





## INS Magar arrives at Male port to evacuate nearly 200 Indians

NEW DELHI, May 10: *INS Magar* on Sunday arrived at Male to bring nearly 200 stranded Indian nationals home from Maldives amid the coronavirus pandemic.

*INS Magar*, designed for landing operations, had made all necessary logistic, medical and administrative preparations at her base port Kochi to comfortably accommodate civilians before setting sail towards Maldives.

The ship will evacuate nearly 200 citizens while ensuring all precautions, including social distancing norms, are followed, the Navy stated.

"An entirely separate section of the ship with essential facilities like food and washrooms has been prepared to accommodate the evacuees and a separate mess has been allotted for ladies, infants and senior citizens," it mentioned.

The evacuees have been divided into groups to avoid crowding at common areas like the dining hall and bath-rooms, the Navy noted. — PTI

## AP's COVID-19 tally shoots up by 50 to 1,980

AMARAVATI, May 10: The Chennai Koyambedu connection had a clear reflection on the number of fresh coronavirus cases in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday as the border districts of Chittoor and SPS Nellore reported 16 and five in the last 24 hours as the states overall tally shot up by 50 to 1,980.

The official bulletin showed one fresh Covid-19 death in Kurnool district and put the overall count at 45, as the one fatality reported in Vizianagaram on Saturday was not added to the table.

Over 160 people with contacts to people who returned from the Koyambedu wholesale market in Chennai were traced in Chittoor district and tests so far revealed 27 COVID-19 positive cases in the last two days, official sources here said. The total number of patients discharged from hospitals now increased to 925, leaving 1,010 active cases in the state. — PTI

# Rly minister urges states to allow special trains to ferry migrants

NEW DELHI, May 10: Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has appealed to all states to permit the operation of migrant special trains so that the stranded can reach home in the next three to four days.

The appeal comes a day after Home Minister Amit Shah wrote to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to allow such trains to run.

"As per the directions of Hon'ble PM @NarendraModi ji, Railways is fully geared up to run 300 Shramik Special trains everyday at short notice since the last six days.

"I appeal to all the states to give permission to evacuate and bring back their stranded migrants so that we can get all of them back to their homes in the next 3-4 days itself," Goyal tweeted on Sunday.

On Saturday the West Bengal government claimed it had given clearance to eight trains to be run carrying its migrant home. Four of these trains, it said, were to depart on Saturday, which did not.

Senior railway officials say the national transporter has a capacity to run around 300 trains per day ferrying around 20 lakh migrants in a maximum of five days.



Migrants arrive at Amritsar Railway Station by buses to board a special train for Barauni in Uttar Pradesh on their way back to home, amid the lockdown, in Amritsar on Sunday. — PTI

However, they said, clearances from states are not forthcoming, especially from states like West Bengal and Rajasthan, which till now have accepted the least

number of such trains despite being a significant source of migrant population.

As on May 10, a total of 366 Shramik Special trains have been operationalised across

the country, of which 287 had reached their destinations and 79 trains are in transit.

These 287 trains were terminated in various states like Andhra Pradesh (1 train), Bi-

har (87), Himachal Pradesh (1), Jharkhand (16), Madhya Pradesh (24), Maharashtra (3), Odisha (20), Rajasthan (4), Telangana (2), Uttar Pradesh (127), West Bengal (2). — PTI

## Naval ship arrives in Kochi with 698 repatriated Indians from Maldives

KOCHI, May 10: *INS Jalashwa*, carrying 698 repatriated Indian citizens from the Maldives, arrived at Cochin Port on Sunday morning, completing the Indian Navy's first massive evacuation exercise from foreign soil during the COVID-19 lockdown.

"The first group of 698 persons evacuated from the Maldives arrived at Cochin Port today (Sunday) at 9:30 am by 'INS Jalashwa' of the Indian Navy", a Port Trust statement said.

The group comprises 595 males and 103 females. Of this, 14 are children below 10 years and 19 pregnant women.

Though most passengers are from Kerala and Tamil

Nadu, there were repatriates of 18 other states and Union Territories also in the ship, which began its journey from Male to Kochi on Friday night.

The ship has berthed at BTP Jetty and the disembarkation procedures are being carried out at Samudrika Cruise Terminal, the statement said.

Inspector General of Police Vijay Sakhare said all arrangements are in place to facilitate the safe stay of those repatriated, comprising 440 Keralites and people from other parts of the country.

Four passengers are from Lakshadweep. The other passengers are from Tamil Nadu (187), Telangana (9), Andhra Pradesh (8), Karnataka (8),

Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan (3 each) and Goa (1), Assam (1).

There are seven passengers each from Uttarakhand and West Bengal, Delhi (4), Puducherry (3), while there are two passengers each from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, the sources said.

Passengers showing COVID-19 symptoms are being disembarked first, followed by others in small groups, district-wise, a Port Trust official said.

Thermal screening of passengers on arrival is being carried out by the Port Health Organisation.

Customs and Immigration procedures are carried out

inside the Terminal, where arrangements have also been made for distribution of SIM cards by BSNL and installation of ArogyaSetu in mobile phones of passengers, the official said.

Disinfection facilities for baggage and free wifi have been made available by the Port at the Terminal. Arrangements for onward travel to hospitals or institutional quarantine centres and home quarantine have been ensured by the state government by deploying ambulances, state transport buses and taxis, the official said.

These arrangements are coordinated by the District Administration, Police and Health Departments. — PTI

## Eminent historian Hari Shankar Vasudevan dies

KOLKATA, May 10: Eminent historian Hari Shankar Vasudevan died at a private hospital here on Sunday. He was 68.

Vasudevan had tested positive for novel coronavirus on May 6 after being admitted with high fever and breathing difficulty symptoms on May 4 but had other chronic ailments also, his family said.

He died at 1 am on Sunday, they said. Vasudevan is survived by his wife Tapati Guha Thakurta and a daughter.

He was considered one of the foremost names in Russian and Central Asian history.

Condoling his demise, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar recalled "Prof Hari Vasudevan, an eminent scholar, UGC Emeritus Professor, Department of History and China

Centre of Calcutta University as well as Ex Director of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies - MAKSIAS, an autonomous body under Ministry of Culture Govt of India."

The governor in the statement said Vasudevan died of coronavirus.

It said "Professor Hari Vasudevan was prominent specialist in Russian and European history and Indo-Russian Relations. He was also Visiting Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation and President, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata and these positions he made commendable contributions."

"He was involved in projects on Indo-Russian relations and the Radiating Globalities project initiated by

Gayatri Spivak of Columbia University (New York). At ORF, he was evaluating the overlap between 'Look East' and 'Look Far East' policies of India and the relationship between Greater Eurasia ideas of the Russian establishment and Chinese establishment," the statement added.

Describing Vasudevan as a multifaceted person, Dhankhar said he made his mark while being involved in a formal consultative capacity with projects/institutions of the Ministry of Culture, MHRD, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India and was Chairman of the Textbook Development Committee for the Social Sciences of the NCERT from 2005. — PTI



### Formidable Fifteen

There were a total of fifteen women who were part of the constituent assembly of India. They were Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Jivraj Mehta, Kamala Chaudhary, Leela Roy, Malati Choudhury, Purnima Banerjee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Renuka Ray, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, Vijalakshami Pandit and Annie Mascarene.



## Pregnant COVID-19 warrior in Karnataka wins accolade

BENGALURU, May 10: A nine-month pregnant nurse on COVID-19 frontline in Karnataka has emerged as a shining example for selfless dedication to work, with Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa expressing his gratitude and requesting her to go on maternity leave.

Roopa, working on a contract basis at Jayachamarajendra Taluk Hospital in Yediyurappa's home district of Shivamogga, insisted on continuing to discharge her duty despite health officials' advising against it citing her advanced pregnancy and surfacing of fresh COVID-19 cases in the district.

"Roopa, I am amazed to learn about your efforts. It is nice to learn that a woman from my district is putting in so much of efforts.

At least now please take rest and return to work after

delivery... I humbly request you to take rest from today," the Chief Minister told her over the phone. Recently, the nurse was deputed to Gajanur in the same district to tackle cases of coronavirus.

She has been commuting from Teerthahalli to Gajanur by bus for the past few days.

Meanwhile, Shivamogga, which was under green zone till now, saw a spurt in cases on Sunday with eight people testing positive and one of them was from Teerthahalli.

It was then the district and Taluk health officials realised that Roopa would risk her life if she continued to work and asked her to take a break, sources in the CM office said.

However, Roopa was adamant that she would continue to serve the patients during the pandemic. — PTI

## 75% cases asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, May 10: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said 75 per cent of COVID-19 cases in the city are asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms, and asserted that the number of serious patients and deaths caused by the infection is "less".

"The number of serious patients is less. The number of COVID-19 -19 deaths is very less," he said, a day after his government was attacked for "under-reporting" the deaths.

On Saturday, Congress leader Ajay Maken sought more transparency from the Kejriwal government and

Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari urged the chief minister to "tell the truth", saying people have a right to know about the severity of the outbreak.

Officials of the 10 hospitals treating COVID-19 patients have said the number of people dead due to the virus is higher than what the Delhi government's bulletin reflects.

A confusion has prevailed over the exact number of deaths as the data from four hospitals showed that 92 people succumbed to the infection against 68 reported by the government till Friday.

However, Kejriwal said on

Sunday that 73 people have died due to the virus.

He said Delhi has reported 6,923 coronavirus cases, out of which 2,069 have recovered, while 91 patients are in ICU and 27 are on ventilator support. It has been observed that 82 per cent of people dead were above the age of 50, Kejriwal said, requesting senior citizens to take precautionary measures against the infection.

"Out of 6,923 COVID-19 patients, only 1,476 are admitted to hospitals," he said, adding that the rest are getting treatment at their homes and COVID-19 care centres.

Addressing an online briefing, Kejriwal said those asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms need not to be admitted to hospitals and can be provided treatment at home.

"Our team makes inspection of their home to ascertain whether social isolation can be observed or not. Our teams are in regular touch with such people and if needed, family members of affected person can contact officials," he said.

If there is no sufficient space at home to ensure social isolation, the government sends the patient to a COVID-19

care centre where he/she can stay for 14 days, he said.

He said the government has attached the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital with two-three five-star hotels where frontline warriors, infected by COVID-19, are being treated.

"It pained me when I heard that the Opposition was criticising our move. I want to ask you whether corona warriors should not be given better facility," he said.

This is not the time to do politics but time to work together against the virus, the AAP chief said. — PTI



**GOOD NEWS for FARMERS**

In view of the difficulties faced by farmers following Covid-19 pandemic, State Bank of India hereby announces sanction of an additional pre-approved loan of 10% of existing limits to all KCC (Kisan Credit Card) borrowers and SHG (Self-Help Group) in the Agriculture segment whose loan accounts are regular.

For further details, borrowers may please contact their branch.



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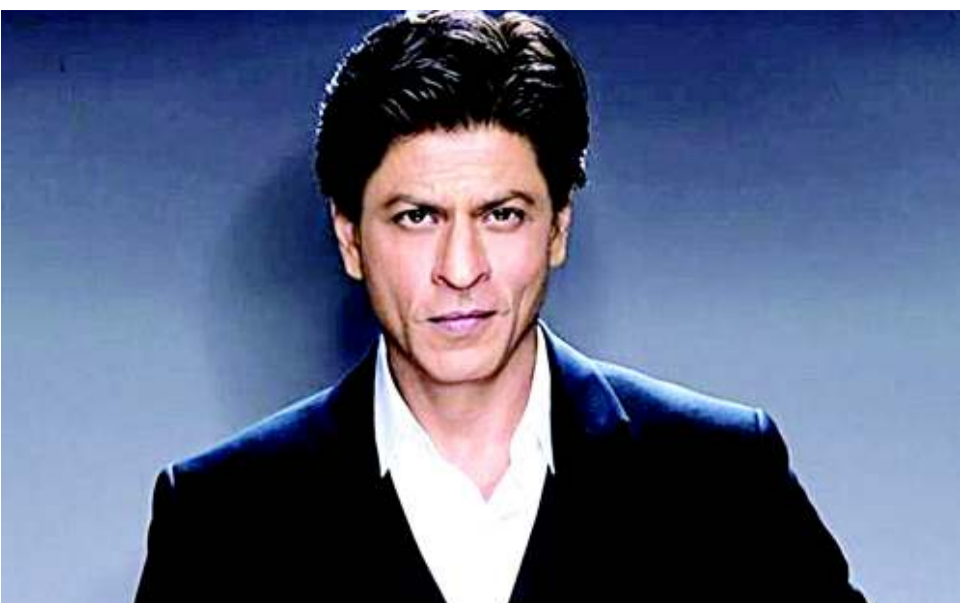












Spook challenge

SRK has asked people to make scary indoor films

Ahead of the launch of his web production, the horror show Betaal, Shah Rukh Khan has announced an interesting task for people amid the lockdown. He wants people to make 'scary' indoor films. Three winners will get a chance to do a video call with the superstar.

Sharing the details, SRK took to social media and wrote: "Since we've all got a bit of time on our hands in quarantine, thought I can get us all to work a bit... in a fun, creative and spooky way. How about channel the inner filmmaking ghost in us to make a scary indoor film with an element of horror in it."

People can mail their work to teamdigital@redchillies.com by May 18. The entries will be judged by Betaal co-director Patrick Graham, cast members Viineet Kumar and Aahana Kumra, and Gaurav Verma of Red Chillies Entertainment, producers of the show.

"Ghosts are welcome to send their entries too," SRK quipped.

The project is a collaboration between SRK's Red Chillies entertainment, Netflix, SK Global, and Blumhouse Productions, the banner that is known for its Hollywood horror productions as Paranormal Activity and Insidious.

SRK and his wife Gauri have also offered their four-storied personal office space to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation

(BMC) to be utilised as a quarantine facility for women, children and the elderly.

Thanking the Bollywood superstar and his wife for their act of generosity, BMC shared on social media: "#StrongerTogether We thank @iamsrk & @gaurikhan for offering their 4-storey personal office space to help expand our Quarantine capacity equipped with essentials for quarantined children, women & elderly. Indeed a thoughtful & timely gesture! #AnythingForMumbai #NaToCorona."

The superstar's decision to donate his office comes just a couple of days after he made huge contributions to the government to aid the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic.

SRK, through his IPL franchisee Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), has committed to contribute to the PM Cares Fund. Through his film production banner, Red Chillies Entertainment, he will give to the Maharashtra CM's Relief Fund. The superstar has also pledged Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for healthcare providers and workers in Maharashtra and West Bengal.

SRK's Meer Foundation along with the foundation Ek Saath will provide daily food requirements to over 5,500 families for at least a month in Mumbai. Meer Foundation is also collaborating with Roti Foundation to provide meals to underprivileged people and daily wage labourers.

(Source: IANS)

Kids section with CN, Pogo, and AXN logos and program schedules.

Entertainment section with colors, rishtey, Zcafé, and StarPlus logos and program schedules.

Movies section with STAR GOLD, MOWIES, and HBO logos and program schedules.

Infotainment section with Nat Geo Wild, National Geographic Channel, and History TV18 logos and program schedules.

Regional section with NEWS LIVE, NEWS 18, and raiing logos and program schedules.

Sports section with various sports logos and program schedules.

Know your DAY

By JACQUELINE BIGAR. HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Monday, May 11, 2020: Individualistic and creative you produces many wonders in this year of isolation. It is very important for your imagination to be deeply understood by another. If single, you search for that other — and may decide to keep on searching. If attached, you both exist in your own little world. Happy as clams, you both create beauty together. If not, you part ways amicably. AQUARIUS can be as eccentric as you.

LOCKHORNS comic strip panel with text: "JUST ONCE IN MY LIFE I'D LIKE TO EXPERIENCE THE HAPPINESS OF THE GUYS IN BEER COMMERCIALS."

Comic strip panel with text: "IF ONIONS MAKE YOU CRY, WHY AREN'T THEY CALLED PULLIES?"

THE PHANTOM comic strip panel with text: "PHANTOM'S FINAL STOP IN WAMBESILAND" and "BACK AWAY FROM THE GATE, CHATU... I'M COMING IN..."

BLONDIE comic strip panel with text: "THIS ARTICLE ASKS: 'DOES YOUR MARRIAGE STILL PACK PLENTY OF PIZZAZZ?'" and "I KNOW THREE PEOPLE WHO WOULD SAY OURS DOES!"

HAGAR THE HORRIBLE comic strip panel with text: "MY HUSBAND GIVES ME AN ALLOWANCE!" and "I KNOW! IT'S LIKE I'M BEING PAID TO PLAN MY OWN ESCAPE!"

Tribune CROSSWORD - 6890 grid and clues.

SOLUTION TO TRIBUNE CROSSWORD - 6890 with answers for across and down words.

HEALTH CAPSULES by Bron Smith. WHAT IS A CORONARY CALCIUM SCAN? The coronary calcium scan detects only the calcium in the arteries, not soft plaque.

Thought for the day: I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy. - RABINDRANATH TAGORE

# Himanta visits Zonal Health Screening Centre at TU

CORRESPONDENT

TEZPUR, May 10: Minister for Health and Family Welfare Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited the Zonal Health Screening Centre, quarantine facility set up within the Tezpur University campus and inspected the facilities made available for screening, registration and testing of all passengers returning from outside the state.

He was accompanied by MP Pallab Lochan Das, Minister of State, H&FW Pijush Hazarika, MLAs, senior officials of the Health Department, and Deputy Commissioner Manvendra Pratap Singh, among others.

To contain the spread of COVID-19, and as per directions received from the state Department of Health, the Sonitpur district administration had set up a Zonal Screening Centre in Tezpur Central University at Napaam to screen all people belonging to the five districts falling under the North Assam Division, ie., Udalguri, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Lakhimpur and Dharmaj districts who return from outside the state. The Minister first inspected the screening centre set up at the Community Hall being used for screening of passengers and then the Kendriya Vidyalaya which has been used to set up an institutional quarantine facility with 250 people capacity.



He later had a brief meeting with senior district and health department officials along with top administrators of Tezpur Medical College and Hospital and issued necessary directives to ensure proper screening and registration and subsequent monitoring of all people who report at the venue.

The Minister also interacted with the Vice-Chancellor of Tezpur Central University Dr VK Jain and informed him that the quarantine facility at KV will not be used to house any COVID-19 positive patient, but will only be used for screening and observation of all inbound people. All COVID-19 positive patients will be

kept and treated at the Isolation Ward of Tezpur Medical College and Hospital or other dedicated COVID-19 hospitals identified for the purpose.

Dr Sarma assured him that the Government will take all precautionary measures for the safety and security of the residents of the campus.

Later, briefing the media about various steps taken to deal with the current situation prevailing due to COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Sarma said that community transmission has not happened in Assam till date.

"When more than 100 people are infected, then it will be known as community transmission," he said, adding that general screening will not be done at the quarantine centres from now onwards. Only the swab will be taken from people coming from outside. He also said that people stranded outside the state are in a very precarious condition for which as per the central government's direction, the state is taking initiative to bring back them to their homes.

On the other hand, he assured that more precautionary measures would be taken in the quarantine centres. "It is time to face the challenge and we will have to be more cautious. Uptil now, a total of 126 people have been tested in the TU Zonal Screening Centre," he mentioned.



Extending blood bonds beyond kinship: Rakta-Dhara Statewide Voluntary Blood Donation Camp being held to mark 163 years of Sipahi Vidroh, organised by National Medicos Organisation at North Lakhimpur, on Sunday. – UB Photos

## Blood donation camp held to mark Sipahi Vidroh

CORRESPONDENT

NALBARI, May 10: The Assam branch of National Medicos Organisation in association with Seva Bharati, Purbanchal, organised a voluntary blood donation camp at the Blood Bank of Swahid Mukunda Kakati Civil Hospital here today.

The blood donation camp was held to mark the 163rd anniversary of the historic Sipahi Vidroh (Sepoy Mutiny) of 1857.

The camp was inaugurated by Ashok Sarma, MLA of Nalbari LAC in the presence of Dr Numal Momin, MLA of Karbi Anglong district.

In the blood donation camp, Dr Mriganka Talukdar, present of district BJP, Dr Ramesh Chandra Bhattacharya, Dr Kameswar Lahkar, Dr Khanindra Mohan Saud and Dr Utpal Das were present.

A total of 30 units of the life-sustaining fluid was collected at the voluntary blood donation camp.

## Concern over mushrooming of 'pharmacies'

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, May 10: Amidst the ongoing medical emergency in the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, the All Adivasi Tea Tribes Jagran Association (AAT-TJA) today alleged that a number of pharmacies, having no registration certificate from the authority concerned, have been mushrooming in some tea gardens areas of the State since the past few days.

According to a statement of the AATTJA, such pharmacies, which mainly deal in contraband narcotics tablets along with some fake medicinal items, have been noticed in tea garden areas of Sivasagar, Charaidoo, Golaghat, Tinsukia and Darrang districts.

## Red Cross, Thalassemia Day observed in Hailakandi

CORRESPONDENT

HAILAKANDI, May 10: Amidst the nationwide lockdown to break the transmission chain of the dreaded coronavirus pandemic, World Red Cross Day was observed in Hailakandi district on Friday last.

The programme started with hoisting of the flag by the president of Hailakandi district branch, Kshitish Ranjan Paul. Maintaining social distance, members of the Red Cross distributed masks and sweets among the people and security personnel present.

Dr Rubeya Begum Mazumdar and Samsuddin Barlaskar also addressed the gathering.

World Red Cross Day is observed on May 8 in sync with the birth anniversary of Henry Dunant, who was the founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The main aim of the Red Cross Society is basically to inspire, initiate and encourage all kinds of humanitarian activities at all times and under all circumstances.

Further, a blood donation camp was organised at the Blood Bank of Hailakandi's SK Roy Civil Hospital in col-

laboration with Barak Valley Voluntary Blood Donors' Forum, Bajrang Dal and Jeevan Daan on Friday on the occasion of Thalassemia Day.

The day is observed to honour patients suffering from this disease. People also express gratitude to all the scientists whose dedication and enduring efforts have contributed to make life better for the thalassemia patients.

The president of the forum, Dr Paritosh Chandra Dutta informed that altogether 13 persons, including a woman, donated blood on the occasion.

## Women SHGs doing brisk business by selling masks

CORRESPONDENT

HAILAKANDI, May 10: Fired by the zeal to make face masks abundantly available, women SHGs in Hailakandi have lately set up mask-selling kiosks so as to cater to the needs of the public.

Since the inauguration of the first mask-selling kiosk in Hailakandi town under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM) on April 29, a total of 18,320 masks have been sold till date.

Another mask-selling kiosk was inaugurated by District Develop-

ment Commissioner (DDC)-cum-Project Director of DRDA Vikram Dev Sarma at Katilcherra Block on Friday.

Speaking at the inaugural function, Sarma said, "During the coronavirus pandemic, the demand for masks is increasing by leaps and bounds. To keep the highly contagious disease at bay, wearing of mask is essential. All these masks have been made by women self-help groups under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission."

In the meantime, the

district administration has made wearing of masks or face covers mandatory. The DDC appealed to the public to buy these products from the women SHGs so as to support them financially and occupationally.

Sources said 72 women SHGs under ASRLM in the district have produced 1,41,898 masks till date. Biplob Kumar Nath, DPM of ASRLM, who is supervising the production of masks, said: "The two-leafed mask prepared from cotton cloth is sold at Rs 25 apiece". Nath

said the sale of masks is satisfactory as more and more people are realising their importance to save themselves from the dreaded virus.

The residents of Hailakandi, Katilcherra and other places across the district sincerely appreciated the endeavour of ASRLM, Hailakandi to cater to the needs of the public by making available masks at reasonable price at a time when they are being sold at inflated rates owing to acute shortage and unprecedented demand.



Alert today, alive tomorrow: Hailakandi DDC-cum-DRDA Project Director Vikram Dev Sarma inaugurating a mask-selling kiosk run by a women's SHG. – Photo: Hailakandi Correspondent.

## Call to cancel coal mining project at Saleki in Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve

ABHIJIT KHATANIAR

DOOMDOOMA, May 10: Nature lovers, environmentalists and green NGOs have intensified their protest against the decision of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) to allow coal mining at Saleki in Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve.

The Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve, of which Saleki is a part, is the largest rain forest in India. It stretches for 575 sq kms in Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar districts in Upper Assam. This virgin forest land is also referred to as the Amazon of the East. The biodiversity of this forest is very rich and unique.

Hoolock gibbon, slow loris, pig-tailed macaque, stump-tailed macaque, capped langur, Indian leopard, Asian elephant, Royal Bengal tiger, gaur, Chinese pangolin, Himalayan black bear, Himalayan squirrel, leopard cat, clouded leopard, porcupine, crab eating

mongoose, sambar, sun bear, binturong, barking deer, golden cat and marbled cat are some of the animal species found here.

Further, Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve is also home to around 293 different species of birds, besides rock python, king cobra, Asian leaf turtle and monitor lizard are among the most common reptiles found here.

Moreover, the forest is also home to 30 different species of butterfly which thrive in the beautiful tropical vegetation along with over 100 species of orchids.

Amidst the nationwide lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in its 56th annual meeting held on April 7 last through video conferencing under the chairmanship of Prakash Javedkar, Chairman of NBWL and Union Minister for Forest, Environment and Climate Change approved a coal mining project in the Saleki proposed reserve forest, which is a part of the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve.

The NBWL standing committee had discussed and subsequently approved a proposal for use of 98.59 hectares of Saleki land for a coal mining project by North Eastern Coal Field (NECF), which is a unit of Coal India Limited. The NBWL, it may be pertinent to add here, is under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoFCC).

It may be recalled that the NBWL had in its 54th meeting constituted a panel with Prof. R Sukumar, a member of NBWL as its head to visit the proposed Lekhapani open cast project under Lekhapani Range of Digboi Forest Division in Tinsukia district.

As per the report submitted by the panel, the Standing Committee of NBWL recommended the proposal for broken up area (57.20 hectares) for approval subject to submission of a rectified site-specific mine reclamation plan in consultation with the Forest Department of Assam.

On the other hand, for the unbroken area (41.39 hectares), the NBWL will consider the matter after the user agency submits a feasibility report for underground mining and compliance report regarding fulfilment of all the other conditions recommended by the NBWL.

This recommendation for coal mining in the forest by the NBWL has been strongly opposed by the nature lovers, environmental activists and NGOs. The protesters opined that while offering recommendation for coal mining in the forest, the NBWL has overlooked the fact that this is a Protected Area and "should be conserved and protected from any destructive activities in order to ensure the country's ecological and environmental security".

The protesters urged the Prime Minister, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Chief Minister of Assam and the NBWL to stop any current or future coal

mining project at Saleki and the whole of Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve, stating that coal extraction will have a catastrophic consequence for the entire ecosystem in the region.

Due to the ongoing lockdown, various NGOs and environmental activists have launched a protest campaign against this issue through social media. A few among them have also embarked on a signature collection drive too.

It may be mentioned here that the Dehing Patkai region is already threatened by high polluting industries such as coal mines, oil refineries and gas drilling adversely affecting the biodiversity in the region.

"Though the NBWL allowed the coal mining project on April 7, 2020, but illegal mining has been going on covertly by the coal mafia in the forest for long, thereby affecting the biodiversity of this virgin forest land," alleged the environmental activists.

## Madina Khatun: a tribute

Septuagenarian Madina Khatun of Bilasipara made a remarkable footprint in social media at the age of 67 years till her last breath. She wrote articles, poems and limericks which were widely accepted. Her vast knowledge was noticed in various comments she made in different articles written by famous people in Facebook.

Born at Bilasipara in Dhuri district, she hailed from a conservative Muslim family. She always espoused causes which she felt were correct. Having completed her grad-



uation in the sixties, she joined Assam govt service. She was the first lady Chirastadar of Assam, a post created in the Land and Revenue Department.

A studious lady, she was an active member of *Axomiya jatua-thas, khondo bakyo, fokora jojona, xathor, probad iyadi*

and participated by posting various Assamese *Jatua thas* and *xathor*. Fighting against cancer since the last two years, she finally breathed her last on April 20 at the age of 73 years.

Before her death, she wrote "Goodbye my friends" on her Facebook wall on April 9, which was her last message in social media.

The members of *Axomiya Jatua-thas, khondo bakyo, fokora jojona, xathor, probad iyadi* were deeply shocked on her sad demise and wish her departed soul eternal peace in heaven. You will always be remembered Madina di.

– Pratul Barkataki

