

Two Hotlines for reporting flu-like symptoms

NADIRA GUNATILLEKE

All who suffer from flu like symptoms such as sneezing, cough, fever, headache etc should not go out from their homes and they should first dial the hotlines 1390 or 1999 from any telephone, Health Services Director General Dr. Anil Jasinghe said.

According to Dr. Jasinghe a well-qualified team of over 100 doctors answer this hotline all 24 hours in all three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. The team of doctors will tell the patient what to do. All patients should act only after obtaining instructions over the phone. The 1999 number belongs to the Health Promotion Bureau (HPB).

Dr. Jasinghe pointed out that coordinating the ambulance service 1990 will also be done through the same hotline 1390. All those who suffer from above symptoms can dial one of these numbers and follow the instructions given by doctors.

Dr. Jasinghe stressed that no one should go to any private/state doctors, private/state medical centres, private/state hospitals or anywhere else when having flu like symptoms - they should first call 1390 and obtain instructions from the doctors before taking any action. This arrangement has been made in order to stop the spread of COVID-19.

FURTHER MEASURES TO RESTRICT FOREX OUTFLOW

PAYMENTS VIA OUTWARD INVESTMENT ACCOUNTS FOR OVERSEAS INVESTMENTS SUSPENDED | MONETARY BOARD EMPOWERED TO DECIDE ON CASE BY CASE BASIS

MIGRATION ALLOWANCE LIMITED TO US\$ 30,000

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is also Finance Minister, has issued an Extraordinary Gazette suspending Sri Lankan Citizens from making payments through Outward Investment Accounts for overseas investments for three months.

This order was made under the Section 22 of the Foreign Exchange Act Number 12 of 2017.

However, certain exclusions will apply: Investments to be financed out of a foreign currency loan obtained by the investor from a person resident outside Sri Lanka under the provisions

of the Foreign Exchange Act or Investments to be made to fulfill regulatory requirements of that country.

The new regulations will also suspend any outward remittances other than on current transactions through Business Foreign Currency Accounts or Personal Foreign Currency Accounts held by persons resident in Sri Lanka.

The new regulations will also suspend the repatriation of funds under the migration allowance through Capital Transaction Rupee Accounts by migrants who have already claimed the migration allowance

under the general permission granted by exchange control regulations. First time migrants will be allowed a migration allowance only up to US\$ 30,000.

However, the Monetary Board shall have the authority to grant permission under the Exchange Control Act for investments on a case by case basis which exceed the specified limits. However, these should be financed out of a foreign currency loan obtained by the investor from a person resident outside Sri Lanka under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Act or the proposed investment is to be made to fulfill a regulatory requirement of that

country. This will be in effect for a period of three months from April 2, 2020.

These are among the measures adopted by the Government to prevent the unnecessary outflow of foreign exchange at a time when all developed and developing economies including that of Sri Lanka have been battered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government has also urged importers to suspend the imports of all non-essential and luxury goods including vehicles for an initial period of three months from April this year. Imports of essential items will continue uninterrupted.

Curfew Timings

The curfew imposed in the high-risk areas such as Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Puttalam, Kandy and Jaffna districts will be in effect until further notice.

In all other districts, the curfew was lifted at 6.00 am yesterday and re-imposed at 2.00 pm. In these districts, the curfew will be lifted at 6.00 am on Thursday, 09th April and re-imposed at 4.00 pm the same day.

This week from April 06 to Friday April 10th has been declared a work from home week. Unless for essential services, travelling between districts has been completely banned.

The police warn that those who misuse the mechanisms put in place to ensure the smooth functioning of the essential services, would be dealt with very strictly.

The government has implemented a mechanism for people to order their essential goods without any hindrance right from their homes.

Meanwhile, those engaged in farming and other agricultural trades such as tea estates and other export crops, have been granted permission to engage in their cultivations.

As the government has taken all these measures to ensure the safety of the public, the government urged the public to stay home and refrain from travelling around unless it is absolutely essential.

Follow all safety guidelines when curfew is lifted - Health Minister

Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi has appealed to the public to follow all safety guideline even when the curfew is lifted in order to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus.

Addressing the media briefing of the National Operation Centre for the prevention of the spread of Covid-19 she urged the people to understand the gravity of the situation as the last person to die of the Coronavirus was a healthy 44-year-old who had no underlying health conditions.

Therefore, she said that the government is taking all measures to prevent the virus from spreading throughout the country, adding that the curfew is lifted for several hours in certain districts taking into consideration the requirements of the people. However, she urged the public to follow all safety guidelines during this period to prevent the virus from spreading.

Based on the directives of the special task force appointed by the President and headed by Basil Rajapaksa, all disabled persons, elderly and those with kidney ailments will receive Rs. 5000 through their Grama Seva Officers tomorrow. They will receive this money to their homes.

Minister Wanniarachchi said that the committee appointed to look into the grievances of the daily wage earners who have lost their income sources, will take action to look into their difficulties from the 07th.



Anura Bandara Herath, the sole Sri Lankan on board the ocean liner MSC Magnifica was brought shore by the Navy yesterday. Here Herath steps on to Sri Lankan soil, as a sailor waits to disinfect him. Above: Herath waves goodbye to the cruise liner. (See also page 3)

NAVY BRINGS ASHORE SRI LANKAN CREW MEMBER ON CRUISE SHIP

Acting on a directive of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Navy yesterday met the cruise ship MSC 'Magnifica' off the Port of Colombo and brought ashore the only Sri Lankan on board, Anura Bandara Herath, who was a crew member.

Herath recently made a request over social media to get him back to Sri Lanka.

This came to the President's attention and he directed Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral Piyal De Silva to make arrangements to bring him back ashore as his ship would be in Sri Lankan waters while on its way to Italy. The ship, which was on a world tour, had to abandon the tour and head back

to Italy from Australia as no port was willing to let it dock.

A team of Navy's Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRNE) Unit was dispatched to the passenger ship which was about 4.4 nautical miles (9 km) off the port of Colombo and the Sri Lankan was safely retrieved and transferred ashore.

A 75 year old German female passenger suffering from a heart ailment on board the MSC 'Magnifica' was also safely brought ashore by the Navy.

The Sri Lankan and the ill German passenger were disinfected on the harbour premises in accordance with proper sterilization procedures. Subsequently, the Sri Lankan was directed

to the Boossa Naval Quarantine Centre for 21 days of quarantine following all safety guidelines. The German woman was rushed to the National Hospital Colombo for treatment. The Navy Commander said that as Sri Lankans, all should be happy that the one and only Sri Lankan national aboard has been safely brought shore, in circumstances where the ship not been accepted by any port in the world.

Upon disembarkation, Anura Bandara Herath expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the President, Government and the Navy for taking prompt action to get him back. Speaking on national television, his mother also thanked the President and the Navy for this gesture.

More than 3,000 leave Quarantine Centres

The Army has so far released a total of 279 quarantined individuals from Jaffna and Kundasale Quarantine Centres after the two-week quarantine process. They left for their residences after receipt of Quarantine Certificates. Accordingly, a total of 3169 quarantined individuals have so far left those QCs, manned by tri services. All those who left after quarantining have been asked to undergo another two-week long self-quarantining at their homes, Lt. Gen Shavendra Silva said at the National Operation Centre for the Prevention of Covid-19 media briefing.

"Another who completed the two-week long quarantine and left home had been confirmed positive for COVID-19 after seven days upon completion of the quarantining and was taken to the hospital, a matter that should be noted," said Lieutenant General Silva.

Another 144 individuals, suspected to have been in contact with a positive COVID-19 victim, found from Akurana after his return from a religious conference in India were taken to Punani QC by the Army yesterday while Akurana as well as Ataluwagama areas continue to remain in isolation. And a group of 45 individuals, suspected to have got in contact with the COVID-19 patient found from Maharagama area on Friday (3) were also referred to Punani QC today (5) in consultation with health authorities as a precautionary measure to arrest further transmission of the infection. Similarly, another of 34 more individuals who have had contact with the positive case from Mount Lavinia were found from Ratmalana area, and the driver and family members who took the victim to the hospital as well as 21 relatives of the patient from Orugodawatte, a total of 55 persons were thus admitted to the Punani QC during the day (5), the Head of the NOPCO told the Media.

GLOBAL CASES CLOSE TO 1.3 MILLION

The total number of global COVID-19 cases was close to 1.3 million mark last night as the Coronavirus Dashboard of the Johns Hopkins University, USA indicated 1,289,390 cases, with the US leading at 338,000 cases. Spain (135,000 cases) has overtaken Italy (129,000 cases) while Germany exceeded 100,000 cases last night. France was edging closer to that figure with nearly 94,000 patients. There are 70,500 COVID-19 deaths recorded around the world so far, with Italy accounting for 16,000 and Spain 13,000.

More than 270,000 people across the globe have fully recovered from the viral disease, with the biggest number of recoveries (77,000) in China, where several previously locked down cities are now open for travel, day-to-day activity and limited business.

In Sri Lanka, the total number of infected persons confirmed stands at 178, out of which 33 have fully recovered.

There is currently no cure or vaccine for COVID-19, though trials are underway for both.

AN APPEAL FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Buddhist religious leaders and health authorities yesterday appealed to devotees not to flock to temples today on account of Bak Full Moon Poya Day. They urged the devotees to stay at home and

engage in Ata Sil and other religious observances in view of the social distancing efforts needed to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, ITN and the private TV channels as well

as the radio stations have arranged to broadcast religious programmes throughout the day for the convenience of devotees. Some of these will be beamed in live from temples in various cities, but Chief Incumbents

and organizers have strictly advised the public not to converge on such locations.

Likewise, Catholic and Christian religious leaders have exhorted their followers not to visit Churches dur-

ing this Holy Week. Instead, the important Good Friday (April 10) and Easter Sunday events will be telecast live from some of the leading Churches. Muslim and Hindu religious dignitaries have made similar

appeals to their faithful. In addition to the religious activities, the coming week would normally have also taken on a festive air as it includes the Sinhala and Tamil New Year on April 12 and 13.

Govt, SJB discuss measures taken to abate pandemic

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa discussed matters relating to the prevailing situation in the wake of COVID-19 spread with the representatives of Samagi Jana Balawegaya at the Presidential Secretariat today (06).

President Rajapaksa elaborated on the measures already taken by the Government to prevent the spread of the lethal virus and the future actions in this regard.

The responsible manner in which the Government acted following the declaration by the World Health Organization about the pandemic was explained by the President. The Government was able to take several swift actions to safeguard the citizens of this country, the President said.

Every step to ensure uninterrupted day-to-day civilian life was taken. These timely measures were instrumental in controlling the spread. Actions were taken under the guidance of experts in collaboration with the health sector and security forces. Pre-testing with the assistance of medical consultants to identify the infected and those associated with them will continue. This will be helpful

for the early detection of the affected, the President added.

The quarantine process continues at 40 centers. Programmes have been initiated with the assistance of Public Health Officers (PHOs) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in areas where the infected have been identified. The President lauded the service of the PHOs in detection and observations processes.

The representatives of Samagi Jana Balawegaya expressed their satisfaction over the measures taken by the Government so far. Both parties agreed that this should continue without political or any other differences.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that if there are any shortcomings in the government programs, immediate action will be taken to rectify them.

President Rajapaksa and the leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, Sajith Premadasa requested the employers to attend to the needs of those who are engaged in various daily wage based industries including construction sector as they can get stranded and have not been able to return to their homes.

A stock of essential medicine required for daily healthcare services including

medicine for non-communicable diseases is to arrive in the island from India upon the request by the government.

The President explained that after taking the current global economic and social crisis into account, plans are already underway to implement an appropriate economic model suitable to Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa highlighted that the experts have been consulted to uplift the apparel and tourism industries which have suffered a setback and the government will take action under their instructions when the opportunity permits.

The Government and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya paid their attention to future plans in a number of fields including healthcare.

Ministers Dinesh Gunawardena, Nimal Siripala De Silva, Wimal Weerawansa, Dullas Alahapperuma, Bandula Gunawardana and Johnston Fernando represented the government while Samagi Jana Balawegaya was represented by its leader Sajith Premadasa and General Secretary, Ranjith Maddumabandara. Secretary to the President, Dr. P.B. Jayasundara and several others were present as well.



A Bhikku feeds a stray dog at his temple in Colombo just ahead of Bak Full Moon Poya Day which falls today. (Picture by Sudam Gunasinghe)

Govt formulating plans for tourism revival

IRANGIKA RANGE

Industrial Export, Investment Promotion, Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Prasanna Ranatunga said yesterday the government is in the process of working out on the long term and short term plans on the revival of tourism industry which has been adversely affected by the Corona virus pandemic.

We expect to embark on many programs to revive the tourism industry back to normalcy soon after successful tackling of the corona virus pandemic and preventing its spread within the country,"the Minister added.

In many countries, tourist traffic is already falling, the number of tourists is rapidly decreasing. Countries in which international tourism consti-

tutes a significant share of Gross Domestic Product are particularly vulnerable to the decline in economic growth. The Coronavirus's impact on the tourism sector in Sri Lanka is also very large. However, the government has given its utmost priority to prevent the spread of Coronavirus pandemic within the country to protect the people at a time. Therefore, when this task is completed by controlling the spreading of virus, the government will embark on a massive drive to develop the economy in the country," the Minister added.

He further said the tourism industry was badly hit by the Easter Sunday attack in last year. However, it has been recovering due to a number of measures taken by the government for the revival of tourism.

Rubber manufacturers, exporters get green light

Rubber product manufacturers and exporters and others supporting them along the entire supply chain have got the government green light to resume production, the Sri Lankan Association of Rubber Product Manufacturers and Exporters (SLAMERP), which represents them, said.

All companies must take precautions to protect their workers against the coronavirus by giving them proper healthcare and sanitary facilities and following all medical and government guidelines, along with the PHI recommendations, its Director General Rohan Masakorala said.

"It is strongly advised to all the companies that this is not considered a general police curfew, but a health curfew to contain COVID 19," he said.

Masakorala said the government green light came after SLAMERP met with Basil Rajapaksa, chairman of the Presidential task force on facilitating the industry during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Earlier, rubber exporters made a request from the government to make it an essential service during this crucial time as the sector supplies various products to the medical industry and the agriculture sector.

SLAMERP said in a state-

ment it is also advisable companies to educate their workforce on the importance of their industry to the economy and why everybody in the supply chain, from the manufacturer to the farmer, have been given special attention by the government.

Those who have teething problems and other issues as they start operations can contact the SLAMERP Director General through WhatsApp 0777881947.

SLAMERP said the green light is extended to all supply chain partners and indirect exporters, both Board of Investment and non-BOI companies. They should tell the BOI or Export Development Board and the Ministry of Plantations about the details of their workers who need to travel to work. Companies must make sure that all supply chain partners needed for operations are covered and notified to either BOI or EDB.

Details of BOI companies should be sent to Ranjith - ranjithd@boi.lk - and non-BOI firms to the EDB to Chithanjali Dissanayake on 071 8071163 or chitty@edb.gov.lk It is important to text or email them before calling where possi-

ble and get their approval letters, SLAMERP said.

Details to be given include number of workers, location of the factory with details of the area, such as GS/GA division, Police station, district and province, amount of vehicles needing curfew passes, drivers' details, daily requirement of workers, districts/ places of where individual workers need to get passes, any other suppliers/indirect exporters/ shipping and logistics requirements that need to be given permission to operate (both inward and outward operations).

The following could also be contacted from government institutions and the task force:

BOI - Sanjaya Mohottala, DG Direct (2430511)
Ministry of Plantations - Chaturangi 0718726727 chaturangi4@gmail.com
Sri Lanka Police- Senior DIG Deshabandu Tennakoon 0718591017

Presidential Task Force- Dr. Priyath Bandu Wickrama, Secretary Urban Development: 0718688300

Sri Lanka Ports Authority AMD, Upali Zoysa, 0718688328 zoysa@slpa.lk
Sri Lanka Customs, Director General Retired Major General Vijitha Ravipriya 0761582940



Musician Jayantha Rathnayake passes away

Veteran Musician Jayantha Rathnayake passed away yesterday (06) morning.

Rathnayake was a father of two, and was being treated for cancer at Maharagama Cancer Hospital when he succumbed to his illness at the age of 51.

Music Director and Singer Jayantha Rathnayake was the elder son of veteran Artist Victor Rathnayake.

The body is kept at Koswatta Thalagama Mahinda Panagoda funeral parlour. The funeral will be held today (07).



INVITATION FOR BIDS MINISTRY OF HEALTH

PROVINCIAL GENERAL HOSPITAL, BADULLA

Bids are invited for **URGENT PROCUREMENT** by the Chairman of the Regional Procurement Committee of the Provincial General Hospital, Badulla from qualified bidders for obtaining the following supplies.

Serial No.	Bid No.	Supplies	Qty	Non-Refundable Bid Document Fee (Rs.)	Refundable Bid Deposit (Rs.)
Medical Equipment					
01	PGHB/FC/19/20	Supply & Installation of Ultra Sound Scanner Gyn. & Obs.	01	2,550.00	140,000.00
02	PGHB/FC/20/20	ICU Bed with Mattress	15	2,700.00	150,000.00

02. Bids will be conducted through National Competitive Bidding procedure.

03. Further details regarding this may be obtained during office hours on working days of the week either by calling the Accountant (Ext. 1103) or from the undermentioned hospital website.

04. Qualified bidders may obtain bid documents by email from 08.04.2020 until 19.04.2020 upon payment of the above mentioned non-refundable bid document fee for each bid to the Shroff Division of the Hospital between 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. on working days of the week and between 9.00 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. on Saturdays or by depositing the amount in the Hospital Account.

05. **It is mandatory to submit a letter of request for documents along with a copy of the valid NMRA (CDDA) Registration Certificate for each item and copy of the Company Registration Certificate to obtain bid documents.**

06. Duly perfected sealed bids may either be sent by Registered Post to the Provincial General Hospital, Badulla or deposited in the Tender Box to receive before 2.00 p.m. on 20.04.2020. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be opened at 2.30 p.m. on the same day and the bidder or an authorised representative may be present at the time of opening of bids.

07. Regional Procurement Committee of the Provincial General Hospital, Badulla reserves the right to take the final decision regarding this bid.

**Chairman,
Regional Procurement Committee,
Provincial General Hospital, Badulla.**

Tel. Nos. : 055-2222261

Email : info@badullapgh.org

Fax : 055-2231205

Website : www.badullapgh.org

07.04.2020



Obituaries

SCHNEIDER-LOOS - MR ERNEST TREVOR - At rest with Jesus - Beloved husband of late Marlyn Loos (nee Decker), loving father of Deborah Rodrigo, Stewart Schneider-Loos and Jacqueline Nugara, much loved father-in-law of Tania Schneider-Loos and Clifford Nugara, darling grandpa of Aaron Chambalo, Tatum Rodrigo, Danielle and Ethan Schneider-Loos and Adele, Aidan & Angus Nugara (all of Brisbane, Australia), dearly loved brother of Neville Schneider-Loos, late Yvonne Loos, Erin Decker, Ronald Schneider-Loos, Aureliya Edwards and Benita Holdenbottle, dear brother-in-law of Lilo Schneider-Loos, late Anton Decker, Marie Schneider-Loos, Robin Edwards, Tyrone Holdenbottle, late Brian Decker, late Primrose Shedden,



People observe social distancing measures as they listen to a performance by the Police Band in Colombo. The Tri Forces and Police have arranged these performances to keep the public morale up as they battle the Coronavirus pandemic. (Pictures by Sulochana Gamage)

CLOSER INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION URGED AGAINST COVID-19

The Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, together a number of other political parties across the globe, yesterday issued a call for greater international cooperation to combat COVID-19, which they called "the most urgent and serious challenge to both the health of the humanity and world peace and development".

The statement said that faced with this unprecedented situation, major political parties of various countries tasked with the weighty responsibility of improving people's wellbeing, promoting national development and safeguarding world peace and stability, are making a joint appeal as follows:

I. We extend our deep sympathies and solicitude to those who are suffering from pain and under life threat of COVID-19 as well as their bereaved families. We also pay our loftiest tribute to all the people, health workers in particular, who devote themselves to saving lives and protecting people's health. Our profound condolences go to those who unfortunately passed away in the outbreak.

II. We have recognized that if the COVID-19 outbreak could not be effectively contained in a prompt manner, it would inflict even greater harm to the lives, safety and health of even more people, and exert a severe impact on the economic and social development of most countries as well as international exchanges and cooperation. We call on all countries to put the lives, safety and health of the people above everything else and take resolute and forceful measures to put an end to the spread of the epidemic.



Chinese President Xi Jinping talks to residents



Coronavirus affects everyone around the world

III. We encourage countries to make contingency plans and strategies to combat the epidemic in light of their specific national conditions, with equal emphasis on containing further spread of the epidemic and on patient treatment. Meanwhile, modern science and technology must be applied to the full to ensure the best possible results as speedily as possible.

IV. We call on the general public of all countries to comply with epidemic prevention and mitigation measures with due sense of social responsibility. We encourage countries to fully leverage the strength of civil society organizations and volunteers with a view to unleashing the power of all social sectors to combat the epidemic.

V. We encourage all countries, while devoting efforts to epidemic control, to adopt an integrate approach to ensure economic and social development and honour their commitment to people's living standards and social progress. As per recommendations of the World Health Organization, countries are also encouraged to maintain appropriate level of international exchanges, and the flow of trade, capital and personnel worldwide, in particular to facilitate the cross-border transportation of urgently needed medical equipment and protective materials for epidemic prevention.

VI. We are aware that virus



Researchers work on a COVID-19 vaccine

respects no borders and no country can respond to the challenges alone in the face of the outbreak. Countries must enhance their consciousness of a common community with a shared future for mankind and render each other mutual support and help in an even more proactive manner as more difficult situation arises. To this end, closer international cooperation will enable us to defeat the virus, the humanity's common enemy.

VII. We take note of the significant progress in epidemic prevention and control in China and some other countries, which has bought time and offered experience for the rest of the international community. We highly commend countries including China for adopting an open, transparent and responsible attitude to disclose epidemic related information in a timely fashion, share experience on epidemic response and patient

treatment, and in particular provide to the best of their ability to other affected countries medical and other supplies. These represent a major contribution to the global fight against the epidemic, boosting hope and confidence of countries to win the battle.

VIII. We encourage countries to strengthen the sharing of experience and medical cooperation in containing the outbreak, including joint research and development of specific medicine and vaccine. We call on the provision of material, technical and other support to developing countries and countries in need. Let the sunlight of cooperation disperse the darkness of the epidemic.

IX. We call for science-based professional discussion on issues like epidemic prevention measures and the origin of virus. We strongly oppose politicization of public health issues

and stigmatization of other countries in the name of epidemic control. We stand firmly against all discriminatory comments and practices against any country, region or ethnic group, and any attempt to undermine the cooperation of countries to contain the epidemic.

X. We are of the view that the epidemic has laid bare the need for all countries to further foster the global governance outlook of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration and to support the core role of the United Nations and the World Health Organization in global public health governance. We call for all parties to enhance coordination and cooperation within the framework of G20 and other international mechanisms for joint prevention and control as we strive to build a global community with a shared future for public health.

As major political parties from countries of the world, we undertake to maintain close communication under the unusual circumstances of epidemic outbreak, and ensure better performance of the due role of political guidance for the purpose of injecting political energy to the global fight against the outbreak. We firmly believe that all current difficulties are only temporary, just as the sunlight shall eventually shine after each storm. So long as the international community makes concerted efforts with confidence and resolve and takes a science-based and targeted approach, it shall definitely win the final victory in global campaign against the epidemic. It is our belief that, after the epidemic, the community with a shared future for mankind will emerge even stronger and the humanity will embrace an even brighter tomorrow.



The Sri Lankan on way to quarantine



The Navy on its way to meet the passenger liner

Anura Bandara Herath, a Sri Lankan national performing duties aboard the cruise ship MSC 'Magnifica' was brought ashore by the Navy on a request made by him through social media. The Navy met the passenger liner off the Port of Colombo and transferred him as well as a German passenger who was experiencing a heart ailment. All precautions against the Coronavirus was taken in this exercise. Here are some moments from the mid-sea operation.



The German patient



The Sri Lankan being disinfected



The Sri Lankan being brought ashore

SIGNIFICANCE OF BAK FULL MOON POYA DAY

THE BUDDHA'S SECOND VISIT TO LANKA



SACHITRA MAHENDRA

The significance of Bak poya is historical since it marks the Buddha's second visit to Sri Lanka. This is noteworthy, as Bak is a month of national importance as well.

According to Mahavamsa, the Buddha foresaw an imminent war between two Naga Kings Culodara and Mahodara, uncle and nephew, over a jewel-studded throne that made him think of visiting Sri Lanka for the second time. Professor Wilhelm Geiger explains the conflict in the translation of Mahavamsa:

"That same Naga Mahodara was then a King, gifted with miraculous power in a Naga Kingdom in the ocean, that covered half a thousand Yojanas. His younger sister had been given (in marriage) to the Naga-King on the Kannavaddhamana mountain; her son was Culodara. His mother's father had given to his mother a splendid throne of jewels, then the Naga had died and therefore this war of nephew with uncle was threatening and also the Nagas of the mountains were armed with miraculous power."

Mahavamsa also records that the Buddha was accompanied by a deity to Sri Lanka.

"The deva named Samiddhisumana took a rajayatana-tree standing in Jetavana, his own fair habitation and holding it like a parasol over the conqueror, he with the Teacher's

leave, attended him to that spot where he had formerly dwelt. That very deva had been, in his latest birth, a man in Nagadipa.

On the spot where thereafter the rajayatana-tree stood, he saw paccekabuddhas taking their meal. And at the sight his heart was glad and he offered branches to cleanse the alms-bowl.

Therefore he was reborn in that tree in the pleasant Jetavans garden, and it (the tree) stood afterwards outside at the side of the gate-ram-part. The God of all gods saw (in this) an advantage for that deva and for the sake of the good which should spring (therefrom) for our land, he brought him hither (to Lanka) together with his tree."

Mahavamsa then relates how Buddha settled the dispute and the next development of events.

"Hovering there in mid-air above battlefield the Master, who drives away (spiritual) darkness, called forth dread darkness over the Nagas. Then comforting those who were distressed by terror he once again spread light abroad.

When they saw the Blessed One they joyfully did reverence to the Master's feet. Then preached the Vanquisher to them the doctrine that begets concord and both (Nagas) gladly gave up the throne to the Sage.

"When the Master, having alighted on the earth, had taken his place on a seat there and had been refreshed with celestial food and drink by the Naga-Kings, he the



Lord, established in the (three) refuges and in the moral precepts eighty kotis of snake-spirits, dwellers in the ocean and on the mainland.

"The Naga-King Maniakkhika of Kalyani mother's brother to the Naga Mahodara, who had come thither to take part in the battle and

who, aforetime, at the Buddha's first coming, having heard the true doctrine preached, had become established in the refuges and the moral duties, prayed now to the Tathagata: 'Great is the compassion that thou hast shown us here, O Master!

Hadst thou not appeared we had all been consumed to ashes. May thy

compassion yet light also especially on me, O thou who art rich in loving-kindness, in that thou shalt come again hither to my dwelling country, O thou peerless one'.

When the Buddha had consented by his silence to come thither, he planted the rajayatana-tree on that very spot as a sacred memorial and

the Lord of the Worlds gave over the rajayatana-tree and the precious throne-seat to the Naga-Kings to do homage thereto. 'In remembrance that I have used these do homage to them, ye Naga-Kings!'

The Buddha's calling forth dread darkness over the Nagas should not be misunderstood. The Buddha holds fame for being the Greatest Compassionate on earth. The concept bears a symbolic meaning; Buddha preached the dark side of the world, and the Naga tribes were scared just to hear and visualise them. That paved the way for them to a comfort later on.

The Buddha's visits to Sri Lanka are believed to be false and legendary in certain sects. One reason is that it is not contained in Tripitaka, the official document of the Buddha's life.

Tripitaka contains more of philosophically important factors, rather than history. Buddha had been to Sri Lanka thrice: the first visit to Mahiyangana, second to Jaffna, then called as Nagadipa, and third to Kelaniya.

The common question is that if the Buddha had already been to Sri Lanka, not only once, but thrice, why did Arahant Mahinda visit Sri Lanka once again. Arahant Mahinda, of course, had a mission to fulfil: to establish the Upasampada Bhikkhu order. The suitable time was not ripe for Buddha to consider establishing a serious Bhikkhu order. However, Buddhism was not alien when Arahant Mahinda set foot.

Rest and recharge the mind!

Cultivating Samadhi and Panna would make our journey toward nibbana smooth and trouble-free

AJAHN SUCHART

When we come to the temple to give alms to the monastic order, to keep the moral precepts and to cultivate mental development, we are in effect creating happiness for ourselves.

There are two kinds of happiness namely, physical and mental. To feel good physically is not hard to do, all we need are the four requisites of life such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine to prevent the body from getting sick, go hungry or thirsty. But the happiness of the body is insignificant when compared to that of the mind both in strength and intensity. Though the body may be well and fit, the mind could still be afflicted with sorrow and pain that could adversely affect the body. On the other hand when the body is not well, has aches and pains here and there, a happy mind could diminish or eliminate them entirely. Taking good care of the mind has therefore become the central theme of the Buddha's teaching.

When the body gets sick it doesn't hurt so much if the mind is happy. A happy mind could rise above the physical pain. But when the mind is unhappy, it could cause the physical fitness or well-being to diminish or disappear entirely. For this reason the Buddha kept stressing the importance of taking good care of the mind, more than taking care of the body. The mind needs the Dhamma, meritorious and wholesome kamma to make it happy. Otherwise it could never be happy. What we are doing here today is installing the Dhamma inside our heart and mind because the Dhamma is like medicine that could cure the sorrow and pain caused by the mental defilement or kilesa that have been embedded inside our heart and mind since time immemorial and accompanied us through countless rounds of rebirth. We have to use the Dhamma, wholesome, skillful, good and meritorious kamma to cleanse our heart and mind of the kilesa in order to eliminate all of our sorrow and pain.

The Buddha's enlightenment is cause for rejoicing and celebration because of the invaluable assistance he could offer to all sentient beings, as he is the only person in the entire universe who has discovered the secret to true happiness or supreme bliss that results from the elimination of the kilesa from the mind by the good and wholesome kamma. The kilesa are like germs and viruses inside the body that could cause sickness and death such as the HIV virus that causes aids, an incurable disease. While the kilesa are not eradicated from

the mind, stress and suffering can still afflict all of us.

THE DHAMMA MEDICINE

We are fortunate because we have the Buddha to help us cure our mental illness. He is like a physician who has discovered the Dhamma medicine to heal our mind. Unfortunately no one has yet found a cure for Aids and, for those afflicted, death seems to be the only outcome. Before the Buddha became enlightened no one in this world knew how to make the mind stay happy all the time. Now we know by his teaching that bliss and contentment can only be realized through the eradication of the kilesa, namely greed, anger and delusion from our mind by the cultivation of Dhamma, good and meritorious kamma, a message he had been propagating for forty-five years.

The purpose of our coming to the temple is to cultivate the various levels of Dhamma, skillful and wholesome kamma as much as we can. Some of us could only cultivate dana, the giving of the four requisites such as food, clothing, medicine and shelter to the monastic order. Others could do more, like keeping the five or eight precepts depending on the strength of our indriya or mental faculties like saddha (conviction), viriya (persistence), sati (mindfulness), samadhi (concentration), and panna (discernment) that we have developed thus far. If they are highly developed we would be able to practice bhavana or mental development in order to lift the mind up to higher planes of bliss, tranquility and purity by eliminating the various kinds of kilesa.

RESTLESS MIND

The Buddha exhorts us to calm our mind as the first priority because when the mind is restless and agitated it is confused, it can't tell north from south, cause from effect, right from wrong, good from bad, pain from pleasure; it is deluded, not seeing things clearly as they are, such as seeing pleasure in sensual gratification when in fact it's miserable and painful. When we are addicted to sensual pleasure we are subjected to stress and discontent like a drinker or a drug user, whereas a non-drinker or a non-user of drugs would know the difference, that it's better not to be addicted to alcohol or drugs.

When we are possessed by the kilesa or delusion we would not be able to see clearly. It is therefore imperative that we should first make the mind calm in order to clear up the clouds of defilement blinding the mind like purifying water of pollutants. Once the water is separated from the pollutants it would become clear and transparent and would ena-

ble us to see what's in the water. It is the same with the mind, when it's defiled it would become murky, couldn't see clearly, not knowing what is obscuring its vision. But once the mind has calmed down it would temporarily be cleared of the defilement of greed, anger and delusion, enabling it to experience a brief moment of joy and peace, long enough to let it know what true happiness is and where to find it.

Next we must use discernment (panna) to separate good from bad, right from wrong, wholesome from unwholesome, etc., just like separating the pollutants from the water. With a mind calm and content we would see that the defilement (kilesa) such as greed, anger and delusion are really a threat to our happiness and contentment because when the mind is calm and tranquil, it would render the kilesa temporarily inactive, creating peace and contentment as a result, but as soon as the mind emerged from repose (samadhi) the kilesa would become active again by inciting greed, anger and delusion into action causing it to become restless and agitated. We would be able to see the harmful effect caused by the kilesa very clearly if we have already developed samadhi even if we haven't heard of the kilesa before, we would know them by their destructive impact on our peace of mind and mental well being.

When we realize this, we must apply panna (insight) based on the four noble truths (ariya-sacca) and the three characteristics of existence (ti-lakkhana) inherent in all conditioned phenomena namely, being inconstant (anicca), stressful (dukkha), and anatta (not-self) to eliminate them. If we cling to anything in this world we would be consumed by stress, sorrow and pain because they are impermanent, subject to change and dissolution and are not ours or ourselves such as our body for example, which we can see clearly will get old, get sick and die one day, sooner or later. If we cling to it we would then wish it to live for as long as possible which is a form of greed or craving that runs contrary to the truth of the Buddha's teaching that says all bodies are impermanent, cause stress and anguish, and not a self.

If we have the Dhamma teaching residing in our mind to remind us of the truth of the ti-lakkhana we would be able to eliminate our attachment to our body because it's like a lump of burning coal that would burn our hands if we scoop it up. But if we merely look, it would not cause us any pain, because the body is just a lump of the four physical elements namely, earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (gas) and fire (heat) that our delu-

ed mind happens to take possession of. If we know this and let go of our clinging, it would then not cause us any pain or anguish. It's similar to taking possession of a plot of land that doesn't belong to anybody and claims it to be our property. If someone should snatch it away from us we would be sorry because we were attached to something that doesn't really belong to us in the first place and would not permanently remain with us anyway. Our body is like this plot of land that we stake our claim to by considering it to be ours and ourselves. When it becomes old, sick and dies, we would be consumed by sorrow and pain because we lack panna or insight into its true nature.

ELIMINATING THE KILESAS

If we continually contemplate on the truth of the three characteristics of existence such as anicca (impermanence), dukkha (stress) and anatta (not-self), we would not dare to cling to anything or wish for things to be as we would like them to be, but instead we'd let them be as they are and will be, and be ready to see them depart even if they are our possessions. If we could really do it, then we wouldn't be consumed by pain and sorrow because we have panna (wisdom) and vipassana (insight) to eliminate the kilesa from our mind leaving it peaceful, content and blissful. We'd have achieved the supreme bliss that the Buddha had pointed out to us by declaring that the happiness of this world can never equal or surpass the supreme bliss that arises out of a mind permanently subdued by the total removal of the kilesa from the mind.

The bliss that results from the development of samadhi (concentration) is not this supreme bliss because of its temporary nature. Once the mind emerges from this samadhi, the kilesa which were also subdued by the power of samadhi would also emerge to wreak havoc on the mind again, which is not the same as the supreme bliss that results from the work of panna (wisdom) that has completely eradicated the kilesa from the mind, not allowing them to ever return again, like the minds of the Buddha and his noble disciples. If we truly aspire to this supreme bliss, we must develop both samadhi and panna. Do not be content with just samadhi because it's like a piece of rock sitting on a patch of grass preventing the grass from growing. But when the rock is removed the grass would eventually grow again, because it was not uprooted, just like the kilesa, which can't be uprooted by samadhi alone. We need panna (wisdom) or vipassana (insight) to do the job.

Therefore after we have developed samadhi

we must then turn to the development of panna or vipassana by continually contemplating on the characteristics of all conditioned phenomena such as the five khandha or the five physical and mental components of our existence namely, rupa (body), vedana (feeling), sanna (memory or perception), sankhara (thought), and vinnana (sensory awareness) as being impermanent, stressful and not-self. By continually contemplating on these three characteristics of conditioned phenomena panna (wisdom) would gradually transform from conceptual to practical. Conceptual wisdom is contemplation of the truth while practical wisdom is the application of the truth in our daily life like when we get sick and become anxious. We must let go of our attachment to the body if we want to eliminate our anxiety. We should always be vigilant by constantly developing panna and vipassana after we emerge from samadhi.

SAMADHI AND PANNA

After contemplating for a while, the mind gets tired. We must then return to samadhi for a rest, after having rested we would then do more contemplation. This is the way to develop samadhi and panna - they go together like the left and right foot we use for walking, taking turns stepping. Don't listen to those who say skip samadhi, develop panna straight away, or those who say once you have developed samadhi, panna would automatically appear. These views are not correct. In fact both of them have to be cultivated and developed, one at a time alternatively. They perform different duties. Samadhi is for resting and recharging the mental energy, while panna is like a knife for cutting our attachment to things that agitate and vex the mind.

We must watch what we are getting into in our practice. If we are devoting all our time to samadhi even after we have already mastered it, we should turn to developing panna or vipassana by contemplating on the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena such as our body, feeling, memory, thought and sensory awareness.

But if we are engaging entirely in contemplating without the support of samadhi, we could become more deluded by our contemplation, by thinking that we have become enlightened when no such thing has actually occurred. We should therefore rest and recharge the mind from time to time to keep it in balance. Samadhi and panna are interdependent; they support and assist each other. Cultivating both would make our journey toward nibbana smooth and trouble-free.

(Translated by Chantaporn Gomutputra)

NEXT GENERATION ONLINE LEARNING FROM SLIIT

The Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT) opened the doors for all their students from all five faculties of the university, to attend a virtual campus on the 18th of March this year, creating a milestone in the history of higher education in Sri Lanka.

This move which came in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak was an unprecedented success with over 8,000 students attending interactive lectures online daily.

Professor Lalith Gamage, CEO of SLIIT says, "We are on the cusp of transitioning to the next generation of online learning, for us there is a silver lining in this very dreary situation, where we can use it as a laboratory for experimenting and learning how to communicate and teach students in a remote environment. Whilst we know we are well ahead in our delivery for an interactive lecture which is very close to a face-to-face teaching-learning experience, our faculty and management will find ways of further improving the quality and delivery of the lecture. In online delivery one key factor is availability of bandwidth and data, we are very thankful to SLT and Dialog for making data free of charge to our students during this time."

SLIIT has joined top universities of the world in moving to online delivery of their lectures. Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Rochester and the State University of New York are some institutions that have already moved their campuses to the web.

In the Sri Lankan context, although the Government has requested universities to consider online delivery, only SLIIT was ready to give a precise time-

line for moving to an online platform. "Not only were we ready with the infrastructure, but most of our content was already online, at the time COVID-19 hit Sri Lanka last February. Online teaching is often misinterpreted as a system where students have access to an online repository of lecture material such as lecture slides, lecture notes or supplementary material. This can be facilitated by any traditional Learning Management System (LMS), but what we are providing our students is interactive and as close to a physical classroom experience as possible," said Dr. Malitha Wijesundara, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities & Sciences at SLIIT.

SLIIT moved to an LMS platform in 2006 and from then on all their modules maintained a module page with the content for each week, including quizzes and assignments done online. But in 2018, SLIIT pilot-tested a technology developed by a start-up company in their Technology Incubator 'eduscope.' The technology was meant for lecture capture, which automatically records lectures and uploads to a common portal for students to view later.



"In 2019, the technology was fully deployed in several of our lecture theatres and it became very popular amongst students. We saw an increase in the number of students who opted for recorded lectures. The system provides detailed analytics on how the students view each lecture with a per-minute breakdown to indicate if they find some sections more challenging to understand," says the Dean.

The system allows students to playback the lectures on their phones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs seamlessly. This gives the students a considerable advantage as they can playback and bookmark areas for revision and make short notes on unclear areas to get further instruction on. Such information becomes visible to the lecturer who can intervene immediately to support the students.

To supplement this system, SLIIT has now rolled out a live teaching technology by partnering with Cisco. The Cisco WebEx platform allows lecturers and students to stay in their homes while they teach and learn, and students follow lectures in real-time.

SLIIT uses both platforms i.e. the Lecture capture technology and Cisco WebEx in their online delivery, which currently supports over 10,000 students who have access to 300 academics providing learning.

Dr. Wijesundara says, "while we may face many challenges in rolling out our online campus, we believe this is a great breakthrough and our students are benefiting vastly from it."



Apple chips in for online education

As schools across the world adjust to distance learning, Apple has announced some new tools that aim to ease the transition to distance learning. Apple is announcing a free 30-minute one-on-one virtual coaching sessions with Apple Professional Learning Specialists and a new Apple Education remote learning video series.

Virtual one-on-one coaching sessions with Apple Professional Learning specialists are being made available for free to help educators improve their approach to online teaching and workflows. Educators wanting to set up a session can send an email to appleprofessional-learning@apple.com to request a coaching session. Apple has more than 100 educators on staff who are ready to work with teachers.

Apple has also released a new video-based training series to help schools with distance learning. These videos are designed to help teachers use the built-in features of their Apple devices to enable distance learning for their students. The first two episodes are available to watch now, and new videos will be added soon. As of now, all videos are available in English,

with English subtitles. Closed captioning in other languages is coming soon.

Here's what you can expect in the video library:

Prepare Resources for Remote Learning

This video will help educators learn how to get up and running for remote learning with iPad. We'll explore ways to access school resources and find apps that support remote learning. Tips will include using iPad built-in features to scan documents and stay organized, using Markup to annotate teacher materials and student work, getting set up with Voice Memos, and more.

Create and Share Presentations and Demos

Presenting information in compelling ways is even more important when you're not able to face-to-face with your students. In this video we'll show you how to use iPad built-in features to create demos and instructional videos and share them with your colleagues and students.

Using Keynote, or any presentation tool, you'll learn how to record content and create demos on iPad for use with your students.

Create Engaging Videos With Clips

Clips is a free app that lets educators and students easily create and share fun and engaging videos. We'll show you how educators can use Clips to create instructional videos for exploring new skills and ideas — and how students can make videos to share what they've learned.

It's great to see Apple offering these one-on-one sessions for teachers. A lot of educators are likely outside of their comfort zones, so by providing these coaching sessions, they'll get up to speed on how best to take advantage of their iPads and Macs to enable distance learning.



E-Learning: A Bangladesh Perspective

SHAMSA MORTUZA

The closures of academic institutions for two weeks in response to the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping the globe have caught many of us involved in the academia by surprise. The immediate purpose of the suspension of classes is to ensure social distancing by discouraging our young ones from physically gathering in a crowded place. The intention to stop the novel coronavirus from spreading is noble. However, in all probability, the moratorium is going to be prolonged, and the end is not in sight. All of a sudden, many working parents do not know what to do with the mischief-making adorable little humans in their houses during the daytime. Many teachers do not know how to compensate for the lost time and finish their lesson plans on time. Many students do not know how to negotiate with this unexpected isolation.

For the most, one thing is certain: it means missing classes altogether. Some of the private universities tried to switch to online platform trialling

e-teaching. My institution, ULAB, has been using a learning management system—MOODLE—for the last five years or so. We have mostly used it as a supplementary platform for in-class teaching. In response to the closures, we initiated an emergency management protocol and decided to migrate to e-teaching with an aim of delivering lectures, uploading learning materials, and assessing learning progress online. Our faculty members were enthusiastic; many were pro-active enough to adjust and adopt. The response from our students, however, was an eye-opener. It gave us a rare insight into the psychosocial behaviour of our students as well as the lack of nationwide e-structure to support off-campus online teaching. Our tiny effort is a pebble in the pond, and the waves have reached many shores, exposing a critical gap in our broader education sector that lacks emergency preparedness.

The unofficial Facebook page of our university is crowded with comments from students who have gone back to their hometowns or villages

where they reportedly do not have regular access to the internet. Many of them do not have PCs, laptops or smartphones. Even if they do, they do not have the speed and bandwidth to connect with a live classroom. They are worried about having uninterrupted power supply during a real-time examination. Printing, scanning a document, uploading assignments within a given time are concerns shared by our students. In our response, we tried to remain flexible, offering both synchronous and asynchronous services in multiple avenues and platforms. At the same time, we have realised that our students are the microcosm of a system that screams inadequacy. I am sure many of the students are presenting the problem as larger than it is to skip exams or classes as they are used to equating closures with vacation. Add to that the genuine resilience against a system that is new. Still our hiccups suggest a mal-digested education system that is currently in place.

A survey done in the US shows only nine percent of educators are comfortable in teaching in a completely online environment. One suspects, in our culture, the number is going to be significantly low among those who have been solely exposed to bricks-and-mortar classrooms. For many of the old-school teachers, a virtual classroom where it is difficult to pick up the non-verbal cues of students (e.g. whether they are bored or excited, confused about a topic, shy to ask a question, etc.) robs us of the fun of teaching. Then again, good teaching is good teaching. The challenge for us then is to prepare the course contents in a way so that the human side of a teacher remains

intact. Students must feel the warmth of a teacher even while attending a virtual classroom. A teacher can show the warmth by intuitively placing herself/himself in the shoes of the learners, explaining what is expected of a student, and making the learning experience pleasant.

Having conducted many teachers' training courses for intermediate and graduate level teachers, I know the banality of my supposition above. Our peripheral schools and colleges are yet to make digital experience central to their pedagogical practices. The ICT in Education Masterplan Review 2019 prepared by Unesco, which is available on the website of the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh, may tell you that there has been a significant progress in the incorporation of ICT in classrooms. This simply involves equipping schools with computers and multimedia projectors. Whether they are properly being used is a different issue. While I was teaching the teachers how to make their classes interactive and to apply blended learning, my trainee teachers told me that, in most cases, the projectors in their institutions were locked in the rooms of the principals. A teacher can issue the equipment at her/his own risk, giving written assurances that she/he will be responsible for any damage as the institutions do not have any maintenance budget. This is symbolic of how our digital progress is contained. The equipment lies in a box, nipping any possibility of thinking-out-of-the-box in its bud.

When students from these institutions come to the tertiary system, particularly to places where student-centred active learning is practiced, they find it difficult to cope with the



changes and challenges. The recent aversion to digital classrooms made me reflect on the contextual background. What is even more alarming is the fact that there is an absolute lack of preparedness to deal with crisis management in the education sector. All the directives so far involve health and safety related issues. There are no official directives regarding the safeguarding of the education of our future generation in a prolonged crisis scenario. Hence, immediate guidance is needed for the clueless teachers, students and parents so that they can prepare for educational continuity. Similar guidance is needed so that psychosocial support can be made available to both teachers and students during long-term out-of-school closures. Education is not only transmission of knowledge from educators to learners; it is related to the holistic growth and wellbeing of the individuals concerned. Education shapes one's personality, one's attitudes towards life, and makes one a social being. How we do that in a virtual setting (better

not to confuse with social media) is a "koti taka" question!

We need a plan for strategic interventions—a national contingency plan for the education sector which may go beyond fire drilling or natural disasters. The pandemonium ensued by the pandemic has given rise to new concerns. Long-term social distancing, self-isolation is not only a probability but a reality. Migrating to the online teaching platform can be a logical step. Countries such as Syria, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and the Philippines have earlier adopted flexible distance learning to deal with wartime emergency. Maybe the time has come for us to educate ourselves and brace ourselves against the new dangers that may not wear a crown; they may appear in the shape of climate change or in some other formats where we will need to relearn everything that we have learned so far. And that day is not far, yet we are far away from being ready for it.

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Social Media during a pandemic

Sri Lankans are talking with each other more than ever before on a nationwide scale as the 'home stay' and 24-hour curfew regimes lengthen in the densely populated urban metro regions especially but also throughout the country and the whole nation tensely lives through this ominous pandemic.

"Are you all OK? Taking all precautions?" we are asking each other more than ever before at a single point of time on this island. With an average of two mobile telephones per Sri Lankan, the highest mobile phone penetration among all SAARC nations, the phone lines are truly 'buzzing'.

Actually, 'buzzing' is an inadequate adjective given that so many videos shared among us reverberate with loud sound – loud laughs, shouted comic dialogues, blaring music and stranger noises as bored people get imaginative in cyberspace using the amazing digital technology our smartphones now possess.

Today's smartphones, especially the more sophisticated ones, easily record videos and our telecommunications system enables immediate sharing and forwarding. The communication is not just across the island but across the globe, reaching Sri Lankans in the Diaspora as well.

Firstly, the nature of the crisis we face affects all of us, not just those directly infected. A whole city neighbourhood may get cordoned off if one or two or more cases of infection are detected. And the fear of the rapid spread makes us worry about our relations, friends and colleagues enough to pick up the phone and message them, if not call them.

The fear of deadly disease is something that stirs our natural instincts for species survival more than war and even most natural disasters since this death threat is something that works within our very bodies. We need to check on each other.

The added boost to telecommunications traffic is our enforced immobility and partial isolation within households. Stuck at home and with time on our hands due to either fully suspended work routines or drastically reduced 'work-from-home' routines, people are happy to go on the Net.

The majority of Sri Lankans go on the Internet via their smartphones. Millions are busy sharing all kinds of things via Web-based communications – from the most practical matters like supply delivery opportunities to jokes, to information about pandemic trends, to government announcements, to gossip about bio-warfare conspiracies to sexist jokes, to pornography and crude racism.

The biggest concern is the messaging that speculates about 'suppressed information' that hides the 'real' situation which is alleged to be far worse than the 'official' pronouncements or even the reportage of the mainstream professional news media.

The sheer density of the networks is such that a single viciously misleading message rapidly spreads with considerable anonymity unless it is directly tracked by the authorities in collaboration with the server companies.

One dominant gossip disinformation is about the deliberate design of this virus species for malicious purposes either by a single country or by some fanatical group. Another disinformation threat is the constant speculation about the lengthening of the curfew or the geographical broadening of the lockdown.

The sophistication of our cyber information systems is such that the authorities can and do make announcements intermittently as and when contingencies demand it. Just as much as the authorities may make pronouncements at any time, likewise, public speculation on the Net, especially on social media, happens at any time.

There is also the constant danger of elements in society or on the global stage (geopolitically) deliberately injecting dangerous and destabilising speculation into mass of messaging on social media.

Whether innocently spontaneous or, geopolitically deliberate, such speculation on social media about sudden 'total lockdowns' could be enough to generate public panic over supply needs and medical needs. Disinformation ripple effects on assessments of production and markets could affect the economy. Carefully laid plans by the Government or Health authorities or law and order agencies could be undermined by such messaging.

Similar speculative messaging could fuel inter-ethnic mistrust and fears. Already we have experienced some volume of ethnic hate speech targeting certain communities. This kind of inter-ethnic virulence considerably distracts from the need to be fully alert and, socially co-operative, against the pandemic.

We simply cannot afford to indulge in anything that undermines the social discipline and focus needed to survive this pandemic. The slightest laxity is enough for yet another infection of a Sri Lankan. Every added infection case further delays our trajectory toward recovery from the pandemic.

This is why the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and its ancillary monitoring bodies are busy watching public communications to interdict any such disruptive messaging and can be expected to punish those individuals and groups indulging in such behaviour.

The citizenry, too, must join in this endeavour with self-discipline. We simply must restrain our urge to 'forward' any or every message we get. And whatever we do communicate with others must contribute to the health of all of us and not pander to our subjective whims and pet hates.



PATH TO PEACE AND STILLNESS

AJAHN CHAH

It's the shortest and most direct path. You can come and argue with me on points of Dhamma, but I won't join in. Rather than argue back, I'd just offer some reflections for you to consider. Please understand what the Buddha taught: let go of everything. Let go with knowing and awareness. Without knowing and awareness, the letting go is no different than that of cows and water buffaloes. Without putting your heart into it, the letting go isn't correct. You let go because you understand conventional reality. This is non-attachment. The Buddha taught that in the beginning stages of Dhamma practice you should work very hard, develop things thoroughly and attach a lot. Attach to the Buddha. Attach to the Dhamma. Attach to the Sangha. Attach firmly and deeply. That's what the Buddha taught. Attach with sincerity and persistence and hold on tight.

In my own search I tried nearly every possible means of contemplation. I sacrificed my life for the Dhamma, because I had faith in the reality of Enlightenment and the Path to get there. These things actually do exist, just like the Buddha said they did. But to realize them takes practice, right practice. It takes pushing yourself to the limit. It takes the courage to train, to reflect, and to fundamentally change. It takes the courage to actually do what it takes. And how do you do it? Train the heart. The thoughts in our heads tell us to go in one direction, but the Buddha tells us to go in another. Why is it necessary to train? Because the heart is totally encrusted with and plastered over with defilements. That's what a heart is like that has not yet been transformed through the training. It's unreliable, so don't believe it. It's not yet virtuous. How can we trust a heart that lacks purity and clarity? Therefore the Buddha warned us not to put our trust in a defiled heart. Initially the heart is only the hired hand of defilement, but if they associate together for an extended period of time, the heart perverts to become defilement itself. That's why the Buddha taught us not to trust our hearts.

If we take a good look at our monastic training discipline, we'll see that the whole thing is about training the heart. And whenever we train the heart we feel hot and bothered. As soon as we're hot and bothered we start to complain. 'Boy, this practice is incredibly difficult! It's impossible'. But the Buddha didn't think like that. He considered that when the training was causing us heat and friction, that meant we were on the right track. We don't

think that way. We think it's a sign that something is wrong. This misunderstanding is what makes the practice seem so arduous. In the beginning we feel hot and bothered, so we think we're off track. Everyone wants to feel good, but they're less concerned about whether it's right or not. When we go against the grain of the defilements and challenge our cravings, of course we feel suffering. We get hot, upset, and bothered and then quit. We think we're on the wrong path. The Buddha, however, would say we're getting it right. We're confronting our defilements, and they are what is getting hot and bothered; but we think it's us who are hot and bothered. The Buddha taught that it's the defilements that get stirred up and upset. It's the same for everyone.

That's why Dhamma practice is so demanding. People don't examine things clearly. Generally, they lose the Path on either the side of self-indulgence or self-torment. They get stuck in these two extremes. On one hand they like to indulge their heart's desires. Whatever they feel like doing they just do it. They like to sit in comfort. They love to lie down and stretch out in comfort. Whatever they do, they seek to do it in comfort. This is what I mean by self-indulgence: clinging to feeling good. With such indulgence how could Dhamma practice possibly progress?

If we can no longer indulge in comfort, sensuality and feeling good, we become irritated. We get upset and angry and suffer because of it. This is falling off the Path on the side of self-torment. This is not the path of a peaceful sage, not the way of someone who's still. The Buddha warned not to stray down these two sidetracks of self-indulgence and self-torment. When experiencing pleasure, just know that with awareness.

When experiencing anger, ill will, and irritation, understand that you are not following in the footsteps of the Buddha. Those aren't the paths of people seeking peace, but the roads of common villagers. A monk at peace doesn't walk down those roads. He strides straight down the middle with self-indulgence on the left and self-torment on the right. This is correct Dhamma practice.

If you're going to take up this monastic training, you have to walk this Middle Way, not getting worked up about either happiness or unhappiness. Set them down. But it feels like they're kicking us around. First they kick us from one side, 'Ow!', then they kick us from the other, 'Ow!' We feel like the clapper in our wooden bell, knocked back and forth from side to side. The Middle Way is all about letting go of happiness and unhappiness, and the right practice is the practice in the middle. When the craving for happiness hits and we don't satisfy it, we feel the pain.

Walking down the Middle Path of the Buddha is arduous and challenging. There are just these two extremes of good and bad. If we

believe what they tell us, we have to follow their orders. If we become enraged at someone, we immediately go searching for a stick to attack them. No patient endurance. If we love someone we want to caress them from head to toe. Am I right? These two sidetracks completely miss the middle.

This is not what the Buddha recommended. His teaching was to gradually put these things down. His practice was a path leading out of existence, away from rebirth - a path free of becoming, birth, happiness, unhappiness, good, and evil.

Those people who crave existence are blind to what's in the middle. They fall off the Path on the side of happiness and then completely pass over the middle on their way to the other side of dissatisfaction and irritation. They continually skip over the center. This sacred place is invisible to them as they rush back and forth. They don't stay in that place where there is no existence and no birth. They don't like it, so they don't stay. Either they go down out of their home and get bitten by a dog or fly up to get pecked by a vulture. This is existence.

Humanity is blind to that which is free from existence with no rebirth. The human heart is blind to it, so it repeatedly passes it by and skips it over.

The Middle Way walked by the Buddha, the Path of correct Dhamma practice, transcends existence and rebirth. The mind that is beyond both the wholesome and the unwholesome is released. This is the path of a peaceful sage. If we don't walk it we'll never be a sage at peace. That peace will never have a chance to bloom. Why? Because of existence and rebirth. Because there's birth and death. The path of the Buddha is without birth or death. There's no low and no high. There's no happiness and no suffering.

There's no good and no evil. This is the straight path. This is the path of peace and stillness. It's peacefully free of pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow. This is how to practice Dhamma. Experiencing this, the mind can stop. It can stop asking questions. There's no longer any need to search for answers. There! That's why the Buddha said that the Dhamma is something that the wise know directly for themselves. No need to ask anybody. We understand clearly for ourselves without a shred of doubt that things are exactly as the Buddha said they were.

If we can no longer indulge in comfort, sensuality and feeling good, we become irritated. We get upset and angry and suffer because of it. This is falling off the Path on the side of self-torment. This is not the path of a peaceful sage, not the way of someone who's still. The Buddha warned not to stray down these two sidetracks of self-indulgence and self-torment. When experiencing pleasure, just know that with awareness. When experiencing anger, ill will, and irritation, understand that you are not following in the footsteps of the Buddha.

DEMYSTIFYING THE TRADE-OFF BETWEEN BUSINESS REALITIES AND HEALTH RISK

DHINESHA RUWANTHI PERERA

In the backdrop of COVID-19 (Corona Pandemic), plethora of news and awareness is focusing on health education in the interest of national health along with the intention of safeguarding the Constitutional right to healthy environment for every citizen. Local Media deeply discusses statistics about active cases, critical conditions, recovered, and even deaths from Corona Pandemic. However, with still scant discussions, it is worthwhile to decipher the impact of the deadly virus on social distancing. While some consider distancing from fellow friends, colleagues and one another as an opportunity for self-time alone and social isolation, there is measurable impact on organizations which include business enterprises, financial services, advisory services, utilities, retailers with further emphasis on all forms of stakeholders in a supply chain of goods and/or services in the country.

Customers and end-consumers / end-users are encouraged to exercise a "non-touch technique" or non-tactile approach to promote healthier practices in society and during associations among one another. Therefore, three typical cases namely; grocery retailers, banking services and advisory work services take this non-tactical approach amidst the health risk situation with the intention of minimizing contact time among individuals. In spite of these services being readily available and supplied, citizens still seem to assume only a nominal benefit from it and does not understand the real benefit(s) yielded to citizens and the organization supplying the services too.

In this backdrop, it is useful and vital to measure the extent to which the technology and Information Communication techniques have vitally facilitated the benefits to both organizations and its stakeholders. It is certain that technology is the facilitator of such convenience processes and the Government will further benefit if the gains and losses from such mechanisms can be quantified. This approach is also in the interest of the providers of essential services. In this scenery, the landscape of the enterprise organizational transactions will encounter a pattern shift in management and legal aspects inclusively where enterprises and the legal framework intersect.

Business and Legal perspectives

Therefore, from the company point of view and the Government there are organizational benefits that are realized while transacting with the general



public. Ideally stakeholders may perceive such outcomes of online business transactions as a benefit to them, overlooking any dis-benefits they may be realized throughout phases of the project lifecycles. While at crucial time the spotlights are on medical concerns relating to the pandemic the managerial implication COVID-19 had brought on organizations, stakeholders and the wider nation may be discounted. Thus alarming a necessity to effectively measure the benefit(s) and thereby manage resources of the country appropriately and moderately during a pandemic situation with such foreseeable and unforeseeable risks.

On the flip-side the legal landscape of the country relating to English law-based electronic transactions interprets the current business dimension in a purposeful manner. In compliance with the objectives of Electronic transaction Act 19/2006 the online businesses facilitate domestic e-commerce by eliminating legal barriers (S 2a), promote efficient delivery of government services by means of electronic filling of documents and reliable forms of communications (S 2c) and encourage the use of reliable forms of electronic commerce (S 2b). It can be reasonably justified that the business transactions on technological platforms are in align with the law passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka in the context of being governed and regulated by the Act 19/2006 even after the lapse of more than a decade.

E governance and benefits

As Sri Lanka on par with other nations cradle electronic governance (e-governance) methodologies the 'business to consumers' and 'government to citizens' models are turning up to technology platforms. In the limelight of corona and its destruction on civic lives e-governance project benefits are being discussed, nevertheless in limited thresholds. Online transaction benefits approach is categorized into benefit identification, benefit realization planning, benefit control and benefit realization. In this manner, banking services are encouraging online money transfers, mobile alerts, call to inquire bank balances, e-statements among others to facilitate the non-touch banking method through electronic transactions. Certainly the Government foresees a tangible benefit in this process addressing benefit identification and realization planning as at now. It is still required to enlighten citizens of the extent to which benefits are realized while the gain(s) of the project is actually felt.

Measurement approach

In the practical case of online business transactions the organization and government consistently emphasize on health benefits. The materialization of the benefit depends on adoption of non-touch techniques and customer engagement with government regulations in the light of the risky environment. While the business cases are outwardly only an indication of hopeful futuristic returns, there are much timely real benefits and gains to the enterprises, customers and country at large.

In measuring such benefits the following method can be used. The approach is rarely practiced (Low), moderately practiced (medium) and frequently (High)

Figure 1: Novel approach to quantify the measurement of health benefits during health risk pattern I

Realization of health benefits		Customer engagement with regulations		
		Low	Medium	High
Non-touch business approach	Low	1 Very low Health	2 Low Health	3 Moderate Health
	Medium	2 Low Health	3 Moderate Health	4 High Health
	High	3 Moderate Health	4 High health	5 Very high Health

Source: Author

On an alternative business case if we map customers' isolation with operation automation as identified benefits the materialization of desired benefits can be measured at five (5) different categories. Stated value is rarely observed (Low), moderately observed (Medium) and frequently (High).

Figure 2: Novel approach to quantify the measurement of health benefits during health risk pattern II

Realization of health benefits		Customers' isolation		
		Low	Medium	High
Operation Automation	Low	1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Sometimes
	Medium	2 Seldom	3 Sometimes	4 On most occasions
	High	3 Sometimes	4 On most occasions	5 Always

These business cases and the benefit measurement are supported by formulae and mathematics. In an environment down-turn, the identified benefits of electronic transactions will only be progressively realized over time. Hence the benefit planning and controlling should be wisely managed. In the times of Corona pandemic or any similar crisis this measurement approach to quantify the benefits, outcomes and gains will be an invaluable resource of knowledge.

The author is a Senior Lecturer and a researcher in Organizational Benefit Management in Projects.

Let's not stop singing in the lifeboats

MALINDA SENEVIRATNE

Even in the flood of well-meaning, ill-intended, harmless, spirit-lifting and depressing posts, sometimes a soft, pink petal makes its presence felt. This is the quote that floated up from the void. Voltaire. 'Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.'

Well, this is a shipwreck unlike any in remembered history. The downside is that we have, as a species, done everything possible to wreck the ship, steering it into tumultuous waters, unforgiving storms and of course known and unknown rocks. This is one that hadn't been marked on any of the crude maps we've used to guide us. What's worse is that we wrecked the ship long before we hit this rock, but pretended that it had been and will always be 'plain sailing.' Now we are struggling in the lifeboats and we cannot pretend any more.

The upside. People. Hope. Heart. Community. Solidarity. Song. The things that sustained us through the longest and darkest nights infested with nightmares and werewolves.

My friend Sudat Pasqual wrote about a song he heard.

'I was in the train on my way home from work a few hours ago. As my stop was approaching, I got up to get my backpack on and was having a little difficulty with one strap with the train lurching around. I felt the bag lift and a hand help me get the strap right. I turned and thanked him. "If you don't have the pack on right, your back will hurt tomorrow", he said. I agreed and thanked him again. I noticed him get on the train a few stations before, he was with a group who I am quite



certain are homeless. I am glad that social distancing never even crossed my mind when he was helping me.'

Social distancing does not mean shutting the door on solidarity and humanity. That's the rather long title of this song. You could trim it to 'solidarity and heart.' That's a song whose melody moves from one story to another, one house to another house, from village to village. Somewhere, right now, someone is collecting and parceling rations to be distributed among the needy. Somewhere, right now, someone is talking with friends about how to obtain equipment urgently needed by medical practitioners.

Right now, from the balcony of the small apartment I have been self-isolated for almost three weeks, I can see kites. I saw them yesterday too. It's a late evening ritual, almost. There are kites resisting the setting sun and there are kites embracing it. The kites soar like a dream that will not be pinned down. The kites, they are singing, absolutely.

There are houses whichever direction I cast my eyes. I look to the west. There's a coconut tree flanked by

kohomba and kos. I turn towards the east and there's a mango tree blending into a bo tree. A young father takes his child in a stroller up and down the lane. There's a young mother who can't stop smiling and bubbles through her fears about which all she says is 'I don't sleep well at night.' People in Italy played music. They sang from their balconies. People in various countries decided to cheer the health workers and everyone working hard to repair the ship. At the same time. People all over the world decided that they will meditate at a particular time. Together. That's song. That's singing.

There's always music in the luxury liners. There's singing in the lifeboats. I don't know about luxury liners, but the music from the lifeboats — they are divine. And the melody will wrap the earth many times over long after the voices have gone silent. They will ribbon the wrecked ship and transform into material and science that will help set us afloat again.

If you want to stop the Coronavirus, here's a remedy: don't stop singing.
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Responding to socio-economic impact of COVID-19

As the number of coronavirus cases continues to grow, concerns are simultaneously growing about the current and long-term effects this will have on certain demographics — specifically, women, the youth, migrant workers, and many employees around the world.

This week, the United Nations launched a report "Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19" that detailed how these communities are affected disproportionately by the current pandemic and quarantine.

At the centre of it remains one demographic that likely bear the strongest brunt of it: women.

"The fact that women make up 70 percent of the global health workforce puts them at greater risk of infection," read part of the report. "The current crisis threatens to push back the limited gains made on gender equality and exacerbate the feminization of poverty, vulnerability to violence, and women's equal participation in the labour force." But just because women make up almost three-quarters of global healthcare professionals, does not mean they're given the proper respect. According to a March 2019 report by the World Health Organisation, despite having such a crucial role in the public health industry, women continue to face various kinds of abuse or negligence in society, including but not limited to being attributed to a "lower status" or engaging in paid and often, unpaid roles, and being subject to gender bias and harassment.

Meanwhile, given such a large percentage of the workers are women, the requirement of child-care can hinder a woman's ability to work during the pandemic. According to the Centre for American Progress, currently millions of healthcare workers have a child under the age of 14, who might be struggling to manage between going to work and taking care of their children.

"Because mothers' employment is especially likely to suffer when they cannot find reliable child care, this



finding suggests that millions of vital health workers currently could be struggling to secure child care, endangering their ability to work at a moment when the U.S. health care infrastructure is already spread too thin," the report reads.

At the launch of the report, U.N. Secretary General António Guterres called for policies to not only address the pandemic and contain its spread, but also that would adopt measures to address the long-lasting impact of the crisis. He called for "designing fiscal and monetary policies able to support the direct provision of resources to support workers and households, the provision of health and unemployment insurance, scaled up social protection, and support to businesses to prevent bankruptcies and massive job losses."

Another demographic that is deeply affected as a result of the pandemic are migrant workers, according to the report. "Migrants account for almost 30 percent of workers in some of the most affected sectors in OECD countries," read the report. "Massive job losses among migrant workers will have knock on effects on economies heavily dependent on remittances, such as El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Tonga, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan." The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Nepal cites the government's figure that estimates between 700 000 to 800 000 Nepali migrants workers in India.

"With the outbreak of COVID-19 and measures by the GOV to mitigate the risks, country is in a national lock-down. Economic production has

stopped and many seasonal Nepali migrant workers had to stop working," Lorena Lando, Chief of Mission at IOM Nepal, told IPS.

"Thousands returned back to Nepal before the lock down, others are still in India but unable to work. Many of the migrant workers are daily wages earners, and now they no longer have an income to support their families. Even for those that return back home, job opportunities will be scarce, keeping in mind that was the first reason why they travelled abroad for work."

"The economic impact of COVID-19 in countries such as Nepal will be much bigger than other countries, and while some actions to take are good for the short term, other will need be a socio economic recovery response in longer vision," she added.

Beyond migrant workers, International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that the current crisis in the labor market could see between five and 25 million job losses.

"The current crisis exacerbates the feminisation of poverty, vulnerability to violence, and women's equal participation in the labour force," the report noted, highlighting that even amid joblessness, women will be affected disproportionately. Furthermore, connectivity to the internet, especially at a time when all work and courses are moving online, is also of priority. The report states that currently an estimated 3.6 billion of the world's population remain without connectivity, which means they may not have access to education, health information and telemedicine. (IPS)

JAPAN PM PROPOSES STATE OF EMERGENCY



Japan's prime minister Monday proposed a state of emergency for several major regions seeing a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, as well as a stimulus package worth \$1 trillion to cushion the impact on the world's third-biggest economy.

The official declaration of the state of emergency would likely come as soon as Tuesday, Shinzo Abe told reporters, as the country grapples with a recent spike in coronavirus cases, especially in the capital Tokyo.

"Currently, we are seeing rapid increases of new infections particularly in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka," said Abe.

The declaration hands regional governors the power to ask residents to stay inside, seek the closure of businesses that attract large crowds and commandeer land and buildings for medical purposes.

But it falls far short of the sort of lockdown measures imposed in parts of Europe, where police have patrolled the streets and fined offenders.

"We envision, for a period of about one month, that we will ask further cooperation of the Japanese people to reduce person-to-person contacts that lead to infections," said Abe.

The measure does not include legal powers to enforce requests for people to stay inside, or punish-



ments for people who fail to do so. "In Japan, even if we declare a state of emergency, we will not close cities as seen in foreign countries. Experts have told us that there is no need for such a step," said Abe.

Tokyo's Governor Yuriko Koike has already urged residents of the capital to avoid non-essential outings on weekends and to work from home during the week.

Concerns are starting to be raised about medical facilities in Tokyo, with doctors saying the situation is becoming stretched and staff overrun.

"From the medical point



of view, Tokyo faces a critical condition," said Haruo Ozaki, head of the Tokyo Medical Association.

The measures lack the teeth seen in other parts of the world and experts say Japan's legal system restricts the government's ability to limit the movement of citizens.

"Japan is still haunted by the negative legacy of the war and the oppression of its citizens," said Yoshihiko Yamamoto, an emeritus professor of international politics at the University of Tokyo.

But he said if the relatively relaxed measures proved insufficient to curb

the spread of the virus, "calls for a stronger power to control people may grow".

Japan has so far been spared the sort of crisis seen in parts of Europe and the United States, with around 3,650 cases across the country - compared to around 330,000 in the US and around 130,000 in Italy and Spain. Abe stunned the country in late February by calling for a nationwide shutdown of schools, at a time when there were only a handful of cases and few other countries had taken such a measure. But a recent spike in cases, especially in Tokyo, has raised renewed concern. New cases in the capital have been hitting almost daily records - 148 on Sunday and 83 cases on Monday - still far below figures seen elsewhere but enough to prompt official action.

Separately, Abe unveiled a stimulus package worth around 108 trillion yen that he said was worth 20 percent of GDP, "an unprecedented scale".

However, Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at SuMi TRUST, said it would not ensure Japan avoids a recession in the first half of 2020 "but will kickstart a V-shaped recovery" in the second half.

The Japanese economy was tottering even before the coronavirus struck, with growing fears of a recession. (AFP)

Australia sends away cruise ships

The largest maritime operation ever undertaken in Sydney Harbour was completed on Sunday with the successful restocking and refuelling of five cruise ships, Australian police said.

It was part of government efforts since mid-March to force vessels to leave the country's waters to prevent any further spread of the coronavirus in Australia.

Cruise ship guests have so far accounted for almost 10 percent of Australia's more than 5,500 infections. At least half a dozen other ships are believed to still be in Australian waters.

Meanwhile police launched a criminal investigation to probe whether the Ruby Princess vessel honestly reported the health conditions of its passengers before they disembarked in Sydney. Hundreds later tested positive and 10 died. Authorities



have also warned Australians to be wary of imported COVID-19 home testing kits, saying border officials had intercepted several "faulty" consignments from China in recent weeks.

Pakistani authorities are searching for tens of thousands of worshippers who attended an Islamic gathering in Lahore last month amid fears they could be spreading COVID-19 across the country.

At least 154 attendees have tested positive following the Tablighi Jamaat

event, which attracted 100,000 people and took place despite government requests to cancel in light of the worsening pandemic. About 2,500 people - including 1,500 foreigners - who had remained around the event site, which includes a mosque and sleeping quarters, have been placed in quarantine.

Priests delivered blessings from the back of trucks and motorised tri-cycles in the Philippines on Sunday, adapting the deeply Catholic nation's

traditions to the battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

Locals in their fourth week of lockdown in Manila lined up in front of their homes to watch the priests on Palm Sunday, the start of the week that culminates with the observance of Easter.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a set of stimulus packages worth \$8.5 billion to help the country's economy ride out the damage inflicted by the pandemic. (AFP)

Locked-down India lights up to mark virus fight

Twinkling flames from candles and traditional lamps lit up India's night sky Sunday in a nine-minute show to mark the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, which has left the vast nation in lockdown.

Across major cities and towns in the world's second-most populous country of 1.3 billion people, many heeded the call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to turn off their lights at 9:00 pm local time.

Residents shouted "Hail mother India" and "go corona go". They cheered, clapped, and set off firecrackers and fireworks that shattered the quiet evening, in scenes reminiscent of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

"Salute to the light of the lamp which brings auspiciousness, health and prosperity, which destroys negative feelings," Modi tweeted in Sanskrit. He shared photos of himself lighting a "diya" clay lamp.

In a modern touch, some residents turned on the lights from their mobile phones.

Modi on Friday had

called on Indians to take part in the event to "defeat the deep darkness of the crisis by spreading the glory of light in all four directions".

India has been under a strict lockdown since March 25, halting public transport and closing offices and shops apart from essential services.

But the shutdown has badly hit rural migrant workers, leaving them jobless with hundreds of thousands trying to return to their villages, many on foot.

Many others have been blocked from returning home. The government has set up tens of thousands of makeshift camps and feeding centres for 7.5 million people.

The confirmed number of new coronavirus cases in India has passed 3,500 with 83 deaths, the government said, although experts say wider testing is needed.

The health ministry has blamed a recent jump in cases on a large religious gathering in the capital New Delhi in March that has been linked to more than 1,000 infections. (AFP)

ITALY'S DOCTORS LOOK FOR HELP FROM SLEEK NEW ROBOTS

The shiny new robots gently check the pulses of highly infectious patients on life support in the Italian epicentre of COVID-19.

The doctors and nurses love them because they also help save their own lives.

Italians have seen the world around them turn unrecognisable from the various lockdowns and social distancing measures used to fight the new coronavirus outbreak.

But little appears to have pained them as much as seeing dozens of doctors and nurses die while trying to save the tens of thousands of patients who have suddenly ended up in hospitals across Italy's pandemic-hit north.

The country's medical association said Friday that at least 70 medics have died from various causes since Italy recorded the first official COVID-19 death on February 21.

The fear is that an overwhelming majority of the 70 would still be alive today had they been better protected against the coronavirus.

This helps explain why the doctors are nurses in a hospital near Italy's mountainous border with Switzerland are laughing behind their face-masks while posing for photos with their new robot friends.

The Varese hospital has received six of the sleek and slightly human looking machines on wheels.

Some are white and have screens and various sensors in place of a human head. Others are simpler and look a little like a black broomstick on wheels.

The doctors say the robots bring smiles from the younger patients.

But their real purpose is to help save doctors from both catching and spreading the disease.

"Robots are tireless assistants that can't get infected, that can't get sick," said the Circolo Hospital's intensive care unit director Francesco Dentali.

"Doctors and nurses have been hit hard by this virus. The fact that the robots can't get infected is a great achievement."

The readings from the machines allows medics to stay out of the intensive care units and monitor patients' vital signs on computer screens in separate rooms.

Italy's death toll, the worst globally, has reached 14,681 and is on course to top 15,000 this weekend.

Doctors doubt the official figures and think the real number of dead may be twice as high in Varese's Lombardy region.

Italy is expected to remain under a general lockdown at least through the end of the month. (AFP)

Italian doctors and nurses pose with a medical robot (afp pix)



Coronavirus lands British PM in hospital

Europe's hardest-hit countries showed tentative signs of progress in the battle against coronavirus on Monday, even as the disease hospitalised British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The virus has infected virtually every corner of the planet, confining nearly half of humanity to their homes and turning life upside down for billions on a deadly march that has claimed nearly 70,000 victims.

Queen Elizabeth II delivered only her fourth emergency address in a 68-year reign to urge Britain and Commonwealth nations to "remain united and resolute".

The rare speech came as the 55-year-old Johnson was admitted to hospital for tests as a "precautionary step" after 10 days of persistent symptoms.

But there was cause for cheer in some European hotspots, with Italy reporting its lowest death toll in two weeks, Spanish fatalities dropping for the third straight day, and France

seeing its fewest dead in a week.

"The curve has started its descent and the number of deaths has started to drop," said top Italian health official Silvio Brusaferro, adding the next phase could be a gradual easing of a strict month-long lockdown.

In Spain, nurse Empar Loren said: "The situation is more stable. The number of patients in intensive care is not growing much anymore, and we are starting to discharge quite a few."

At a field hospital set up at a Madrid conference centre, staff applauded whenever a patient was healthy enough to be sent home.

Builder Eduardo Lopez, 59, gave a "10/10" rating to the staff who cared for him "with tenderness and a great dose of humanity".

But while the curve was bending in Europe, there was little sign of let-up in the United States, where the death toll approached 10,000 and authorities warned worse was around the corner.

"This is going to be the

hardest and the saddest week of most Americans' lives, quite frankly," US Surgeon General Jerome Adams told Fox News.

"This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment, only it's not going to be localised."

The death toll in hardest-hit New York state rose to 4,159, Governor Andrew

Cuomo said, up from 3,565 a day earlier.

It was the first time the daily toll had dropped, but Cuomo said it was too early to tell whether that was a "blip".

Images from New York showed medics in protective gear wheeling bodies on stretchers to refrigerat-

ed trailers repurposed as makeshift morgues. The city that never sleeps was quiet, the streets around Time Square deserted as neon lights continued to flicker, one reading: "2020. To those fighting for our lives. Thank you."

President Donald Trump has warned of "horrific" death toll numbers and

Johns Hopkins University said more than 1,200 people had died of coronavirus complications over the past day.

In an empty Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis, head of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, appealed for people to show courage in the face of the pandemic.

The effective mothballing of the global economy is beginning to hit hard with analysts warning poverty levels will spike with millions of jobs lost despite unprecedented stimulus programmes.

Iran, whose economy has suffered the double blow of the virus and punishing US sanctions, said it would allow "low-risk" economic activity to resume as daily infection rates fell for a fifth straight day.

But some in poorer countries are already chafing against curfews destroying their livelihoods.

"How can anyone stay home without anything to eat?" asked Garcia Landu, a motorcycle taxi driver in

Angola's bustling capital, Luanda.

"Better to die of this disease or gunshot than to starve to death," he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged governments to protect women from rising domestic violence.

"For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest. In their own homes," he said.

Describing a rise in abuse as "horrifying", he said authorities should "make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19".

In Asia, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was expected to declare a state of emergency, although the decree doesn't give him power to force people to stay inside.

Despite the gloom, heartwarming examples of humanity around the globe have lifted spirits, with ordinary people doing what they can to help those on the medical front line. (AFP)



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Despite the gloom, heartwarming examples of humanity around the globe have lifted spirits, with ordinary people doing what they can to help those on the medical front line. (AFP)

A TIGER CATCHES CORONAVIRUS

A TIGER AT the Bronx Zoo in New York City has tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, and six other big cats are exhibiting symptoms consistent with the illness, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Sunday afternoon.

"It's the first time, to our knowledge, that a [wild] animal has gotten sick from COVID-19 from a person," says Paul Calle, chief veterinarian for the Bronx Zoo. The Malayan tiger, named Nadia, likely contracted the coronavirus from an infected—but unknown—asymptomatic zookeeper. "It's the only thing that makes sense,"

Calle says. The zoo has been closed to visitors since March 16.

Several domestic animals had previously tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, including a Pomeranian and a German shepherd in Hong Kong, a domestic cat in Belgium. Cats, both wild and domestic, are susceptible to feline coronavirus, but until recently, it was unknown whether they could contract SARS-CoV-2.

A new Chinese study has found that cats may be able to infect each other, and scientists are rushing to learn what other species

may be able to be infected by it.

After developing a dry cough in late March, the four-year-old Malayan tiger, Nadia, was tested for the virus on April 2, according to Calle. Nadia's sister, two Siberian tigers, and three African lions have also had coughs and a loss of appetite, though they have not been tested. The zoo has the seven cats under veterinary care and expects them to recover, Calle says, though the Wildlife Conservation Society, the nonprofit that runs the Bronx Zoo, cautioned in a news release that it's unknown how the disease might progress in animals.



When Nadia started showing symptoms, the veterinary team did a number of diagnostic tests and blood work. "Considering what's going on in New York City, we of course did

the COVID testing," Calle says. The team took samples at the zoo, after sedating Nadia. They sent the samples for testing to the New York State Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell Uni-

versity and to the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. It is not the same type of test that health care providers give to people, says Calle, "so there is no competition for testing between these very different situations."

According to the USDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is currently no evidence that domestic or captive wild animals can spread the novel coronavirus to people.

This is all completely new, Calle says, so there are many unanswered questions, including

whether tigers and lions are more susceptible to coronavirus than other animals. None of the zoo's other big cats, including snow leopards, cheetahs, a clouded leopard, an Amur leopard, and a puma are showing symptoms.

Zookeepers around the country have been making extra efforts to protect great apes in their care, as great apes can easily catch respiratory illnesses from humans. Experts have warned that they may be particularly susceptible to coronavirus. The Bronx Zoo team is going to be sharing the diagnostic information widely with the zoo and scientific com-

munity, Calle says. "I suspect that there are other cases, and now that we're sharing this information I have a hunch other likely cases will turn up." John Goodrich, chief scientist and tiger program director at Panthera, a global big cat conservation organization, is concerned for wild tiger populations. "Big cats like tigers and lions are already facing a litany of threats to their survival in the wild. If COVID-19 jumps to wild big cat populations and becomes a significant cause of mortality, the virus could develop into a very serious concern for the future of these species." (Natgeo)

Recovered patient donates plasma for experimental procedure

A Californian man who recovered from COVID-19 has donated his plasma to help others fighting the potentially deadly virus.

On March 6, Jason Garcia noticed he had a mild cough and some congestion.

The 36-year-old aerospace engineer from Escondido, California, didn't think that much of it.

But later while on a work trip, he noticed a headache had begun accompanying his cough.

Within a day, he also had a fever and body aches that quickly came and went.

Then he began experiencing shortness of breath.

Garcia called his doctor and based on his symptoms was told to go to the hospital and get tested for coronavirus.

He was sent home and received a call on March 14 letting him know he had tested positive.

"They said stay isolated," Garcia said. "That's what I did."

He spent nearly 10 days inside his home, confined to his office or his guest room, staying away from his active-duty Navy wife and their 11-month-old daughter.

He started to feel better and on March 18, he said, he considered himself "symptom free."

He received a letter from the county of San Diego saying that it was safe for him to come out of isolation and rejoined the world on March 23.

Garcia said although the protocol for coming out of isolation was 72 hours without symptoms, he wanted to be extra careful. "I decided to do five days just to be safe," he said.

To celebrate his recovery, he posted on social media to let his friends know he had been infected with coronavirus and was better.

"I claimed victory over this deadly virus. I won over COVID-19," Garcia said he wrote.

Around the same time, health officials in California looking for someone who had recovered from the virus and was willing to take part in an experimental treatment.

The treatment would potentially save the life of another coronavirus patient.

A friend who saw both social media posts reached out and the hospital called Garcia just a few days after his quarantine had ended, he said.

They asked him for a plasma donation to be given to a coronavirus patient who was in dire condition and unresponsive to other treatments, Garcia said. (NEWS.com.au)

CHINESE FLOCK TO POPULAR TOURIST SPOTS

Large numbers of people flocked to popular tourists sites and major cities across China over the country's holiday weekend, despite warnings from health authorities that the risk posed by the coronavirus pandemic remains far from over.

Images from the Huangshan mountain park in Anhui province on Saturday April 4 showed thousands of people crammed together, many wearing face masks, eager to experience the great outdoors after months of travel restrictions and strict lockdown measures.

Such was the rush to get into the popular tourist spot, that at 7.48 a.m., authorities took the unusual step of issuing a notice declaring that the park had reached its 20,000 person daily capacity, and would not be accepting any more visitors, according to state media Global Times.

Meanwhile in Shanghai, the famous Bund waterfront was once again packed with shoppers and tourists, after weeks of being near deserted. Many of the city's restaurants that were shuttered only days ago also appeared to be doing a brisk trade, with several requiring reservations to enter.

A similar story played out in the capital Beijing,



with locals flocking to the city's parks and open spaces.

The abrupt return to apparent normality comes more than three months after the virus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The outbreak, which has since spread around the world infecting more than a million people, saw much of China brought to a near standstill in an effort to contain transmissions.

At its peak, thousands of new cases were recorded in China everyday. However, in recent weeks the rate of infection has slowed significantly. On Monday, China reported just 39 new cases, all but one of which were imported. To date, China has recorded 82,641 cases and 3,335 deaths.

But while the government is slowly relaxing restrictions, Chinese health experts have urged the public to continue to practice caution.

Zeng Guang, chief epidemiologist with the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told the Health Times on Thursday that China had not seen the end of the epidemic.

"China is not near the end, but has entered a new stage. With the global epidemic raging, China has not reached the end," he said.

With the number of new infections in China reportedly falling, the government has tentatively begun efforts to restart the country's manufacturing and service industries.

The collapse in activity has affected every sector of the country's economy, leading to concerns of long term damage.

In recent weeks, however, there have been signs that the government has been wary of opening up too quickly and sparking a second wave of infections in the country.

Plans to re-open movie



cinemas were canceled in late March, less than two weeks after they had been told to restart, according to state media. While numerous tourist attractions in Shanghai were open for just 10 days before they were shut again on March 31.

After pictures of the crowds at Huangshan emerged on social media, the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, issued a stern reprimand on social media warning tourists: "Do not gather!"

In a commentary published on the newspaper's website, one opinion writer said while it was understandable people would want to get out after being shut up in quarantine, now was not the time to stop being "vigilant."

"If there are asymptomatic carriers present during large-scale gatherings, the consequences would be severe," the article said.

According to the paper, Huangshan has since announced it will stop receiving tourists.

Concerns around whether China is relaxing its coronavirus restrictions too soon have led Hong Kong experts and authorities to warn of the possibility of a "third wave" of infections in the city.

Speaking to local journalists Sunday, Hong Kong epidemiologist Yuen Kwok-yung said that there could be a "new wave" of cases in mainland China, off the back of imported infections from Europe and the US.

"So in Hong Kong, we might have a third wave of cases coming from the mainland after a second wave... The epidemic is still serious in the society. At this stage, it is still not optimistic."

What worries me the most is inadequate testing on patients with mild symptoms, which prevents

us from cutting off the chain of transmission," he said.

The global financial hub is still trying to contain a second wave of imported cases after returning citizens and expatriates from Europe and the United Kingdom led to a new outbreak in late March.

In just under two weeks, the number of local infections has risen from 317 to almost 900.

The convenor of Hong Kong's Executive Council, Bernard Chan, told public broadcaster RTHK Sunday that the city's government still had stricter measures it could bring in to contain the coronavirus epidemic.

Such measures could include restricting restaurants to "take-out only" or even a citywide lockdown. "It could also risk spreading panic but we have to accept that it may be necessary if the alternative is the risk of something worse," he said. (CNN)

LESSONS FROM PANDEMIC FOR LIFE ON MARS

People around the world rethink many aspects of their lives to combat the coronavirus pandemic, NASA experts say that knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe and healthy will help us prepare for landing on another planet.

After all, NASA's robotic explorers are already on Mars paving the way for future astronaut-led missions to the Red Planet – and those expeditions will require a level of safety planning that would put a germophobe to shame.

Astronauts don't want to carry Earth bacteria to the surface of Mars because it could contaminate the environment, or even show up as a false positive of life on the planet. And they also have to be careful to quarantine any samples returned.

It requires a level of care

and caution we haven't had to exercise in our daily lives – until now.

During the Apollo program, astronauts were quarantined before and after moon landings for weeks in case they encountered pathogens on the lunar surface. Samples returned from the moon were treated with the same level of care as biohazards.

Now we know that the astronauts didn't pick up any diseases during their moon walks, and there's no life that we know of on the moon. The surface is hit by micrometeorites and radiation, with no atmosphere to protect it.

But it was a smart move because humans were exploring the unknown and they wanted to protect the astronauts.

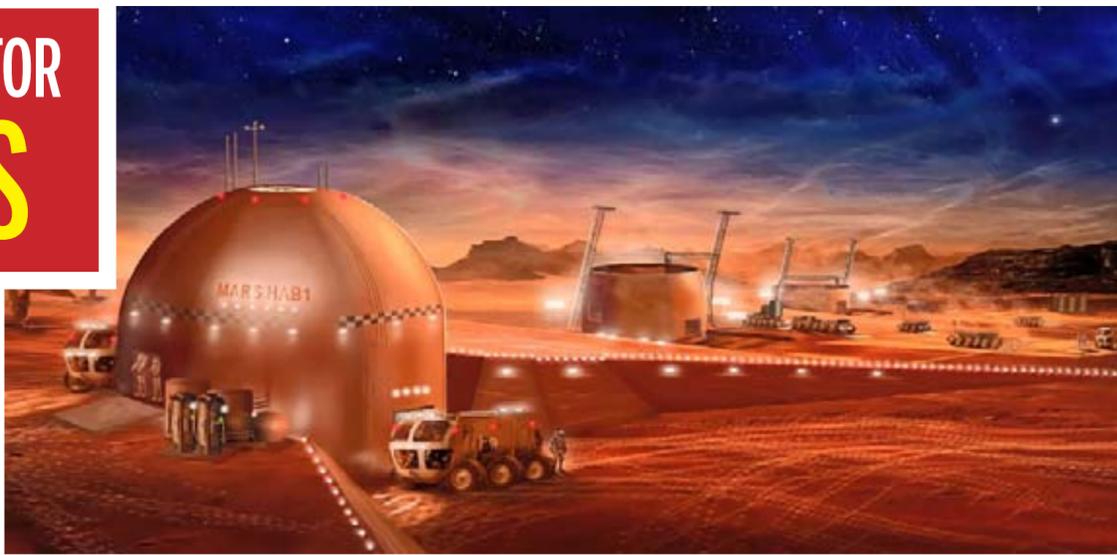
It's also part of the reason why COSPAR, the global Committee on

Space Research, exists. It was formed in 1958 to further research, exploration and the peaceful use of outer space through international cooperation, according to the COSPAR mission statement.

COSPAR has a planetary protection policy ensuring that the world's space agencies protect the safety of our planet as well as any that we explore.

"The Planetary Protection Requirements are an international NATO treaty, ratified by COSPAR," said Moogega Cooper, Planetary Protection Lead Engineer for NASA's Perseverance rover mission. "It's an international policy that we have to abide by. Agencies around the world have to make sure their hardware and their spacecraft is clean enough."

This governs the level of sterilization that spacecraft



and robotic explorers endure before launch. The rovers and landers were assembled in NASA's "cleanrooms," where the only people allowed to enter are covered head-to-toe in white coveralls called "bunny suits," complete with face shields.

And even more precautions will be taken when humans are sent to explore Mars.

NASA's next generation of Martian rover, named Perseverance, will land on

Mars in Jezero Crater next year. The site is where a lake once existed 3.5 billion years ago. Perseverance will collect samples and seal them up to preserve them until they can be returned to Earth, hopefully sometime in the 2020s.

Cooper's job is to "make sure that we don't contaminate Mars with Earth germs when we go and explore that planet."

In his lab, the team take samples that they collect

from the spacecraft and grow them in Petri dishes to see how clean the spacecraft really is before launch.

They look for evidence of spores that can attach to the spacecraft.

"We look for these seeds that certain microbes can produce, and those are the things that would survive the journey in deep space, the harsh environments – that's why we look for those on our Petri dishes every single day when we

swab the spacecraft," Cooper said.

They also look for viable organisms, like E. coli, that can live on skin. Although something like this can't survive without a host, if it was found on the Martian surface it could be confused with fossilized life, Cooper said.

The room where the rover is constructed is "cleaner than an operating room, cleaner than a lot of the things we interact with," he said.

Parts of the spacecraft that will actually touch the Martian surface are sterilized, fired at 662 degrees Fahrenheit. "It's just the cleanest thing you're ever going to see," Cooper said. This includes collection tubes for samples on Mars. Perseverance will collect rock, mineral and soil samples – and those soil samples could even include microfossils from ancient organisms that may have once lived in the lake. (CNN)

WORLD HEALTH DAY FALLS TODAY

A DEDICATION TO
NURSESON THE FRONTLINES OF
COVID-19 RESPONSE

April 7, 2020 is the day to celebrate the work of nurses and midwives and remind world leaders of the critical role they play in keeping the world healthy. Nurses and other health workers are at the forefront of COVID-19 response - providing high quality, respectful treatment and care, leading community dialogue to address fears and questions and, in some instances, collecting data for clinical studies. **Quite simply, without nurses, there would be no COVID-19 response. Hence the tagline for World Health Day is: Support nurses and midwives.**

COVID-19 highlights how important it is for all nurses to have access to the most up-to-date knowledge and guidance required to respond to such outbreaks. It also underscores the critical (and often unmet need) for protective equipment so they can safely provide care and reduce the rate of infection in health settings.

"We can't stop COVID-19 without protecting our health workers," said the head of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, at a recent press conference in Geneva, adding that the continuing shortages of supplies such as gloves, medical masks, respirators, and aprons, are leaving doctors, nurses and other frontline healthcare workers "dangerously ill-equipped" to give proper care to patients.

Every day, health care workers risk their lives to provide care in their communities — from rural health clinics, mobile medical tents in refugee camps to major city hospitals. During the Ebola outbreak six years ago, WHO estimated that health care workers were between 21 and 32



times more likely to be infected with the disease than people in the general adult population. In West Africa, more than 350 health care workers died while battling Ebola.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated the year 2020 as the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife" in order to honour the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale. The year 2020 is an important year in terms of strengthening its Universal Health Coverage strategy.

This World Health Day, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is calling everyone to respect, appreciate and support the courageous and committed medical community. It continues to stress the need for more investment in the health care work-

force and systems, and the importance of following public health advice.

This year, the WHO also highlights the current status of nursing around the world. The organisation and its partners aim to make a serious recommendation in order to strengthen the workforce of nurses and midwives, as per the WHO website.

This is important for achieving global targets related to universal health coverage, maternal and child health, patients' safety, mental health, infectious and non-communicable diseases, delivery of people-centred care amongst others.

Strong nursing and midwifery workforces are required to ensure that everyone, everywhere gets the healthcare they need.



Also, this World Health Day, WHO will launch State of the World's Nursing Report 2020, the first of its kind. This report will provide a global picture of nursing workforce and will also support evidence-based planning to optimise their contributions for improving health and well-being for all. A similar report of midwifery workforce will be launched in 2021.

Both these reports will set agenda for data collection, investment, research and advocacy and policy dialogue in health workforce for generations to come.

Nurses, midwives and all health workers are on the COVID-19 frontline. Take a moment to thank them and show them your appreciation. Share photos and videos of and from nurses and midwives, or other health workers, and patients explaining why their work is vital. Use #SupportNurses

Nurses and midwives account for nearly 50% of the global health workforce.

There is a global shortage of health workers, in particular nurses and midwives, who represent more than 50% of the current shortage in health workers.

The largest needs-based shortages of nurses and midwives are in South East Asia and Africa.

For all countries to reach Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being, WHO estimates that



the world will need an additional 9 million nurses and midwives by the year 2030.

Achieving health for all will depend on there being sufficient numbers of well-trained and educated, regulated and well supported nurses and midwives, who receive pay and recognition commensurate with the services and quality of care that they provide.

Investing in nurses and midwives is good value for money. The report of the UN High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth concluded that investments in education and job creation in the health and social sectors result in a triple return of improved health outcomes, global health security, and inclusive economic growth.

Globally, 70% of the health and social workforce are women compared to 41% in all employment sectors. Nursing and midwifery occupations represent a significant share of the female workforce.

Investing more in midwives, who are critical for maternal and newborn health as well as for family planning, could avert over 80% of all the maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths that occur today

Nurses and midwives are often the first and sometimes the only health professional that people see and the quality of their initial assessment, care and treatment is vital. They are also part of their local community – sharing its culture, strengths and vulnerabilities – and can shape and deliver effective interventions to meet the needs of

FIVE KEY INVESTMENT AREAS:

1. Accelerate investments in nursing and midwifery education
2. Employ more specialist nurses
3. Invest in the leadership skills of nurses and midwives.
4. Make midwives and nurses the heart of primary health care
5. Support nurses and midwives in

NURSES:
BRAVING THE
CORONAVIRUS
RISK

The coronavirus is taking a serious toll on the doctors and nurses risking their lives while treating the disease.

Carlo Palermo, head of Italy's hospital doctors' union was almost in tears when he told reporters in Rome that two nurses had committed suicide as a result of the emotional trauma. "I can stand those who look death in the eye every day, who are on the front lines, who work with someone who maybe is infected, then a few days later you see him in the ICU or die," he said. "It's [an] indescribable condition of stress."

Hospitals worldwide are straining under the load of too many patients and not enough medical equipment and protective gear for doctors and nurses, The Washington Post reported.

On Saturday, China singled out its more than 3,000 doctors and nurses who have been infected with the disease and the 14 who reportedly died from it, the AP said. Numbers of those dying and infected are greatly reduced in China, however.

Nurses may have a higher chance of getting seriously ill from the coronavirus if they do get infected. The numbers from the initial Wuhan, China, outbreak indicate 15 percent of the roughly 1,700

Covid-19 cases for medical personnel as of mid-February were critical or severe. Five had died.

The World Health Organization's report found that health care workers were actually not more at risk of infection than other people. But the WHO also noted that "attention to the prevention of infection in health care workers is of paramount importance in China. Surveillance among health care workers identified factors early in the outbreak that placed [health care workers] at higher risk of infection, and this information has been used to modify policies to improve protection."

"It's not that they're getting infected at higher rates; instead, they're getting sicker than one might expect on the basis of their age," says Peter Hotez, the dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College, of health care workers in Wuhan.

The early data from the European countries hit the hardest by Covid-19 indicates health care workers account for a significant share of their Covid-19 cases. In Spain, government officials reported on Tuesday that medical staff accounted for 14 percent of the country's nearly 40,000 reported cases. In Italy as of March 22, almost 1 in 10 coronavirus cases was a health care worker.

(Vox) Pix by AFP

**A TRIBUTE TO OUR HEROIC DOCTORS AND NURSES**

As Sri Lanka battles the Coronavirus, we take this moment to honour our nurses, who are on the frontlines caring for the Coronavirus infected and suspected patients. Along with doctors and other medical workers, nurses are in the forefront of caring for these patients regardless of the risk to their own lives. No amount of money can compensate for their sheer dedication at this critical juncture, for their service is selfless and priceless. On this World Health Day, let us honour these heroes who work day and night to ensure that COVID-19 does not become the nightmare that it has already become in some other countries. They are doing their part, but are we doing ours?

If we disregard the advice of the medical fraternity and violate the curfew, that nightmare will be upon us sooner than we think. So let us do these brave men and women of the health services and Security Forces a favour. Let us all stay in and save lives. Yours, theirs and mine.

That is what healthcare workers and the Nation needs from us now. Let us heed that call. Stay home. Deny the virus the hosts it seeks. Flatten the Curve. Then victory shall be ours.

On this World Health Day dedicated to nurses, we take a look at the life and times of nursing founder Florence Nightingale. She was, incidentally, one of the pioneers of hand washing for the purpose of killing germs.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE: PIONEER OF NURSING

GRETA WESTWOOD

On 12 May this year we will celebrate the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale. Her contribution to furthering the rights of women have often been dismissed and debated heavily. Florence divides opinion. Was she a publicity seeker or was she a trailblazing social and health reformer, who challenged the norms of society? She was certainly a nurse.

Florence was born in 1820, into an aristocratic family, and benefitted from all the advantages that such a birth could offer – a first-class education and access to the upper echelons of high society.

Her mother, Frances Nightingale, with whom she would clash throughout her lifetime was extremely proud of their prominent social standing and her father, William Shore Nightingale, was a wealthy landowner. Florence chose to shun her privileged upbringing, all in the name of nursing.

SO WHO EXACTLY WAS FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE?

She was a rebel. Expectations on her were set at birth – she was to marry a man of a similar social standing and become an obedient wife and no doubt a devoted mother. At the age of 17, she turned down a proposal from Richard Monckton Milnes, looking beyond their intellectual and romantic connection to pursue her dream of helping others through nursing that at the time was considered to be a 'lowly' profession.

She was a philanthropist. Florence had a natural call-



Florence attending to patients



ing to help others and decided at the age of 16, that nursing was to be her vocation. Upon informing her parents of her chosen career, she was met with less than an enthusiastic response and was forbidden from pursuing such a career. Through her determination she eventually lived out her dreams.

She was a leader. When the Crimean War broke out in 1853, Florence and the rest of the country heard about the



Florence Nightingale

horrendous conditions and poor standards of care that British soldiers endured. Ignoring the deeply misogynistic thinking about women and their participation in health-care, she set out with 38 trained volunteer nurses to Constantinople to tend to British soldiers.

She was a role model for gender equality. Despite the respect she received in her lifetime, her career and achievements came with struggle and a steely determination to be seen as nothing less than equal to men. Her clashes with Sir John Hall, the chief British army medical officer, were well known. He fought with her about her proposed changes to run Scutari hospital.

She in turn had no time for his advice and largely ignored him. He accused her of being a publicity seeker and feared the impact her methods would have on hospital settings. Florence soon started working around Sir John Hall, carrying out night shifts to tend to sick soldiers, earning her the nickname, 'Lady with the Lamp'.

She was a statistician. Florence used statistical data to improve health conditions for the injured military personnel. She was the first woman admitted to the Royal Statis-

tical Society in 1858. Above all else, she was a nurse. Florence's lasting legacy is her work to improve and regulate sanitation in hospital settings. When she arrived at Scutari Hospital, she was greeted by the sight of men lying in their own excrement. There were no dressings, no beds and there was no clean water. They were dying of hospital acquired infections. Her compassion and desire to alleviate the suffering of others drove her to do everything in her power to help these men in their time of need.

When Florence arrived back to England from Crimea, a large sum of money had been raised in her honour through public subscriptions, concerts and other fundraising activities. Soldiers who had fought in the war gave a day's pay. She used £45,000 to establish the world's first school of nursing connected to a hospital, St Thomas' Hospital in London. The first nurse probationers arrived in July 1860.

A statue of Florence's contemporary, Mary Seacole, sits proudly in the grounds of St Thomas'. Mary said of Florence: 'A slight figure, in the nurses' dress; with a pale, gentle and withal firm face, resting lightly in the palm of one white hand, while the other supports the elbow – a position which gives to her countenance a keen inquiring expression, which is rather marked.'

By the time Florence died at the age of 90, she was a renowned nurse, social and health reformer, statistician, and a well-known advocate for women's rights. In 1859, she wrote *Suggestions for Thought to Searchers After Religious Truths*, and argued for the rights of women to pursue careers.

As we celebrate her bicentenary, we must remember all that she contributed to nursing. She kicked down the door of patriarchy, allowing thousands of women to follow in her footsteps and become great nursing leaders. She is the legend that professionalised nursing.

Greta Westwood is chief executive officer, Florence Nightingale Foundation

NIGHTINGALE: HAND WASHING PIONEER



Florence Nightingale, who was born 200 years ago, is rightly famed for revolutionizing nursing. Her approach to caring for wounded soldiers and training nurses in the 19th century saved and improved countless lives. And her ideas on how to stay healthy still resonate today – as politicians give official guidance on how best to battle coronavirus.

For example, although Nightingale did not fully subscribe to the idea that many diseases are caused by specific microorganisms known as germs until she was in her sixties, in the 1880s, she was well aware of the importance of hand washing. In her book *Notes on Nursing* (1860), she wrote that:

Every nurse ought to be careful to wash her hands very frequently during the day. If her face, too, so much the better.

During the Crimean War (1853-1856) Nightingale had implemented hand washing and other hygiene practices in British army hospitals. This was relatively new advice, first publicised by Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis in the 1840s, who had observed the dramatic difference it made to death rates on maternity wards.

Nightingale's attention to international medical research and developments was just one factor behind her ability to make effective interventions in public health. Like many public health experts of her age, Nightingale considered the home to be a crucial site for disease-preventing interventions. This

was the place where most people contracted and suffered from infectious diseases. Nightingale's book, *Notes on Nursing* (1860), was more of a public health instruction book than a nursing manual. It advised ordinary people how to maintain healthy homes – particularly women, in accordance with the worldview of the times. There was straightforward advice on everything from how to avoid excessive smoke from fireplaces (don't let the fire get too low, and don't overwhelm it with coal) to the safest material with which to cover walls (oil paints, not wallpaper).

Nightingale strongly counselled that people open windows to maximise light and ventilation and displace "stagnant, musty and corrupt" air. And she advocated improving drainage to combat water-borne diseases like cholera and typhoid.

Notes on Nursing also called upon the "mistress" of every building to clean "every hole and corner" of her home regularly, for the sake of her family's health. But Nightingale also recommended a more holistic approach to health. She encouraged soldiers to read, write and socialise during their convalescence so they would not sink into boredom and alcoholism.

During her youth, Nightingale's father had introduced her to a leading practitioner of statistics, then a brand new academic field, and paid for her to have a mathematics tutor. During and after the Crimean War, Nightingale seized on statistics as a way of proving the effectiveness of different interventions.

She went on to produce her famous diagrams, which demonstrated the high proportion of soldiers' deaths caused by disease as opposed to battle wounds, and became the first woman admitted to the London Statistical Society in 1858.

Thereafter she designed questionnaires to obtain data on such questions as the sanitary condition of army stations in India, or the mortality rates of aboriginal populations in Australia. Her guiding principle was that a health problem could only be effectively tackled once its dimensions were reliably established.

In 1857, around a year after returning from the Crimean War, Nightingale suffered a severe collapse, now believed to have been caused by a flu-like infection called brucellosis. For much of her subsequent life, she was racked with chronic pain, often unable to walk or leave her bed.

Having been declared an invalid, she imposed a rule of seclusion on herself because of pain and tiredness rather than from fears of contagion – a form of self-isolation that extended to her closest family.

During her first years of working entirely from home, Nightingale's productivity was extraordinary. As well as writing *Notes on Nursing*, she produced an influential 900-page report on the medical failings during the Crimean War, and a book on hospital design.

This was in addition to setting up the Nightingale Training School for nurses at St Thomas' hospital in London in 1860, and a midwifery training programme at King's College Hospital in 1861, plus advising on the design of a number of new hospitals. (*The Conversation*)

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE: THE EXHIBITION

A rare family album featuring portraits of The Lady With The Lamp, uncovered after 100 years, will go on display for the first time at a Florence Nightingale exhibition.

Nightingale's aunt, Ann Elizabeth Nicholson, started the book, which was passed down through generations of the Nightingale-Nicholson family before becoming buried in papers for more than a century.

The album, which was unearthed by the family last year, contains some depictions of Nightingale, among the drawings by both families.

The exhibition will also feature the watch that Nightingale wore throughout the Crimean War, on display for the first time.

Nightingale is often pictured in her thirties, when she nursed wounded soldiers in the Crimean War.

The exhibition, in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital in London, aims to also remember the tri-



Nightingale at age 86

umphs of the more mature woman.

Nightingale rocketed to fame during the Crimean War, and became known as The Lady With The Lamp because she would check British soldiers throughout the night.

Other exhibition highlights, previously



Nightingale's lamp



A model of a Nightingale-era hospital

Your 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene



1. Wet hands with water
2. Apply soap
3. Rub hands together
4. Rinse hands with water
5. Dry hands with a clean towel



Finance

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'Lanka's public finances will exacerbate economic shocks'

Country will have to borrow heavily and look to new IMF program

Sri Lanka's public finances are about to receive another blow from the fallout of Covid-19 says 'Fellows of the Advocata Institute.

Studies indicate that pandemic impacts a country's economy through several channels, including the health, transportation, agricultural and tourism sectors.

As international supply chains contract exports may remain constrained, even when markets reopen as components and raw materials may remain in short supply. The supply chain impact will affect even domestic producers as imported raw materials run short. Agriculture depends on imported fertiliser, pesticides,

planting materials and chemicals.

Local factories source raw materials, components and spare parts from overseas and may be unable to work at full capacity. As cash flow dries up and debts mount, many businesses will find it difficult to cope.

During the global financial crisis of 2008/10, an estimated 90,000 Sri Lankans lost their jobs due to downsizing amongst manufacturing firms, especially in the apparel sector. The impact of the current crisis has potential to be worse, because unlike the financial crisis, this pandemic is not confined to advanced countries.



Daily wage-earners will see their already uncertain incomes further dampened. Small businesses will be among the hardest hit.

This would mean that growth will slow further. The budget deficit will take a double hit from falling revenues and increased expenditure. Lower levels of activity mean lower levels of tax collection. As sales and imports decline,

the collection of VAT and import taxes will decline. As business profits fall, income tax collection will fall.

Meanwhile government spending on health (from testing kits to hospital costs) and relief measures will rise in response to the pandemic. The budget deficit will thus widen and the government will need to borrow more. Sri Lanka's interest bill this year alone will

be Rs 1 trillion. Unfortunately, the bulk of government revenue comes through the form of consumption taxes particularly VAT, so much of the burden of increased tax fell on the general public anyway, provoking intense displeasure. Income taxes were also increased, angering the business community. The former government thus succeeded in antagonizing a remarkably diverse set of constituents and became exceedingly unpopular.

Following the Presidential election of November 2019 the new government announced sweeping tax cuts in December. Given the unpopularity of the tax increases, responding to public

frustration could hardly be faulted, but the breadth of the cuts was astonishing.

The objective was to kick start a floundering economy but the cost—around a quarter of government revenues or 3-4% of GDP destabilised public finances.

'Fellows of the Advocata Institute further notes that the biggest headache for the government will be managing the foreign debt. Sri Lanka's 2020 budget deficit could rise to 7.9% of GDP, the highest since 2015. "In the short-term bailouts will be necessary, but it is only a temporary measure, postponing the issues for a later but not too distant date."

COLOMBO TEA AUCTIONS FACILITATED BY DIGITAL PLATFORM



Colombo Tea Traders' Association successfully conducts the weekly tea auction

In the light of recent developments caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, following consensus among the stakeholders of the tea industry and with the support of the Chairmen of the Sri Lanka Tea Board, the Colombo Tea Traders' Association successfully conducted the weekly tea auction on March 18 and 19 at the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce.

It was however realized that continuing to assemble such a large number of buyers at a single location would be too great a risk. Since this situation was unlikely to resolve itself soon eventually it was determined that the most pragmatic solution was to conduct the auction, facilitated by a digital platform, over a

period of four days, from April 4 to April 7.

This is a historic event, as it is the first time in 126 years that the tea auction deviated from its conventional "out-cry" system, requiring the physical presence of the buyers, to move into the electronic age, with buyers recording their bids from remote locations, circumventing the need to expose themselves to any serious health hazards.

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Colombo Tea Traders' Association acknowledge with great pride the extraordinary feat achieved by the stakeholders of the industry, at such short notice, and extend their felicitations to all the members of the tea industry for their contribution,

through their support and cooperation, to this groundbreaking initiative.

In the context of the Colombo Tea Auction, it is pertinent to make reference to the close association between the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce [CCC] and the Colombo Tea Traders' Association [CTTA], engendered by its creation in its formal configuration, that commenced in 1894. In fact, it was the Chamber that inaugurated both these tea industry institutions in the same year, to facilitate the sale of tea in an orderly and efficient manner. Since then this relationship progressively strengthened, particularly on account of the fact that the auctions were held continuously within the office building of the Chamber.

COYLE makes suggestions on relief measures for business sector

The Chamber of Young Lankan Entrepreneurs (COYLE) hailed the initiatives taken by President and the government, to contain the COVID-19 virus and manage the situation in a profound manner.

COYLE in a statement adds that they unanimously agree that the highest priority and attention should be to secure the people and the society. "We have evaluated the impact on many economic sectors with the intention of adapting to the current situation to restore the economy and social crucial factors to be considered."

The following recommendations are forwarded by COYLE Chairman, Chamath Kottage and the Committee. "Financial and tax moratorium relief programs that would help regain and revive the economy for small, medium, large and extra-large enterprises: It is imperative that all Sri Lankan enterprises irrespective of turnover are included and not left out of the financial moratorium reliefs."

Reduce the interest rate to 4% for all types of working capital loans for a period of 2 years with effect from 01st March 2020. Bank charges and penal interest should be



COYLE Chairman, Chamath Kottage

waived or refunded if accumulated on or after March 1. "The present regulations on export proceeds with DP and DA terms may experience delayed remitting proceeds. Therefore Export proceeds should be extended to six months." "Thin capitalization provisions applicable under section 18 of the Inland Revenue act should be removed with retrospective effect from January 1, 2019 and thereafter. This is not bearable in the present situation and companies cannot survive without borrowing at present context or pay taxes for the past excess borrowings. It is not practical to disallow a portion of interest and impose Income Tax on such expenditure incurred by a person."

"We also suggest to reduce

AWPLR to 7% for next two years to develop the production-based economy and this will benefit government borrowing and moratoriums as well. Lending interest rates should be AWPLR +1.5% maximum."

"Overdue loan interest must be limited to maximum of AWPLR + 3%. Guarantees and bond charges must be maintained at maximum 1.5% per Annum. LC commissions must be maintained at maximum of 0.125% per quarter. All potential legal actions and default actions resulting from the predicament should, at present, be held over for the next two years to find a resolution."

Additional working capital and term loans should be provided to local production, exports and export-supported services.

COYLE suggests that re-establish state-owned development banks and venture capital companies to enhance and bring back the focus on SME and develop entrepreneurship. "Credit cards dues to be converted to a loan at very low interest to be paid back across a 2 year period.

Housing loans, Vehicle loans to be restructured with a grace period of 12 months."

WTO, WCO chiefs pledge joint efforts to facilitate trade

World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and World Customs Organization (WCO) Secretary General Dr. Kunio Mikuriya issuing a joint statement said the two organizations would work closely together to minimize disruption to cross-border trade in goods – in particular those essential to combat the COVID-19 pandemic – while safeguarding public health.

They also pledged to establish a coordinated approach to support initiatives that facilitate cross-border trade so that essential goods can quickly reach those most in need, including in least developed and land-locked countries.

WTO and WCO members have already been invited to increase transparency by sharing information on new trade and trade-related measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As COVID-19 continues to spread globally and governments consider new measures to protect the health and well-being of their citizens, we urge Members to ensure that any new border action is targeted, proportionate, transparent and non-discriminatory," they declared.

"We will continue to further explore ways to coordinate the efforts of the two organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic aimed at keeping trade flows open for the safety of populations around the world and a strong recovery of the global economy."

IATA Postpones 2020 AGM

GENEVA - The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced the postponement of the 76th Annual General Meeting (AGM) and World Air Transport Summit. The event had been scheduled to take place on 22-23 June in Amsterdam.

The 76th IATA AGM and World Air Transport Summit will be held when it is both safe and practicable to do so. IATA anticipates that will be in the late third or early fourth quarter of 2020. An announcement will be made when a date is confirmed.

"Our members are in the deepest crisis the air transport industry has ever faced. With much of the passenger business grounded as part of the global fight to contain the virus, many airlines are in a struggle to remain viable. On the cargo side, airlines are doing whatever they can to keep global supply chains moving with vital shipments, including those for critical medical supplies.

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CCC to host webinar for SMEs on April 9



Dr. Nirmal de Silva, Yasas Hewage and Lasantha Pradinandu

In a bid to assist the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to adapt to a post-COVID-19 world, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) is hosting a webinar for SMEs on April 9.

Many entrepreneurs are finding the current climate challenging, as many business activities have been forced to come to a halt, or be cut down, due to the pandemic.

To continue, SMEs will have to re-evaluate their business models. A general overview of the current situation and possible future predictions will be covered

during the webinar. Following topics to be discussed: How to re-evaluate the business models of SMEs, and why it is necessary, How to manage finances, including working capital, cash flows, and negotiations with banks and other financial institutions, What marketing strategies should be adopted for better ROI, Supply-chain related issues and operations, HR strategies and issues, Roles and strategies relating to leadership and communication and New growth areas and opportunities as a result of COVID-19.

The speakers for the panel are Dr. Nirmal de Silva, Co-founder/CEO of Paramount Realty, and Board Director, Regional Development Bank; Yasas Hewage, Director/Co-founder at Snipexx Academy of Business; and Lasantha Pradinandu, Principal Consultant, JKSE Consultants Pvt Ltd.

The discussion will be moderated by the Chandra Vithanage, Senior Assistant Secretary General of the Ceylon Chamber.

Registrations for the event could be done through, yasura@chamber.lk or inshaf@chamber.lk

Singapore announces third stimulus package worth \$3.6 bn

Singapore on Monday announced another 5.1 billion Singapore dollars (\$3.6 billion) in stimulus to soften the economic damage from the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

That's the third stimulus package that Singapore has announced since the outbreak. Together with the previous two packages, the Southeast Asian country has set aside 59.9 billion Singapore dollars (\$41.7 billion), accounting for around 12% of the country's gross domestic product.

The latest stimulus was planned to help businesses and households tide through the coming month, during which stricter social-distancing measures — which include closing schools and shutting workplaces temporarily — will kick in starting Tuesday.

The measures announced by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat includes, Greater wage subsidies for all companies in April, Waivers on rental and foreign worker levies for businesses and Cash payout of 600 Singapore



A food outlet in Singapore placed markers on selected tables to separate diners

dollars (\$417.70) each for all adult Singaporeans

The additional spending will bring the country's annual budget deficit to 44.3 billion Singapore dollars (\$30.8 billion) or 8.9% of GDP, said Heng. The minister said the government will draw an additional 4 billion Singapore dollars (\$2.9 billion) from its reserves to fund the measures.

Singapore was one of the earliest countries outside China to report cases of the coronavirus disease, which is formally named COVID-19. Its response

to the outbreak involves quickly isolating confirmed and possible cases, as well as tracing people they've come in close contact with — efforts that have won praise from experts around the world, including those from the World Health Organization. Despite those efforts, the Southeast Asian country reported its biggest single-day jump in cases on Sunday, adding 120 new infections to bring its tally to 1,309 cases with six deaths, according to the Ministry of Health.

(www.cncb.com)

John Keells Group supports essential food distribution to disadvantaged households



John Keells Group's essential food distribution to disadvantaged households in progress



John Keells Group through John Keells Foundation, Keells supermarkets and Ceylon Cold Stores (Elephant House) have distributed 10,000 packs of essential goods to households in identified regions in the island, to ease the burden of those not having ready access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Group distributed these packs of essential goods free of charge to families in the Western Province, as identified by the Government Agent / District Secretary Colombo, in Slave Island, Thimbrigasyaya, Mattakkuliya, Kolonnawa, Obeysekerapura, Kaduwela, Ranala and Dematagoda this week, supporting the government's initiative of ensuring that Sri Lankans have access to daily essentials during this hour of need.

In addition to the above, Ceylon Cold Stores also initiated a program in response to a request by the Government Agent of the area, where they distributed dry ration packs to over 500 low income earning families

identified by the Kaduwela Municipal Council around the Ranala factory area on March 29.

The ongoing pandemic in the country has led to the loss of income for multitudes of people.

Driven by the need to support families who survive on daily earnings, the Group is looking at innovative initiatives to bring some relief to the most vulnerable in society.

John Keells Foundation Keells Supermarkets and Elephant House will continue to work closely with the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure the nation and public are supported during these challenging times.

John Keells Foundation is the CSR division of the John Keells Group. Ceylon Cold Stores PLC and Jay Kay Marketing Services are subsidiaries of John Keells Holdings PLC (JKH), Sri Lanka's largest listed company in the Colombo Stock Exchange operating over 70 companies in 7 diverse industry sectors.

Maliban supports IDH Hospital during battle against COVID-19

In aim to contribute towards the combat of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Maliban Biscuits recently donated special cold storage facilities and highly essential medical equipment to treat infected patients, at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH).

The donation recently commenced on April 1, at the IDH Dental Hospital and was attended by Kumudika Fernando – Managing Director of Maliban, Ravi Jayawardena – Group CEO of Maliban, Dr. Hasitha Aththanayake – Director of IDH Hospital and Dr. Chintha Sooriyarachchi – Deputy Director of IDH Hospital.

Renowned for its reputation as a brand which steps forward to provide its utmost support during times of need, Maliban Biscuits further supplied the hospital staff with snacks such as yahaposha, biscuits and tea, to help sustain their energy while being on the frontlines of the pandemic. Additional to the donation at IDH Dental Hospital, Maliban Biscuits recently aided the Manusath Derana



Handing over of donations to Dr. Hasitha Aththanayake – Director, IDH Hospital (left) from Kumudika Fernando – Managing Director of Maliban Biscuits and Ravi Jayawardena – Group CEO of Maliban Biscuits (right).

program with its products as well. Ravi Jayawardena – Group CEO of Maliban stated, "During this critical period, IDH provides an incredible service to all Sri Lankan citizens. On behalf of the Maliban Group, it is a

great pleasure to be able to donate to IDH and its valued staff. We really appreciate the efforts made by all staff members and I humbly request all Sri Lankans to help them as much as possible during this period."

Microimage unveils MiHCM for Microsoft Teams.

As businesses around the world take steps to ensure that their employees are connected and engaged, MiHCM announced the release of MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams to empower companies to manage their remote workforce. The company also extended the features of its cloud-based Digital HR platform to enable MiHCM users to manage their day-to-day HR operations more conveniently.

MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams will allow companies to manage their human resource operations with check-in/out facilities, leave applications, preview payslips, submit timesheets and leave balance checking. Employees will be able to escalate a range of service requests to the HR department, such as requesting letters, documents, infrastructure or reporting work related issues.

The company is pleased to offer MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams app free of charge to its existing SMB

clients who use Microsoft Teams applications during the COVID-19 pandemic period while charging a nominal fee for corporate & enterprise clients.

MiHCM clients can directly locate and install MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams on the Microsoft Teams app while non-MiHCM customers can leverage the app by integrating it with their third-party HR system via secure APIs.

"With the majority of the global workforce, now working remotely there will be increased usage of collaborative tools to ensure productivity and employee engagement. Our purpose with MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams and our new feature enhancements for MiHCM for SMB & Enterprise variants is to support companies to manage their remote workforce seamlessly with all the essential HR tools," said Harsha Purasinghe, Founder/CEO of MiHCM



"MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams currently supports employees to perform essential Core HR tasks; however, we will be adding more functionalities with frequent updates to enable the workforce to submit all the key HR service requests & increase engagement. While this app supports employees with essential HR task execution, our MiHCM SMB & Enterprise solutions will enable HR professionals to continue their HR tasks from remote locations" added Harsha.

"The technology transformation occurring in

human resources around the world is having a broad impact on businesses, people, processes and industry. In Sri Lanka, we're excited to see Microimage unveil MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams which improves the productivity and efficiency of every organization by enabling them to complete tasks as quickly and seamlessly as possible; ensuring that every human resources function is enabled by modern collaboration and communication tools," said Hasitha Abeywardena, Country Manager, Microsoft Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Tire industry rolls on despite lockdown



The Sri Lankan Government has granted companies with high export business permission to keep manufacturing in the midst of a general COVID-19-induced lockdown, a decision that allows certain rubber-related companies such as Global Rubber Industries (Pvt.) Ltd. to remain open.

This exemption — together with a declaration that the island nation's natural rubber industry is "essential" to the country's economy — means selected tire producers are able to keep operating, according to GRI, which claims it's been ahead of other companies in the

industry with "proactive and far-sighted" policies.

By developing a COVID-19 operating procedure "well above" that required by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Sri Lankan government, along with worker training, GRI was able to instill a "strong sense of responsibility with each employee," Mahesha Ranasoma, CEO of GRI, said.

GRI makes agricultural and materials-handling tires at two plants in Sri Lanka, including one dedicated to radials in Badalgama, in western Sri Lanka, that opened in 2018.

In a statement, GRI Man-

aging Director Praphash Subasinghe stressed that the company's tires are essential to the food, agriculture and logistics industries.

"GRI is privileged to have this pivotal role in the world's food supply chain," he said, "and are committed rise up to the needs of our customers, our country and our world."

In North America, the tire maker is represented by GRI Tires Inc. of Indianapolis. It has additional distribution outlets in Indiana and Kentucky. There are at least six other tire makers of note in Sri Lanka. (Tirebusiness.com)



People's Bank launches Mobile Banking Unit in Gampaha

With the inability of customers to carry out regular banking activities as a result of the curfew imposed to combat the Coronavirus, People's Bank has launched its Mobile Banking Unit with the aim of bringing banking services to the doorstep of customers. As the first step, the Mobile Banking Unit was launched in the Gampaha District with a large numbers of customers successfully carrying out their banking activities.

The Mobile Banking Unit, consisting of an ATM and a cash deposit counter, provides a safe, hygienic environment that is in line with the guidelines given by the

Government in its battle against the Coronavirus. Customers were able to conveniently deposit and withdraw cash as the unit arrived at their doorstep.

The unit covered several areas and Customers expressed their gratitude to People's Bank for initiating the Mobile Banking Unit as they were running short of cash to buy food and rations despite the fact that such goods were being brought to their doorstep by various parties. People's Bank has finalised plans to continue this service in all parts of the Gampaha District during the curfew period and eventually expand it to cover all districts of the island.



A People's Bank Mobile Banking Unit in Gampaha

Cathay Pacific to reduce passenger capacity by 96% in April and May

Cathay Pacific and Cathay Dragon will reduce capacity by 96% across our passenger network in April and May in light of the severe drop in demand due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and multiple government travel restrictions that form part of the global health response plan.

As previously announced, Cathay Pacific and Cathay Dragon intend to operate a bare skeleton passenger flight schedule in April and May, though our freighter capacity remains intact.

Our ability to maintain even this skeleton schedule will depend on whether more travel restrictions are imposed by governments around the world which will further dampen passenger demand.

Cathay Pacific will operate three flights per week to 12 destinations: London (Heathrow), Los



Angeles, Vancouver, Tokyo (Narita), Taipei, New Delhi, Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and Sydney.

Cathay Dragon will operate three flights per week to 3 destinations: Beijing, Shanghai (Pudong), and Kuala Lumpur.

Cathay Pacific Chief Customer and Commercial Officer Ronald Lam said: "As Hong Kong's home airlines, it is important that we continue to provide important passen-

ger and cargo connections to and from the Hong Kong hub. We will therefore endeavour to maintain a minimal number of flights to and from key destinations in our network to ensure these vital arteries remain open.

"While our freighter network remains intact, we are also ramping up our cargo capacity by mounting charter services and operating certain suspended passenger services purely for airfreight to meet cargo customer demand.

Sri Lanka Insurance joins with ayubo.life to provide online medical care

Sri Lanka Insurance in collaboration with ayubo.life provides free access to online medical care to Sri Lanka Insurance policyholders.

All Sri Lanka Insurance policyholders are eligible to receive COVID-19 Quarantine assistance and medical support services through ayubo.life mobile application.

Under the COVID-19 relief-based benefits consist of an Initial assessment of each individual by qualified medical practitioners. Further comprehensive health status questionnaires will be updated and daily symptoms check will be conducted in order to review the progress.

Further through these services SLIC policyholders now can channel doctors online. Delivery of medicine is also enabled through

this service by uploading the prescription through the ayubo.life app.

Further access to guidelines of fitness instructors to keep everyone active and dieticians for any advice on nutrition are additional services that customer receive through this service.

Also as facilitation and support services ayubo.life will provide guidelines on cleaning, practical instructions based on government guidelines, working from home, getting groceries, exercising, eating healthy, kids education and ideas to get the best out of family time.

In order to get access to the ayubo.life support services Sri Lanka Insurance policyholders can download the SLIC app available on Google Playstore and Apple App Store and click on offers

Spit, sweat and shaking on it

Three sports habits that could change after coronavirus

PARIS, MONDAY - As the coronavirus brings the international sports calendar to a grinding halt, AFP Sport looks at three long-standing habits which could change forever once competition resumes.

SALIVA TO TAKE SHINE OFF SWING BOWLING

- It's been a tried and trusted friend to fast bowlers throughout the history of cricket.

But the days of applying saliva to one side of the ball to encourage swing could be over in the aftermath of COVID-19.

"As a bowler I think it would be pretty tough going if we couldn't shine the ball in a Test match," said Australia quick Pat Cummins.

"If it's at that stage and we're that worried about the spread, I'm not sure we'd be playing sport."

TOWELS IN TENNIS - NO TOUCHING

- Tennis players throwing towels, dripping with sweat and blood and probably a tear or two, at ball boys



Habits that could change after covid-19.

and girls, has often left fans sympathising for the youngsters.

Moves by officials to tackle the issue took on greater urgency in March when the coronavirus was taking a global grip.

Behind closed doors in Miki, ball boys and girls on duty at the Davis

Cup tie between Japan and Ecuador wore gloves.

Baskets, meanwhile, were made available for players to deposit their towels.

Back in 2018, the ATP introduced towel racks at some events on a trial basis, but not everyone

was overjoyed. "I think having the towel whenever you need it, it's very helpful. It's one thing less that you have to think about," said Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas when he was playing at the NextGen Finals in Milan.

"I think it's the job of the ball kids to provide towels and balls for the players."

LET'S NOT SHAKE ON IT

- Pre-match handshakes were abandoned in top football leagues just before the sports shutdown.

Premier League leaders Liverpool also banned the use of mascots while Southampton warned against players signing autographs and stopped them posing for selfies.

Away from football, the NBA urged players to opt for the fist bump rather than the long-standing high-five.

"I ain't high-fiving nobody for the rest of my life after this," NBA superstar LeBron James told the "Road Trippin' Podcast".

"No more high-fiving. After this corona shit? Wait 'til you see me and

Applying saliva to a cricket ball could become a thing of the past.



my teammates' handshakes after this shit."

Basketball stars were also told not to take items such as balls or teams shirts to autograph.

US women's football star Megan Rapinoe says edicts to ban hand-

shakes or even high-fives may be counter-productive anyway.

"We're going to be sweating all over each other all game, so it sort of defeats the purpose of not doing a handshake," she told the New York Times in March. -AFP

Disappointed O'Keefe quits first class cricket after NSW snub

SYDNEY, SUNDAY - Australia's Steve O'Keefe, whose 12 wickets for 70 runs against India in a 2017 test remains the best figures by a visiting spinner, quit first class cricket on Sunday after New South Wales opted not to retain him.

O'Keefe was the leading wicket-taker among spinners in the recent Sheffield Shield season, which triggered speculation about a possible test recall for the 35-year-old.

"I was disappointed when I was told that I wasn't getting a contract but I respect and accept the decision, so I have decided to retire from first class cricket," the left-arm spinner said in a statement.

O'Keefe said it had been a "privilege" to play for his country and to captain his state. He would miss the camaraderie the most, he added.

"When I think about my time playing cricket, that's what I'll miss most," added O'Keefe, who will continue to play for Sydney Sixers in the T20 Big Bash League.

One of the 13 spinners Australia have employed to fill the void left by Shane Warne's 2007 exit, O'Keefe played nine tests between 2014-17, claiming 35 wickets. Twelve of them came in the 2014 Pune test alone, where he claimed six wickets in each innings to help Australia to a comprehensive victory.

"He is one of the most successful spinners ever to play for NSW, which earned him Australian selection and the captaincy of the Blues," NSW chief executive said.

"On behalf of Cricket NSW I'd

like to thank Steve for his great service to NSW and Australian cricket."

- Agencies

Australia's Steve O'Keefe acknowledges the crowd as he walks off the ground.

French soccer club doctor 'commits suicide' after coronavirus diagnosis

REIMS, FRANCE, SUNDAY - French Ligue 1 club Reims were on Sunday in mourning for long-serving club doctor Bernard Gonzalez who committed suicide after being diagnosed with coronavirus, sources confirmed.

"Devastated, Reims cries for Bernard Gonzalez," said a statement released by the Ligue 1 club.

"Not just the club but also hundreds of men and women in Reims." Contacted by AFP, Reims mayor Arnaud Robinet said he had been made aware of the suicide of the 60-year-old, who had worked at the club for over 20 years, by the local prefecture.

"I was told Doctor Gonzalez had left a note in which he mentioned that he had tested positive for COVID-19."

A medical source also confirmed to AFP the existence of this letter but added that the doctor had appeared "to be in good shape two days ago".

"I am shocked by his death because he was someone I had known for many years," said Robinet. "No only was he the club doctor, but he was also the GP of many people in Reims. He was known for his human and professional qualities."

"He will be missed by the football family and all those in Reims who met him."

Reims club president Jean-Pierre Caillot said he was "stunned" by the news. "This pandemic has struck Reims in the heart. A great personality and great professional of the sport has left us," said Caillot.

More than 8,000 people have died from the coronavirus in France. -AFP

Remembering EW Balasuriya on his tenth death anniversary

HAFIZ MARIKAR

Famous sportsman and promoter EW Balasuriya was remembered on his tenth death anniversary although no arms giving was held due to the ongoing coronavirus epidemic. Balasuriya known as 'Bala' to some while others called him EW was a great lover of sports. He was a man who dedicated his life to the cause of sports promoting.

E.W. was one of the most versatile sportsman, sports benefactor, and philanthropist and above all a gentleman, of the highest caliber who passed off at the age of 92 on April 6 2010. Many are the instances in his illustrious career and

public life where he displayed his integrity and honesty which was a shining example of a man living a clean life.

He was educated at Dharmaraja College and later at Ananda College, where he excelled in cricket as a steady and stylish opening batsman and fine close in fielder. After schooling, he came to Kandy and played cricket for Kandy United, Kandy and Central Province.

As a donor, he was unique and unlike most others, he was freely available to all sportsmen at all times. He was one-time secretary of the Central Province Cricket Association and later he hit the top spot when he organized the first

Official Test match in Kandy between Sri Lanka and Australia at the Asgiriya Stadium in 1983. He was also in the Executive Committee of the Cricket Board when late Gamini Dissanayake was the president.

In the field of rugby he founded the Kandy Lake Club (in 1962) and later Kandy RFC. EW's idea of forming this club, was to give the unknown ruggerites a chance, he was a great rugby developer. At the end of the 1973 season, former CPRFU president Dr. K. B. Sangakkara who was well known in the rugby circle at that time, after seeing Kandy SC not doing well requested E.

W. to amalgamate Kandy RFC with Kandy SC and play under one banner and thus Kandy SC was formed in 1974.

In 1975 E.W. became the president of Kandy SC for the first time and took the club to the semifinals of the Clifford Cup knockout tournament. His Kandy Lake Club had a top cricket team and played in the domestic tournaments. He also gave a hand in football, hockey and iron sports.

EW has passed away but his memory will remain forever in the minds of all those who knew his qualities. He will not be forgotten by the sports loving public of Kandy.

Bangalore burdened by title pressure - Kohli

NEW DELHI, SUNDAY - Royal Challengers Bangalore need to rediscover the joy of cricket if they are to end their Indian Premier League (IPL) title drought, captain Virat Kohli has said.

Star-studded Bangalore have reached three finals of the Twenty20 league but are one of only three existing franchises — along with Delhi and Punjab — not to have won the title.

"You go after something so badly, and it keeps running away from you," Kohli told former England batsman and ex-RCB team mate Kevin Pietersen in an Instagram chat.

"It has just that added pressure in recent years. We've just thought, 'this is the season, this is the season', and that's blown us all over the place. I think we need to get that joy back," Kohli said.

The India captain acknowledged that expectations were bound to be high from a team featuring some of the most destructive Twenty20 batsmen in cricket. "When you have some of the biggest names to play for RCB, obviously there's going to be much more attention on the team."

"Even with this team — myself, AB (de Villiers) and (Chris) Gayle has played recently for us as well — we're always going to be more in focus. We've spoken about it," Kohli said.

"We've reached three finals ... but those things are irrelevant till the time you don't win that title."

"Even when we've had the best team, we've just not been able to do it. That's one of our main goals. We deserve to win the title," Kohli said.

Their bid for a maiden IPL title will have to wait though, as the start of this year's tournament has been put back to April 15 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with another postponement seemingly inevitable. -Agencies

Woods, Mickelson to play coronavirus relief match with Brady, Manning - report



Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods

NEW JERSEY, SUNDAY - Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson will play a coronavirus relief golf match next month with Super Bowl-winning quarterbacks Tom Brady and Peyton Manning, CNBC reported on Wednesday.

The report, which sourced an unnamed person familiar with the negotiations, said the charity match would be held at an undisclosed location without fans and is being organized by the PGA Tour and AT&T's WarnerMedia.

The negotiations are still being finalized but the match pitting 15-times major champion Woods and Manning against five-times major winner Mickelson and Brady could be aired on live TV

duction crew to film it and each individual will obey the social-distancing recommendations to stay six-feet apart, the report said.

Mickelson was asked recently on Twitter about the chances of a round of golf against Woods being live streamed in the near future, and the American replied: "Working on it".

When another fan tweeted to Mickelson asking him not to "tease", the 49-year-old responded: "I don't tease. I'm kinda a sure thing".

Woods, 44, last competed in mid-February and then withdrew from a number of tournaments with a back injury before the PGA Tour decided to cancel a slew of events because of the coronavirus.

Mickelson finished third in the Pebble Beach Pro-Am in early February and missed the cut in his next two starts.

Woods and Mickelson played each other in a winner-takes-all \$9 million matchplay exhibition in November, 2018 that was golf's first venture into pay-per-view.

That event was hyped like a Las Vegas prize fight but proved more of a pillow fight with both golfers in jovial mood, playing for a purse that was put up by sponsors and went to a charity of Mickelson's choice.

Brady recently joined the Tampa Bay Buccaneers after 20 years with the New England Patriots during which he won an NFL-record six Super Bowl titles.

Manning, who played for the Indianapolis Colts and Denver Broncos, retired in 2016 as the NFL's all-time leader in passing touchdowns and yards and is the only five-times winner of the league's Most Valuable Player award.

-Agencies



Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli

Lists his top three innings in Test cricket

Kevin Pietersen rates his 151 against Sri Lanka in 2012 the best



A masterclass innings of 151 against spin in Colombo (P Sara Oval) in 2012 – Pietersen's best knock of his career.

Former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen has been quite busy on social media during the ongoing lockdown period due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

He is rather taking interviews of several cricketers on Instagram or is interacting with the fans on Twitter. This time around he opened up about a little bit about his much-talked about international career and picked his top three knocks in Test cricket.

Though his England career came to an end in an ugly way, Pietersen played some memorable knocks for his team. As far as his career is concerned, he represented England in 104 matches and went on to amass 8181 runs at an impeccable average of 47.3 with 23 centuries and 35 scores of more than 50.

Among his 23 tons, the 39-year-old's century against India during the 2012-13 season in Mumbai Test is often discussed by many.

His 186-run knock in the game had turned not only the game but the series on its head.

Pietersen had counter-attacked India's much famed spinners on a square turner and it led to England to winning the series by 2-1 despite losing the opening game.

Interestingly, the England international has rated this innings as the second best of his career.

Pietersen rates his 151 in Sri Lanka as the best knock.

With temperatures soaring into the forties and the tourists already one-down in the series, Pietersen played perhaps his most purely audacious knock since that life-changing day at The Oval.

In reply to Sri Lanka's 275 in the first innings of the Colombo Test (P Sara Oval) in April 2012, England went on to post 460 runs on the board on the back of a fantastic knock from Pietersen. He scored 151 runs off just 165 balls.

He later explained that with the heat so oppressive, any thoughts of playing a conventional innings were inconceivable, and so he'd turned to all-out attack, launching six sixes and belting 16 fours in barely over three hours of breathless

batsmanship. England won the match to square the series. While citing the reason for picking this innings as his best ever, Pietersen hilariously mentioned that he wasn't confident of batting for more than an hour or two in the Sri Lanka heat.

"Often asked my best innings – THIS ONE! Only cos I thought there was NO WAY I could bat for longer than an hour or 2 at most in the heat in SL! Therefore – a Test swing fest!" he tweeted.

However, when asked about his 186-run knock against India at the Wankhede, Pietersen rated the innings as the second best while his 158-run knock at The Oval against Australia which had saved the Test match for England was rated the third best.

Out of the 23 Test centuries scored by Pietersen, England had ended up winning 11 matches and lost only one with the remaining 11 ending in draws. The only loss was to Australia at Adelaide in 2006 despite Pietersen scoring an epic 158 against the great Aussie trio of McGrath, Lee and Warne.

Big-hitting New Zealand batsman Jock Edwards dead at 64

Jock Edwards, a big-hitting wicketkeeper-batsman who played six tests and eight one-day internationals for New Zealand and who would have been a natural at Twenty20 cricket, has died. He was 64.

His death was confirmed Monday by the Central Districts province, for which he played 67 first class matches between 1974 and 1985. A cause of death was not available.

Edwards was a stocky and powerful batsman whose approach would have been ideally suited to the modern white-ball game but put him at odds with the more traditional style of his era.

He told his local newspaper, the Nelson Mail, in 2011 that several coaches had tried to rein in his attacking style but he "didn't listen." He agreed his talents would have suited Twenty20 cricket.

"It's more like a backyard game, I'd have loved it," he said.

Edwards' best moment in test cricket came when he scored half centuries in each innings of a drawn test against England at Auckland in 1978.



Jock Edwards

World's fastest blind man adjusts training in coronavirus crisis

Reuters) - David Brown, the world's fastest totally blind sprinter, has been accompanied every step of the way by his guide Jerome Avery but the coronavirus outbreak has forced them apart for the first time in six years of training and racing together.

Many runners can continue training more or less as usual in this time of social and physical distancing but it is not so easy for those without sight, who run in tandem with their guide, their adjoining hands tethered by a 30cm (12 inch) band.

But even though Brown and Avery cannot currently work in such a manner, they are not sitting idle as they continue working towards their goal of defending their Olympic title in Tokyo next year.

"Right now, we have to make some adaptations," American Brown, the world 100 metres record-holder for the totally blind at 10.92 seconds, said in a telephone interview.

"Jerome, or my coach (former 800m Olympic champion Joaquim Cruz), will stand about 50 or 60m away and clap loudly and I'll sprint towards them."

Brown, who lost his sight from Kawasaki disease that caused glaucoma and ultimately complete blindness when he was a boy, is understandably less confident running alone.

"Running with a guide as opposed to not is night and day," he said.

"Running by myself, even though I'm able to run straight, I still run hesitant because different factors come into play.



David Brown (left) and Jerome Avery

(For example), I may not be able to hear Jerome because of wind blowing hard in my ears."

Watching Brown and Avery run together in full speed in perfect synchrony is like poetry in motion. And while Brown deserves every plaudit that comes his way, Avery's role is not to be ignored.

Brown's guide must be faster for starters. Avery checks this box, with a 100m personal best of 10.17.

Avery, now 42, says he switched to being a guide after realising that for all his speed he was not quite fast enough to be an Olympic medalist.

"I was getting older and I knew in my heart that in order to not just qualify for the Games, but to be a medalist I would have to be running 9.9 or 9.8," he said.

Avery uses his voice to guide Brown throughout a race, constantly updating how far they are into the race before instructing him with split-second perfection to "lean" at the line. Brown ran 10.99 in winning at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, and Avery reckons an even better time is on the cards in Tokyo.

"If David's on his A

game, the sky's the limit," Avery said. "We'll definitely be prepared, just as we were in Rio. To be honest I knew we were going to win (in Rio) before we even stepped onto the track. The preparation, training, focus, that all tells the story."

INSPIRATION

But whatever results are in store for Brown, Avery in his role as guide has been inspired by Brown.

"Being around David taught me to be a better person — overcoming obstacles, communication, trust," Avery said.

"Every day I hear so many amazing things, feedback I get from mothers who have kids who are blind. They say 'David just truly inspired me. Now I can show this to my child.'"

Brown, the first Paralympic brand ambassador for On running shoes, is delighted to touch so many lives.

"Every single time I hear something like that it is always humbling to me," he said. "I'm just trying to be the best athlete I can be, trying to be the fastest, faster than Usain Bolt, faster than Jerome Avery."

- Agencies

Pressure grows for shortened IPL behind closed doors



Players are putting pressure on cricket authorities to plan a shortened Twenty20 Indian Premier League later in the year to "kickstart" the sports economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

The world's richest cricket tournament has been postponed until April 15, which coincides with the end of India's 21 day nationwide shutdown to halt the spread of the pandemic.

But with the number of cases and deaths rising and India isolated from international travel, few believe any sport will be possible in the sub-continent for at least three months.

"Let's say July-August is the earliest," said Kevin Pietersen, the former England batsman.

"I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I think every single player around the world is desperate to watch the IPL," he said on Indian broadcaster Star Sports. Pietersen suggested the eight-team tournament be shortened from its normal eight-week duration and played behind closed doors.

"There could be a way in which to get some money into the franchisees, into the economy by having a situation where you use maybe three venues which are completely closed to fans," said Pietersen.

"And the players can still go out and play the tournament in three weeks or in four weeks. I think the fans need to understand they can't watch a live game

at the moment and they might not be able to watch a live game for the foreseeable future." The league is a huge revenue earner for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and is estimated to generate more than \$11 billion for the Indian economy. Chinese mobile phone-maker Vivo paid \$330 million to be the league's top sponsor for 2018-2022.

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar said the league, which involves stars such as England's Ben Stokes, David Warner and Pat Cummins of Australia, and India captain Virat Kohli, will inject life into the virus-ravaged economy.

"The moment we get clearances from all the authorities that matter, the IPL should happen, only because it will kickstart the economy," said the cricketer-turned-commentator.

"Because when you talk about the IPL it's not just about the Mumbai Indians, or a (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni or a Virat Kohli, there are a lot of people who are making their livelihood through the IPL."

Stokes and Cummins have already voiced their eagerness to participate in the IPL. Kolkata Knight Riders-contracted Cummins said "everyone's still really keen for it (IPL) to all go ahead."

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has conceded the IPL will be a "truncated" affair if it happens at all.

Wider interests can help players cope better with shutdown-mental coach

NEW DELHI, MONDAY - Cricketers who have interests beyond the sport are likely to cope better with the shutdown forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, said mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton.

Professional cricket, like most other sports, has come to a grinding halt in the wake of the global health crisis which has also forced lockdowns in several places.

"A significant change in the status quo is stressful for most people," South African Upton, who worked with the 2011 World Cup winning

India team, told the Times of India newspaper.

"For athletes, there would be a range of experiences, from welcome relief for the established to anxiety and insecurity, both professionally and financially, for possibly a greater number.

"The athletes who had interests outside of cricket, and which they can still pursue, will be coping better than those who have made sport the sole focus and purpose of their lives."

Upton has also worked with the Pune, Rajasthan and Delhi franchises of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

He felt fringe players would be particularly disappointed with the uncertainty around this year's edition, which has been put back to April 15 with another postponement seemingly inevitable.

"Fringe players and those at the early stages of their career, especially those who have very recently broken through to the next level, would naturally be feeling this break very disruptive."

"Naturally IPL is a huge highlight on the calendar for many cricketers, and a cash cow," he added. - Agencies



Paddy Upton