

Friday, 29 May 2020

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NATION

## No booze, 8 commit suicide in Kerala

Posted: 📅 Apr 01, 2020 07:12 AM (IST) Updated: 🕒 1 month ago

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**Sreevalsan Thiyyadi**
**Kochi, March 31**

When KP Shybu was found missing from his house near Thrissur, the family filed a police complaint. Within 24 hours, this Monday morning, the 43-year-old construction worker's body was found lying in a canal by the paddy fields off Cherpu town.

### Special passes for tipplers

- Special passes will be issued for tipplers in Kerala to buy liquor but on doctor's prescription that they are showing withdrawal symptoms due to non-availability of alcohol
- The decision has been taken by the state government to prevent suicidal tendencies and frustration among people who consumed alcohol regularly

At Kechery, 28 km north of Shybu's Venginissery village in central Kerala, daily wager KV Sanoj (38) chose to hang himself. That was last Friday. Four suicides were reported on weekend: SK Suresh and Biju Viswanathan of downstate Kollam district, KC Vijilal of north Malabar's Kannur and B Vasu of Kaitharam near Kochi.

All this for a common reason: non-availability of liquor. The state has all its beverages shops shut from March 25 following a nationwide lockdown against the coronavirus.

While all the above deceased are in the 25-40 age bracket, a sexagenarian died due to acute withdrawal symptoms in Kollam. Murali Achari (62) of Mukhathala panchayat had turned violent at home for 48 hours before he suffered a cardiac arrest on Sunday.

The same forenoon, Thoppil Noufal (38) of Kayamkulam in neighbouring Alappuzha district ended life by consuming shaving lotion. Around the same time, urban Changanassery in bordering Kottayam district saw a distressed 46-year-old atop a shopping complex threatening to jump.

The police tried to calm down C Sasi standing on the building's second

floor, but to no avail: he is now in hospital with multiple fractures.

The state administration had foreseen such a spectre. Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who was the first in the country to announce a state's closure (from March 24) to guard against the virus outbreak, had let liquor supply continue. To a cryptic question at that press meet in capital Thiruvananthapuram, he replied matter-of-factly: "No, liquor isn't (yet) an essential commodity."

The "indispensability" of alcohol had by then triggered an animated debate among Malayalis. While supporters of political parties opposing the ruling Left highlighted the health hazard posed by long queues at beverages outlets amid the government's sustained calls for social distancing, the

Chief Minister sought to defend the apparent contradiction by reiterating the "social issues" that entail a virtual prohibition.

Chiefly, Vijayan hinted at the deaths that can follow when drunkards are suddenly deprived of alcohol, which is effectively a biological need. Two, there is high prospect of hooch (which is proving right: 9,700 litres of fermented wash seized in six days till March 29). Critics, ridiculing instances of how tipplers did maintain a metre's gap at certain line-ups, wrote these off as a tactic to ensure non-stop tax flow to the exchequer.

Now, with the Union home ministry's order restricting human movement, the

Chief Minister suggests sale of liquor if the doctor prescribes a dose of it. The state's medical and psychiatric associations have dismissed the idea.

Simultaneously, the government is focusing on rehabilitation. "We've set up de-addiction centres in each taluk hospital. The treatment is free," says Excise Minister TP Ramakrishnan.

It is another matter Thrissur's Shybu did visit a physician last week, but the 'patient' eventually found refuge in death alone.

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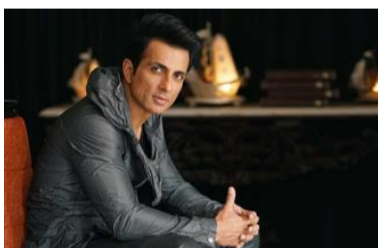
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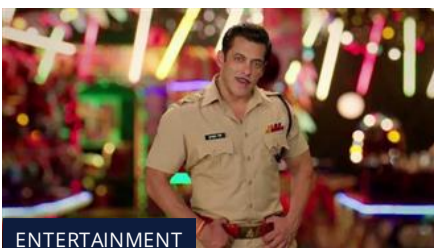




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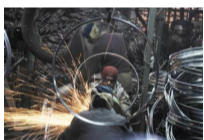
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