

# NEWS IN brief

## China shuts down Everest over virus

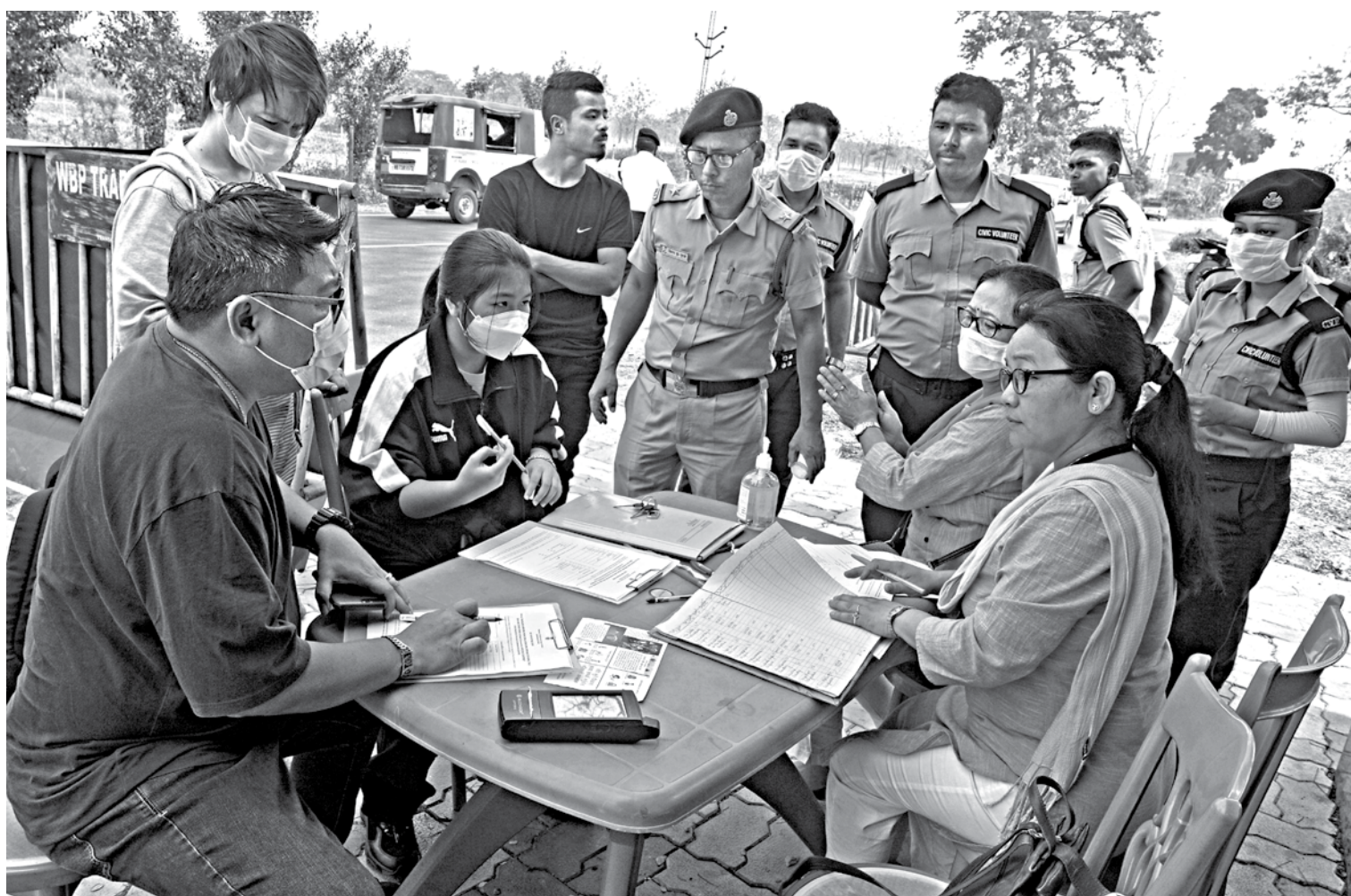
AFP, Kathmandu  
China has cancelled permits for Mount Everest because of the coronavirus, expedition organisers said yesterday, ahead of the spring climbing season on the world's highest peak. Last year's traffic-clogged spring window saw a record 885 people summit Everest, 644 of them from Nepal and 241 from the northern flank in Tibet. The Nepal side remains open for now although some expedition operators have seen cancellations and climbers have been asked to submit a 14-day travel history and medical reports.

## Philippines' Duterte takes virus test

AFP, Manila  
Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was tested for the new coronavirus yesterday, officials said, as key government buildings were being disinfected over an exposure scare. The Philippines has seen a jump this week in cases, including people who recently attended events with Senate lawmakers and government officials, potentially exposing them. In response, the Senate building and Philippine central bank were undergoing cleaning, and several officials announced they would isolate themselves as a precaution.

## HK dismisses US criticism over rights

REUTERS, Hong Kong  
Hong Kong yesterday dismissed US criticism of its human rights practices, saying the Asian financial hub was "firmly committed" to upholding and safeguarding freedoms. The US State Department said in a report on Wednesday that significant human rights issues in the Chinese-ruled city included police brutality against protesters, interference with the right of peaceful assembly and restrictions on political participation.



Members of medical staff check the details of foreign tourists amid concerns of the spread of the coronavirus at an information collection and awareness desk setup by the Darjeeling district at a checkpoint in Simulbari village, on the outskirts of Siliguri yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Web not working for women, girls

Warns internet inventor Berners-Lee

AFP, London  
The internet is "not working for women" and is fuelling a new era of widespread abuse against females, the creator of the world wide web, Tim Berners-Lee, warned yesterday. In a bleak assessment published on the World Wide Web Foundation, an organisation founded by Berners-Lee that advocates a free and open web for all, he also argued that a "dangerous trend" of abuse threatens any advances in gender equality. "The web is not working for women and girls," he wrote. "The world has made important progress on gender equality thanks to the unceasing drive of committed champions everywhere. "But I am seriously concerned that online harms facing women and girls -- especially those of colour, from LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised groups -- threaten that progress." The abuse was so extensive that "over half of young women surveyed have experienced violence online", said Berners-Lee, citing a survey from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. The world-famous computer engineer also highlighted that discrimination was being further fuelled as many women could not get access to the internet. Citing the foundation's own research, he said men were 21 percent more likely to be online, rising to 52 percent in the world's least developed countries. Berners-Lee said such inequalities threaten the "Contract for the Web", a global action plan he launched a year ago to prevent the internet becoming a "digital dystopia".



# Say no to panic

Modi tells people as virus infections across India rise to 73

AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday asked the nation to not panic over the coronavirus outbreak. In a social media post, Modi urged the nation to "say no to panic, say yes to precautions." The prime minister assured that the government was "fully vigilant about the situation due to COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus. Across ministries & states, multiple steps have been proactively taken to ensure safety of all. These steps are wide-ranging, from suspension of Visas to augmenting healthcare capacities." In a series of tweets, PM Modi also said that no minister of the central government will travel abroad in the upcoming days and he urged the people to also avoid non-essential travel.

the exams, reports NDTV. The tweet from the Chief Minister read, "All cinema halls to remain shut in Delhi till 31st March. Schools and colleges where exams are not being held will also remain closed. The number of people affected by coronavirus in the country rose to 73, Kerala had the most cases -- 17. Several states, including Kerala, have also shut educational institutions and crowded places like cinema halls. In Maharashtra, where 10 cases have been reported, the government has banned ticket sales for the 2020 Indian Premier League opener between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings. The match was to be held on March 29. The remaining two matches of India-South Africa ODI series are likely to be played in empty stadiums due to COVID-19 threat, reported news agency Press Trust of India.

All schools, colleges, cinemas in Delhi shut till March 31

No minister of central govt will travel abroad in upcoming days: Modi

Kerala had most cases -- 17



"We can break the chain of spread and ensure the safety of all by avoiding large gatherings," the PM tweeted. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced yesterday that all schools, colleges and cinema halls in Delhi will remain shut till March 31 as a measure to counter the coronavirus. The Delhi government had already shut the primary schools, the secondary classes remained open in view of

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar yesterday told parliament that the outbreak is a "matter of concern." "Exceptional situations require exceptional responses," Jaishankar said, adding that "travel at this time is not recommended as it only heightens risks". The virus was declared a pandemic on Wednesday by the World Health Organisation or WHO.

# 'Better than nothing'

Thailand encourages cloth masks amid surgical mask shortage as virus infections in the country rise to 70

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's health authorities are encouraging people to make cloth face masks at home to guard against the spread of the coronavirus amid a shortage of surgical masks. Thailand, which has reported a total of 70 cases, put surgical masks and sanitizers under its list of controlled goods last month, as the spread of the coronavirus led to shortages in stores. The shortage of surgical masks prompted the Thai government to approve a 225 million baht (\$7 million) budget last week for government agencies to produce 50 million cloth masks in a matter of days for nationwide distribution. Cloth masks are enough to prevent people from catching the virus via droplets from coughing or sneezing, said Panpimon Wipulakorn, Director-General for the Department of Health. "The droplet from coughing and

sneezing is around five microns and we have tested already that cloth masks can protect against droplets bigger than one micron," Panpimon said, adding that the masks needed to be washed daily. The official herself appeared in a public health ministry video teaching people how to make cloth masks at home. Workshops have also been set up nationwide to help produce the masks. Many Thais answered the government's call by getting together in small groups at community centres around the country to make masks from cloth and distribute them to others for free. It did not take long for



Phongsai Kaewwichit, a 63-year-old retiree, to make one. "I'm making these cloth face masks for my family and relatives because I can't find the surgical masks anymore and the price is very high," said Phongsai. "I think it is better than nothing because at least it can protect me from people's saliva in close contact."

# No law to back UP action

Indian SC on 'name and shame' posters in Lucknow over anti-CAA protests

PTI, New Delhi

The Indian Supreme Court yesterday told the Uttar Pradesh government that as of now, there was no law that could back their action of putting up roadside posters of those accused of vandalism during anti-CAA protests in Lucknow. An apex court bench refused to stay the March 9 Allahabad High Court order directing the Yogi Adityanath administration to remove the posters. The top court, which grilled the Uttar Pradesh government for putting up such posters in public, described the plea as a matter that needed "further elaboration and consideration". A vacation bench of justices U U Lalit and Aniruddha Bose said a "bench of sufficient strength" would consider next week the Uttar Pradesh government's appeal against the Allahabad High Court order directing the state administration to remove the posters of those accused of vandalism during anti-CAA protests. It directed the apex court registry to

put up the case file before Chief Justice of India (CJI) S A Bobde so that a "bench of sufficient strength can be constituted at the earliest to hear and consider" the case next week. During the hearing, the bench told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government, that it was a matter of "great importance". It asked Mehta whether the state government had the power to put up such posters. The top court, however, said there was no doubt that action should be taken against rioters and they should be punished. Mehta told the court that the posters were put up as a "deterrent" and the hoardings only said that these persons were liable to pay for their alleged acts during the violence. Senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for former IPS officer S R Darapuri whose poster has also been affixed in Lucknow, told the bench that the state was duty-bound to show the authority of law backing its action.



Police detain Tibetan activists during a demonstration near the Chinese embassy in New Delhi yesterday to mark the 61st anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day that commemorates the 1959 Tibetan uprising. PHOTO: AFP

## 1MDB SCANDAL

# Malaysia ex-PM's trial halted over virus scare

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Disgraced Malaysian ex-leader Najib Razak's corruption trial was halted yesterday after his defence team were reportedly ordered to self-quarantine over fears about the coronavirus. Najib and his cronies are accused of looting billions of dollars from sovereign wealth fund 1MDB and using it to finance a global spending spree. The allegations played a major part in Najib losing power in 2018, and he has since been arrested and is facing multiple trials over the scandal. He denies wrongdoing. The legal process has moved slowly, however -- and Najib's main trial was hit by yet another delay

# 90pc young Kashmiris want Indian forces to leave: survey

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

More than 90 percent of college and university students surveyed in Indian-administered Kashmir want a complete withdrawal of Indian forces from the region, according to a new survey. Approximately 600 college and university students were part of the survey conducted by researchers from the Central University of Kashmir and New York's Skidmore College in the wake of New Delhi's decision to revoke the Muslim-majority region's special status last August. Fearing a backlash to the revocation, India rushed tens of thousands of additional troops to the region in addition to the more than 500,000 soldiers already stationed there and suspended internet, which was fully restored earlier this month. Indian forces have been battling separatists fighting for Kashmir's independence or merger with neighbouring Pakistan, which also lays claim to the Himalayan territory, for 30 years. New Delhi says the military has been deployed to quell



the armed rebellion that erupted in 1989. Kashmir is dubbed the most militarised region in the world. Rights organisations, as well as the United Nations, have accused Indian forces of carrying out systematic human rights violations against the people of Kashmir, including widespread killings, torture, rape, and enforced disappearances. According to the survey, which was conducted between October and December 2019, 91 percent of the respondents wanted a complete withdrawal of Indian forces from the region. The same percentage backed the holding of a referendum to decide the future status of the Muslim-majority region, the survey, published in The Washington Post last week, said. While New Delhi maintains that the region is an integral part of the country, conducting a plebiscite that lets Kashmiris choose to accede to either India or Pakistan has been a long-standing demand of Kashmiris who, for the most part, consider India an occupying power. Many who would like to see the region remain independent of both nations believe that the plebiscite, in its current form, might not adequately address popular aspirations.

# Pak passes child abuse law after girl's rape, murder

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, Islamabad

Pakistan's parliament passed a new law against child abuse on Wednesday, two years after the rape and murder of a 7-year-old girl that shocked the country. Pakistan's first national child abuse law will introduce a penalty of life imprisonment for child abuse, said Pakistan's Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari. It follows the death of Zainab Ansari, whose body was found in a garbage dumpster in Kasur district near the eastern city of Lahore in 2018, sparking large protests and accusations of negligence by authorities. There had been reports of a number of missing children in the district since 2015, when authorities uncovered what they said was a paedophile ring linked to a prominent local family. Mazari tweeted that the bill's passage had been "a long struggle" as she thanked colleagues for helping it clear numerous

hurdles. "Finally, we have emerged today successfully, getting the Zainab Alert Bill sailed through the National Assembly with a majority of votes," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone. An amended version of the bill cleared Pakistan's legislative assembly late on Wednesday after being passed by the upper house earlier this year. It is expected to receive the formal assent of the president in the coming days. Zainab's case triggered debate in Pakistan over whether to teach children how to guard against sex abuse, a taboo subject in the Muslim majority nation. Nearly 10 cases of child abuse a day are reported in Pakistan, according to Sahil, an organization that works on child protection, with girls disproportionately affected. The law requires police to register a case within two hours of a child's parents reporting them missing.

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