections over the past year, was elected parliament speaker Thursday.

The two men had held talks through the night "aimed at establishing a national emergency government to deal with the corona crisis and the additional challenges facing the State of Israel," said a joint statement from Blue and White and Netanyahu's Likud.

"Significant progress was made during the meeting," it added.

"During the course of the day, an additional meeting will be held in order to come to a finalised agreement." Gantz was tasked with forming a government following the March 2 vote -- something he had been unable to do after two elections last year.

There was no guar-

antee he would succeed this time, given a lack of cohesion within the anti-Netanyahu bloc.

The divided anti-Netanyahu forces, who held a narrow majority in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, forced the ouster this week of speaker Yuli Edelstein, a member of Netanyahu's Likud party.

Gantz then put himself forward as speaker, triggering the break-up of Blue and White, with two key partners -- the Telem and Yesh Atid parties -- accusing Gantz of surrendering "without a fight" to Netanyahu.

Gantz and Netanyahu had both previously voiced support for a unity government to combat the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far seen over 3,800 Israelis infected, including 12 deaths.

There were no official details of the makeup of a future government, but Netanyahu has in past weeks proposed 18-month premiership terms -- with him taking the first, to be followed by Gantz.

The veteran premier, in office since 2009, was in January charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust, with the start of his trial delayed due to the virus pandemic.

Netanyahu denies the charges.

North Korea fires missiles into sea, criticized by South

SEOUL, MAR 29 (AP): North Korea on Sunday fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea, South Korea said, calling it "very inappropriate" at a time when the world is battling the coronavirus pandemic.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected the projectiles flying from the North Korean eastern coastal city of Wonsan into the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan on Sunday morning.

The projectiles flew about 230 kilometres at a maximum altitude of 30 kilometres, the statement said.

South Korean and US intelligence authorities were analyzing more details of the launches.

The military described them as "very inappropriate" because they occurred while the world is grappling with the coronavirus outbreak. It urged North Korea to stop such military action.

In recent weeks,



North Korea has fired a slew of missiles and artillery shells in an apparent effort to upgrade its military capability amid deadlocked nuclear talks with the United States. The talks remain stalled since the breakdown of a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump in Vietnam in early 2019.

The weapons launched recently were all short range and didn't pose a direct threat to the US homeland.

North Korea hasn't carried out nuclear or long-range missile tests since it began nuclear diplomacy with the United States in 2018. A resumption of a major weapons test by North Korea could completely disrupt the negotiations, some experts say.

North Korea also has been engaged in an intense campaign to prevent the spread of the coronavirus that has infected more than 660,000 worldwide.

North Korea has repeatedly said there hasn't

been a single virus outbreak on its soil, a claim questioned by foreign experts. Many experts say an outbreak in North Korea could be dire because of its chronic lack of medical supplies and poor health care infrastructure.

A week ago, North Korea said Trump sent a personal letter to Kim, seeking to maintain good relations and offering cooperation in fighting the outbreak. A North Korean state media dispatch didn't say whether Trump mentioned any of the latest weapons tests by the North.

US coronavirus toll at new records

Reported coronavirus cases in the US

(As of March 29, 2020)



WASHINGTON, MAR 29 (AFP): The number of novel coronavirus cases in the United States, already the world's highest, reached a new record on Saturday, a count by Johns Hopkins University showed.

Over the past 24 hours the United States also marked a record 453 deaths linked to the COVID-19 illness, bringing the country's toll to 1,891 deaths since the pandemic began.

That is fewer than the 10,023 in Italy, Spain's 5,812, China's 3,299 or the 2,317 in France, the tally showed.

But the United States since Thursday has recorded the world's high-

est number of cases.

As of 1855 GMT Saturday, Johns Hopkins recorded 115,547 US cases. That included a 23 percent jump of 21,309 in one day, also a record.

New York is the epicentre of the US outbreak, with more than 50,000 -- or about half -- of the country's total cases. US President Donald Trump on Saturday said he was considering placing the entire state under quarantine.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters he did not think such a move could be legally enforceable and did not know what it would accomplish from a public health perspective.

Prince William and Kate Middleton Share the Importance of Mental Health Care Amid COVID-19

ALYSSA MORIN

LONDON, 29 MAR: Prince William and Kate Middleton want us to know that practicing self-care is just as important as practicing social distancing.

With everything happening in the world with the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, the royal couple knows that these uncertain times can cause stress, anxiety and other effects to our well-being.

That's why they're sharing the importance of mental health care.

"The last few weeks have been anxious and unsettling for everyone," the Duke and Duchess said in a statement, per The Telegraph.

"We have to take time to support each other and find ways to look after our mental health. It is great to see the mental health sector working together with the NHS to help people keep on top

of their mental well-being," their statement continued. "By pulling together and taking simple steps each day, we can all be better prepared for the times ahead."

As the couple put it on social media, "Self-isolation and social distancing can pose huge challenges to our mental health—in recent weeks The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have been in regular contact with organisations and patronages to understand the issues they are facing during this difficult time."

According to the royal couple's Instagram account, "Public Health England has published new guidance to help support people during the COVID-19 outbreak, and updated its world-leading Every Mind Matters platform, with specific advice on maintaining good mental wellbeing during

the outbreak."

Of the new guidance, both Prince William and Kate issued a statement.

"It is great to see the mental health sector working together with the NHS to help people keep on top of their mental well-being," their message read on Instagram. "By pulling together and taking simple steps each day, we can all be better prepared for the times ahead."

The couple also shared that the government issued a grant for Mind Charity, which helps people struggling with mental health issues.

This isn't the first time Kate and Prince William have encouraged people to prioritize their well-being. Last October, the couple released a powerful mental health PSA with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Their message at the time was similar to the one the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge recently issued over the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Everyone knows that feeling when life gets on top of us," Prince William narrated the beginning of the video. "All over the country, millions of us face challenges to our mental health—at all ages, at all intensities, and for all sorts of reasons."

"We feel stressed, low, anxious or have trouble sleeping," Prince Harry stated after his brother's message. "We think there is nothing to be done, nothing we can do about it."

"But now there's a new way to help turn things around," Meghan chimed in. "Every Mind Matters will show you simple ways to look after your mental health."

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There is constant learning and unlearning for actors: Manisha Koirala

MUMBAI, MAR 29 (PTI): With time and the kind of roles that she is being offered now, actor Manisha Koirala believes she has changed from being spontaneous to methodical in her approach towards acting.

The actor, one of the most popular faces in the 1990s and 2000s films such as "Bombay", "Khamoshi", "Dil Se", says she is enjoying doing something new with the characters is playing today.

"The roles that I used to do earlier didn't require me to have specific skills or way of doing the role. Today, the roles that I am doing require me to do that so I want to put in that extra hour, extra effort.

"I feel when you are challenged, you push your boundaries and you try to excel in that direction. I love this whole thing of becoming a method actor from spontaneous actor. And if I can bring in the spontaneity and method together that will be great. I love harnessing my skills, I love pushing boundaries," Manisha told PTI in an interview here.

Due to changing styles of storytelling, the 49-year-old actor believes artistes should always be open to any kind of challenge that is thrown at them.

"There is a constant learning and unlearning that happens if you want to grow as an actor," she said.

Having changed her process and style of acting, Manisha said, she feels happy when people appreciate the efforts an actor puts in building a character.

"If people appreciate your work, it is a pat on your back. If I get appreciated, I feel happy and grateful. As artistes, be it a writer or director or painter or actor, our work depends on whether it has moved the audience or not, when it happens, you feel thrilled."

The actor's role in 2018 Netflix anthology "Lust Stories" was critically lauded and now she stars in another film from the streamer, "Maska". She is reuniting with director Dibakar Ba-



nerjee for another Netflix project, "Freedom".

"I am a hungry actor and I am constantly trying to become better. At some point, I am happy I am getting opportunities to do something that is helping me grow," she added.

She said the jump from films to streaming wasn't a planned move.

"I have never been a planning kind of person. From the 80 to 90 films that I have acted in, there are about 10 to 15, where I have worked with good directors where I have been given good roles but that is not always possible. Whatever came to me, I tried my best," she said.

Asked about equal opportunities for women, the actor said the film industry has always been a male-dominated space as the heroes tend to bring in the money.

"If you have a big hero, people are willing to put in money, this is a fact. When we talk about equality, I feel we have a long way to go, we haven't arrived yet. But the momentum has started."

There are more women working in different departments of filmmaking, which was not the case in the past, she said.

"So times are changing slowly. Women are taking centre stage. But to think we have arrived is also delusional. We have a long way to go. We have to strive to get equal standing and respect," she said.



BUDDING ROMANCE! Hot new couple Ben Affleck & Ana de Armas step out for a springtime stroll in Brentwood, Calif.

Jon Bon Jovi believes his son Jacob contracted 'mild' coronavirus

LOS ANGELES, MAR 29 (PTI): Singer-songwriter Jon Bon Jovi says he suspects that his teenage son Jacob might have contracted a mild version of coronavirus.

Talking to Entertainment Weekly, the 58-year-old singer said his son showed symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been tested for it.

The whole family is together, all the kids are here with us. We've been here 15 days now, not that I'm counting. Everyone here, Jake had a mild version of it just the intestinal kind," Bon Jovi said.

The singer and his wife, Dorothea, share four children together -- daughter Stephanie, 26, and sons Jessie, 25, Jacob, 17, and Romeo, 15.

He said Jacob, who was quarantined from the rest of the family, started

feeling better since visiting a private doctor.

"Dorothea created the quarantine zone, you know, with the laundry room being triaged and no one could go in there unless they had gloves and a mask and she had a bathrobe on backwards and different slippers," Bon Jovi said. "But we kept him in there until all of the symptoms had cleared and now he's a hundred percent," he added.

When asked why Jacob was not tested for COVID-19, the singer said it was pretty difficult to get one.

"It stemmed from some of the young guys that we had taken in here that also tested, they were tested and tested positive and had the main symptoms but they had left, and so we just followed those same protocols," he added.

those around you. Therefore, the need to help is also far greater. But, there's only so much you can pour from an empty cup. So strike a balance between what you give yourself and what you give to the world. This is the time to develop self-care rituals that will help you feel nurtured. Meditation and mindfulness are also taking centre-stage this week. So, breathe in and breathe out. Quarantine season revelations: nothing helps you cancel out the noise like raising your vibrations.

Tip: Understand the need of self-care in the time of self-isolation.

Leo: The process of self-inquiry is seldom easy. There are demons vying for your attention, unhealed trauma and unprocessed emotions to deal with. But denial is never healthy. Leo. If there's anything this period of isolation is teaching you, it's the importance of bringing light to your shadows and putting a balm to those old wounds. As Eckhart Tolle wisely said, "Awareness is the greatest agent for change."

Tip: You are experiencing deep, inner alchemy through the process of isolation.

Virgo: This work-from-home scenario is anything but rainbows and sunshine. There are dishes to do and cobwebs to clear and meals to prepare. Not that you can explain any of this at the 10am meeting today. But let's not forget that you are a Virgo! Even if the world is falling apart, you will "always" have a plan in place. So manage your time and organise your schedule better. Make focus and discipline your power words. This is the time to establish new routines that will serve you in the long run.

Tip: Establish new routines and learn to manage your time in an effective manner.

Libra: The world may be on lockdown, but that doesn't mean

your optimism has to be. This is a time of deep, inner alchemy, Libra. You're having so many epiphanies around the concept of joy, contentment, and happiness; learning to be your own sunshine because there is the only way to survive the dark night. Feeling inspired to connect with your inner child? Replace the idea of productivity with creativity. Respond to the creative urges emanating from deep within you through art and movement.

Tip: You're learning to make your own happiness potion.

Scorpio: Quarantine season was supposed to be fun. I mean, weren't we going to be parading around in our Sunday best (read: PJs) and OD-ing on our favourite shows? But now, the lockdown has been extended and you're longing for the outside world. At times like these, we have no option but to turn inwards, Scorpio; to find a source of joy and happiness within, to celebrate the simple things that make our lives oh-so-beautiful, like making chai with your sister every morning or listening to your dad narrate anecdotes from his youth!

Tip: Find joy in small, simple things.

Sagittarius: This period of self-isolation was supposed to be an extended sleeper party but you've re-read all your favourite books, watched every show on Netflix, and learned about seven new languages. Now what? The outdoors look tempting but your longing for sunshine could get you into a lot of trouble. What the cards are urging you to do: consider the art of turning lemons into lemon tarts. Drag your mat to the terrace or the backyard and do your crunches to the sound of Cardi B's tunes. Miss having your crew around to motivate you? Organise a virtual dance-a-thon tonight.

Tip: Find new ways to stay motivated.

Capricorn: It's either all-in or all-out, Capricorn, because lukewarm just doesn't cut it for you. You're in the mood to take life

Harry Potter's Tom Felton and Jason Isaacs Have a Malfoy Family Reunion

It's a Malfoy family reunion!

Tom Felton and Jason Isaacs, who played platinum blond duo Draco Malfoy and father Lucius Malfoy in the Harry Potter films, reunited remotely via a video call in support of the British Red Cross. The two, like millions of people worldwide, are remaining at home and practicing social distancing amid the coronavirus pandemic. During their chat, they discussed keeping busy, giving back and...Tiger King. Obviously.

Isaacs, 56, posted the video of their conversation on Instagram on Friday night, writing, "Malfoy Family Reunion. Sharing lockdown life. Draco and Lucius connect as part of @BritishRedCross #PowerOfKindness #PhoneAFriend. Try it. #HarryPotter #StayHomeSaveLives @t22Felton

Tom Hanks, Rita Wilson return to US after coronavirus quarantine in Australia

LOS ANGELES, MAR 29 (PTI): Hollywood star Tom Hanks says he and his wife, singer-songwriter Rita Wilson are back home in the US after undergoing self-quarantine in Australia.

The Oscar winner on Saturday took to social media to share an update.

"We're home now, and like the rest of America, we carry on sheltering place and social distancing," Hanks, 63, tweeted Saturday.

The couple, who tested positive for the novel coronavirus in February, spent a week in isolation at a hospital in the state of

Queensland in Australia.

After their discharge from the medical facility, Hanks and Wilson, 63, continued to self-quarantine at a rented home in Australia, often sharing their experience on isolation and offered advice to those doing the same via social media.

Hanks expressed gratitude to the people in Australia who took care of them.

"Many, many thanks to everyone in Australia who looked after us. Their care and guidance made possible our return to the USA. And many thanks to all of you who reached out with well wish-

TV watching habits. Isaacs said he subscribed to "every single streaming service." Both said they watched the new and immensely popular Netflix documentary Tiger King.

"Weirdly, I did a film a year or so ago where we did a cross country trip and one of the stops was Oklahoma," Felton said, referring to the comedy Braking for Whales. "We filmed in this bar and the owner of the bar was this nutter who walked in with the full-on mullet and the hat and a gun--two guns, I think he had. We were all like, 'Who the hell is this guy?' And lo and behold, two years later, he's got a documentary on Netflix."

"Wait, that was him, the Tiger King?" Isaacs asked.

es. Rita and I so appreciate it," the actor wrote.

Last week, Hanks said he and Wilson felt "better" two weeks after coronavirus symptoms began.

Hanks was in Australia for the pre-production of Baz Luhrmann's untitled Elvis Presley film, whereas Wilson performed at Sydney's iconic Opera House.

Warner Bros suspended the production on the film, starring Austin Butler in the lead, till further notice.

Other film and television production around the world were shut down following the spread of COVID-19.

by the horns and experience everything fully. As a popular phrase goes, "Rejoice in life, in love, in meditation, in the beauties of the world, in the ecstasy of existence—rejoice in everything! Transform the mundane into the sacred. Transform this shore into the other shore, transform the earth into paradise." For those who are feeling lost and confused: there are big things taking place behind the scenes for you. Perfect the art of trust and surrender.

Tip: Experience life fully.

Aquarius: Given the current state of affairs, it will be easy to go into a state of panic. One word, Aquarius: boundaries. This is the only way to ensure you don't pick up on the collective hysteria that could potentially lower your vibration. So take the necessary precautionary measures like self-isolation and regularly washing your hands, but also remember to stay centred. Your consumption habits will play an integral role in how you are feeling. Avoid the instant noodles and sugary chai circle. Instead, consume freshly prepared meals with healthy, immunity-boosting ingredients. Meditating and exercising regularly will also help you maintain a state of balance.

Tip: Be mindful of your consumption habits.

Pisces: Hello, and welcome to the land of your personal demons! Nobody said this was going to be easy. Then again, nothing transformative ever is. Resist the urge to run away from the turmoil. What you want to do instead is unpack, sit down with your thoughts, observe the patterns, and release that which is no longer yours. This is the only way to free yourself from the old story, Pisces. Know that you are rising, moving, shifting, and evolving. The next chapter is going to be fulfilling on so many levels. So, buckle your seatbelt and enjoy every bit of transformation process.

Tip: Have a chat with your demons.