

Navy develops medical robot



Taking in to account a basic concept mooted by an inventor, Thushara Kelum Wadasinghe, the Navy's Research and Development Unit developed a remote-controlled smart appliance called 'Medi Mate' in a bid to treat and test COVID-19 patients, allowing healthcare workers to remain at a safe distance from the highly infectious virus. This smart appliance developed under Navy's patronage was handed over for the use of Dr. Neville Fernando Teaching Hospital yesterday.

This smart appliance will also help healthcare workers to diagnose ailments, communicate with patients and dispense medicine and meals to them, without getting closer to the infected people.

As such, this innovative robot will help protect doctors and healthcare workers from the highly contagious novel coronavirus, when they are dealing with COVID-19 patients.

As a new feature, this remote-controlled gadgetry also has an automated nozzle which sprays a stream of sanitizing liquid to the hands of the patient, allowing him/her to sanitize the hands before touching any equipment or drugs placed on the device.

The Neville Fernando Teaching Hospital has been made ready to treat persons who are suspected of having contracted the novel coronavirus.

The Research and Development Unit of Sri Lanka Navy has also developed a disinfection chamber recently and similar chambers, with added features, have been set up at Kalubowila Teaching Hospital, Neville Fernando Teaching Hospital and University Hospital KDU.

EU ENVOYS COMMEND GOVT EFFORTS TO COMBAT COVID 19

PRAISE FOR ACTION TAKEN TO REPATRIATE EU CITIZENS | LANKA'S HEALTH SECTOR LAUDED | FUTURE COOPERATION ASSURED IN ECONOMY, HEALTH SECTORS

RASIKA SOMARATNE

The Ambassadors of European countries based in Sri Lanka have commended the efforts taken by the Government so far to control the spread of the COVID 19 virus in the country.

They had also appreciated the support given by the Government and other relevant agencies to safely send back home citizens from EU countries who were in Sri Lanka when the outbreak began.

The Ambassadors of European countries based in Sri Lanka had expressed these views during a meeting with the members of the Presidential Task Force established to administer essential services in the wake of the spread of COVID 19.

The EU ambassadors also took part

in the meeting of the Presidential Task Force to direct, coordinate and monitor the delivery of essential services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, held at 'Temple Trees' under the leadership of President's special envoy and former minister Basil Rajapaksa.

During the meeting the EU ambassadors commended the steps taken by health and other Government authorities to combat the COVID 19 virus spread, a press communiqué issued by the Task Force said.

The EU ambassadors had also discussed with Task Force members the ways and means the EU countries can engage with Sri Lanka in the post-pandemic scenario, especially with regard to the economic and health sectors.

Among the EU representatives were Ambassadors of Germany (Joern Rohde), Netherlands (Tanja Gonggrijp), France (Eric Lavertu), Italy (Rita Mannella), Romania (Victor Chiujea), Switzerland (Hanspeter Mock) and Norway (Trine Eskedal) and Head of the EU Delegation in Sri Lanka Denis Chaibi.

In a recent tweet on EU assistance to developing countries, President of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen said : "The EU is securing more than €15 billion to help our partners worldwide to combat the #coronavirus. It is in our interest to ensure that the fight is successful worldwide. By standing united and working together, we can defeat this virus."

EXTREME HEAT CAUTION

The Natural Hazards Early Warning Centre yesterday issued a Heat Index Advisory for North-Western and Western provinces and Anuradhapura, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Monaragala district.

The advisory which was issued at 2.30 p.m. yesterday is valid for April 9, 2020. According to the advisory, the Heat Index, the temperature felt on human body is expected to increase up to 'Extreme Caution' in the above mentioned areas.

Testing to be widened

Testing for COVID-19 will be expanded to determine if there are more COVID-19 patients in the general population, Director-General of Health Services Dr. Anil Jasinghe said.

He said that currently the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests are being carried out in many hospitals across the island to identify COVID-19 infections. The availability of Rapid Test Kits will facilitate the expansion of testing.

The Health Services Director-General also noted that two telephone lines have been created, 1390 and 1399 so that those suspected to have Coronavirus could call these numbers and seek medical advice from their homes without having to go to a hospital on their own.

He also urged the public not to hide their symptoms and to seek medical help if Covid-19 symptoms appear. Otherwise there is a chance that other family members and neighbours could be infected.

He said that it is the responsibility of the public to cooperate with the efforts taken by the Government to contain the spread of the Coronavirus and maintain social distancing efforts.



The Government is launching a mass home garden and agriculture drive named Saubhagya (Prosperity) to ensure food self sufficiency and security. Here two farmers taste sweet success with their bitter melon (Karawila) harvest. Picture by Hirantha Gunathilake

ADB allocates US\$ 44 million to members fighting COVID-19

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday allocated US\$ 44 million in technical assistance resources to support its developing member countries in their response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The funds will be available for all ADB developing member countries in updating and implementing their pandemic response plans, including buying emergency supplies and equipment; assessing health system and economic impacts to improve future resilience; improving regional coordination to prevent, detect, and respond to animal and human disease outbreaks; and developing sovereign and non-sovereign health security projects to build long-lasting systems to address communicable diseases.

The funds comprise \$40 million from ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund, \$2 million from the People's Republic of China (PRC) Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund, and \$2 million from the Republic of Korea e-Asia and Knowledge Partnership Fund. They will be added to a technical assistance program approved on 25 February 2020, Regional Support to Address the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 and Potential Outbreaks of Other Communicable Diseases.

COVID-19 Fund soars past Rs.420 million

The COVID-19 Social Security Fund established by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has now exceeded Rs.420 million.

Around 1,200 personnel employed under the Defence Ministry have voluntarily contributed Rs. 10 million to the Covid-19 Social Security Fund which was handed over to the President's Secretary Dr. P.B. Jayasundara at the Presidential Secretariat by the Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne yesterday morning. Acting IGP C.D. Wickramaratne also donated Rs. 50 million from the Police Department Special Fund to the Covid-19 Fund.

All donations are credited to the special account opened under the number 85737373 at the Corporate Branch of the Bank of Ceylon.

Local, as well as foreign donors, have made massive contributions to the Fund, while all donations to COVID - 19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund have been exempted from taxes and foreign exchange regulations. Deposits can be made through cheques or telegraphic transfers.

Further details can be obtained from K.B. Egodavele, Director General (Administration) of the Presidential Secretariat through the telephone number 0112354354.

Celebrate Avurudu only at home with family

Buddhasasana, Cultural and Religious Affairs Ministry Secretary M K Bandula Harischandra urged the public to observe Sinhala and Tamil New Year rituals at home in a subdued manner given the current situation in the country.

Issuing a press release on the Sinhala and Tamil New Year auspicious times, the Ministry Secretary requested the people not to leave their houses or organize celebrations, but to observe the rituals with family members and engage in religious activities at home in a simple manner.

"At a time the coronavirus pandemic has engulfed the entire world, it is our responsibility to act with restraint to prevent any risk to all citizens in the country. Your



support to prevent the spread of the virus is very important at this time," he said.

An auspicious time to plant a sapling has been recently added as a new feature to the New Year rituals. This 'nekatha' falls on April 19 at 11.38 am.

Bathing for the old year falls on Saturday (April 11). The Sinhala and Tamil New Year dawns at 8.23 pm on Monday (April 13). Nonagathaya will begin at 1.59 pm on April 13 and continue till 2.47 am on April 14.

The 'nekatha' for preparing of first meal falls on April 13 at 10.05 pm facing the East dressed in white. Starting work, transactions and consuming meals should begin at 10.43 pm on April 13 facing the East dressed in white.

The 'nekatha' for anointing oil falls on April 15 at 9.17 am facing the East while dressed in green.

The President's Media Division also issuing a press statement yesterday requested the public to limit the Avurudu rituals and interactions only to family members.

Ratnapura curfew to continue

The curfew in Ratnapura and Pelmadulla Police areas will not be lifted today as announced earlier, Police said. There will be no change to curfew timings in other areas where the curfew is to be lifted for a few hours. However, the curfew in Colombo and a few other districts will continue until further notice.

Meanwhile, permission granted to use official services identity cards as a valid curfew pass for those engaged in essential services and certain other sectors have been extended till April 30, 2020, Police said.

Among those who qualify for this facility are employees of Ports, Customs, Immigration and Emigration, Petroleum, Telecommunications, Water and Electricity, Agricultural, SLTB, Railways, Treasury/Finance Ministry, Central Bank, Private and State Banks and Media. All others have to obtain curfew passes if they intend to travel and those who travel without the required documents face arrest.

Ayurvedic Hospitals to remain open

All Ayurvedic Hospitals throughout the island will remain open despite the curfew, the Presidential Task Force on Essential Services announced yesterday. This is for the convenience of thousands of patients who patronize these hospitals for various clinics and ailments.

It was also announced the government would take steps to import coriander, ginger and tree turmeric (Venivel), since these commodities have been heavily consumed by the public due to the belief that they can ward off viral and other diseases. Moreover, selected Ayurvedic shops will be allowed to conduct mobile services and sales.

Doctors registered with the Department of Ayurveda can visit and treat the patients receiving long term treatments.

The required Ayurvedic medicines of patients registered with the Ayurveda Department will be delivered to their homes in collaboration with the Postal Department, to reduce the inconvenience caused to the patients.

Community Physicians stress need to continue social distancing

Community Physicians pointed out that washing hands often and all the other good health habits and social distancing should be continued at least for another six (6) months. They pointed out that using private vehicles should be minimized and avoiding supermarkets, maintaining social distancing in public transport etc should be properly implemented.

During the discussion, the microbiologists pointed out that it is important to inform all Sri Lankans with respiratory diseases/conditions who are above the age of 60 to stay at home without going out after the curfew is lifted in order to protect them from the Coronavirus, which can be deadly for them.

GLOBAL CASES CLOSE TO 1.5 MILLION

The total number of global COVID-19 cases was close to 1.5 million mark last night as the Coronavirus Dashboard of the Johns Hopkins University, USA indicated 1,452,378 cases, with the US leading at 401,000 cases. Spain (147,000 cases) has overtaken Italy (135,000 cases) while France (110,000 cases) is now ahead of Germany which has 109,000 cases last night. China was next with nearly 83,000 cases, though domestic infections there is now close to zero. There are nearly 84,000 COVID-19 deaths recorded around the world so far, with Italy accounting for 17,000 and Spain 14,555. More than 308,000 people across the globe have fully recovered from the viral disease, with the biggest number of recoveries (77,500) in China, where several previously locked down cities including Wuhan are now open for inbound and outbound travel, day-to-day activity and limited business.

In Sri Lanka, the total number of infected persons confirmed stands at 188 with seven deaths. There is currently no cure or vaccine for COVID-19, though trials are underway for both around the world.

CJE cautions against an 'infodemic' in COVID-19 reporting

Sri Lanka, like most other countries in the world, is in the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The country has been on lockdown status for over three weeks as the government, security and health authorities continue to do battle against the spread of this novel disease. While crises generally have the effect of bringing people together, recently however, distorted and false information that support racism has begun to circulate on social and mainstream media, undermining these efforts. Thus the Centre for Journalism and Education (CJE) fervently urges media institutions, journalists and media personalities/influencers to avoid discriminatory rhetoric, misinformation and disinformation when reporting on any and all matters related to the virus.

"Ethical journalism lies at the core of good journalism. Particularly at a time of unprecedented crisis, it is the responsibility of all individuals and institutions providing information to the public to adhere to the core principles of truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, humanity, accountability and independence," the organisation stated.

CJE added that at stake however is more than journalism itself.



"Attempting to blame a minority group of people for the spread of the disease in the nation is not only unethical and unethical but also puts the whole country at risk. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the threat of misinformation related to the novel coronavirus pandemic an 'infodemic' as it poses a serious threat to public health. To quote the WHO Director-General, the stigma is more dangerous than the virus itself," the organisation said.

Reporting during a pandemic is no easy task and many good journalists put themselves at risk

to provide clear, concise and up-to-date information to the public. Others however, by forcing a fear-based response, are creating confusion, stigmatising an entire group of people, putting victims and their families at risk of violence, and distracting others from following the guidelines issued by the authorities. They are also working in direct contravention of the guidelines issued to the media by the Ministry of Health.

To assist in combatting this deadly epidemic, the Centre for Journalism and Education has created and made available edu-

cational material for journalists, media institutions and even media personalities/influencers to utilise when reporting on the pandemic.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/Centre-for-Journalism-and-Education-104928591056073/photos/?tab=album&album_id=105704200978512

Unlike humans, viruses do not discriminate, based on race or religion. Journalists, media institutions and media personalities/influencers, particularly at a time of crisis such as this, have a responsibility to report accurately in a manner that does not cause harm to an individual, community, or country. "Utilising fear to target a vulnerable group and divide a nation of people does not lead to a path of safety. Let's work to ensure the health and safety of all peoples," the Centre stated.

The Centre for Journalism and Education is dedicated to the development of journalism in Sri Lanka. A non-partisan and non-profit organisation, its aim is to create an ethical, innovative and sustainable journalistic practice across the island, because 'good journalism leads to healthier societies'.

Drought Relief for Gampaha District

IRANGIKA RANGE

Industrial Export, Investment Promotion, Tourism and Civil Aviation Prasanna Ranatunga yesterday directed the Gampaha District Secretary to take immediate action to provide relief to the drought victims in the Gampaha district.

According to the statistics in the Gampaha District Secretariat, 112 Grama Niladhari divisions in six Divisional Secretariats in the entire Gampaha district are

the worst affected by the drought. It has been reported 38,829 persons from 10,642 families have been severely affected by the drought in these areas.

The drought has severely affected the Divulapitiya Divisional Secretariat and 14,346 people have become the drought victims. Accordingly, nearly Rs. Five million has been allocated for providing drinking water to the affected areas.



People buy vegetables from a mobile lorry in Kaduwela amidst the curfew. (Picture by Sulochana Gamage)

More than 140 tested for COVID-19 in Jaffna

MENAKA INDRAKUMAR

More than 140 persons were tested for the Covid-19 virus at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital.

According to the Director of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital Dr. T. Sathiyamoorthy the majority of them have been released and only

seven tested positive. He added, the blood samples were sent to Colombo and the results later showed the positive cases.

"The Jaffna Hospital has all the medical facilities to treat the Covid-19 cases and the situation is under control".

Meanwhile, 15 persons were arrested in the

Vadamarachchi area for violating the curfew laws. The vehicles also have been taken into custody by the police. Several Temples in Jaffna have postponed festivals until the situation is under control. Religious groups and organisations have appealed to the people and temples to postpone any activity.

Sri Lankan doctor dies of Coronavirus in England

A doctor who specialised in treating the elderly has died after testing positive for Covid-19.

Dr Anton Sebastianpillai, who was in his 70s, died on Saturday, four days after being admitted to Kingston Hospital.

The consultant geriatrician, who qualified as a doctor in Sri Lanka in 1967, had a long association with the hospital in south-west London.

Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust said he had last worked on 20 March.

It had previously been reported that Dr Sebastianpillai had retired, but the BBC has been told this was not the case.

"It is with great sadness that I confirm the death of a consultant geriatrician who was part of the team at Kingston Hospital," a trust spokeswoman said.

"Dr Anton Sebastianpillai died on Saturday having been cared for in the hospital's intensive care unit since 31 March.

"We would like to extend our sincere condolences to his family."

Dr. Sebastianpillai trained at the Perad-



eniya Medical School in Sri Lanka and qualified in 1967, according to the institution.

In an obituary notice, he was referred to as a "distinguished alumnus".

In a tweet, acting Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey said Dr Sebastianpillai's death was "very sad news" and he had been "privileged" to meet the "hugely respected" consultant and author.

Bernie Sanders exits US Presidential campaign



Sen. Bernie Sanders ended his presidential campaign on Wednesday, clearing Joe Biden's path to the Democratic nomination and a showdown with President Donald Trump in November.

Sanders made the announcement in a call with his campaign staff, his campaign said.

Sanders' exit caps a stunning reversal of fortune following a strong performance in the first three states that voted in February. The nomination appeared his for the taking until, on the last day of February, Biden surged to a blowout victory in South Carolina that set off a consolidation of moderate voters around the former vice president. The contest ends now as the country continues to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, which halted in-person campaigning for both Sanders and Biden and has led many states to delay their primary elections.

Sanders' departure from the race is a sharp blow to progressives, who rose up during and after the 2016 campaign and commanded the Democratic Party's Trump era debates over issues like health care, climate change and the effects of growing economic inequality.

But even as his policies grew more popular over the years and into the primary season, the Vermont senator struggled to broaden his own support and galvanize a winning coalition. Now, as he did after leaving the 2016 primary, Sanders will seek to influence the presumptive nominee through the means he knows best - from the outside.

Biden has already made gestures toward Sanders' populist base, which formed a movement over the past five years that could be critical to defeating Trump in the fall. Whether the former vice president will take the necessary steps to win over the holdouts, and the extent to which Sanders goes to make the case, will be a running subplot until Election Day.

The Sanders campaign held its final live public event on March 9, transitioning from packed, raucous rallies to an entirely digital operation. He communicated almost exclusively through virtual town halls and livestreams focused on the coronavirus crisis - and how his progressive agenda, headlined by "Medicare for All," might have prevented it or helped cushion the blow. (CNN)

High waves alert

AMALI MALLAWARACHCHI

The Meteorology Department yesterday issued an advisory for high waves and coastal inundation to sea areas extending from Puttalam to Potuvil via Colombo, Galle and Hambantota. The advisory is valid until 2.00 p.m. today (09).

The Department stated, "There is a possibility that near shore sea areas off the coast extending from Puttalam to Potuvil

via Colombo, Galle and Hambantota, may experience surges due to the effect of swell waves, having 2-2.5 meters."

However these waves have no effect to the land areas, the Department observed.

"Above mentioned areas can be fairly rough at times. Naval and fishing communities and those who are living in coastal areas are also requested to be vigilant in this regard," the Department noted.

Navy assists yacht distressed by technical fault

The Navy assisted in providing food and drinking water to a couple who was distressed on a foreign yacht anchored in the seas off Galle due to a technical fault of the vessel while sailing across the Southern seas, on Tuesday.

Under the curfew situation declared over Sri Lanka to control coronavirus, responding to a request made by the foreign couple, SL Navy provided them necessary food and drinking water. Considering a message given to the Navy by this couple who was experiencing a hard time since the inability to get the essential food

and drinking water due to the curfew, under the directives of Commander of the Navy Vice Admiral Piyal De Silva and on guidance of Commander Southern Naval Area Rear Admiral Kassapa Paul, SL Navy provided required food items and drinking water to this foreign yacht by an Inshore Patrol Craft following all safety precautions.

The couple who was spending a crucial time without food and water, paid their gratitude to the SL Navy for timely involvement to assist them in their hour of need.



Jaffna traders keen to transport goods to other areas

MENAKA INDRAKUMAR

The Jaffna Trader's Association has appealed to the government to issue permits to transport the agriculture goods to the other parts of the country.

The traders recently said the production has massively increased and there is no other way to sell the products.

Like in the past these products should

allowed to be transported their produce during the curfew period.

This must be done to benefit the farmers and to prevent the wastage of the harvest.

According to sources through the government officials in Jaffna, The Traders Association has appealed to the Government for this request to be granted.



With inter-district travel banned under the islandwide curfew, the Southern Expressway was mostly empty yesterday. (Picture by Sudam Gunasinghe)

SAUBHAGYA: THE NATIONAL HOME GARDENING/FOOD PRODUCTION DRIVE

STAY AT HOME AND GROW MORE FOOD

ROHANA ARYARATNE

You are stuck at home due to the deadly COVID-19 threat! What can you do other than watching television, listening to music, cooking, eating and sleeping? The routine seems to be the same.

Renowned British Gardener Monty Don writing a piece in the British newspaper Daily Mail says "There's never been a better time to grow your own produce." Giving tips to grow vegetables, fruits in a series of articles he says for the cost of a packet of seeds, you can raise hundreds of plants.

We in Sri Lanka too can follow Monty Don's advice and start our own back garden. The Government has also introduced a programme to encourage people to start home gardens called, "Saubhagya" National Program On Harvesting and Cultivation. The Ministry of Irrigation, Mahaweli Development and Agriculture is offering packets of seeds at Rs.20 per pack to encourage people to cultivate foods of their choice.

We will start with Karapincha or curry leaves which is an essential ingredient linked to the taste of your food.

KARAPINCHA

The curry tree (Murrayakoeni) or curry leaf tree is a tropical to sub-tropical tree. Karapincha leaf adds a special flavor to every dish. It is also packed with carbohydrates, fiber, calcium, phosphorus, iron and vitamins such as vitamin A, B and E. Karapincha leaves help your heart function better, fights infection and can even improve your hair and skin with vitality. Some of the other health benefits are: Helps keep anaemia at bay, fights diabetes, improves digestion, lowers cholesterol and also prevents greying of hair.

Karapincha leaf sambol is another method of consuming this healthy and nutritious leaf. Karapincha congee (porridge) is a mixture of a cup or two of finely shredded leaves, grated coconut, chopped garlic and ginger, a teaspoon of mustard powder and pepper and salt to taste.



GOTUKOLA

Gotukola (Centella asiatica) is a herb in the parsley family. It is commonly used in Traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine.

It is also said Gotukola is used for burns, poor circulation that can lead to varicose veins (venous insufficiency), scars, stretch marks, and many other conditions. Among alternative practitioners, Gotukola is attributed with many health benefits, ranging from the treatment of infections (such as the common cold, shingles, swine flu, and cholera) to the prevention of Alzheimer's disease, blood clots, and even pregnancy. Others assert that Gotukola can treat or prevent anxiety, asthma, depression, diabetes, diarrhea, fatigue, indigestion, and stomach ulcers.

Gotukola contains Vitamins A, G, and K and is also high in magnesium and also contains certain chemicals that seem to decrease inflammation and also decrease blood pressure in veins. Gotukola also seems to increase collagen production, which is important for wound healing. Gotukola can be an aphrodisiac and treats high blood pressure. Recent studies show that the herb has positive effects on the circulatory system. It seems to improve the flow of blood throughout the body by strengthening the veins and capillaries.

Gotukola grows in two ways – Bush and Creepers.



DAMBALA (WINGED BEAN)

Dambala or winged bean is one of the very important legumes that should be given priority in the home garden as it is considered as one of the most versatile edible vegetable of tropical origin. The plant is a climber in the Fabaceae family and closely related to the pole beans. Its scientific name is Psophocarpus tetragonolobus ascribing to its fleshy four-angled fruit pod. Dambala is one of its own kind of plants since almost all the parts of the plant including immature pods, mature seeds, tender leaves and shoots, flowers and tubers can be used in cuisine.

Known to be one of the lowest calorie vegetables carrying only 49 calories per 100g, the winged bean contains a very high protein content similar to that of the soybean. The tender young winged bean is the most delicious. Not

only is it high in flavour, 100 g of such beans provide 66g (16.5%) of daily requirement of folates, 18.3 mg (31%) of vitamin C and is also endowed with abundant minerals such as copper, iron, calcium, manganese, magnesium and phosphorus.

GREEN CHILLIES

Can we think of a meal without a dash of green chillies? Slit, sliced, chopped or diced, we just have to add a few green chillies to add that tang to our food. A green chilli is an important star in our cooking and hence in the home garden too. Green chillies contain water and have no cholesterol content, making them a healthier alternative to many spices.

Some of you can't eat food with it while the other half relish almost everything with a little bit of this vitamin C agent. In fact, a lot of you out there like to munch it raw. Green chilli is rich in vitamin B6, vitamin A, iron, copper, potassium and a small amount of protein and carbohydrates.

Loaded with capsaicin—a chemical compound that makes chilli peppers taste hot, you can eat it raw, fried or in a roasted form along with salads and as a side dish in your main meals.

Green chilli is a rich source of vitamin C and eating it helps in keeping your skin healthy and glowing.

Consuming green chillies can help in the digestion process since it is very high in vitamin C. Also, foods that release saliva while chewing help in proper digestion of the food; thus eating green chillies aids in digestion. In addition as green chilli helps in burning the excess fats of the body, it helps in weight loss and thus increases the metabolism of your body.

People suffering from diabetes must include green chillies in their diet because it can take care of the increased sugar level and can further help in creating a balance in the body. Green chillies are also loaded with antioxidants that protect the body against free radicals by acting as natural scavengers. Green chillies can also keep prostate problems at bay.



MA OR LONG BEAN

Another interesting vegetable which can be planted in your home garden is Ma or Long bean. "Ma Karal" is a common vegetable in Sri Lanka, native to Asian countries and widely cultivated in Dry Zone and wet zone. It is closely related to the Green Bean and also has many varieties subspecies, and many hybrids.

Long Beans, like other beans, belong to the family of plants known as legumes (Leguminosae or Fabaceae).

Long beans are good source of protein, vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, iron, phosphorus, and potassium, and a very good source of vitamin C, folate, magnesium, and manganese.

Long beans work best briefly steamed, stir-fried, or braised, but also hold up well when added to stews. If you want them to be more juicy, blanch before stir frying. Long beans should be cut into 1-2 inch lengths for cooking. They should be stir fried or boiled, rather than steamed, which tends to make them too soft.

VATAKOLU OR LUFFA

Vatakolu or Luffa is a genus of tropical and subtropical vines in the cucumber family. Luffa cutangula is commercially grown for its unripe fruits as a vegetable. Mature fruits are used as natural cleaning sponges. Its fruit slightly resembles a cucumber or zucchini with ridges. It ranges from central and eastern Asia to southeastern Asia.

Vatakolu offers many health benefits. Women use it to restore absent menstrual periods. Nursing mothers use it to increase milk flow. It contains insulin-like peptides, alkaloids and charantin, all of which act together to lower blood and urine sugar levels without increasing blood insulin levels and is also beneficial for weight loss.

It is low in saturated fat and cholesterol, high in dietary fibre, vitamin C, riboflavin, zinc, thiamin, iron, magnesium and manganese.



KARAWILA OR BITTER GOURD

Despite the bitter taste Karawila or Bitter gourd is popular due to its medicinal properties and should be a must in your home garden. The origin of the crop is unknown, but it is widely spread throughout the tropics. The fruit is a good source of iron, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin B. In Sri Lanka Bitter gourd is consumed as a vegetable. It can be successfully grown on elevations from sea level to about 1200m. It can be cultivated in low country and mid country during both seasons. The fruit can be used as a vegetable as well as a medicine for diabetics and vermifuge. While we've been so busy condemning its bitter taste, we've not only overlooked this fact but also the wide range of benefits that drinking bitter gourd juice offers. Bitter gourd juice contains a train of important nutrients ranging from iron, magnesium and vitamin to potassium and vitamin C. An excellent source of dietary fiber, it also contains twice the calcium of spinach, beta-carotene of broccoli, and the potassium of a banana.

A quick tip to reduce the bitterness of the drink is to add some honey or jaggery to it or pair it with sweet fruits like apple or pears. You can even add lemon juice to lessen the harsh taste of the bitter juice. A pinch of black pepper and ginger can also decrease the tartness. The taste however, needs to be developed because contrary to its name bitter gourd is in fact sweet for your health.

Bitter gourd contains an insulin-like compound called Polypeptide-p or p-insulin which has been shown to control diabetes naturally.

Got too much of Bacchus in your system after a crazy night of partying? You can get rid of it quite swiftly by sipping some bitter gourd juice which wipes out the intoxication settled in your liver. The juice cleanses your bowel as well as heals many liver problems.

Bitter gourd fights viruses and bacteria and strengthens your immunity. It prevents allergies and indigestion. The antioxidants work as powerful defense mechanisms against illness and also help fight free-radical damage that can cause various types of cancer. If you dislike it cooked, stir

frying is a very popular option that magically takes the bitterness away.



KANGKUNG

Kangkung which is scientifically identified as Ipomoea aquatica grows in water or on moist soil. Its stems are 2-3 metres (7-10 ft) or longer, rooting at the nodes, and they are hollow and can float. It flourishes naturally in waterways, and requires little if any care. It is used extensively in Indonesian, Burmese, Thai, Lao, Cambodian, Malay, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Chinese cuisine.

Water spinach or Kangkung is a very famous plant all over Asia. In Sri Lanka we find it everywhere there is enough water for it to grow.

In restaurants this dish is a very famous & an expensive dish. You can all ways adjust the amount of garlic that you like and also the spices. If you can find a place where water is found you can plant Kangkung there.

If you can plan out a home garden with these plants during this period of compulsory home stay you won't regret your efforts in the future.

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WE WILL OVERCOME THIS CHALLENGE TOGETHER

- PRIME MINISTER

P rime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in a special statement on Tuesday urged the public to render their utmost support to the Government's efforts to save the country from the COVID-19 outbreak.

In his Address to the Nation, the Premier outlined the measures taken by the Government to mitigate the pandemic outbreak and appreciated the sacrifices made by health workers, security forces and other public servants who are on the COVID-19 frontline.

The full speech of the Prime Minister: "Around the world over 200 countries are fighting against the Coronavirus and it has been seen how thousands of their citizens are being taken to the cemeteries.

Whether we live or die will be determined on how we handle this virus. It will take a lot of commitment and discipline if we are to triumph over this virus.

From the first moment this virus was detected, the President and government acted with great interest in what happens to our people. That is why we sent an aircraft to bring back the students who were stranded in Wuhan before any other country, when the Coronavirus erupted. By the time they were brought back to the country the quarantine centres were ready. We very quickly established over 40 quarantine centres around the country to quarantine people who return to the country from overseas. Now these centres can accommodate thousands for quarantine at any given point. These are not just facilities with accommodation. These centres offer good food, bedding, sanitary facilities and every detail is attended to including medical attention, even the cup of Kottamalli is given to all those in quarantine during their entire 14 day period.

Those who go to the quarantine centres with sour faces, leave these quarantine centres smiling and happy. This is because they were looked after well and every possible facility was given to them. We also constructed a special hospital to care for Coronavirus patients in just six days.

In addition, we identified those who were suspected of having contracted the Coronavirus and took measures to quarantine them at their own homes and those who were evading, our intelligence services were deployed to track them and get them to quarantine centres to save the larger community.

The moment the Coronavirus hit, we closed all schools and universities to safeguard the chil-

dren from this virus. We were one of the first countries to set up the presidential task force to deal with the Coronavirus. We also did everything in our power to control the price of goods. There are 416,000 elderly in our country but we provided the payment of Rs. 5000 to 442,000 elderly persons. Then we had to see to the disabled. There were only 22,000 of the disabled persons who were eligible to receive this payment, but we paid it to an additional 38,000. We also had to give this payment to 160,000 farmers and 4,600 fisher folk. There were only 25,000 kidney patients on our payment list, but we paid this amount to even the 13,850 who were on the waiting list. Triposha has been sent to the homes of all pregnant mothers and malnourished children. Recently, 645,000 pensioners were paid their pensions.

Now as the state institutions are closed due to the virus 1.5 million state sector employees are at home. However, we have already taken steps to pay them their April salaries. We had planned to recruit 40,000 unemployed graduates, but now we are going to use them for quarantine duties and help them make a living. There are 1.7 million Samurdhi beneficiaries in the country and another 600,000 on the waiting list. We are taking measures to pay them all the allowance of Rs. 5000.

We also had to think of the around 1.5 million others such as trishaw drivers, school van operators, bus operators etc who are out of work due to the curfew. We have taken steps to grant them concessions in payment of their leasing etc. We have not passed funds by parliament to do all this. When parliament was convened and we asked for funds the opposition did not support us. Now what is the point in reconvening parliament?

The whole world knows that the head of the WHO commended our President for the steps taken to control the spread of the Coronavirus. We have already paid over 5 million of our citizens to help them weather this period. At this point we are focussed on dealing with the crisis at hand and don't need to be engaging in debates. Despite all the government income sources being dysfunctional, we are still looking into the best interest of the people.

Our garment trade was hampered as Europe has stopped importing our goods over the pandemic and we used to receive a considerable income from migrant workers in Italy and the Middle East. But, that too is hampered due to the Coronavirus.

The tourism trade world-wide has taken a hit due to the Coronavirus. Yet, with all the difficulties, we have not refused the people and we have looked after them despite our own difficulties. We will not give up this fight.

We have taken all decisions without considering politics, religion or race. This is a unique moment when all political parties are committed to working together to defeat the common enemy, the Coronavirus.

At a time when medical staff of other countries are refusing to attend to the sick due to not having been provided proper personal protection gear, we are blessed to have committed medical staff who sew their own masks and come to work to attend to the sick. Our doctors and tri forces personnel are dedicated to attending to the sick and serving their country leaving their spouses and children at home. We are proud of our people and even the Public Health Inspectors are going house to house identifying and attending to those infected even risking their own lives. We are all fortunate to live in such a country. Even the efforts of the local government establishments and their staff should be commended.

The soldiers who sacrificed everything during the war are now giving up their barracks for the quarantine centres to be established and they are sleeping on the cement floors. There are thousands of young people waiting for an opportunity to serve their country. We are blessed to be born in such a country and as long as we have this compassion among us we will never be alone.

Hence, we need to triumph over this adversity very soon. Now there is much enthusiasm about growing our own food in our back yards. Our youth are manufacturing the beds needed for our hospitals. Some are even inventing robots to be deployed in the ICUs. When I see all this I am proud of my country. When all this is over, we will develop our own industries, grow our own food and develop as a united nation.

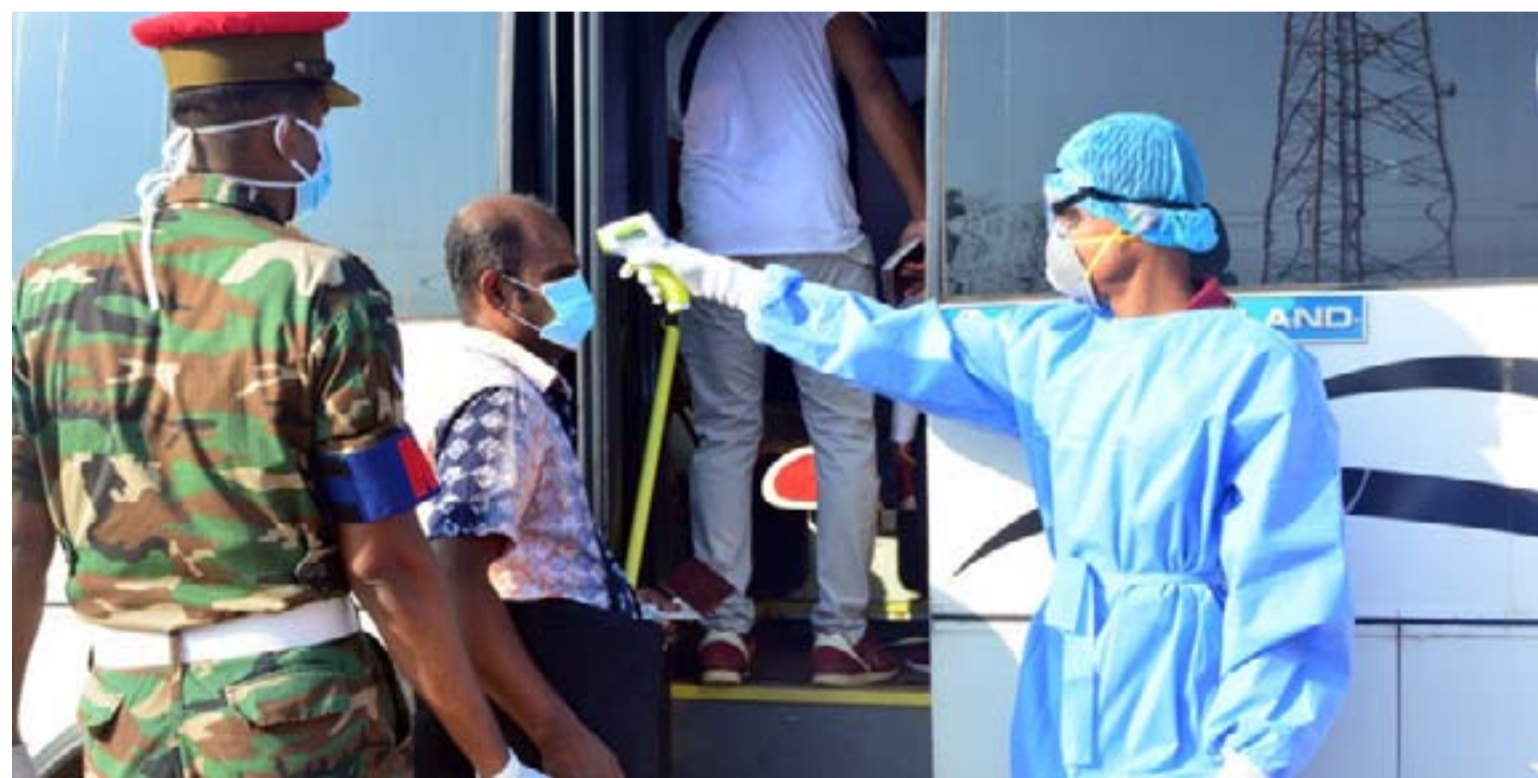
We have faced much bigger challenges in the past as a nation and staying indoors for a short period is not something we can't do. Hence, I appeal to my loving people to please bear this us and stay indoors for the sake of the country. I am confident that we can overcome this crisis without facing the fate suffered by other countries. We will rise together not as a developed nation but as a healthy nation. I wish you all a prosperous future!"



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Thursday, April 9, 2020

World solidarity against COVID-19

The death of one more victim of COVID-19 last evening brought the total fatalities in the country to seven while the number of infected people detected stood at 188. While, compared with the huge numbers affected by COVID-19 in Western Europe and Northern America, this does not seem much, we must remember that we have yet to test substantial numbers of the population.

Thanks to the sharing of data and research among all the world's medical agencies and scientific reporting media, we have the ability to compare conditions in different parts of the world. Constant sharing of scientific monitoring by national and international research agencies provides us with the range of national and regional experiences in combating the pandemic.

Aside from the amazing capacities provided us by the World Wide Web, we are today fortunate enough to have an enormous, tightly knit, global network of organisations and specialized institutions focusing on the crisis. We are well informed of every move to counter the pandemic by agencies and researchers and health administrators from the World Health Organisation downwards to national governments and our local PHIs (Public Health Inspectors).

Seven hundred years ago, when the whole of medieval Europe and parts of Asia were devastated by the 'Black Death' pandemic caused by the Bubonic Plague, neither the Internet nor the network of collaborating international agencies existed. Terrified populations had no idea what was causing people to fall ill and die so fast.

Historical research into that 14th century pandemic, however, has shown that in different parts of Europe, specific local experience of the disease and the efforts to treat victims actually did result in some findings at that time, especially in localised methods to combat the contagion.

In Italy, where the Plague first hit western Europe, medical practitioners of the time, after much bitter experimentation in treatment procedure, did learn that the disease was communicable among humans through the air especially from expelling of human breath (although they did not know of viruses). They also learnt that whatever the infected people handled - whether clothing or utensils or furniture - could become infected and could infect others.

At the same time, in the trading republic of Dubrovnik, in what is now Croatia, health authorities instituted the practice of 'quarantine' as a procedure to combat the spread of the Plague. In fact, the term seems to have been first used in that city. 'Quarantine' referred to the 40-day period of seclusion that was then imposed on Plague-infected people by the Dubrovnik republic authorities.

But the world did not have any system of international relations and mechanisms that enabled the quick sharing of this knowledge to other parts of Europe and Asia. If the knowledge had been shared and communications had enabled the comparison of epidemic experiences across regions, it would have certainly helped reduce the attrition of the Plague.

When the 1918 Influenza pandemic (Spanish Flu) hit Europe and spread to parts of Central and East Asia, there was a modicum of international sharing of information. Nevertheless, the world reportedly lost tens of millions of lives due to this 'flu pandemic.

Today, the world is grateful for the existence not only of a global health governance system but also of other bilateral and multilateral inter-state relationships that are enabling nations to help each other and share resources.

China, befitting its size and stature as the world's largest producer and second largest economy, has barely waited for its own COVID-19 epidemic to ease before it has begun extending the hand of friendship. Teams of Chinese experts, equipped with their own research and experience of the epidemic, are fanning out across the world to advise other severely affected countries.

Ironically, they are now in some countries whose news media scoffed at China's rigorous measures to overcome COVID-19.

The 'supplier to the world' is already producing various types of disease combating equipment, including clothing and face masks, and Beijing is shipping them all over the world from the much-vaunted USA to Europe, to Africa and to Sri Lanka. The Western news media is beginning to appreciate not only China's sheer might but also the sophistication of Beijing's global health diplomacy which cannot be compared with the scrounging for pandemic countering resources now resorted to by some of the First World powers.

Little Cuba has sent teams of brave doctors and medical specialists to COVID-afflicted Europe to join the frontline battle against the pandemic.

India, too, despite its own struggle against COVID-19, has gifted Sri Lanka with a consignment of valuable equipment.

We are fortunate to have two of the world's largest manufacturers of pharmaceuticals, China and India, as close friends who have a good record of helping us in times of under-development and crisis.

Sri Lankans must take inspiration from this global human endeavour and burden-sharing to steel ourselves to show more disciplined social behaviour to win this struggle.



Tighter Covid-19 vigilance in coming weeks

LAKDEV LIYANAMANA

The crisis caused by Covid 19, more commonly known as the Coronavirus around the world continues into another week and its political implications in Sri Lanka where a General Election was scheduled to be held in late April became apparent last week.

With the country in virtual 'lockdown' with the imposition of an indefinite curfew, the spread of the pandemic has been comparatively well contained. At the time of writing, there have been 185 recorded cases of the disease, with six deaths. The celebrations for Easter and the Sinhala and Tamil New Year will be muted this year because of the current crisis.

Health experts say that the real number of persons infected with the corona virus is likely to be much higher. This is not readily detected due to the lack of widespread testing. However, the fact that the number of persons with symptoms is relatively low means the pandemic has not spiralled out of control as it has in some countries such as Spain, Italy and the United States.

This has been achieved by a combination of measures: 'social isolation' being enforced through a curfew, isolating those known to be infected in a few selected centres for treatment and compelling those who have had contact with infected persons into quarantine centres, with stringent monitoring of their whereabouts.

However, the doctors' trade union, the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) warned this week that there was no room for complacency. This is because it was estimated that the 185 persons known to be infected with the virus are likely to have had contact with about 42,000 others before they were detected. Most of these persons are not in quarantine and could potentially pass on the infection.

Last week, there was controversy over a decision by the authorities to cremate those who succumb to the illness, resulting in protests from Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauff Hakeem. This followed the cremation of a sixty-four-year-old Muslim person who passed away following complications from Coronavirus infection at the Negombo hospital.

Taking to social media, Hakeem noted that it is "unfortunate, regrettable and of course reprehensible that the Janaza of the

Negombo Victim of the Covid 19 virus had been cremated without permitting the burial as is ordained in our faith." The controversy erupted in part because the guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in late March included the option of burial.

In Sri Lanka, standard operating procedures sent out to judicial medical officers in the second week of March laid out guidelines for the disposal of the bodies of people who die from Covid 19. They included restrictions on the viewing of the body, a ban on public funerals and compulsory cremation. Burial was not given as an option in the original circular.

Subsequently however, Director-General of Health Services Dr Anil Jasinghe told the media that "burial is permitted as long as the grave is eight feet deep and the water table is not high where it could be contaminated." This was however not the case in Negombo where the level of ground water was high, raising the possibility of ground water being contaminated by the virus.

Hakeem raised the issue at a meeting political party representatives had with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa where other officials were also present. Initially, he appeared to request a separate discussion with the Prime Minister but Premier Rajapaksa urged him to proceed while officials were present, so they could respond.

It was Dr. Jasinghe who provided the necessary clarifications. He noted that while the WHO guidelines stated that "to date there is no evidence of persons having become infected from exposure to the bodies of persons who died from Covid-19," the virus was relatively new to the scientific community which became aware of its existence only about three months ago.

As a result, issues such as how it would interact with the environment following burial are unknown. He also pointed out that arranging for burials in a few selected safe and secure locations would mean having to transport bodies over long distances, resulting in the possibility of exposing more people to the virus. Because of these and other reasons burial was not a practical option in Sri Lanka, Dr. Jasinghe, who has won accolades for his calm demeanour and matter of fact approach to the crisis, explained.

Subsequently, the Ministry of Health was to update its guidelines for the disposal of bodies of persons dying from corona virus

infections. These guidelines state that remains of all those who succumb to the disease would be cremated within 24 hours. The body should never be washed under any circumstances and it has to be placed in a sealed body bag and a coffin. The disposal of bodies must be monitored by police, the Ministry of Health and public health inspectors, the guideline states.

SLMC leader Hakeem's stance attracted widespread attention from media outlets overseas which were critical of Sri Lanka's stance. At the same time, the issue also became a target for vilification of the Muslim community in social media posts in Sri Lanka. The Government was keen to prevent its fight against the pandemic deteriorating in to a communal issue, with the added risk of the Muslim community shying away from seeking treatment for the illness, as a result.

There were other political implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. That related to the conduct of the General Election which was originally scheduled for April 25. This has now been indefinitely postponed by the Elections Commission (EC) because of the current crisis.

Last week, EC Chairman Mahinda Deshapriya wrote to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa noting that there was a constitutional requirement that, following the dissolution of Parliament, a newly elected Parliament must meet within three months of the date of dissolution.

This is according to Article 70(5)(a) of the Constitution which states that, "A Proclamation dissolving Parliament shall fix a date or dates for the election of Members of Parliament, and shall summon the new Parliament to meet on a date not later than three months after the date of such Proclamation." This meant that, with Parliament being dissolved on March 2, the newly elected Parliament must convene by June 2, 2020.

Adhering to this timeline will now be impossible. The EC has calculated that even in the highly unlikely event that the Coronavirus crisis subsides in the next two weeks, it would still not have sufficient lead up time to prepare for and conduct a general election. It also appears that the Constitution does not have any provision to postpone elections indefinitely in emergency situations such as the current crisis.

The EC has therefore requested President Rajapaksa to consult the Attorney General and consider the option of seeking an opinion from the Supreme Court regarding the constitutional conundrum that is very likely to ensue. The Supreme Court is

tasked by the Constitution as the authority responsible for interpretation of the Constitution, where necessary.

EC Chairman Deshapriya was also to caution political parties regarding converting the crisis over the corona virus pandemic into a political exercise, noting that some politicians resorted to social media to seek political gains from distributing relief for those facing hardship due to the curfew and the lack of employment.

"The efforts of various stakeholders of society including religious leaders, the business community, political parties, civil society organisations and others coming forward to provide relief to those affected by the Covid 19 pandemic are praiseworthy. However, it is unacceptable to seek political mileage out of the current situation when the entire country is fighting to defeat a virus," Deshapriya said.

Mainstream political parties, to their credit, have steered clear of playing politics over the Coronavirus crisis, although a few regional politicians may have done so. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had a meeting with leaders of major political parties. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, accompanied by the Prime Minister Rajapaksa and the head of the Presidential Task Force on the Covid crisis, Basil Rajapaksa, met with representatives of the United National Party. A few days later, they also met with Samagi Jana Balavegaya leader Sajith Premadasa and its general secretary Ranjith Madduma Bandara.

On Tuesday night Premier Rajapaksa made a special address to the nation, thanking those on the frontline battling the Coronavirus crisis. The Prime Minister also noted that all political party leaders have come forward to support the government in the fight against corona virus. "We have only one common enemy at the moment and it is the Coronavirus," Prime Minister Rajapaksa said, urging the public to set aside any divisions among them.

On reviewing the events of the past few weeks, experts are of the opinion that the Government and the health sector have done a commendable job in containing the Coronavirus epidemic to manageable proportions. However, they also warn that the worse may not be over yet, particularly if restrictions are relaxed and the public is allowed to return to a 'normal' lifestyle.

That is why they are keen to ensure that the strictest restrictions are still in place in the days to come when the country enters what would have otherwise been the highpoint of its holiday season- the Easter break followed by the Sinhala and Tamil New Year.

NEVILLE LADDUWAHETTY

It is reported that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has granted a pardon to former Corporal Sunil Rathnayake who was convicted of murder, unlawful assembly and common intent by a Trial-at-Bar in 2015. On appeal, the judgment was upheld by a five Judge Bench of the Supreme Court. There is considerable reaction from the public both nationally and internationally for the decision taken by the President. As part of this reaction the Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) had written to the President expressing "deep concern" about the pardon granted in view of the seriousness of the crime committed. Having expressed concern, the HRCSL went on to state that while death sentence is mandatory for murder, they "would have been in agreement" had the President "commuted the death sentence to long term imprisonment given the serious nature of the offence".

Before proceeding to comment on the measures adopted and the concerns expressed, it is appropriate that there is an understanding of the background to the events that precipitated the judgments.

SUMMARY of BACKGROUND MATERIAL

On December 19, 2000, eight villagers bicycled to Mirusuvil with a five-year old "toddler". When they were about to leave at around 4 in the afternoon, two military personnel confronted them. They were asked to kneel and were questioned. One soldier left and returned with four others. They were blindfolded and assaulted. Maheswaran, the sole survivor, lost consciousness. When he came around, the others were not to be seen. His blindfold had come off and he was taken to a location close to a cesspit. He noticed patches of blood on the slab. Fearing for his life he pushed two soldiers who had come to blindfold him, and ran for his life. On December 24, 2000, Maheswaran along with Major de Soya of the military police, Maheswaran's parents, members of EPDP and the Gramasevaka visited the cesspit which still had blood patches. When the slab was removed they found body parts of a goat and a reptile. While they were there a few military personnel approached them.

Major de Soya was entrusted with the task of investigating this incident. In a nearby building he found about 20 Army officers of the special operations of the 6th Gajaba regiment, in occupation. Major de Soya had requested Sgt. Ranasinghe who was in charge to summon those responsible for slaughtering the goat. Two soldiers had come forward. When all of them neared the cesspit, Maheswaran got deeply agitated and identified the two soldiers who came forward as those who assaulted them. The two soldiers became restless and were reassured by the Military Police that there was no cause for alarm. Major de Soya identified the two soldiers as Corporal Rathnayake and Private Kumarasinghe.

As the search continued, Corporal Rathnayake had pointed out two areas close to the cesspit that had been covered with loose soil and twigs. Before proceeding further, Major de Soya obtained a Magistrate's order to search the area during which eight bodies were unearthed. This discovery prompted Major de Soya to take the five soldiers including Corporal Rathnayake and Private Kumarasinghe into custody.

All five were charged with murder of the eight civilians, unlawful assembly and common intent as per sections 296, 146 and 32 of the penal code. However, the judgment by the Trial-at-Bar convicted only Corporal Rathnayake and acquitted the other four. Inexplicably, Private Kumarasinghe who

THE PARDONING OF FORMER CORPORAL



Correcting a paradox of justice



was arrested along with the Corporal was not indicted.

SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT

The case was heard by a High Court Trial-at-Bar. The verdict of the Court was that one soldier namely, Corporal Sunil Rathnayake, was guilty of murder and sentenced him to death as required by law. The 2nd to 5th accused were acquitted. The verdict by the High Court in respect of Corporal Rathnayake was based on circumstantial evidence established based on credibility of the evidence given by the sole survivor, Maheswaran, while the other four were acquitted due to the inability to establish their identities to the extent required by law.

Following the High Court judgment, Corporal Rathnayake appealed and the case was heard by a Bench of five Supreme Court Judges. The Supreme Court while upholding the judgment of the High Court, made the following comment. "It is clear that the acquittal of the 2nd to the 5th Accused had resulted not due to disbelieving the evi-

dence of Maheswaran, but due to the failure on the part of the Prosecution to establish the identities of the 2nd to the 5th Accused to the degree required by law". Continuing, the Court held that "the prosecution had failed to establish that there was an unlawful Assembly with the common object of committing Assault on Raviwarman within the meaning of Section 342 of the Penal Code. Thus, counts 1 to 10 of the indictment must necessarily fail. Accordingly, I set aside the conviction of the Accused-Appellant (former Corporal Rathnayake) on counts 1 to 10. What remains are counts 11 to 19 which are based on vicarious liability or common intent".

Having set aside nearly half the indictments, the Supreme Court went on to state: "When one considers the participation of the Accused-Appellant coupled with the evidence with regard to the participation of the others, it is clear that the Accused-Appellant is not only liable to the act committed by him, but also acts committed by others who were with him as well by virtue of Section 32 of the Penal Code. "There are significant features in this case that direct me to conclude that all persons involved

had acted in furtherance of common intention ...This assault appears to have commenced simultaneously indicating fusion of minds and a common intent".

Section 32 states: "When a criminal act is done by several persons in furtherance of the common intention of all, each of such persons is liable for that act in the same manner as if it were done by him alone".

Prior to agreeing with the conclusions reached by the High Court Trial-at-Bar the Supreme Court stated: "It is highly improbable if not impossible for a single person to commit all these acts. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that these acts have been committed by more than one person...Considering the above the irresistible inference that could be drawn is that it was the Accused-Appellant and the group of men who had inflicted the fatal injuries to the deceased and from the nature of the injuries it can be concluded that the injuries were inflicted with the intention of causing their deaths. Thus, I conclude that the prosecution has established the counts of murder (11 to 18) and the count of causing hurt to Maheswaran, count no. 19 of the indictment".

What could the public make out of the judgments of the Courts? We have a situation where out of five accused four are acquitted on grounds that their identities cannot be established and the one man whose identity is known is found guilty of all the crimes. However, the Court also admits that the one man, namely, the former Corporal Rathnayake by himself could not have committed all the acts. Under the circumstances, to sentence the Corporal to death or to commute him to life imprisonment while the others who presumably participated in the crime are acquitted, presents issues that cannot be reconciled. Such a paradox implies that the system has failed.

PRESIDENTIAL POWER to PARDON

The perception reflected in the letter by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to the President is that the President is the sole authority responsible for pardoning an offender condemned to death by a Court. This is not the case. The procedure involved, is stated in Article 34 (1) of the 1978 Constitution. The President acts on the recommendations of the Minister of Justice.

This Article 34 (1) states: "Provided that where any offender shall have been condemned to suffer death by the sentence of any court, the President shall cause a report to be made to him by the Judge who tried the case and shall forward such report to the Attorney-General with instructions that after the Attorney-General has advised thereon, the report shall be sent together with the Attorney-General's advice to the Minister in charge of the subject of Justice, who shall forward the report with his recommendations to the President".

It is therefore clear that the opinion of the Minister of Justice is vital, and that the intent per the Constitution is that the President does not act unilaterally. Furthermore, despite the fact that a death sentence by a Court is reached after diligent and deliberate evaluation of all facts, a further opportunity is given to the Minister of Justice by Article 34 (1), because the sentence of death once executed cannot be recalled. Consequently, most civilized societies explore all avenues before taking irreversible decisions when it comes to punishment by death. This means not to rely solely on decisions of Courts whose responsibility is to abide within the limits of Rules codified by Law. Therefore, the emphasis given by the HRCSL to the decisions of the Trial-at-Bar and the Supreme Court are misplaced for an institution that is responsible for Human Rights.

In view of the irrevocable nature of what is at stake when it comes to a death sen-

tence, the task before a Minister of Justice is daunting. Therefore, before the Minister of Justice forwards his recommendations to the President, he is entitled to raise certain basic question that would occur to any normal questioning layman. For instance, one obvious question is that if five suspects are charged on identical counts, why is one sentenced to death while the other four are acquitted? Another is that if only Corporal Sunil Rathnayake is guilty, it means that he is solely responsible for killing all eight civilians, digging a large enough hole to bury them all in one place, and digging another to bury the bicycles; a possibility the Courts also found as "highly improbable". Therefore, for former Corporal Rathnayake to carry the guilt of all five and either face the death sentence or be imprisoned for life is a paradox arising from a failure of the system for which the Corporal should not be held accountable. These complex issues are bound to impact on the recommendations of the Minister of Justice to the President.

CONCLUSION

Five soldiers were charged individually under Sections 146 and 296 of Sri Lanka's Penal Code for having unlawfully assembled with the common intent of murdering nine civilians that included a five-year old toddler on December 19, 2000 in Mirusuvil, Sri Lanka. Section 296 states: "Whoever commits murder shall be punished with death" and Section 146 states: "If an offence is committed by any member of an unlawful assembly in prosecution of the common object of that assembly, or such as the members of that assembly knew to be likely to be committed in prosecution of that object, every person who, at the time of the committing of that offence, is a member of the same assembly is guilty of that offence".

The Attorney General indicted the five persons on counts of 1 to 10 under Sections cited above and on counts 11 to 19 under Section 32 of the Penal Code. The High Court Trial-at-Bar found former Corporal Sunil Rathnayake guilty and acquitted the other four because the Prosecution could not establish their identities to the extent required by law. The Corporal appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court set aside counts 1 to 10 and charged him on counts 11 to 19 which according to the Court are based on "vicarious liability or common intention".

The Supreme Court concluded "that the learned judges of the Trial-at-Bar were correct in coming to the conclusion that the Accused-Appellant was guilty on counts 11 to 19 (inclusive of both counts)". The Supreme Court also referred to the fact that "It is highly improbable if not impossible for a single person to commit all these acts. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that these acts have been committed by more than one person", and thus the "irresistible inference that could be drawn is that it was the Accused-Appellant and the group of men who had inflicted the fatal injuries to the deceased".

Such paradoxes are bound to influence the Minister of Justice when he forwards his recommendations to the President. If it is "highly improbable" for a single person to have committed all the acts without the participation of others who incidentally, were "acquitted" earlier by the High Court, the only rational explanation for this paradox is that such contradictions are manifestations of a failure of the system for which the Corporal cannot be solely held accountable. Under these circumstances, pardoning the only survivor of these multiple gruesome acts is the only measure possible, since imposing a death penalty or imprisoning former Corporal Rathnayake for life, makes him a victim of a system that sets up such paradoxes.

BLACK TEA: AN IMMUNITY BOOSTER FOR COVID 19?

Every sector in the world from oil & gas, automobiles, air & travel, HORECA (hotel/restaurant/catering), insurance, shipping, printing, banking, apparel/fashion, luxury to FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) products are hit hard by the present Coronavirus pandemic. As analysts predict, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has delivered the swiftest and hardest global economic shock in modern history. The direct negative impact and the subsequent ripple effect on industrialized nations or on developing countries both will be extraordinarily significant. The COVID already infected over one million people while the death toll has reached 75,000 where a worldwide recession cannot be avoided. In this scenario, purchasing power and the consumer demand of all nations are bound to decline drastically.

Is there any silver lining in this dark cloud for Ceylon Tea? The Tea Research Institute of Sri Lanka (TRI) has released a scientific paper under the theme:

"Antiviral properties of tea - black tea may become the unique brew of choice with no side effects, to fight against Coronavirus?"

Many attempts are ongoing globally in search of therapeutic options, to recognize antiviral agents which could treat patients affected by COVID-19. However, 'prevention is better than cure'. Therefore, in the context of healthy living, TRI has made a genuine effort

to investigate the 'Power of Ceylon Black Tea' as a potential booster to aid one's immune system to fight against the virus when confronted.

TRI has quoted a recently conducted research study from Taiwan where the chemical structure of 64 compounds had been bioinformatically modelled against SARS-CoV-2. It had been revealed that Theaflavins could potentially inhibit a critical SARS-CoV-2 virus, and thereby, theoretically inhibit COVID-19. Clinical trials, however, needs to be initiated before claiming benefits against COVID-19 in humans. Theaflavins are antioxidant polyphenols that are formed during the enzymatic oxidation process (fermentation) in the manufacture of Black Tea. In contrast to Green Tea, Black Tea is rich in Theaflavins due to the different manufacturing process. Due to the presence of catechins, flavonoids, polyphenols, amino acids etc in Black Tea, it is perceived to offer active antiviral activity. Green Tea is said to have similar properties at different levels.

As quoted by TRI, many epidemiological studies have shown that regular consumption of tea is linked to the lowering of cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, certain types of cancer and cardiovascular diseases. The major chemical constituent found in Black Tea is polyphenols, particularly the flavonoids that have been reported to possess antioxidant,

anti-inflammatory, anti-atherosclerotic, anti-mutagenic, anti-tumour and anti-viral activities. It has been popularly accepted by the scientific world that daily consumption of three to four cups of Black Tea (without sugar or milk) by an individual is probably sufficient to trigger some of these activities in the human body.

The TRI has highlighted that several studies undertaken in different countries have demonstrated the potential benefits of Black & Green Tea consumption in controlling influenza and common cold generally caused by viral infections. Tea Catechins can bind onto the surface of the influenza virus and inhibit the spread. An alkaloid, found in tea is Theaflavins, a chemical shown to alleviate respiratory diseases such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and other lung diseases. It relaxes and opens air passages in the lungs making it easier to breathe. Inhaling boiling water mixed with Black Tea can facilitate the clearing of the passages towards the lungs. As the COVID-19 epidemic is a similar illness where the patients find it difficult to breathe. Please note that Black Tea is neither a medically proven prophylaxis nor a treatment against COVID-19, but it is worth conducting further research to investigate the possible anti-viral benefits of Theaflavins in Black Tea against COVID-19.

The scientists at the Sri Lanka Tea Board Laboratory suggest that frequent consumption of hot black tea is capable of flushing viruses trapped in the throat area. This practice is believed to improve immune capacity and inhibit inflammation due to Catechins and Polyphenols contained in Black Tea. Further, inhaling the fumes (steam) of hot black tea at high temperatures facilitates the removal of viruses trapped around the nasal area and opens a pathway for the tea Theaflavins to reach the lungs and protect it from viruses.

In the light of above explaining, it could be assumed in respect of the circumstantial evidence available that daily consumption of



Black Tea (03 to 04 cups without sugar or milk) is very useful and linked to the boosting of the immune system of normal human beings against respiratory diseases. COVID-19 is an

infected patients with Coronavirus. Just for comparison purposes, take a brief look at the table below as of 7th April 2020 on the COVID 19 statistics:

Country	Infected	Deaths	Mortality - %	Cases per 1M population
USA	367,650	10,939	2.96	1,111
China	81,740	3,331	4.08	57
Italy	132,547	16,523	12.47	2,192
Iran	60,500	3,739	6.18	720
Australia	5,908	243	1.96	1,377
Spain	124,739	8,367	6.71	2,923
Sri Lanka	180	6	3.33	8
India	4,850	136	2.80	4

Data Source: Coronavirus Real Time News Update (7th April 2020, 4.pm, Sri Lanka Time) <https://thewuhanvirus.com>

influenza-like illness which could be perceived to be curtailed by Theaflavins, one of the most active ingredients in Black Tea as explained in this review.

Sri Lankans habitually consume 03 to 04 cups of Ceylon Black Tea and perhaps certain avid connoisseurs even more. Therefore in addition to epidemic control measures, social distancing and hot local temperatures (between 26°C-32°C), the practice of drinking tea may also contribute to the low incidence of

The infected cases and the cases per million people in Sri Lanka is comparatively low. It could be due to a combination of multiple reasons, which certainly requires an in-depth investigation. It is premature to make concrete claims until in-vivo experiments or Research & Development on living cells are undertaken as per WHO guidelines. Nevertheless, Sri Lankans strongly believe that Ceylon Tea, the miracle Black Tea beverage is certainly one of them. (Sri Lanka Tea Board)



TODAY IS MAUNDY THURSDAY

INSTITUTION OF HOLY EUCHARIST AND PRIESTHOOD TOOK PLACE TODAY

E.WEERAPPERUMA

Today is Maundy Thursday and is also referred to the day as the Holy Thursday or Great Thursday.

Today Maundy Thursday is of Great Significance except the Day of Resurrection of Jesus Christ, defeating death. Today thus is one of the most important, complex and profound days of celebration of the Catholic world. On this day we recall to our mind with reverence the institution of the Holy Eucharist - as the True Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; and the institution of the Holy Orders or the Sacrament of Priesthood. Also, we remember with great reverence the "Washing of the feet of His Disciples by Jesus Christ, the Gurudev, the Lord and Master.

On this day the disciples get together with the Lord and Master in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover. Passover means "Pesah"; the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) of the Chosen People of God, to the Promise Land.

The Catholics and Christians across the world and in Sri Lanka, the precious and glorious land of our birth will join-in, celebrating and commemorating the central events of the Life of Christ, basis of our Faith " Passion, Death and Resurrection". He is the Supreme Teacher and the Only Founder held in the highest esteem by all for His saving life of sacrifice on the Cross, for all humanity lived, living and live in the future.

He is Suffering Servant of Yahweh, trapped, scourged, humiliated and brutally attacked on the Night He was betrayed by one of His Disciples. He is the Paschal lamb, who offers willingly His own self at the last supper as the Passover sacrifice. He is the Lord and Master who humbles Himself by washing the feet of His disciples like the servant washing his Master's feet. He thus set an example while playing the role of the Lord and Master and be humble enough to be a sacrifice, a servant to His dear and near Loved Ones. His action, the washing of the feet manifested humility to the core.

This-day, named 'Maundy Thursday' is derived from the word 'Maundy' from the



old French 'Mande' and from the first word of the Latin phrase: "Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos. (a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you).

"Mandatum" means a commandment; "I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another". (John 13: 34- 35).

The old English name for 'Maundy Thursday' was 'Shear Thursday'. The penitents obtained absolution, trimmed their hair and beards (customarily shear the beard on that day) wash-in preparation for Easter.

The word denotes that it is the day of cleaning. The name for the 'Holy Thursday' in the German language is 'Grundonnerstag'. It means 'Green Thursday'. It is claimed the word is coined using 'grun' to mean green and Donnerstag, is the name in German for Thursday of the week.

In the Czech Republic, the day is called "Zeleny ctvrtek" means 'Green Thursday'. In Malta, the day is called "Hamis ix-Xirka" means "Society Thursday".

Some claim that the word Maundy has



its origin and the term is derived from the word 'maund' from the old French 'mendier' and Latin word 'mendicare' which means 'to beg'. Some claim that there is an old English custom supporting that view. It is said that on this day in every year goods are taken in a container to be distributed by the King or the Monarch as alms among the deserving senior citizens and also to the poor. The container is known as 'maund' or 'maundy purse'. The money given in red and white purses are called 'Maundy money' or 'Royal Maundy'. This custom dates back to the times of King Edward I.

The white purse, contains currency, one penny for each year of the monarch's age. Giving special 'Maundy' money came to be practised from the year 1822. It was also on record that the Monarch (King) washed the feet of the selected poor and that custom continued until the death of King James II.



On this particular year, the reign of Tiberius Caesar, the Jews celebrated the Passover on a Friday, the day Jesus Christ made the most sublime offering on the Cross, the Self-offered Passover Victim. On the previous day that is Thursday night, Jesus celebrated His Last Supper with His 12 disciples before the Nisan 15th day, the day before the Passover or the Preparation Day or Friday as we now understand. (before Nisan 15th day, Sabbath of that year).

The theologians speculate that Crucifixion occurred on April 3, (A.D.33). The Last Supper also signifies the farewell to His disciples who had assembled, some of whom would betray, desert or deny Him, before the sun rose again.

Holy Thursday will bring to our mind the lesson taught by the Lord by 'Washing of the Feet' of the 12 including the one who betrayed Him. It ascribes to the humility of service and the need for cleansing with water (a symbol of Baptism). Jesus performed the washing of the feet of His disciples before the supper was taken. He explained its significance by action.

Symbolizing this act of Christ, on Holy Thursday the washing of the feet is done by a Bishop, priest or today, laymen. The emphasis is on the ritual washing, giving rise to the ancient tradition of spring

cleaning the home in preparation for the feast of Passover (Easter celebrations).

Also the institution of the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and the sacerdotal priesthood (as distinct from the priesthood of all believers) is of great significance of the Day.

The day is of great significance as that was the Night Jesus Christ was taken away from the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal of Judas for 30 silver shekels; price the law had fixed for a slave's life.

The Holy Mass of this day marks the final Mass before the Easter Vigil. The services of the evening ends with the solemn procession, taking the Blessed Sacrament to the flower-bedecked Altar of Repose where the Body of Christ, present in the consecrated Host, remains 'entombed' until the communion service on Good Friday.

The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament by the people reminds us of the staying of the disciples with the Lord during His agony on the Mount of Olives, before the betrayal by Judas.

On this day a special Mass is held in the Cathedrals attended by priests of the dioceses in observance of Christ's institution of the priesthood. During this 'Chrism Mass', the Bishops bless the Oil of Chrism used for Baptism and Confirmation.

THE EVENTS THAT SHAPED MAUNDY THURSDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY

WILLIAM BRADSHAW

Last week I heard a sermon by a young minister who had not been out of seminary all that long. In his effort to appear knowledgeable and profound, he talked about Holy Week in deep theological terms reminiscent of seminary classes, and people in the pews had difficulty comprehending what he was talking about. Many of them expressed disappointed in not understanding what he was saying, admitting that they did not know the meaning of "Maundy" Thursday and why the day Jesus was crucified is called "Good" Friday.

Let's take a look at these two holy days.

Maundy Thursday. The word "Maundy" comes to us as an Anglo-French word derived from the Latin "mandatum," which means "commandment." It refers to when Jesus, in the Upper Room during the Last Supper, said to the disciples: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34, Revised Standard Version).

Maundy Thursday (or Holy Thursday) is the Thursday before Easter. Most Christian churches in mainline denominations, and some of the



more fundamental churches, commemorate Maundy Thursday in some way, but the types of services vary greatly.

Since the focus of Maundy Thursday is on the Upper Room and the Last Supper, the celebration of Holy Communion or the Eucharist is one of most ancient Christian practices of all Maundy Thursday commemorations. However, the Sacrament is celebrated in some churches as part of an evening meal in a less formal setting than the church sanctuary, reminiscent of the setting of the original Last Supper.

In addition, many churches will observe some variation of the ancient service of Tenebrae, the Latin word for candles. It is a service of candles

accompanied by various readings of scripture and the gradual extinguishing of candles, which cast shadows of the Cross in different dimensions on the walls. Eventually the worshippers are left for a minute or two in total darkness, signifying the coming death of Jesus. Tenebrae is usually observed as an integrated part of some kind of worship service and accompanied by celebrating the Sacrament.

In recent years, including foot-washing as part of the evening's observance of Maundy Thursday has become popular, even in mainline denominations. Such services are reminiscent of the washing of feet by Jesus in the Upper Room during the Last Supper and accentuate the theme of humility and service (John's Gospel, 13:1-20).

Good Friday. The celebration of Good Friday is ancient, dating at least to the 4th century. But why is it called a "good" day? The exact details of what happened on that original Friday are somewhat different in the four Gospels, but this is what we are able to piece together.

Either very late on Maundy Thursday or in the early hours of Friday, after the Last Supper, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to meditate. When he was there, one of his disciples betrayed him by leading the soldiers to him and portraying him as a threat to both the Jewish and

Roman authorities. He was arrested and immediately taken before the Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court), where he was found guilty. From there he was taken to stand before Pilate (Roman manager of Judea, southern division of Palestine), thereafter taken to face Herod (Roman king of Judea), and then back to Pilate again. He was condemned to death. He was stripped of all human dignity: scourged, crowned with thorns, spat upon, made to carry a cross through the streets, actually nailed to the cross, and finally having to suffer the slow and painful death of crucifixion from 9:00 a.m.

to 3:00 p.m. After he died, he was taken from the cross and buried in a tomb.

How is it possible to characterize the horrific events of that day as "good"? How is it that the cross of that Friday has become the universal symbol of Christendom? This would have gone down in history as just another death of a renegade who tried to overthrow Jewish and Roman officials had it not been for what followed.

The third day later it was discovered that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. At first it was thought that perhaps the body had been stolen. But guards had been placed at the entrance of the tomb to keep that from happening, and then Jesus appeared to the disciples. It was clear that he had overcome death.

The Apostles' Creed, well known outline of the Christian faith ascribed to the early Disciples and used in public worship, puts it in broad but simple terms. Quoting from parts of the Creed relating directly to Good Friday: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried . . . the third day he rose again from the dead: he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on

the right hand of God the Father Almighty . . . I believe in . . . the life everlasting."

That terrible Friday has been called Good Friday because it led to the Resurrection of Jesus and his victory over death and sin and the celebration of Easter, the very pinnacle of Christian celebrations. Although Christians, from the very fundamental to the very liberal, vary in their interpretations of exactly how the death of Jesus on the cross frees man from his sins and gives him everlasting life, and exactly what everlasting life means, they all agree that it took the death and burial of Jesus on that Friday to make the victory of the Resurrection possible. John simply says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (3:16 RSV)

Services of worship on Good Friday differ, but all are solemn in tone and the liturgical color is black. Some denominations have traditional types of worship services. Many Protestant churches participate in ecumenical or union services from 12 noon to 3:00 p.m., the traditional hours for commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus. These services usually focus on the seven last sayings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and the worshippers are free to come and go at will.

(HuffPost)



Tenebrae



Garden of Gethsemane in modern day Jerusalem

Wuhan OPENS, sparking HOPE

Thousands streamed out of the Chinese city of Wuhan Wednesday after a lockdown on the birthplace of the coronavirus was lifted, offering a ray of hope even as Europe and the United States faced rising deaths and crippling economic pain.

As Wuhan reawakens, Western countries remain in the throes of a crisis that has claimed the lives of more than 80,000 people worldwide and forced around half of humanity into some form of lockdown.

The hardest-hit countries, among them Italy, Spain, France and the US, are grappling with how to balance public safety with the devastating impact of shutdowns that have erased millions of jobs, sent financial markets plunging and pummeled major industries from travel to construction.

In an alarming calculation of the economic costs, the French economy recorded its worst performance since 1945 during the first quarter, shrinking some six percent.

Germany's economy, the biggest in Europe, is also expected to fall into a "serious recession" and shrink by nearly 10 percent in the second quarter, leading researchers warned. Yet health experts stressed it is too early to loosen restrictions that could accelerate the spread of a disease that has infiltrated every layer of society, from refugees to

royals to Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who entered his third day in intensive care.

"Now is not the time to relax measures. It is the time to once again double and triple our collective efforts to drive towards suppression with the whole support of society," said the World Health Organization's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge.

'Stuck for 77 days'

In the ground-zero city of Wuhan, who led the world with its unprecedented lockdown, strict measures appeared to have paid off.

After a nearly 11-week travel ban was finally lifted, tens of thousands of people fled the city in joyous scenes that contrasted with the macabre mood around much of the world – even if some passengers were travelling in hazmat suits.

"I've been stuck for 77 days! I've been stuck for 77 days!" shouted one man, who arrived at the railway station for a train back to his home province of Hunan.

Yet not all is back to normal, with schools still closed and travel discouraged.

At the train station a robot whirred through crowds to spray their feet with disinfectant as it played a recorded message reminding them to wear face masks.

Passengers also had to pass temperatures checks and show green



"health codes" on their phone, which are calculated in part by whether their neighbourhoods have been declared virus-free.

"Wuhan has lost a lot in this epidemic, and Wuhan people have paid a big price," a 21-year-old man surnamed Yao told AFP.

"Now that the lockdown has been lifted, I think we're all pretty happy."

Stages of grief

The mood was far bleaker in the United States, where the country mourned another 1,939 deaths over a period of 24 hours, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, bringing the nation's death toll to nearly 13,000.

President Donald Trump lashed out at the WHO, accusing it of a pro-Beijing bias as he threatened to cut funding.

The US president has criticised China's handling of the pandemic and questioned the accuracy of official statistics that show its deaths have slowed to a trickle.

Yet Trump himself has also come under fire for initially downplaying the virus by likening it to the flu and failing to adequately prepare the country's hospitals.

Medical staff around the world are working tirelessly in brimming intensive care units and makeshift hospitals erected in sports stadiums, on ships and even in an New

York cathedral. In Spain, home to the world's second deadliest outbreak, another 757 deaths were reported Wednesday, bringing the toll up for a second day after several days of decline.

Antonio Alvarez, a 33-year-old nurse at at Barcelona hospital, described his experience of the crisis as akin to bereavement. "I've had my phases of anger, of denial, you go through all of them."

"Now we are still a little overwhelmed but it is better. Fewer patients are dying," he told AFP.

Hundreds are still dying daily in devastated Italy although the peak of the crisis appears to have passed, with the rise of infections hitting a new low.

Britain, meanwhile, is bracing for its most agonising days after another record 786 more deaths on Tuesday, while the prime minister's hospitalisation underscored the seriousness of the disease for many in a country that was slow to react.

A staggering 81 percent of the world's 3.3 billion-strong workforce has been affected by "the worst global crisis since the Second World War", according to the UN's International Labour Organization.

Governments around the globe are rolling out unprecedented stimulus measures, including a \$1 trillion package in Japan.

Yet the eurozone is mired in bickering over a bailout plan for its hard-hit members, with finance ministers unable to bridge the divide after 16 hours of talks that will now resume Thursday.

Meanwhile, markets continued their rollercoaster ride, with European stocks retreating Wednesday after the Dow Jones index soared around 1,000 points on Tuesday before ending slightly lower.

The economic fallout is biting hardest among the world's poor.

Mohamed Said, a carpenter and father-of-three queueing for food packages in Cairo, spoke for millions as he told AFP of his desperation.

"Since this crisis started we've been sitting at home and there's no money coming in," said the 36-year-old.

"We don't know how to feed our kids... and if, God forbid, something happens to any of them, I won't be able to foot a hospital bill," he said. (AFP)

Monkeys, elephants reclaim India's streets

Hundreds of monkeys have taken over the streets around India's presidential palace, leading an animal offensive taking advantage of deserted streets as the country remains under a coronavirus lockdown.

With India's 1.3 billion population and tens of millions of cars conspicuous by their absence, stray domestic animals and wildlife has moved to fill the void, while also suffering from the pandemic fallout.

In the financial capital Mumbai, peacocks have been seen perched on top of parked cars, displaying their spectacular trains.

In Delhi, troops of monkeys now scamper over

the walls of the Rashtrapati Bhawan presidential compound, past military guards and into the grounds of ministries and other official buildings.

"They are stealing a lot more, but not yet threatening humans," said one officer on duty at the palace entrance. The Rhesus macaque monkeys – who often snatch food from shoppers' bags – have long been a problem in the capital, but there have been reports of some getting into office buildings during the lockdown.

Other animals have also been emboldened by the coronavirus restrictions on humans, who are only allowed out for food and

essential items. A Himalayan black bear last week wandered into Gangtok, capital of the northeastern state of Sikkim, entering a telecoms office and injuring an engineer, media reported.

Indian Forest Service officers, meanwhile, have shared videos on social media of elephants trundling past shuttered shops along deserted streets.

But the lockdown has also been deadly for some animals.

Four horses normally employed for tourist carriage rides near Kolkata's landmark Victoria Memorial have died from starvation in recent days, animal rights activists said.

Human activity to blame for virus spread: study



Diseases such as the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe could become more common as human activity destroys habitats and forces disease-carrying wild animals into ever-closer proximity with us, a major study showed on Wednesday.

Illegal poaching, mechanised farming and increasingly urbanised lifestyles have all led to mass biodiversity loss in recent decades, devastating populations of wild animals and increasing the abundance of domesticated livestock.

"Our data highlight how exploitation of wildlife and destruction of natural habitat in particular, underlie disease spillover events, putting us at risk for emerging infectious diseases," said Christine Johnson, from the University of California's School

of Veterinary Medicine, lead author of the research. Last year the United Nations panel on biodiversity warned that up to one million species faced extinction as a result of human activity.

The landmark assessment showed that 75 percent of land and 40 percent of oceans on Earth have already been severely degraded by mankind.

Deforestation, in particular, is placing increasing pressure on wild mammals, which struggle to adapt to dwindling habitats.

And as we encroach further on their territory, wild animals are being forced into increasing contact with humans, heightening the risk of another COVID-19. (AFP)

Killer of Bangladesh's founding leader faces execution

A Bangladesh military captain arrested after nearly 25 years on the run over the assassination of the country's founding leader will be executed, officials said Wednesday.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was killed along with most of his family in a military coup on August 15, 1975, nearly four years after he led Bangladesh to independence from Pakistan.

In 1998 Abdul Majed was sentenced to death along with a dozen other army officers over the murders.

Bangladesh's Supreme Court upheld the verdict in 2009 and five of the killers were executed several months later.

Majed is believed to have fled to India in 1996. He returned to Bangladesh last month, a prosecutor told reporters.

Acting on a tip-off, counter-terrorism police arrested Majed on Tuesday as he rode in a rickshaw in the capital Dhaka, said police inspector Johurul Haque.

"The formalities to execute him have already begun," Justice Minister Anisul Huq told AFP, adding that the former officer will not be able to appeal his sentence.

Huq said Majed's only option to avoid the gallows was to appeal to the president for clemency. (AFP)

Ethiopia declares state of emergency

Ethiopia on Wednesday declared a state of emergency to fight the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far infected 55 people and resulted in two deaths there.

It is the first state of emergency announced under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who came to power in 2018 and won last year's Nobel Peace Prize in part for expanding political freedoms in the authoritarian nation.

"Because the coronavirus

pandemic is getting worse, the Ethiopian government has decided to declare a state of emergency under Article 93 of the constitution," Abiy said in a statement.

"I call upon everybody to stand in line with government bodies and others that are trying to overcome this problem," he added, warning of "grave legal measures" against anyone who undermines the fight against the pandemic.

It was not immediately

clear how the state of emergency would affect day-to-day life in Ethiopia.

The government has so far refrained from imposing a lockdown similar to those in effect elsewhere in the region, including in Rwanda, Uganda and Mauritius.

According to the country's constitution, under a state of emergency the Council of Ministers has "all necessary power to protect the country's peace and sovereignty" and can

suspend some "political and democratic rights".

The constitution also says lawmakers need to approve a state of emergency, which can last for six months and be extended every four months after that.

Wednesday's decree is likely to "beef up security operations with a greater role for the federal government, including the military," said William Davison, Ethiopia analyst for the International Crisis

Group, a conflict-prevention organisation.

"While this approach is understandable given the situation, it is critical that there is transparency over the government's extra powers and that there is adequate monitoring of implementation," Davison said. Since reporting its first COVID-19 case on March 13, Ethiopia has closed land borders and schools, freed thousands of prisoners to ease overcrowding, sprayed main

streets in the capital with disinfectant, and discouraged large gatherings.

But Abiy said over the weekend that a harsher lockdown would be unrealistic given that there are "many citizens who don't have homes" and "even those who have homes have to make ends meet daily."

Jawar Mohammed, a leading opposition politician, said Wednesday this called into question why a state of emergency was necessary. (AFP)



How plants bounce back after crushing blows

Some flowers can recover with remarkable speed after a major accident, such as being walked upon by humans.

Scientists found that species including orchid and sweet pea could reorient themselves in 10-48 hours after an injury.

These plants are able to bend, twist and reposition their stems to ensure that they reproduce.

But others such as buttercups fail to bounce back after damage.

The remarkable abilities of some flowers to recover quickly from serious injury, have been previously overlooked by science, say the authors of this new work. Researchers looked at 23 native and cultivated flower species in the UK, Europe, Australia and North and South America. They examined species which had suffered accidents and they also carried out experiments where the flowers were tethered at either 45 or 90 degrees off their normal orientation.

For many flowers, their ability to reproduce depends on the careful alignment of their sexual



organs or stigma and their nectar tubes in order for a visiting pollinator to help them make seeds.

The scientists found that when these species were damaged, they could accurately reposition their sexual organs.

"The common spotted orchid does it largely by just bending the main stem," said Prof Scott Armbruster from the University of Portsmouth who led the research.

"It's pretty quick, within a day or two, it's reoriented its main stem so that now all the flowers are in the right position," he told BBC News.

"The slightly more

interesting ones were where each individual flower re-orientates on its own, by the sub stem, that's what's called the pedicel connecting the flower to the main stem, and that is bending or twisting. And that's what you see with aconitum."

These rapid recovering species were usually bilaterally symmetrical flowers, which is where the left and right hand sides mirror each other. Examples of these types of flowers include snapdragon, orchid and sweet pea.

Other species, termed radially symmetrical, such as sunflower, petunia, buttercup and wild rose have

far fewer abilities to bounce back. Even if they lose their orientation, they are still capable of reproducing.

"The ones that do it are the ones where it matters. And the ones that don't do it are the ones where it doesn't really matter," said Prof Armbruster.

"The radially symmetrical flowers like clematis had a nice radially symmetrical flower.

And the same with passion flower, and they don't bounce back. We tether them and they just stay there or they might change position but not in a way that corrects their position." (BBC)

Lung exercise may help prevent COVID-19

COVID-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus, attacks the lungs. In the most severe cases, patients need ventilators to breathe, but by then it might be too late. A majority of people put on the machines are dying from the disease.

There is something you can do that might prevent this worst-case scenario.

Dr. Sarfaraz Munshi of Queen's Hospital in London says that, if you're starting to have COVID-19 symptoms, you should undertake breathing exercises that will help your lungs fight the illness, thus making it less likely you'll need hospitalization and ventilation.

"Once you have an active infection, you need to get a good amount of air into the base of your lungs," he says in a YouTube video. He says people should regularly do the exercises as soon as they begin to show COVID-19 symptoms, and that it's not a bad idea to do them even when you're healthy and symptom-free. Could relatively simple breathing exercises really work? J.K. Rowling, for one, swears by them. The "Harry Potter" author said on Monday that she had coronavirus symptoms for two weeks and diligently followed Munshi's advice. She wrote on Twitter that she's now "fully recovered & technique helped a lot." Below is Dr. Munshi's explanation of how to do the exercises. "The way it will work is, you will take five deep breaths in, and each time you will hold your breath for five seconds," Dr. Munshi says. "On the sixth deep breath, you will



take it in and do a big cough [to open up your lower airways], covering your mouth. You will do this twice, and then you will lay flat on your bed [on your front], with a pillow in front of you, taking slightly deeper breaths for the next 10 minutes. Because you've got to understand that the majority of your lung is on your back, not on your front. By lying on your back you are closing off more of your smaller airways, and this is not good during the period of your infection." Dr. Kathryn Dreger, a professor at Georgetown University's medical school, explained in The New York Times recently what happens to lungs that are being attacked by COVID-19, and it helps explain why Dr. Munshi's exercises could indeed make a

difference. She wrote: When we take a breath, we pull air through our windpipe, the trachea. This pipe then branches in two, then again into smaller and smaller pipes finally ending in tiny tubes less than a millimeter across called bronchioles. At the very end of each are clusters of microscopic sacs called alveoli. The lining of each sac is so thin that air floats through them into the red blood cells. These millions of alveoli are so soft, so gentle, that a healthy lung has almost no substance. Touching it feels like reaching into a bowl of whipped cream.

Covid-19 changes all that. It causes a gummy yellow fluid, called exudate, to fill the air sacs, stopping the free flow of oxy-

gen. If only a few air sacs are filled, the rest of the lung takes over. When more and more alveoli are filled, the lung texture changes, beginning to feel more like a marshmallow than whipped cream.

When those air sacs become clogged, the lungs stiffen up. Oxygen levels in the patient dramatically fall, and the heart struggles to function properly. A ventilator can help, but only so much. Said one doctor who's treating COVID-19 patients on ventilators:

"I feel like I'm trying to ventilate bricks instead of lungs."

Once a patient is on a ventilator, "[d]octors are left with impossible choices," Dr. Dreger wrote. "Too much oxygen poisons the air sacs, worsening the lung damage, but too little damages the brain and kidneys. Too much air pressure damages the lung, but too little means the oxygen can't get in. Doctors try to optimize, to tweak." For patients lucky enough to survive this ordeal and be removed from ventilators, some are likely looking at lifelong severe health problems.

With this context, Dr. Munshi's breathing and coughing technique makes sense.

That said, it's certainly not a cure-all, and how much it truly helps is unknown.

If you do develop COVID-19, monitor your symptoms closely and stay in touch with your doctor. If you're having trouble breathing, you might need to be hospitalized.

(Oregon Live)



NEVER SHAKE HANDS AGAIN

- DR. ANTHONY FAUCI



Dr. Anthony Fauci, the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) director, said Americans should never shake hands again, in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus and other diseases.

The leading infectious disease expert on President Donald Trump's coronavirus task force told the Wall Street Journal that an end to handshaking would be good for reducing future transmissions of the novel coronavirus and would also cut the number of influenza cases.

In a wide-ranging interview with The Journal podcast, the NIAID director hoped to see "light at the end of the tunnel" by the end of April.

Speaking about the eventual return to normal life, Dr. Fauci said: "When you gradually come back, you don't jump into it with both feet. You say what are the things you could still do and still approach normal. One of them is absolute compulsive hand washing. The other is you don't ever shake anybody's hands."

He also suggested that people might want to wear "cloth face protection" if they could not avoid being within six feet of others as life starts its return to normal.

When the host Kate Linebaugh noted that Dr. Fauci and others on the coronavirus task force did not stand six feet apart at

pandemic briefings, the disease expert said: "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good here. The task force group is a little bit different."

"Since we're around the president... it's got to be clear that we're not endangering him. So I get tested frequently and I get my temperature taken eight, nine times a day. Every time you go into a different room in the White House you get your temperature taken. "So I don't think you should judge the use or not of masks and physical separation what you see with the task force for the rest of the country, it really is different."

Asked to paint a picture of what life may look like once the worst of the novel coronavirus has passed, Dr. Fauci said he could see the country phasing back to normality by doing such things as limiting the num-

ber of people who can be at a restaurant or event at any one time.

"But can I as a resident of New York City hug my 77-year-old mother with vulnerable respiratory systems?" Linebaugh asked. "I mean I don't think you should do that now. You're in New York City. You're in a very vulnerable situation in regard to infection," Fauci replied.

"But when this goes down, and gets down to almost zero, when we get to that, then I think what's important... there is an antibody test that will be widely distributed pretty soon, in the next few weeks, that will allow you to know whether or not you've actually been infected."

He said: "I can imagine a situation where you take an antibody test and you are absolutely positive that you were infected and you

did well, then you could hug the heck out of your grandmother and not worry about it."

Later in the podcast, Trump's top coronavirus doctor said: "I don't think we're ever going to get back to free-flying lack of attention to what transmissibility of infections are. I think that people are going to be careful."

"I don't think we should ever shake hands ever again, to be honest with you. Not only would it be good to prevent coronavirus disease, it probably would decrease instances of influenza dramatically in this country."

Newsweek has contacted the NIAID for further comment and will update with any response.

President Trump revealed at the end of last month that social distancing guidelines would be extended until April 30. He also warned that he expected the novel coronavirus death toll to peak in a couple of weeks.

"The peak for death rates is likely to hit in two weeks," Trump said on March 29. "Nothing would be worse than declaring victory before victory is won." Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told Fox Business on Tuesday that he hoped the coronavirus shutdown would not go on for more than eight weeks, adding that the president was looking at how parts of the economy could be reopened.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advice on Using Face Coverings to Slow Spread of COVID-19



- CDC recommends wearing a cloth face covering in public where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- A simple cloth face covering can help slow the spread of the virus by those infected and by those who do not exhibit symptoms.
- Cloth face coverings can be fashioned from household items. Guides are offered by the CDC. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>)
- Cloth face coverings should be washed regularly. A washing machine will suffice.
- Practice safe removal of face coverings by not touching eyes, nose, and mouth, and wash hands immediately after removing the covering.

World Health Organization advice for avoiding spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

- | Hygiene advice | Medical advice | Mask and glove usage |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean hands frequently with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand rub. • Wash hands after coughing or sneezing; when caring for the sick; before, during and after food preparation; before eating; after using the toilet; when hands are visibly dirty; and after handling animals or waste. • Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing. • Avoid touching your hands, nose and mouth. Do not spit in public. • Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing. Discard the tissue immediately and clean your hands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid close contact with others if you have any symptoms. • Stay at home if you feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as headache and runny nose, to avoid potential spread of the disease to medical facilities and other people. • If you develop serious symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing) seek medical care early and contact local health authorities in advance. • Note any recent contact with others and travel details to provide to authorities who can trace and prevent spread of the disease. • Stay up to date on COVID-19 developments issued by health authorities and follow their guidance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy individuals only need to wear a mask if taking care of a sick person. • Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing. • Masks are effective when used in combination with frequent hand cleaning. • Do not touch the mask while wearing it. Clean hands if you touch the mask. • Learn how to properly put on, remove and dispose of masks. Clean hands after disposing of the mask. • Do not reuse single-use masks. • Regularly washing bare hands is more effective against catching COVID-19 than wearing rubber gloves. • The COVID-19 virus can still be picked up on rubber gloves and transmitted by touching your face. |

Another vaccine trial begins

The biotech company Novavax announced Wednesday that it has identified an "ideal" coronavirus vaccine candidate — and is set to launch the first clinical human trial in mid-May.

The candidate, NVX-CoV2373, proved its ability to produce immune responses and high levels of antibodies against COVID-19 in pre-clinical animal trials, the Gaithersburg, Maryland-based company announced.

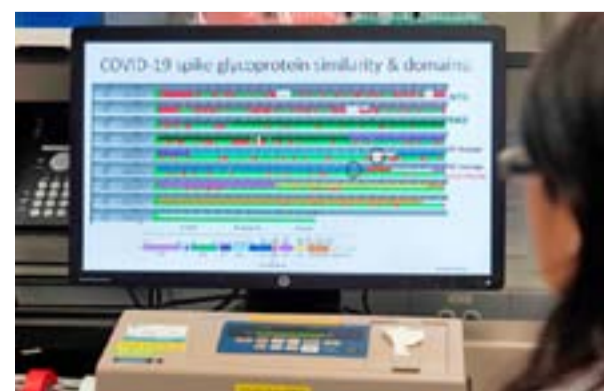
"This is strong evidence

that the vaccine created by Novavax has the potential to be highly immunogenic in humans which could lead to protection from COVID-19 and helping to control the spread of this disease," Matthew Friedman, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, said in the statement.

The "ideal vaccine candidate" was "selected from a number of constructs," Dr. Gregory Glenn, President of Research and Development at Novavax, said in



the statement. The company is working with another Gaithersburg firm, Emergent BioSolutions, to help expedite the process of rolling out the vaccine.



The expected mid-May trial launch is "weeks ahead of schedule," Stanley

C. Erck, President and CEO, of Novavax, said in the statement.

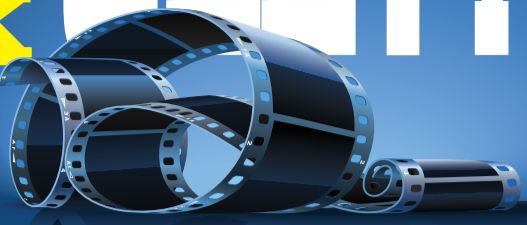
Last month, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations awarded Novavax a \$4 million investment to support its efforts, with additional funding discussions underway, according to the statement.

That initial funding — coupled with the candidate's promising early results — "put us in position to have preliminary human data in July," Glenn said. "This progress demonstrates the ability of our recombinant nanoparticle

technology to rapidly create vaccine candidates for emerging viruses like SARS-CoV-2," Erck said.

"In addition, the performance of NVX-CoV2373 in multiple preclinical studies and testing gives us increased confidence in its potential to protect against COVID-19 disease." But the company will need lots more funding — hundreds of millions of dollars — to get its program through regulatory approval, The Washington Business Journal reported.

HOLLYWOOD



HOMESCHOOLING TEACHER ROLE

Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez has revealed that she has been homeschooling her twins ever since the lockdown started due to the coronavirus outbreak. During an appearance on an episode, the global star opened up about the pros and cons of virtual homeschooling, reports said.

"Tomorrow we talk to the coolest homeschool teacher on the block Jennifer Lopez," posted on Instagram, along with a short clip from the JLo interview.

JLo and her fiancé Alex Rodriguez are engaged and they share four children from earlier marriages. In the short clip, DeGeneres begins by asking Lopez who is helping the children with the homework.

"I help with the homework," the 50-year-old confessed during the interview that was recorded outside her home in Miami.

She then revealed that all four kids her 12-year-old twins Emme and Max and Rodriguez's daughters Natasha, 15, and Ella, 11 are doing virtual school right now.

"And so I stay more on top of Emme and Max about that," she clarified about her son and daughter with former husband and singer Mark Anthony, and then jokingly added: "Yeah me." *IANS*



WORKING ON A COVID-19 PANDEMIC FILM

Director Eric Rivas said he has started work on a movie about the coronavirus pandemic in spite of his stars being in isolation due to the lockdown.

Rivas said he shot footage of the empty city over the weekend from his car, and the actors including porn star Ron Jeremy and the film's producer Noel Ashman are sending him videos of themselves performing their scenes, which Riva is editing together.

The film, which is reportedly titled as 'Duke Of York', is about a dastardly movie producer who tries to trick a director into killing an Asian actor in a misguided attempt to take revenge for the disease.

"It's sort of a stand against xenophobia, and also about people's desperation during this time," Rivas said.

Other details related to the project including its release date are still under wraps. *IANS*

Bitten BY THE CREATIVE BUG

Jacqueline Fernandez is well known for the positive aura she brings to the industry and is aptly known as 'Bollywood's Sunshine Girl'. The actress is known to have a vigorous positive vibe about her and her ever-lasting beautiful smile is proof of that.

Taking to the present, the lockdown has dampened everyone's light. However, Jacqueline, who has an enormous presence on social media, keeps us entertained by bringing to us some light-hearted content during these heavy times.

Jacqueline recently spoke about the lockdown in an interview and shared, "It took me some time to realize what was happening and the first week was difficult. I felt a bit lost thinking about what I would do."

She further added, "However I figured that I may not be able to go on a film set but I have my audiences and a platform and I decided to be as creative as possible."

Fernandez is uplifting the audience's spirit on social media by posting her workout videos and sharing positivity.

On the work front, Jacqueline is all set to be seen next in 'Mrs. Serial Killer' and venturing in the OTT platforms which is proof of how she is constantly experimenting and bringing a different variety of characters and content to her audience. *DB Post*

Working together again?

Priyanka Chopra and Shah Rukh Khan were last seen together in Farhan Akhtar's Don 2 (2011). It's been over nine years since they were last seen together.

While there were reports of the two working on the Sahir Ludhianvi biopic, the rumours were scrapped by sources.

But now reportedly, SRK and Phee will work on the same project, though they will not be sharing the screen space in it. Lady

MAKE UP TUTORIALS

Shruti Hassan, who is spending the lockdown at her home, shared a make up tutorial video on her social media page. She captioned the video as "Nude Bake Face."

In the four-minute video, she did the entire face make up and also shared the details of the products she used. The video is making rounds on the internet because this is her very first make up tutorial.

In fact, in a matter of 24 hours, Shruti's video has gathered 1.4 million views and fans have started to flood her comments section asking doubts and beauty tips. Shruti Hassan has been taking efforts to keep herself and her followers entertained. She has tried her hands on cooking, posted few videos of her work out routine, skin and hair care tips. She also did live sessions with coach Gayatri Aptekar, lawyer Priyanka Khimani, dancer Ashlee Nino and actress Sarah Hay. *TNN*

Seeing triple!

Most people probably wouldn't profess surprise that a Marvel actor has multiple stunt doubles. Working on Marvel movies is grueling, mentally and physically, especially for a character as athletic and dynamic as Black Widow.

However, Scarlett Johansson had as many as three stunt doubles when she was working on 'Avengers: Age of Ultron', at least partly for a very big (or small) reason – she was pregnant at the time she shot it.

By the time she made 'Avengers: Age of Ultron', which came out in 2015, Johansson was making her fourth Marvel movie, having played Black Widow in 'Iron Man 2', 'The Avengers', and 'Captain America: Winter Soldier'.

As E! Online reported, this required some extra teamwork. As director Joss Whedon said at the time, "She's not going to spend the whole movie carrying groceries. We didn't trim any scenes. We're like, 'We'll make it work.'" And make it work they did, hiring three stuntwomen.

The E! article did not identify the three stuntwomen, but a later Hollywood Reporter piecenameed one of Johansson's doubles as Heidi Money-maker. Yes, that's her real name. Her training as a gymnast comes in very handy. *Showbiz*



Gaga's initiative with Global Citizen, 'One World: At Home Together' is a virtual collaboration between some of the biggest celebrities across the globe. Paul McCartney, Billie Eilish, Jimmy Fallon, Lizzo and many more will be part of it to raise funds for WHO's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund. Priyanka and Shah Rukh are part of this line-up.

The organisers have already raised a total of \$35 million. With the involvement of such hi-profile celebrities in this historical cultural event, a much more substantial amount is expected to be raised for people being affected and working against COVID 19. *Filmfare*



Finance

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Lankan Banks' risks to persist despite regulatory measures - Fitch

Fitch Ratings believes that the extraordinary regulatory measures announced by the Central Bank (CBSL) - focusing on the relaxation of capital expectations and classification of loans for banks - should relieve immediate pressure on the banks' financial profiles, but will not prevent medium-term deterioration.

The recently announced measures are in addition to a spate of concessions already given, including a debt moratorium (capital and interest) and

a working-capital loan for businesses and individuals affected by COVID-19.

The additional measures allow Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs) and non D-SIBs to draw down their capital conservation buffers by 100bp and 50bp, respectively, where banks currently hold a buffer of 250bp of their risk-weighted assets.

This will allow the banks to operate below their current Tier 1 regulatory minimums of 10% for bucket 2 D-SIBs (Bank of

Ceylon and Commercial Bank), 9.5% for bucket 1 D-SIBs (People's Bank and Hatton National Bank) and 8.5% for non-DSIBs. This would release around LKR 53 billion of capital for lending purposes, based on banks' reported capital ratios at end-2019; however, it will also reduce buffers against potential deterioration in asset quality.

The regulator has also provided support to the smaller banks through regulatory forbearance. CBSL has extended

the deadline to increase the minimum capital requirement for banks by two years to end-2022.

This will provide some breathing space for banks such as Pan Asia Banking Corporation, Amana Bank and Cargills Bank that were required to double their existing capital levels - which would have been challenging in the current environment.

In addition, the regulator has loosened some NPL classification requirements, and the

banks no longer need to classify all credit facilities extended to a borrower as non-performing when the aggregate amount of all outstanding non-performing loans granted to such borrowers exceeds 30% of total credit facilities. "We believe that while this and other measures should help to suppress a sharp near-term increase in NPLs, a reversal in these guidelines as the economy recovers could see the banks' NPL ratios rise significantly."

Banks have also been per-

mitted to grant an extension of 60 days to borrowers who are not entitled to any other concessions, to settle loans and advances which are becoming past due during March 2020, and not to consider such facilities as past due until the end of this 60-day period.

Such relief measures highlight the authorities' supportive stance to the banking system.

The regulator has allowed the banks to consider changes to payment terms and loan contracts until end-June 2020 as

'modifications' instead of 'restructuring' for the purpose of classification of loans and advances and impairment computation.

"Banks have already undertaken a large amount of restructuring, which saw the share of restructured loans in gross loans increase sharply to 3.6% across Fitch-rated Sri Lankan banks by end-September 2019 from 1.8% at end-2018."

Fitch expects weaker profitability to also weigh on capitalisation over the next 12 months.

Sri Lanka Insurance initiates Viru Abhiman

The National Insurer, Sri Lanka Insurance, has taken many initiatives to pledge support to the government initiatives in the prevention of the spread of Covid 19. One such initiative was the Rs. 50 lakhs donation made to the Covid 19 Health and Social Security fund last week.

Today Sri Lanka Insurance launches yet another initiative in support of motivating all state sector employees on the front line of Covid 19 service.

VIRU ABHIMAN - a free financial cover for the families of the state sector employees who are actively involved in combatting Covid - 19. The Cover is extended at the unfortunate event of employee's loss of life due to Covid -19 within in the year 2020.

The Cover VIRU ABHIMAN is extended to all health care employees in the state sector (Eg: Health Ministry Officials, Doctors, Nurses, Attendants, Drivers, Minor workers, Public Health Inspectors, Regional Health Officials etc) Members of the Armed Forces of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Army, Sri Lanka Navy, Sri Lanka Air Force) Sri Lanka Police and Civil Defense Force of Sri Lanka, Members of the

Offers Rs. 1.5 mn cover to Heroes who fight against COVID 19 Pandemic



SLIC Chairman Jagath Wellawatta and Chandana L. Aluthgama, Chief Executive Officer at the press conference. Picture by Sumanachandra Ariyawans

Divisional Secretariats including field officers, Members of the District Secretariat, Members of the postal department.

"This is the first and the only cover in Sri Lanka offered free for our heroes who are taking the front line in ensuring the safety of our people," said SLIC Chairman Jagath Wellawatta. He also said that they would not take in to account if the beneficiary of the Viru Abhiman is a permanent employee or a casual worker as long as he or she has done some service towards fighting the COVID 19 pandemic.

He said that they will also look at several other initiatives like donation

days' pay towards CSR initiatives towards fighting coronavirus. As the national insurer to the nation our main objective is to fulfill our duty towards the nation by safeguarding the families of the state sector employees and members of the armed forces who have come forth to protect the country from the COVID 19 pandemic and to assist the national program of the Sri Lankan Government.

Chief Executive Officer at Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation, Chandana L. Aluthgama said that they are likely to extend the expiry date of their Life and Motor cover Policies from April 30 as people may still not be ready to pay the installments. (SS)

NCE commends address of PM on measures to overcome COVID 19

The National Chamber of Exporters of Sri Lanka (NCE) appreciates the proactive measures of the Government to overcome COVID -19. The Prime Minister explained in simple terms to the people, the measures that have been adopted. These have enabled the country to effectively contain the threat, states the Chamber. Other Counties including developed economies are in great difficulty having failed to do so. This is evident by the commendation of our country by the Head of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Chamber endorses the gratitude of the Government, particularly regarding the services and sacrifices of the Health Authorities, the Forces, and the Police to tackle the common enemy. This in

spite of the risks to their own health, and of their families. As stated by the Prime Minister, this is not the time for debate on rights and wrongs. Each and every one of us irrespective of ethnic, and other differences, need to do our duty to overcome the crisis during these few critical days.

The impact of the Crisis on the economy of the country, and the lives of the people has been substantial. The Apparel Export Sector, and Tourism which are main Foreign Exchange Earners have suffered a severe blow.

This excludes the other major Foreign Exchange Earner, the remittances of our workers, who have been battered due to conditions in other countries. As such the Chamber agrees with the

view that we need to produce whatever possible locally in the immediate future because imports will be seriously hampered.

This particularly applies to food products, medicines, and other needs of the health care services.

The Prime Minister in his address requested the people to grow their fruits and vegetable requirements as far as possible in their home plots. The NCE wishes to support this move and would like to encourage local growers to supply any excess of agricultural items they could produce to Member exporters of the NCE, who could be requested to purchase such produces for direct exports as well as for



processing to ensure value addition.

For this to happen production activities need to be commenced, to revive the economy without delay, following the lead given by China. The Chamber trusts this will be ensured during the coming days, to resurrect and strengthen the battered lives of the majority of our people

Coronavirus darkens Asia's economic outlooks: JECER survey

The outlooks for Asian economies have greatly deteriorated due to the impact from the corona shock. With the ongoing spread of the novel coronavirus, Asian economists have drastically lowered their growth projections.

Some forecasts see negative growth rates for 2020 in Singapore and Thailand. Indonesia, the Philippines and India face the end of rapid growth of about 5% or more in the past several years. Further downward revisions are expected if the virus is not contained.

An increase in unemployment is projected throughout the region. Economists now express concern about potential social impact from the shock, a survey shows.

The Japan Center for Economic Research and Nikkei conducted a quarterly consensus survey from March 6 to March 26, collecting 33 answers from economists and analysts in the five biggest ASEAN members -- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand -- as well as in India.

The 2020 growth projections for the five ASEAN economies were revised down significantly from the previous survey in December. Coronavirus infections have spread worldwide since January, and have been hitting the global and Asian economies. Some economists held off answering growth forecasts this time as they had not finished their revisions.

The economies of export-oriented Singapore and Thailand were projected to be especially damaged. Economists predicted the growth from minus 0.4% to 0% for Singapore in 2020. Half of the economists foresaw negative growth rates for Thailand in 2020.

Manu Bhaskaran of Centennial Asia in Singapore, who predicted minus 0.4% growth, said "the virus crisis will worsen in the U.S. and Europe,

Growth forecasts for five ASEAN economies and India

Country	2019 result	2020 forecast**	
		Dec. '19 survey	Mar. '20 survey
Indonesia	5.0	5.1	2.9-4.7
Malaysia	4.3	4.3	0.5-3.1
Philippines	5.9	6.5	3.0-4.5
Singapore	0.7	1.5	-0.4-0
Thailand	2.4	2.6	-0.8-1.7
India	4.9	6.1	4.6-5.5

depressing global demand which will hurt Singapore through 2Q20." Som-prawin Manprasert of Bank of Ayudhya forecast minus 0.8% growth for Thailand in 2020. "The outbreak would not only hit tourism and related sectors," he said, "but also the Thai economy via supply disruptions in many countries and negative income effects."

For Malaysia, Vincent Loo Yeong Hong of KAF Research forecast the 2020 growth rate falling to 0.5% from the 4.3% achieved in 2019. He foresees a "sharp drop in 1Q20-2Q20 ... caused mainly by a nationwide lockdown from March 18."

CCC holds webinar on 'Planning for the Unpredictable'

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce's Chamber Academy will host a webinar session on 'Planning for the Unpredictable' with international trainer, certified transformative coach, and motivation specialist Fahad Farook on 10, Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

The session will focus on how to absorb shock and manage worry in these uncertain times.

Though everyone is affected by COVID-19 in numerous and different ways, there are common experiences as well - especially concerning stress, emotional management, and security.

Farook will share ideas, techniques, and models that can be used to manage this tumultuous period a bit better.

Fahad Farook in addition to being involved in consultancy projects with several organisations, his main areas of interest



Fahad Farook

include human interaction, interpersonal relationships and challenging paradigms, aspects he includes in his interventions in order to create interactivity as well as to stimulate alternative thinking amongst participants.

The event is open to students, freelancers, entrepreneurs or a home-makers wondering how to move ahead during lockdown and registration could be done through, <https://event.chamber.lk/>



First Bunkering ship discharging low sulphur fuel at HIP

First Bunkering ship discharges low sulphur fuel at HIP

Bunkering vessel Mt. Melody docked at the Hambantota International Port (HIP) last week to discharge around 25,000 MT of oil into the port's newly refurbished tanks. With the first shipment of Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil (VLSFO) 380 CST in their tanks, HIP will soon begin bunkering for ships that call at the port, providing support to the heavily impacted international supply chain.

Over 31,000 vessels ply the main sea route that lies just 10 nautical miles from the port every year. HIP

with its proximity to the route that connects the East, and the West is in an ideal position to provide these vessels with bunkering services, helping them take maximum advantage of the port's unique location.

Bunkering is an important part of the energy services portfolio offered by HIP. "The port invested in refurbishing the tank farm to Lloyds classification standards and the tank farm facility will be operated and managed by Sinopec, a leading global operator, who will train our local staff up to international stand-

ards in safety and operation. The facility has a fully-fledged oil testing laboratory at the site. HIP and transshipment requirements of LPG. Transshipment of LPG is a part of the energy hub mix at HIP

The International Maritime Organisation set a limit for Sulphur in fuel oil used on board ships of, and many vessels called at the port for transshipment, during the past year.aims to become the bunkering hub of the region and will work with Sinopec and the local bunker suppliers in making this a reality,"

says Tissa Wickramasinghe COO of Hambantota International Port Group (HIPG).

This is another step by HIP in achieving their goal of becoming an energy hub. In October 2018, the port partnered with LAUGFS Gas, a pioneer in Sri Lanka's power and energy sector, to service their storage and transshipment requirements of LPG. Transshipment of LPG is a part of the energy hub mix at HIP, and many vessels called at the port for transshipment, during the past year.

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Softlogic Group ensures continuance of operations

The unprecedented lockdown in the country with curfew being imposed from March 17 and which continues unabated to-date erodes the Softlogic Group's performance with most companies being closed for business. "Nonetheless, Staff wellbeing and good health is of primary importance and overrides any other secondary measures we are implementing to ensure continuance of strong operations in the economy globally battered by the corona virus", said its Chairman, Ashok Pathirage. These unprecedented times are not endemic to Softlogic alone but to all other corporate entities, small and

large operating in the economy. "While other companies have been faster to take measures to cut staff emoluments, after careful consideration and giving much thought to all grades of staff, we have decided to implement cost saving measures to ensure that job losses are minimised while taking the opportunity to look inwardly and reduce wasteful expenses, centralise functions to avoid duplication of work, eliminate unviable business practices and adopt the right strategy - so that management may accordingly stay on top of the learning curve - and face challenges of today's harsh economic realities".

"Government, the Central Bank and Health Authorities are exploring ways to solve such intractable economic and health issues, but as a Group that is responsible for lives and wellbeing of over 10,000 staff and their families we expect staff at this critical time to understand the business rationale for undertaking cutbacks affecting staff emoluments, incentives and allowances in order to save expenditure during a time sustainable revenue growth is undermined for reasons



Chairman, Ashok Pathirage

beyond ordinary control. The following measures will be implemented in conjunction with the withholding of bonuses and pay increases for 2020 for a period of three months and shall be reviewed thereafter until the economy satisfactorily recovers. Salary reduction for various slabs as a percentage has been introduced considering the salary range and thus is applicable to all staff

across the entire group as set out below. However there would be no pay cuts for employees earning less than Rs. 50,000. This measure is an initiative that you will no doubt concur with as we steer the Group during turbulent times to avert the potential high incident of retrenchment that may otherwise become unavoidable during the coming months. Another measure is to freeze on all new recruitments including head count replacements. There will be no overtime payments. "However, when called upon to do so

an employee would need to volunteer and work the extra hours should the job requires such commitment". It is also decided to freeze all expenses pertaining to training and development and employee welfare unless otherwise deemed as a critical expense and also all new plans and capital expenditure is to be held in abeyance. "During this period, we appeal to staff to give their best, double up on their performance objectives and commit themselves with utmost diligence and good faith and thus cooperate with management to implementing these positive decisions until Group performance goals are successfully reached."

SLT donates PPE kits to the Govt.

SLT recently donated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the Ministry of Defense and the Army hospital, Narahenpita. SLT conducted these donations having an aim to contribute towards the combat of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. PPE kits are most important in preventing transmission of COVID - 19 virus especially in treatment centers.



SLT CEO Kiththi Perera handing over the PPE kits to the Secretary of Ministry of Defense Maj Gen. Kamal Gunaratne

Ceylinc Life opens multiple channels to interact with customers staying home

Ceylinc Life has announced it is offering multiple online payment and communications options as well as facilitation of settlement of claims, to ensure policyholder requirements are met as they stay safe in their homes to protect themselves, their families and the community against the spread of COVID-19. Sri Lanka's life insurance leader said it has activated web-based, mobile-phone based and app-based payment options to ensure policies will not lapse during the period of curfew and self-quarantine, and that the company's call centre and social media messaging sites are all activated to respond to customer queries. "These are extremely challenging times for customers and companies alike,

and the best way to ensure we survive the crisis together is to maximise the possibilities offered by technology to look after all stakeholder interests with minimal disruption," Ceylinc Life Managing Director Thushara Ranasinghe said. Among the premium payment methods offered by Ceylinc Life are the 'Easy Pay' option hosted on the company's website which can be accessed and operated with ease. The policy number is all that is required for payment of premiums with minimal hassle. Ceylinc Life also offers a 'Direct Pay' option via sms, where a link is sent for customers to enter their policy details and credit/debit card



credentials securely online. Additionally, the Company said it has partnered with most major banking institutions in Sri Lanka as well with mobile wallet services such as FriMi, eZ Cash, mCash and Genie to facilitate anytime, anywhere premium payments. For existing as well as prospective customers who need information or clarifications, Ceylinc Life's interactive chatbot 'Ceylena' is available 24 hours of the day to help visitors to www.ceylincolife.com/ by answering their queries relating to life insurance. Policyholders that need to make a claim are advised to call the Company's call centre, which would then set the process in motion by arranging for necessary documents to be sent via email or WhatsApp for claim settlement direct to the policyholders' accounts.

AIA Insurance helps the Homagama Base Hospital fight COVID 19.

Having identified the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Infrared thermometers, AIA Insurance donated PPE with visors and Infrared thermometers worth LKR 1 Million, to the Base Hospital Homagama. This hospital was recently appointed as a treatment centre for COVID 19 suspected patients. This donation will help in providing safe care for the patients as well as the hospital medical staff who work on the frontline every day. AIA CEO Nikhil Advani said, "We salute all the hospitals and medical staff as well as the armed forces that are doing so much to protect our citizens from this dreaded virus. We are deeply grateful for their service, dedication and sacrifice and hope this small tribute will help the Base Hospital Homagama, in some way, in all that they are doing to serve our community."



AIA CEO Nikhil Advani along with Suren Mallikahewa (Head of Corporate Sales), Priyankara De Silva (Head of Policy Owner Servicing and Health Care Management) and Ravinda Dharmasena (Senior Regional Manager) with Dr Janitha Hettiarachchi (Medical Superintendent of Base Hospital Homagama).

Rakuten Viber provides 'Sri Lanka New Year Bot'

Rakuten Viber is taking a number of measures to help everyone stay connected with family, friends and communities. After launching a number of features in the wake of COVID-19, Viber aims to cherish people who are staying at home during the country's biggest festival 'Sinhala and Tamil New Year'. As per the directives of the government for COVID-19, many people will be social distancing themselves during the festival this year. Thus, to feel united, wishing loved ones becomes more important. Now, while

in the comforts of their own home, Sri Lankans can avail through 'Sri Lanka New Year Bot' specially designed curated stickers, cool polaroid frames and attractive cards which would make 'wishing' personalized and heartfelt. To make wishing more fun, Viber has also added an on-screen animation when people use texts. Keeping health and safety as a priority, Anubhav Nayyar, Senior Director, Business Development APAC said "At the outbreak of COVID 19, we want people to take social dis-

tancing seriously even at the time of the festival. As a company, we understand the importance of this special day and thus want people of Sri Lanka to stay at home but stay connected with their loved ones amid the crisis. This initiative will add some fun into their lives during the festivities while defeating the virus from spreading by staying at home." Viber has also requested people of Sri Lanka to 'stay-at-home' through a social media challenge posted on its official account. As more and more private

companies are taking health and safety measures amid the COVID-19 crisis, people are finding effective ways of connecting with their community. At Rakuten Viber, we connect people. No matter who they are, or where they are from. Our global user base has access to a range of features like one-on-one chats, video calls, group messaging, and updates and discussions with their favorite brands and celebrities. We ensure our users have a secure and free environment to share their emotions.

LCH EquityClear goes live with new LSEG Technology post trade platform

LSEG Technology, London Stock Exchange Group's technology solutions provider, today announces that it has successfully implemented a new clearing platform for LCH's EquityClear service. The risk management and trade processing platform offers a highly efficient, resilient and scalable solution for a variety of clearing, operations and risk management processes. LSEG Technology's innovative post trade technology offers zero touch straight through processing (STP) and parallel real time processing using hardware acceleration. The platform enables trades to be processed with high throughput and low latency with margin calculations done in real-time. The end of day processing time is significantly reduced, improving operational timeframes for all participants. The platform delivered to LCH is configured to clear and risk manage 20 million trades (40 million trade sides) per day at a throughput of 1600 trades per second. Ann Neidenbach, Global Head of

LSEG Technology said: "We are delighted to have successfully implemented LSEG Technology's post trade platform for LCH's EquityClear service, delivering cutting edge risk management tools with zero touch STP and real time processing. The platform is designed to be scalable, highly efficient and resilient. This was a complex project, requiring extensive planning to meet the challenges of safely delivering critical market infrastructure." Alex Kronic, Head of Equities, LCH Ltd said: "With the migration to the Millennium Clearing & Risk platform, LCH EquityClear is demonstrating its commitment to our members and the market by investing in a state-of-the-art resilient technology platform. The platform offers next generation clearing, operations and risk functionality for EquityClear, increasing operational efficiencies and enabling enhanced risk management for the service. "EquityClear connects to 16 trading



platforms and 19 CSDs across Europe so it was vital that implementation of the new platform was seamless and without any disruption for our members. The fact that the platform successfully processed EquityClear's highest ever clearing volumes is a testament to the close collaboration between all parties to ensure a smooth transition." LSEG Technology delivers robust, scalable, high-performance technology including broker, exchange, market data, risk and collateral management, surveillance, clearing and settlement products to customers around the world. LSEG Technology's market-leading trading and post-trade products, empowered with key patented technology, helps improve operational efficiencies for financial market infrastructure and financial services firms, which include London Stock Exchange, HKEX, Johannesburg Stock Exchange, Singapore Exchange and other markets worldwide.

Sabaragamuwa University Alumni Association lends hand in Combating COVID - 19

The Alumni Association of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka recently donated medical equipment and other protective equipment to the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (IDH Hospital) in an attempt to lend their support in combating the global pandemic: COVID - 19. Launching the inaugural phase of the initiative, the alumni association donated an ECG machine, 30 Digital Thermometers, protective clothes and protective shoes worth Rs. 200,000 after having inquired about the requirements of the hospital. COVID -19 Outbreak has brought the entire world in to a stand-still while Sri Lanka too experiencing its repercussions at the moment. The doctors and other medical officers engaging in health services



Sabaragamuwa University Alumni Association donating medical equipment

are proactively working to bring the situation under control. Their commitment and dedication is apparent in the way they gear up for the situation working day or night prioritizing the health of the patients. As responsible citizens of the country, now is the time to lend them a hand and back up their noble services in any possible way when they are tak-

ing care of the entire nation. The health service sector shoulders a massive responsibility during this crisis and so far has controlled the situation with the resources at hand when the developed countries have failed to cope up with this crisis. The entire sector is being highly appreciated by the people of Sri Lanka and even the foreign diplomats for its well

measured and timely initiatives in fighting against the virus. IDH hospital is mandated as a main body in charge of serving the patients tested positive with COVID -19. Alumni association of the Sabaragamuwa University will be expanding this initiative having identified the need to help the country to overcome this crisis.

Experience how Huawei Tech Devices pave way for a Healthy Life

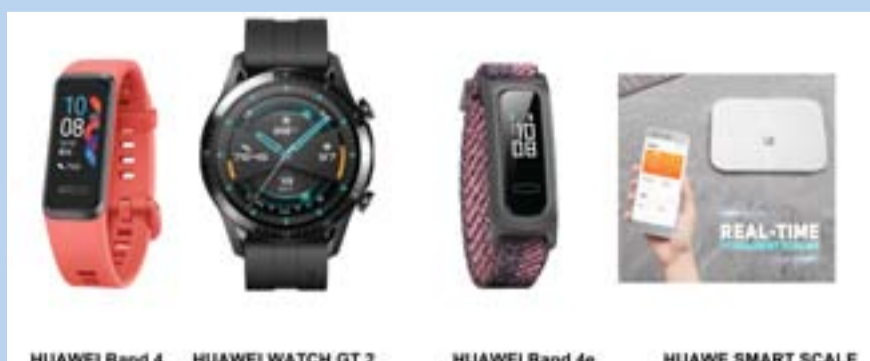
Huawei, the innovative smartphone manufacturer, recently unveiled an array of Health and Fitness products ensuring a more convenient and comprehensive way of looking after health and fitness. Huawei Watch GT2, Huawei Band 4 and Huawei Band 4E help simplify life, track workouts and assist in everyday activities at the same time providing a hassle-free entertainment. The newly introduced innovative Health and Fitness solutions are equipped with all essential features to deliver a

seamless digital workout experience backed by a stylish design. Huawei Watch GT2 features a minimalist design with a 1.39 inches AMOLED screen that matches up with customers' expectations. Its ultra slim design and 3D display provide an eye-catching look and feel. It delivers a great battery life of one and half weeks thanks to the Huawei's self-developed wearable chip, Kirin A1, that comes with a dual chip design and an intelligent

power saving technology. It supports 15 different sports and workout models to bring a diverse experience. Huawei Band 4 is a fusion of an attractive design and comfort that comes in stylish colors including sakura pink, amber sunrise and graphite black. Its 2.5D touch screen helps explore the myriad of its features from Smart Heart Rate tracking, sleep monitoring, tracking of outdoor and indoor run, walk, to cycling. It provides diversified nine workout models to choose

from. It comes with a built-in USB plug that enables easy charging on the go with any USB charger and it also provides an extended battery life up to six days from a single charge. Huawei Band 4E is another light weight band that comes in misty grey, seaweed green, alizarin red, sakura coral, ceylon yellow and cobalt violet color variants. It is capable of providing a two week long battery life from one charge. It comes with the advanced feature of monitoring the basketball perfor-

mances that helps the users to improve on the statistics. It also provides comprehensive running statistics with the help of 6 axis motion sensor. Another innovative addition is the Huawei Smart Scale which is designed for accurate body composition measurements with the help of Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis (BIA) technology. This comes with 9 body composition indicators including weight, body fat %, BMI, Protein, Visceral fat, Muscle mass, Body water %, Bone



HUAWEI Band 4 HUAWEI WATCH GT 2 HUAWEI Band 4e HUAWEI SMART SCALE

mass and BMR. Smart Scale provides a comprehensive health report and comes with an offline weight and

body fat display. These products are a fusion of health and fitness tracking and entertainment plus they

are equipped with long durable battery life which is ideal for trekking and traveling purposes.

Virus prevents play at Trump-opened world's biggest cricket stadium



Cricket's 110,000-seater Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad opened by US President Donald Trump has yet to see a ball bowled.

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY - There is no larger symbol of the global sports shutdown than cricket's 110,000-seater Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad, opened by US President Donald Trump, but yet to see a ball bowled.

India's newest and the world's biggest cricket stadium lies empty because of the coronavirus pandemic. Where there should be the sound of leather on willow and the roar of the crowd, there is only silence.

Just a few weeks ago, it had been packed to capacity as Trump and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood side-by-side in a show of pomp and ceremony for the February 24 inauguration.

Eclipsing Australia's 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground, it was rumoured to be in line to host the final of this year's Indian Premier League, the world's richest Twenty20 tournament, watched by millions worldwide.

But then came COVID-19. The pandemic has brought the sporting

world to a grinding halt with massive events including the Tokyo Olympics, football's European Championships, golf and tennis majors, and the glitzy IPL postponed.

"There was hardly any time between the Trump event and the pandemic," a senior Gujarat Cricket Association official told AFP on condition of anonymity, adding that once cricket resumes, the stadium could be ready "in double-quick time."

"Just five percent work is remaining and it just needs the finishing touches," the official added.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has pushed back the IPL from its original start date of March 29 to April 15, but with the number of coronavirus cases in India exceeding 5,000 and still rising, pressure is growing for it to be scrapped again, truncated or shelved.

The \$100-million, circular venue, promises unobstructed views and has state-of-the-art facilities includ-

ing an Olympic-sized swimming pool as part of a multisports complex.

Next door, a refurbished venue on the site of the former 49,000-capacity Motera Stadium will serve as a venue for cricket, football and hockey.

Critics have charged that it is another "white elephant" vanity project in Modi's home state, following the completion of the world's largest statue there in 2018 - also dedicated to independence hero Sardar Patel.

The giant Statue of Unity measures 182 metres tall (597 feet) - twice the height of New York's Statue of Liberty.

Modi was Gujarat chief minister for 13 years until 2014, and revamping the former Motera stadium had been long a pet project.

Home Minister Amit Shah, a close ally, headed the Gujarat Cricket Association till last year and his son Jay Shah is the secretary of the BCCI, the world's richest and most powerful cricket board.

Despite cricket being wildly popular in India, domestic first class matches - and even some international Test matches - are often played to near-empty stadiums.

The only matches guaranteed to attract big crowds are IPL games and one-day internationals - and even then it depends on the quality of the opposition.

The nation of 1.3 billion people already has more than a dozen stadiums capable of hosting international cricket, although in the off-season they can be used for other events.

"You are left wondering whether it is a rock concert venue, (or) is it a cricket stadium?" ESPNcricinfo senior editor Sharda Ugra told AFP.

"I would have hoped that there would have been some analysis on the kind of grounds that India needs now.

"We have a lot of these giant grounds in which you have one international match in two years."

-AFP

Formula One shutdown period extended to five weeks

PARIS, TUESDAY - Formula One's mandatory shutdown period will be extended by a further two weeks following the delay to the season caused by the coronavirus pandemic, world motorsport's governing body confirmed Tuesday.

The decision to prolong the break during which no staff members related to car performance are allowed to work will be extended from 21 to 35 days. The traditional summer shutdown was brought forward from August last month and increased from two to three weeks.

The latest extension received "unanimous approval" from all F1 stakeholders, the FIA said in a statement.

Teams must observe the shutdown period across March, April and/or May.

"Further discussions regarding this topic remain open between the FIA,



The Canadian Grand Prix in progress.

Formula 1 and all teams in light of the ongoing global impact of COVID-19," it added.

The opening nine rounds of the 2020 season have been either cancelled or postponed, with doubts over a number of the other 14 races as the

pandemic continues to overshadow the sporting calendar. The Canadian Grand Prix, scheduled for June 14, became the latest to be scrapped on Tuesday.

Officials said they would look to find a new date for the race. -AFP

'It's difficult to fill the shoes of Federer, Nadal and Djokovic', former player

2020 could be the year of the definitive consecration for the Next Gen. Although Novak Djokovic won the Australian Open for the eighth time, Dominic Thiem went very close to the feat on the Rod Laver Arena. The pandemic forced ATP and WTA to suspend the season at least until July.

Speaking in an interview with Eurosport, former WTA player Barbara Schett was asked which of the younger generation will emerge from Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Djokovic's shadow. "It's almost impossible to replace those three players," she said.

"We've been so spoilt over the last 20 years



The Big Three: Federer, Nadal and Djokovic.

watching these players compete and pushing each other to the level they are at now. I don't think a rivalry between these three will exist again and I don't know if a player will ever win 20 Grand Slams again.

First of all, it's very difficult to fill the shoes of Federer, Nadal and Djokovic. I don't think that will happen.

But I do love watching the youngsters, [Alexander] Zverev and [Dominic] Thiem - I'm not sure

you can call them youngsters anymore.

There are a few Russians like [Daniil] Medvedev and [Andrey] Rublev who are exciting. [Jan-nick] Sinner too. There are a lot of exciting players who have styles of tennis which are great to watch. There are players who are exciting and players come and players go.

I remember 30 years ago when [Boris] Becker or [Stefan] Edberg retired, even Mats Wilander, people were thinking how could the sport survive without those guys - but there was always someone else. I'm sure as their personalities develop there will be new players on the scene." - tennisworld

Steve Smith reveals reason behind his unusual batting stance

His unorthodox batting stance has left many befuddled but Australian run-machine Steve Smith says though it depends on number of factors, he generally positions himself outside the off-stump to limit ways in which he can be dismissed.

Smith, the world number 1 Test batsman, has amassed 7227 runs in 73 Tests and 4162 runs in ODIs with an unconventional technique, which most have failed to decode.

During a podcast organised by inaugural IPL champions Rajasthan Royals, Smith opened up about his unusual technique to New Zealand spinner Ish Sodhi.

Talking about his open batting stance, Smith, the former Rajasthan Royals captain, said: "It depends on who's bowling, how is the wicket playing, how I gonna score and stuff like that or how people are trying to get me out, probably that determines how open I am or otherwise how closed I am.

"But my general stance where my back foot is going to almost off stump, or may be even outside at stumps, I know that anything outside my eyeline isn't hitting the stumps," he said. "For me, you shouldn't get out if the ball is not hitting the stumps, so that is just a trick from me when I first started doing it, just limiting the ways I get out," he explained.

The 30-year-old said his off-stump stance helps him to leave the ball which are outside his line of sight.

"Sometimes, I get trapped in front but I'm okay with that at stumps, knowing that if it is outside my eyeline, I don't need to try and play the ball, I can just leave that," he said.

Smith, who had lost his captaincy after being banned for a year by Cricket Australia for his role in the ball-tampering scandal in a Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018, made an incredible comeback, becoming the highest run-scorer in Tests in 2019.

He amassed 589 runs in the Ashes last year at a stunning average of 147.25. It included two hundreds and a double century, finishing as second-highest scorer for Australia, behind Marnus Labuschagne. -PTI



Steve Smith's unusual batting stance.

Game changers in IPL:

Bowlers with the best economy rate over the years

Batsmen set up the game and bowlers win them, this is even more true in the T20 format as here, apart from wickets, the frugality of the bowlers is extremely important. The word economy is an inextricable part of the Indian Premier League (IPL). After all it is the one of the biggest money spinners that the game of cricket has ever seen and has changed the fortunes of Indian cricket forever.

The economy of bowlers is the single most important statistic which is looked at by teams along with the strike rate of batsmen. It is rare to get bowlers who can keep a lid on runs and pick wickets also. Hence, economical bowlers are like a goldmine in T20 cricket.

Over the last 12 seasons some of the best bowlers in the world have played in the league and left an indelible mark on its history. If you look at the bowlers with best economy in IPL, the top most



Mumbai Indians' Lasith Malinga

name is of South African legend Shaun Pollock. Anil Kumble and Glenn McGrath also find themselves a place in the top 5 along with the maverick Afghans Rashid Khan and Mohammad Nabi. But none of them have played even 50 matches in the tournament. So, we have decided to make a list of top five best economies in the IPL of players

with 100 matches and above. Here are the names:

BEST ECONOMY IN IPL (Minimum 100 matches)

1) Sunil Narine - Matches - 110, Economy: 6.67

Before he had to remodel his action, Narine was the most lethal weapon in the IPL and T20 leagues across the world. The man who took the term 'mystery

spinner' to another level. He played a pivotal role in Kolkata Knight Riders' trophy winning campaigns in 2012 and 2014.

2) Ravichandra Ashwin - Matches - 139, Economy: 6.79

It is ironic that the man who is now India's biggest match winner in Test cricket, actually rose to fame as a white ball specialist. Ashwin's exploits for Chennai Super Kings led to his India debut and he has been a consistent performer in the league for CSK and Kings XI Punjab. Delhi Capitals, his current team, would hope he continues the good work in their colours.

3) Harbhajan Singh - Matches - 160, Economy: 7.05

The 'Turbanator' was a trump card for Mumbai Indians in the long years that he was associated with the franchise. Bhajji's guile was a very important weapon for captain Rohit Sharma, who used him wisely. Now in the twilight of his career, Harbhajan has been

taking the rabbit out of the hat for his former India captain MS Dhoni and the Chennai Super Kings.

4) Lasith Malinga - Matches - 122, Economy: 7.14

IPL's most successful bowler in terms of wickets picked also does a great job in containing batsmen. After all it was this aspect of his bowling which helped Mumbai Indians edge CSK out in the final over of the 2019 summit clash. No batsman has found an answer to Malinga's toe crushing yorkers and slower deliveries.

5) Bhuvneshwar Kumar - Matches - 117, Economy: 7.24

It was due to his performances in the IPL for Sunrisers Hyderabad that Bhuvneshwar came back into reckoning for the national team. His ability to bowl with utmost discipline in both the powerplay overs and the death makes him a must have for SRH. Not to mention he has two purple caps to his name as well. -HT

Paraguay court releases Ronaldinho into house arrest in Asuncion hotel

ASUNCION, PARAGUAY, WEDNESDAY - A Paraguayan judge on Tuesday ordered the release of Brazilian football great Ronaldinho and his brother into house arrest while they await trial on charges of using false passports to enter the country.

Judge Gustavo Amarilla told reporters that he had ordered the "continuation of house arrest in a hotel for Ronaldinho and his brother."

The pair were jailed one month ago to await trial, but their lawyers have posted bail of \$1.6 million.

Ronaldinho, considered one of the greatest footballers of all time, was a star of Brazil's 2002 World Cup win and played for European giants Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan, among others.

The ruling means the brothers can swap their grim police cell block - which has also housed Paraguay's former soccer federation chief and the ex-speaker of the lower house of parliament -

for a plush colonial-style hotel in downtown Asuncion.

The brochure of the refurbished 107-room Palmaroga Hotel, located in the capital's historic center, describes it as offering "a seamless blend of early 1900s Renaissance grace and modern comfort as well as luxury."

"I have the assurance of the hotel managers that they, at their own expense, can observe house arrest there," Amarilla told a news conference.

Paraguay's appeals court last month rejected a request to release the pair, meaning the two-time world player of the year spent his 40th birthday behind bars.

With Paraguay's capital on lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, the judge communicated his ruling in a cellphone call to the brothers, with prosecutors and defense lawyers - and TV cameras - present. The judge and many others wore face masks as a precaution against the virus.

A beaming Ronaldinho, in a black T-shirt and matching head-



Brazilian football great Ronaldinho soon after his release from jail.

band, gave a thumbs up sign to show he understood the terms of his release.

He and his brother, Roberto de Assis Moreira - who is also his business manager - initially encountered no problems after arriving in Asuncion from neighboring Brazil on March 4.

However, shortly after their arrival, the brothers were taken into police custody when investigators raided their hotel following discovery that their passports were fake.

Ronaldinho, given a rock star's welcome to Asuncion by around 2,000 children and teenagers, said the passports had been given to him by sponsors of a charity working with disadvantaged children.

Fourteen other people have been charged in the case, which has expanded into an investigation into possible money laundering.

An arrest warrant has been issued for the Paraguayan businesswoman in charge of the charity foundation that invited Ronaldinho.

He proved a popular inmate of the police headquarters jail where he was held, donating a trophy to the winning team in a recent prisoners' futsal tournament. -AFP

Pera hockey invitation tourney cancelled

HAFIZ MARIKAR

The Pera hockey family of the Peradeniya University has been cancelled.

The invitation hockey tournament was to be held this month.

This decision is based on the evolving COVID-19 public health threat and the impracticality of hosting such events.

This 6-a-side invitation hockey tournament was to be played at the Peradeniya Campus grounds with 35 teams in the men's and 12 in the women's participating.

Ben Stokes crowned Wisden's leading cricketer in the world

LONDON, WEDNESDAY - Ben Stokes has ended Virat Kohli's three-year reign as Wisden's leading cricketer in the world after playing a starring role in England's World Cup win last year. The 2020 Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, published on Thursday, crowns the swashbuckling all-rounder as the sport's pre-eminent player. He is the first England player to receive the honour since Andrew Flintoff in 2005. The 28-year-old won the man-of-the-match award in the World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's and then produced a remarkable match-winning innings of 135 not out in the third Ashes Test against Australia. "Ben Stokes pulled off the performance of a lifetime - twice in the space of a few weeks," said Wisden editor Lawrence Booth. "First, with a mixture of outrageous talent and good fortune, he rescued England's run-

chase in the World Cup final, before helping to hit 15 off the super over. "Then, in the third Ashes Test at Headingley, he produced one of the great innings, smashing an unbeaten 135 to pinch a one-wicket win. "Against red ball or white, he was a force of nature." Stokes in January won the International Cricket Council's player of the year award. England pace bowler Jofra Archer, who bowled the super over in the World Cup final, is among Wisden's five cricketers of the year. Australians Pat Cummins, Marnus Labuschagne and Ellyse Perry have been named alongside Archer, as well as South Africa-born Essex off-spinner Simon Harmer. Perry also reclaimed the leading women's cricketer in the world title from India's Smriti Mandhana.

- AFP



Ben Stokes against white ball or red ball was a force of nature.

South Africa to put fitness clauses into player contracts



South African head coach Mark Boucher

CAPE TOWN, WEDNESDAY - Cricket South Africa (CSA) will introduce fitness clauses into player contracts in the future in a bid to set minimum standards for selection, national team coach Mark Boucher said on Wednesday. It follows a special fitness camp for four players held in January that cast their international futures in doubt, as well as fears that a strict 21-day lockdown in South Africa could leave a number of other players below the required standard.

All-rounders Sisanda Magala and Jon-Jon Smuts, spinner Tabraiz Shamsi and fast bowler Lungi Ngidi were all placed in what was termed a special 'high-performance fitness and conditioning camp'.

With South Africa in lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak, which has led to a clampdown on exercising outside the house, Boucher admits players will have to take responsibility for maintaining their fitness levels.

"Guys need to keep up their fitness because we will be inserting new fitness clauses in contracts," Boucher confirmed via an audio statement released by CSA.

"In the recent past we have seen that players who are not fit enough don't get selected. They are professionals and they need to do what they have to do."

South Africa were recalled early from a limited overs tour of India last month over fears around the coronavirus, but Boucher believes that, so far, their plans have not been disrupted to a great degree by the lockdown.

"The plan was always to give the guys some time off to spend with the family. It also gives them the chance to get over a few niggles."

"The first two or three weeks is always key, to refresh physically and mentally. We have put in some programmes around the house for the guys to keep them fit and strong."

"They need to keep their discipline. There will be testing after the lockdown period."

South Africa's next assignment is scheduled to be a limited overs tour to Sri Lanka in June. - Agencies

World Athletics suspends Tokyo Olympics qualifying until December



PARIS, TUESDAY - World Athletics announced on Tuesday track and field qualification for next year's Tokyo Olympics has been suspended until December 1 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Games have already been pushed back from this summer to 2021 due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

"This period gives more certainty for athlete planning and preparation and is the best

way to address fairness in what is expected to be the uneven delivery of competition opportunities across the globe for athletes given the challenges of international travel and government border restrictions," World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said in a statement.

Competitors who have already reached the qualification standards will retain their places for the Games due to take place from July

23 to August 8 next year. The deadline for the marathon and 50km walk will be May 31 in 2021 with June 29 the date for the remaining events.

World Athletics' global rankings have also been frozen.

The season is set to begin in June but any results before the restart date will not count.

- AFP

Italian Olympic 800 metres finalist Sabia dies from COVID-19

ROME, WEDNESDAY - Twice Olympic 800 metres finalist Donato Sabia has died from COVID-19 at the age of 56, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) said on Wednesday.

CONI said in a statement that Sabia had been in the intensive care unit of the San Carlo hospital on Potenza, in the southern Italian region of Basilicata, for "a few days."

Sabia finished fifth in the 800 metres at Los Angeles in 1984 and seventh in Seoul four years later. He won the gold medal in the same event at the European Indoor Championships in 1984.

According to CONI, he is the first Olympic finalist in the world to die from the virus.

The Italian athletics federation (FIDAL), which described him as "an extraordinarily talented athlete but, above all, a gentle person", said that Sabia's father had also died from COVID-19 a few days earlier.

"It's a tragedy within a tragedy," said FIDAL president Alfio Giomi in a statement. "Donato was a person who you couldn't not love." - Agencies



Donato Sabia

Paris bans outdoor exercise and threatens to hit joggers with £120 fines

France on Wednesday banned all physical exercise in Paris during daylight hours as part of its ever-stricter coronavirus lockdown.

In a shock move announced by the city's Police Prefecture, joggers and walkers were told they would be fined the equivalent of around £120 if found breaking the restrictions.

If they continue to infringe the conditions, then they will face up to six months in prison.

A statement reads: "From April 8, 2020, outings for individual sports activities will no longer be authorized between 10am and 7pm throughout the Paris area."

"They therefore remain authorised from 7pm to 10am, when the crowds in the streets are at their smallest."

Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris and Didier Lallemand, the police prefect, said in the joint statement that they had taken the decision to avoid 'any form of laxity' that would 'jeopardise the efforts made so far'.

Paris is now France's coronavirus epicentre, with cases in the city and its suburbs multiplying.

On Monday, the country reported 833 new coronavirus deaths in over 24 hours, the highest daily toll since the outbreak began. The total number of



A jogger runs past the Eiffel Tower and the Champs de Mars, in Paris. Paris is now France's coronavirus epicentre, with cases in the city and its suburbs multiplying.

people in France who have died after testing positive for Covid-19 now stands at 8,911, while the number of infections is 98,010. Health Minister Olivier Veran said: "We have not reached the end of the end of the ascent of this epidemic."

Data showed that 605 people had died in hospitals during the past 24 hours and another 228 had died in

nursing homes - both 10 per cent increases. Mr Veran added: "It is not over. Far from that. The path is long. The figures that I have announced show this. Stay at home and continue this confinement effort."

Fines worth some £650million have so far been handed out to those breaking lockdown conditions across the country. - Daily Mail

New Zealand suspends rugby indefinitely due to COVID-19

WELLINGTON, WEDNESDAY - The suspension of club and community rugby in New Zealand has been extended indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the sport's resumption now contingent on health ministry guidance, New Zealand Rugby (NZR) said on

Wednesday. All matches, training and face-to-face education courses in New Zealand were initially suspended until April 18.

However, the governing body said providing a specific restart date was unrealistic given the nationwide lockdown to stop the

spread of the coronavirus. "We continue to monitor the situation and take advice from the government about when it will be safe for rugby and all sports to start," NZR said in a statement on its website. "We will take our lead from the Ministry of Health."

Qatar denies U.S allegations of World Cup bribes

DOHA, TUESDAY - The organisers of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar have strongly denied allegations from the U.S. Department of Justice that bribes were paid to secure votes for the hosting rights to the tournament.

Suspicion and rumours have long surrounded both the 2010 vote by FIFA's executive to hand the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

Yet on Monday, for the first time, prosecutors set direct, formal allegations regarding both tournaments down in an indictment. According to the prosecutors, representa-

tives working for Russia and Qatar bribed FIFA executive committee officials to swing votes in the crucial hosting decisions of world football's governing body.

Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), rejected the charges.

"They are part of a long-standing case, the subject of which is not the 2018/2022 FIFA World Cup bidding process."

"Despite years of false claims, evidence has never been produced to demonstrate that Qatar won the rights to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 unethically or by means that contravened FIFA's strict bidding rules.

"The SC maintains that it strictly adhered to all rules and regulations for the 2018/2022 FIFA World Cup bidding process and any claim to the contrary is baseless and will be fiercely contested."

FIFA said in a statement it supported all investigations into "alleged acts of criminal wrongdoing" and noted it had been accorded victim status in the U.S. criminal proceedings. "The FIFA Ethics Committee has already imposed sanctions, including life bans, on football officials mentioned in this process," said a FIFA spokesman. "So far as FIFA is concerned, should any acts of crimi-

nal wrongdoing by football officials be established, the individuals in question should be subject to penal sanctions."

"As the respective criminal cases are ongoing we are not in a position to comment further for the time being." Although FIFA has reacted to previous media allegations about the Qatar bid process by insisting the tournament will be unaffected, the U.S. allegations will lead to further questions over the hosting of the tournament, which is scheduled for November and December of 2022.

- Agencies

Tottenham and England great Greaves in hospital



Jimmy Greaves

LONDON, TUESDAY - Tottenham Hotspur and England great Jimmy Greaves is being treated in hospital, the Premier League club announced Tuesday.

But there was no mention in their brief statement of whether the former striker was suffering from the coronavirus, or indeed the exact nature of the 80-year-old's current condition. "We can confirm that our record goalscorer Jimmy Greaves is currently being treated in hospital," said a statement on Spurs' official Twitter feed.

"We are in touch with his family and will provide further updates in due course. Everybody at the club sends their best wishes to Jimmy and his family."

Greaves is understood to have been in poor health since suffering a stroke nearly five years ago. A prolific goalscorer throughout his career, Greaves also played for Chelsea and West Ham, but his greatest success came at Tottenham during a golden era for the London side that saw him score a club record 266 goals in 379 matches from 1961-70. For decades Greaves held the record for most goals scored in Europe's top five leagues, his tally of 366 goals in 528 appearances during a career that also included a spell at Italy's AC Milan only broken by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2017. Greaves was equally prolific at international level, scoring 44 goals in just 57 appearances for England. He was a member of the England squad that won the 1966 World Cup on home soil but an injury in a group game against France cost him his place in the side and paved the way for his replacement, Geoff Hurst, to score a hat-trick in the final against West Germany. - AFP