

Detained 'drug smuggler' cat escapes Sri Lanka prison



A prison officer shows off a cat detained while entering the high-security Welikada Prison in Colombo with drugs and cell phone SIM cards. The cat later escaped

AFP News

A cat detained at Sri Lanka's main prison while allegedly trying to smuggle drugs and cell phone SIM cards has escaped, media reports said Monday.

The feline was detected by jail intelligence officials on Saturday at the high-security Welikada Prison, a police official said. He said nearly two grams

of heroin, two SIM cards and a memory chip were found in a small plastic bag tied around the cat's neck.

But it escaped on Sunday from a prison room where it was kept, the *Aruna* newspaper said.

There was no immediate comment from prison authorities.

The prison had reported an increase in incidents of peo-

ple throwing small packets of drugs, cell phones and phone chargers over the walls in recent weeks.

Sri Lanka is battling a major drug problem with some anti-narcotics detectives also implicated in selling confiscated drugs.

Police last week seized an eagle allegedly used by drug traffickers to distribute narcotics in a suburb of Colombo.

Brits enjoy half-price meals thanks to coronavirus subsidy

Reuters | London

People across Britain enjoyed half-price meals on Monday as the government launched its "Eat Out to Help Out Scheme" aimed at driving up business in the shattered hospitality industry after months of coronavirus lockdown.

Diners are entitled to a 50 per cent discount on food and non-alcoholic drinks to eat or drink in, up to a maximum of 10 pounds (\$13) discount per head every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday between Aug. 3 and Aug 31.

The offer - expected to cost half a billion pounds (\$650 million) - is open to diners in participating restaurants, cafés, bars, pubs, work and school



Diners are entitled to a 50 per cent discount



canteens and food halls. More than 72,000 restaurants have registered, finance minister Rishi Sunak said. Matt Healey, 23, who works in digital marketing for Warner Bros., was glad his cooked "English breakfast

would cost him half the usual price at Maggie's, a cafe in Lewisham, south east London.

But he said the priority for him remained the health risks over the discount. "It's a bit of a balancing act," Healey said. "I think the risks will probably outweigh the 50pc off."

The head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which finances the trials, said he expects official registration of the vaccine to be complete "within ten days."

Russia to produce 'millions' of vaccine doses by 2021



At more than 850,000 infections, Russia's coronavirus caseload is currently fourth in the world after the United States, Brazil and India

AFP News

Russia said yesterday it aims to launch mass production of a coronavirus vaccine next month and turn out "several million" doses per month by next year.

The country is pushing ahead with several vaccine prototypes and one trialled by the Gamaleya institute in Moscow has reached advanced stages of development and is about to pass state registration, officials said.

"We are very much counting on starting mass production in September," Industry Minister Denis Manturov said in an interview published by state news agency TASS.

"We will be able to ensure production volumes of several hundred thousand a month, with an eventual increase to several million by the start of next year," he said, adding that one developer is preparing production technology at three locations in central Russia.

The state-run Gamaleya institute came under fire after researchers and its director injected themselves with the prototype several months ago, with specialists criticising the move as an unorthodox and rushed

"If this happens in the next ten days, we will be ahead not just of the United States but other countries too, it will be the first registered coronavirus vaccine," RDIF chief Kirill Dmitriev said in televised remarks.

Another vaccine, developed by Siberia-based Vektor lab, is currently undergoing clinical trials and two more will begin human testing within the next two months, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said on Saturday.

Gamaleya's vaccine is a so-called viral vector vaccine, meaning it employs another virus to carry the DNA encoding the needed immune response into cells.

Gamaleya's vaccine is based on the adenovirus, a similar technology to the coronavirus vaccine prototype developed by China's CanSino, currently in the advanced stage of clinical trials.

- "Who will buy it?" -

The state-run Gamaleya institute came under fire after researchers and its director injected themselves with the prototype several months ago, with specialists criticising the move as an unorthodox and rushed

way of starting human trials.

Vitaly Zverev, laboratory chief at the Mechnikov Research Institute of Vaccines and Sera, said it was too early to register a vaccine.

"I believe a vaccine that is not properly checked must not be registered, no matter in what country," he said.

"It is impossible to ensure the vaccine's safety in the time that has passed since the beginning of this pandemic," he told AFP.

"You can make anything, but who is going to buy it?"

Zverev added that the three firms named as future producers of Russia's vaccines are well-known pharmaceutical firms that do not normally make vaccines, let alone high-tech ones using DNA technology.

"No adenovirus-based vaccine has been proven effective before," he said. "How are they going to grow it? Nobody explains this."

Moscow has dismissed allegations from the UK, the United States and Canada that a hacking group linked to Russian intelligence services tried to steal information about a coronavirus vaccine from labs in the West.

Restaurant offers 'COVID curry' to scared customers

AFP News

An Indian restaurant is hoping to win back customers afraid of eating out during the pandemic with a special "COVID Curry" and "Mask Naans".

"This has been a really tough time for us and for our entire sector," Yash Solanki, owner of the vegetarian Vedic eatery in the western city of Jodhpur, told AFP.

The fried vegetable balls have been shaped to look like the "crowned" coronavirus, while the accompanying breads look like surgical masks.

Solanki said that they had also added, and advertised, that their COVID curry had extra Indian herbs and spices that are good for people's health.

"Even with recently relaxed curbs, the fear still dominates. People are still very reluctant to



A waiter carries "COVID curry" and "mask naan", two coronavirus-themed dishes, to customers at a restaurant in Jodhpur

eat out," Solanki said.

Almost 800 people are dying

daily from coronavirus in the world's second-most populous

nation, with around 50,000 new infections reported every

The fried vegetable balls have been shaped to look like the "crowned" coronavirus, while the accompanying breads look like surgical masks.

24 hours.

The country has had 1.8 million cases, the third-highest in the world behind the United States and Brazil, and more than 38,000 deaths.

One person is dying of COVID-19 every seven minutes in Iran: state TV

Reuters | Dubai

One person is dying from COVID-19 every seven minutes in Iran, state television said on Monday, as the Health Ministry reported 215 new deaths from the disease and state media warned of a lack of proper social distancing. Health Ministry spokesman Sima Sadat Lari was quoted by the state TV as saying the 215 deaths in the past 24 hours took the combined death toll to 17,405 in Iran, and the number of confirmed cases rose by 2,598 to 312,035.