

WORK FROM HOME: WORKING AT HOME

SPECIAL DIGITAL ISSUE

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LOSING SANITY?

The fight against COVID-19 is also a psychological war. The forced isolation, fear and stress are getting to us.



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Anxiety, insomnia, depression, panic attacks... mental health has been a major casualty of the pandemic and the unprecedented lockdown. We talk to experts to figure out how to stay sane in these uncertain times of social distancing, work from home et al.

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13/4/2020

**NEW DELHI**

Sangeeta Kampani: This refers to your April 13 issue *Ration State*. The images of people walking to their native villages, blisters on feet, shows our disaster management capability in a dismal light. And speaks even more poorly of our concern for human rights. Cities shut out the very people who built their bridges, skyscrapers, roads and malls, while living in non-descript slums themselves. This should badger our sleepy conscience like never before. Here is a small composition dedicated to our migrant brethren:

Who is that man?
Emaciated, tired
Amongst that horde
Looks so familiar
I knew the others too
Nameless
You could call them
Chotu 1 and Chotu 2
The same way
As we usually do.

All heading home
Fearing the lockdown
Far more than the virus.
Half alive, half dead

No, nothing to eat
Hunger, their
ever-loyal friend!

At last, the horde reached
the village,
But to an unusual welcome
With a special chemical!
The bleach was potent,
The same they use for
rodents
I am told one of them
Lost his eye.
He was a mason.
Could he be the one
Who built my sprawling
mansion?

MUMBAI

C.K. Subramaniam: What will happen after the lockdown ends? Two scenarios are likely. One is the doomsday prediction, which says that the world in general and India in particular will be in dire straits, with millions finding it hard to make ends meet. Then, there is the optimist, who can take heart in the unprecedented unity Indians

have shown during the lockdown. There is always hope for recovery—people should work hard and make a forceful comeback.

MUMBAI

Rahul Chauhan: UN, WHO and other organisations have warned that if the coronavirus pandemic is not curbed soon, the risk of severe food crises in the world increases. Lockdowns in most of the world are causing a huge bottleneck in the food supply chain. Panic shopping is also increasing. Food exports have been banned in many countries, due to which there is a danger of shortages in the global market. This can worsen the situation in importing countries and increase the prices of food products there. A statement jointly issued by international organisations stated that despite the lockdown, every effort should be made to keep food businesses open.

PRABHJOT GILL





On The Front Line

GOA

M.N. Bhartiya: This refers to your cover story *Corona Warriors* (March 30). As the response to the virus shows, the collective efforts and character of our nation in these times are intact. However, manmade tragedies such as the recent communal riots in Delhi bitterly betray the nation. The conscience of our rulers was not adequately pricked to make them stop the killings. The masses are so gullible that they get easily swayed by politicians' poisonous rhetoric. It is beyond my comprehension that when our national



TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

character is strong enough to face the monster of coronavirus, how and why do we elect only third-rate chameleon-like representatives, many of whom have criminal backgrounds? Is it the case that only fear and selfishness control our character?

LUCKNOW

M.C. Joshi: Coronavirus is an unprecedented threat to humankind. Scientists across the world are trying to develop vaccines and medicines, but as of now, patients are getting conventional remedies for flu.

It is reassuring that over 95,000 patients treated by the available remedies have recovered. Three out of four patients in Jaipur have been cured with a combination of medicines used for swine flu, malaria and HIV. In Lucknow, an infected woman was not prescribed any medicine for the first six days and then Tamiflu was given, the medicine for the H1N1 flu, for the next four days. She eventually tested negative and was discharged from hospital. Undoubtedly, numerous faceless men and women are devotedly working across India to fight against the virus. *Outlook's* initiative of profiling these corona warriors is commendable.

NAINITAL

Vijay Singh Adhikari: A miniscule virus has become a Uniter-in-Chief. It does not respect boundaries or differentiate between the privileged and marginalised, old or young. It has brought humanity, including developed nations, to its knees. Nature has confined us to a complete lockdown to witness its healing power. Wildlife is thriving in the open and reduction in pollution levels are a positive sign. In a way, it has taught us a useful lesson and sends the message that any effort to control nature is fraught with danger. To quote H.G. Wells: "For after the battle comes quiet. Humanity had been strong, energetic, and intelligent, and had used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered con-

ditions." Countries need to shed their mutual animosities and scientists, doctors, journalists, politicians and businesses should work in close coordination to tackle this extraordinary crisis, which demands unprecedented efforts and coordination.

MUMBAI

Gundu K. Maniam: It is the right of a resident to receive a hard copy of the newspaper. The pleasure of flipping through it with a cup of coffee is a lovely feeling in the early morning hours. Newspapers are included in essential services. So, nobody should hinder their distribution. In this world, where gossip and propaganda are elevated to the status of gospel, the printed word in a responsible publication is clearly an essential service, particularly in these times.

FROM THE Paak Room

Yesterday, having drunk too much, I was intoxicated as to pass all bounds, but none of the rude and coarse language I used was uttered in a conscious state. The next morning, after hearing others speak on the subject, I realised what had happened, whereupon I was overwhelmed with confusion and ready to sink into the earth with shame. It was due to a vessel of my small capacity being filled for the nonce too full, I humbly trust that you in your wise benevolence will not condemn me for my transgression. Soon I will come to apologise in person, but meanwhile I beg to send this written communication for your kind inspection. Leaving much unsaid, I am yours respectfully.

↑ **Bacchanalia's Apologia** An apology letter templated by the Dunhuang Bureau of Etiquette, China, for drunken guests who misbehaved at parties (856 CE)



Mukul Vashisht,
Proprietor

CHEER TO THOSE WHO CARE

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We have all had moments of despair, when we've felt low – that feeling of loneliness even when around people or the gloom of boredom and lack of social interaction. It is in times such as these that, as anyone who has stared into the abyss of isolation can validate, the unexpected arrival of a gift, a gesture of care or a trinket of affection, makes this agonizing ennui fizzle away in a jiffy. At RR Solution, we believe in spreading this magic of surprise, unadulterated happiness by becoming a medium for you to bring joy to those you care for, with an impressive range of products you can gift to your loved ones, colleagues and compatriots.



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India's GDP growth rate is likely to drop to a multi-decadal low of 1.6 per cent in fiscal year 2020-21 due to the pandemic and ensuing lockdown, says Goldman Sachs.



The crime rate and FIRs registered have fallen significantly in both Delhi and Mumbai in March. Of the FIRs filed, a majority pertained to lockdown violations.



Five commandos of the Army were killed in Keran sector along the Line of Control in Kashmir after a fight with five terrorists who had infiltrated into India.

The Native Redefined

Opposition to domicile law unites Jammu with Kashmir

Naseer Ganai in Srinagar

ON March 31, when the Centre notified a law through an executive order defining domicile of Jammu and Kashmir and eligibility for employment in government jobs, it triggered anger among people in the Jammu region, while the valley of Kashmir was engulfed in despair. The law defines domiciles as those who have resided for at least 15 years in J&K, or studied for at least seven years in educational institutions there and appeared in the Class 10 or 12 examination. It reserved level-4 government jobs such as peons for the domiciles, whereas the other levels were opened up to people from anywhere in India.

The youth of Jammu took to social media to express their resentment. “Insult after insult is being heaped on us,” said Ankita Sharma, a young woman from Jammu, in her five-minute speech on Facebook. “The biggest insult was when J&K, which was never under British rule, was downgraded into a Union territory and our leaders were arrested. We were quiet as they said huge development is coming to the region. It (domicile law) is a surgical strike against the youth of J&K. If you think we will not retaliate, you are mistaken.” In Kathua, slogans were shouted against the BJP’s J&K president Ravinder Raina.

“We saw anger among Jammu youth, who felt cheated. Feeling threatened, local BJP leaders urged their central leadership to tweak the law,” says Safiq Mir, Rajouri-based Congress leader and president of J&K Panchayat Association.

Apparently under pressure, the Centre in the evening of April 3, brought an amendment that restored status quo on jobs—before August 5 last year, when Articles 370 and 35-A of the Constitution were still opera-

tional, all state government jobs in the erstwhile state of J&K were reserved for its permanent residents. People from outside couldn’t buy property either. Jammu-based lawyer Ankur Sharma says the domicile law fit the “larger strategic paradigm” of J&K’s full integration, “but the BJP bowed before separatist forces and Pakistan”.


Newly formed Apni Party president Altaf Bukhari was the first to condemn the law and ask the government to review it. Bukhari says he was supposed to discuss the law with the Centre before



UMER ASIF

Surgical Strike The new domicile law has sparked anger in Jammu & Kashmir.

its enactment, but it couldn’t be done due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 15, Union home minister Amit Shah had assured an Apni Party delegation in Delhi that the Centre did not intend to make “demographic changes” in the region.

Many in Kashmir, however, feel that is exactly the Centre’s plan. The Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq said the domicile law is part of the process to change J&K’s demographic character that started last August. Observers here say it may also disenfranchise thousands of non-resident Kashmiri Muslims, as well as those exiled from the region since 1947 to Pakistan and elsewhere. They see it as a plan to make Israel-type settlements in Srinagar and expand them to other districts of the Valley. 

→ A shop in Calcutta sells sweets shaped like the coronavirus



SNAPSHOT



← **Just Stop It!** People from the Northeast protest against racism

Community Infection

Anupam Bordoloi

NORTHEAST

Two apparently similar incidents took place in two corners of India in a span of two days. Just one made big news. A woman from a Northeast state was spat at by a man in Mumbai in what was apparently a racist act. He allegedly called her “corona” in reference to her Mongoloid features. It can be safely presumed that he read into her looks a connection to China, where the global pandemic currently ravaging the world originated. The incident was widely reported, Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray said such acts will not be tolerated, the police registered a case and the National Commission for Women began its own investigation.

Around the same time, three women from a neighbouring state working as nurses at a private hospital in Assam’s capital Guwahati, also faced allegedly racist taunts. A group of men called the women “coronavirus”. The incident revealed

what most people in the region refuse to acknowledge—racism in Northeast societies.


One of the women was clearly taken aback. “In Delhi, they don’t understand that people from the Northeast and China are different, but in Guwahati, at least, they should understand,” news portal Scroll.in quoted Kshetrimayum Bidyabati Devi as saying. “We are feeling so bad,” the native of Manipur said, adding that she faced racist slurs at least twice.

Neither the victims nor the hospital reported the matter, but the police suo motu filed a case and started an investigation. “A group of men shouted ‘coronavirus’ at three of our nurses two-three days ago. They have

In Assam’s capital Guwahati, some men taunted three nurses from Manipur by calling them “coronavirus”.

been subjected to physical abuse as well,” the private hospital’s founding director Prakritish Bora told a news agency. When contacted, a senior police official said, “We have recorded the statements of the nurses and hospital authorities. We are now tracing the culprits. Strict action will be taken against them.”

The Assam incident came amid a spate of racist attacks on people from the Northeast, all of them linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. A 25-year-old woman from Manipur was allegedly spat on in Delhi’s Mukherjee Nagar area recently. The accused was arrested after the woman alleged that he spat on her and yelled “corona”.

Despite several measures by the central and state governments, people of the Northeast have been facing racism across India, mainly because of their looks and food habits, often considered “uncivilised” in many parts of the country. Racism has also led to incidents in which several people from the region have been killed in hate crimes. 

KASHMIR

Off With Their Trunks

Naseer Ganai in Srinagar

WHAT is the latest carrier of coronavirus? If authorities in the Valley are to be believed, it is the poplar tree! The district magistrate in south Kashmir's Anantnag district issued an order to chop off all female 'Russian' poplar trees. "With the onset of spring, the trees start shredding pollen enveloped in cotton, which not only glide in air, but after touching surfaces, again hover in air with the slightest breeze. Thus, there is potential risk of it becoming the carrier of the virus and spreading infection from one area to another," reads the statement.

Those who have planted the trees were asked to cut them down, failing which, action would be taken. The DM has directed the police and the forest department to ensure the order is implemented in "letter and spirit".

The tree was introduced in Kashmir in 1982 under a World Bank-aided social forestry scheme. Though called



Russian poplar, it is a western American species known as eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) in the US. People in Kashmir prefer this species over native poplar for its quick growth—within three years, it attains a height of 20 to 30 feet. It has a lifespan of 40 years and is mostly used to make wooden boxes to transport fruits. According to official estimates, the

number of trees in the region is around 15 million.

But this is not the first time the tree has been accused of harbouring health hazards. In 2014, a public interest litigation was filed in the high court calling for the axing of the trees. "The pollen of these trees has given rise to chest diseases in Kashmir, which can become life-threatening," the court observed. Subsequently, lakhs of trees were felled in Srinagar and other districts. However, many experts in the Valley argue that there is no scientific evidence that poplars are the main cause of allergy in Kashmir during April and May. There is no evidence either that it can spread coronavirus. [Q](#)

Russian poplar trees face the axe in Kashmir amid speculation that they can spread coronavirus

brevis



Philip Anderson, an American Nobel Prize-winning physicist, has died at 96.



Paravai Muniyamma, a Tamil actress-singer known for her folk songs, has died at 83.



American soul music icon **Bill Withers**, who wrote and sang hits like *Lean On Me*, *Lovely Day* and *Ain't No Sunshine*, has died at 81.



Tony Lewis, the former university lecturer known for a complex rule of cricket, the Duckworth-Lewis method, has died at 78.



Indian-origin South African virologist **Gita Ramjee**, acclaimed for her role in HIV research, has died of COVID-19. She was 64.



Anurag Srivastava has taken charge as the official spokesperson of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) from Rav-eesh Kumar.

MixedShots



AWESOME, PERFECT, FANTASTIC

IT seems no surfeit of adjectives can do justice to the phenomenon that is Beela Rajesh. The Tamil Nadu health secretary is at the receiving end of public adulation that is generally heaped upon film stars. What has she done, you ask? In these bleak times, the IAS officer has not only led the fight against coronavirus in the state, but also ensured transparency and clarity in her briefings to the media. On top of that, her sartorial elegance has come a delectable treat for eyes sore from the social distancing. No wonder fans can't stop gushing. "Mam...everyday I saw ur saree collection...really awesome...perfect collection of saree mam...fantastic (sic)," raved a woman on Facebook. [Q](#)

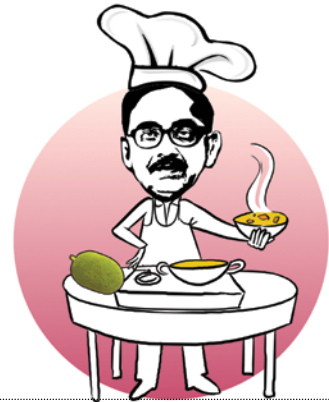


BOO CORONA BOO!

IF the threat of a lethal virus can't stop you from stepping out, what will? Ghosts, of course. The police in Indore are harvesting fear of the supernatural to keep people at home during the lockdown. They have enlisted social workers to don black attire with images of lungs and roam in crowded neighbourhoods to keep errant feet indoors. Then, there are the more communicative ghouls who tell people to stay inside lest the coronavirus demon takes possession of their bodies and souls. [Q](#)

JACK OF ALL FRUITS

IS there a skill development minister as skillful as Mahendra Nath Pandey? Unlikely. While mere mortals were surviving on instant noodles in college, he used to cook vegetable extravaganzas. So as hunger pangs knocked at his oesophagus during the janta curfew, he had a sudden burst of nostalgia. "I recalled how good a cook I was," he says without any pretense of modesty. "So after a gap of 12 years, I made kathal sabzi." Seems like there are more uses of pots and pans beyond banging them on balconies. [Q](#)



DRAUGHT DROUGHT

THE kid with the name Isis, the candy called Ayds, and that refreshing beverage with a wedge of lime, Corona. There's only so much you can do about a name that a global catastrophe decides to adopt. While the jokes of food-in-the-fridge-social-distancing from Corona beer never went flat, it seems the pale lager finally has. The Mexican brewer of Corona has suspended production because of the Mexican government's order to stop all non-essential activities until April 30. Looks like the world will now experience the beerless, cheerless life that Indian tipplers have been going through since the shutdown in March. [Q](#)



LOCKDOWN'S BEST FRIEND

DESPITE the arrest of 627 people and 350 FIRs the Jammu and Kashmir lodged for lockdown violations, it seems people are largely not stepping outside in Srinagar. For evidence, head to the anti-rabies centre at SMHS hospital. The dog-bite cases there have reduced from 20 on an average before the lockdown to 6-7 now. A doctor at the hospital says this suggests that people are staying indoors in the city. For the past few years, Srinagar has been grappling with stray dogs. Last year alone, 11,000 cases were reported at the centre and a 2011 census pegged the number of stray dogs in the city at 91,000. [Q](#)





SARUSAJAI STADIUM, GUWAHATI

DIVIDED STATES IN UNITED FIGHT

Big or small, rich or poor, the provincial constabulary is shouldering India's campaign in a world war

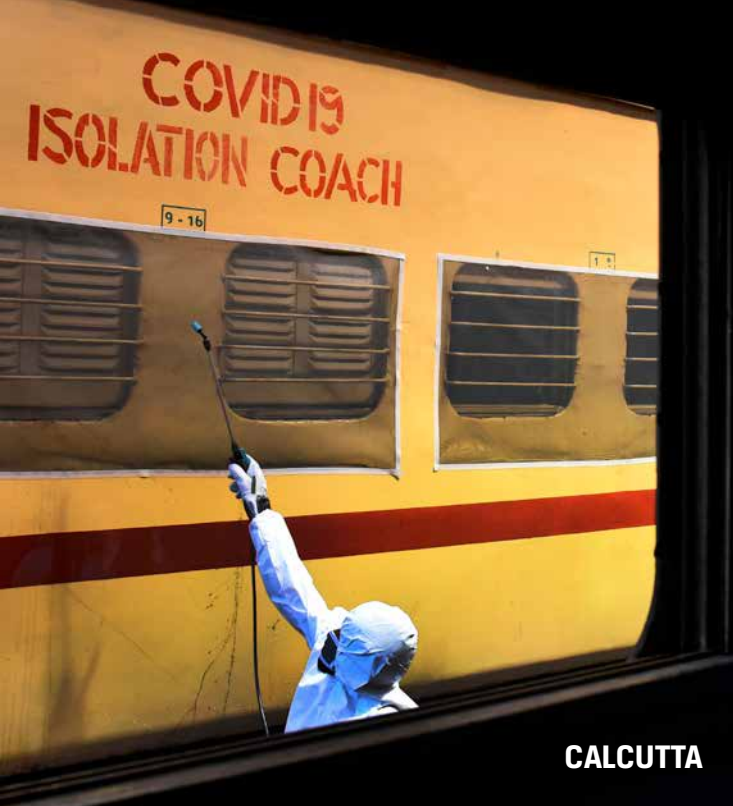
Bhavna Vij-Aurora and Preetha Nair

THEY were clapping, hooting, whistling, blowing into vuvuzelas—a crowd of 33,000 football fans rooting for a goal, expecting a cliffhanger ending. But the Chennaiyin goalie fisted out a full-booted volley, the best chance NorthEast United had that evening in 2016. They lost a home game. At Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati. Similar scenes—idyllic, except for the context—played out again this February. Sarusajai hosted the Filmfare Awards. That, of course, was then. The world has changed. The shadow of the coronavirus pandemic has lengthened across India. The stadium has morphed into a field hospital: a quarantine centre, with rows of 1,000 beds under a tarp-covered longhouse shaped like an inverted U. Masked workers and overseers in hazmat suits have replaced the excitable football fans.

The beds—their neat white sheets gleaming under the floodlights—are empty for now. But the threat posed by the

pandemic has never been more stark. The stadium provides a panoptic view of what lies ahead. How our states, which are no stranger to deadly outbreaks, are responding to the evolving crisis. The response varies from state to state, from Centre to states.

A state like Assam, with a smaller population and lesser number of infections, is better prepared. That is what it seems from the government's bulletins: 5,000 beds with ventilators reserved for COVID-19 patients, a stockpile of 4,000 personal protection equipment (PPE) and 5,000 more on the way, nearly 37,000 N95 masks and 700,000 triple-layer masks. It has 28 active cases, as on April 8, while the tally for the entire Northeast was 33, with Nagaland and Sikkim yet untouched by the 21st-century plague that has forced half of humanity indoors. Assam is also considering issuing entry permits to regulate the number of people entering or passing through the state once the lockdown is lifted. The NE has a geographical advantage—the narrow 'chicken's neck' that



2,500 COACHES—OF THE INDIAN RAILWAYS HAVE BEEN CONVERTED INTO ISOLATION WARDS. TARGET IS 5,000 SUCH COACHES.

joins the region like a train coupling with the vastness of India. Self-isolation leads through a highway and a railway line on that strip. Block these, all movements stop. But even an airtight seal isn't a copper-bottomed guarantee against the virus rebounding post-lockdown. Singapore and Hong Kong are grim reminders.

But not everyone has the luxury of geographical isolation. Chhattisgarh, for instance, sits in the middle, landlocked between Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Some of its neighbours have the highest active cases in the country, prompting authorities to identify 'containment zones', meaning stricter restrictive measures. Simply put, no one gets out of their homes even for groceries and medicines. Such a step is imperative as the virus, incubating inside its human hosts, is popping up rapidly in the 'hotspots' where multiple positive cases were detected. The Indian Council of Medical Research warns that a single infected person—symptomatic or asymptomatic, which are the hidden and more dangerous cases—can infect 406 people in 30 days if that carrier is not quarantined.

Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel knows why 'stay at home' is the most effective cure and how reopening interstate traffic will make his people even more susceptible to catching the infection. He imposed Section 144 in Chhattisgarh on March 21 as soon as the state recorded its first positive case. "When cases emerged in neighbouring Maharashtra, we blocked the Great Eastern Road (Mumbai-Calcutta). There was pressure on me to open it,



PHASE-WISE EASING OF LOCKDOWN IS THE MOST RATIONAL APPROACH'

The Kerala model of healthcare been lauded for effective containment of COVID-19. In an interview to Preetha Nair, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan talks about his government efforts. Excerpts:

Kerala has now dropped to the fourth place from having the highest number of cases. What made this possible?

Right from the beginning, we have been screening and quarantining people coming in from infected areas. Contacts of positive cases have been traced and placed under observation. As there was a steep rise in cases, Kerala went for a lockdown even before the nationwide one. We have also been testing at a rate unmatched by any other state. Now, we have moved towards rapid and mass testing, even setting up kiosks for the purpose.

Modi asked all states to chalk out an exit strategy.

Phased rollback of the lockdown seems to be the most rational approach at this stage, especially as the Centre has designated a few of our districts as hotspots. As directed by the PM, we have set up a task force to devise a strategy and make suggestions to the Centre.

Kerala has been allocated Rs 157 crore under the State Disaster Response Mitigation Fund, much less than other states. Is it adequate?

On our own initiative, even before going into lockdown, Kerala had announced a special package of Rs 20,000 crore to tide over the challenges caused by this pandemic. We hope additional central allocation will come through in the coming days.

Many states have been demanding more testing facilities from the Centre.

The WHO has repeatedly been asking countries to test more. Also, the experience of countries that have been able to contain the spread of the virus points to how essential mass and rapid testing is.

Will all this lead to a financial crisis?

Kerala receives only a fraction of the revenue it generates. Yet, the GST dues are delayed. In the wake of the pandemic, several states are asking for their rightful share of revenue. The Centre will have to address it. Post demonetisation and GST implementation, India is already under financial strain. And now there is hardly any economic activity. So, the government will have to intervene on both the supply and demand sides. It's time to end fiscal conservatism and set aside the strict rules of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

CENTRE
COVID-19
STATES



PTI

30,000 DOCTORS—RETIRED CIVIL, MILITARY AND PRIVATE—HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO HELP FIGHT THE CORONAVIRUS

but tough measures were required,” he says. The state has managed to keep the numbers down. But for how long? “There may have been only 10 patients, of whom nine have recovered, but we have 76,000 people in quarantine,” the CM says. The count is likely to shoot up as the state is ramping up tests.

The state also has to keep an eye out on neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, where the virus has touched almost every strata of society—infesting the top brass of the public health department, cops, and killing a doctor, which is a first in the country. Among those getting treated is public health secretary Pallavi Jain Govil. Another dozen patients in Bhopal are police personnel. Indore district has reported the death of Dr Shatrughan Panjwani, a general physician, who was not treating any known COVID-19 case, but his clinic received over 150 patients every day before he fell ill. His death has triggered fears of community transmission.

COVID-19 cases are doubling every four days in the country, perhaps because more tests are being conducted. But the number of tests is still inadequate, which means India is effectively fighting the pandemic blind and may not know the true extent of infection for months, if not years. The figure of more than 5,000 confirmed cases and 149 deaths in India (April 8) tell only a fraction of the story because the virus is highly infectious—roughly 2.5 times that of the common cold—but not everyone shows symptoms.

So, most states are playing the blind man’s bluff? Jharkhand, which has reported just four cases, certainly is. CM Hemant Soren admits as much. Since the state is not testing, it doesn’t know which stage it is in. “We have been writing to the Centre since March 21 that we need 75,000 PPEs, ventilators, testing kits,



THE CENTRE SHOULD AVOID POLITICS NOW!

In an interview to Preetha Nair, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren talks about the state’s preparedness and the Centre’s alleged negligence in providing assistance. Excerpts:

The PM has asked all states to come up with an exit strategy.

The states weren’t consulted before announcing the lockdown, so it’s strange that we are being asked for suggestions on the exit strategy. During the video conference with the PM last week, I didn’t even get a chance to talk about my state’s problems. We will assess the situation and decide the strategy accordingly.

Is Jharkhand conducting sufficient tests?

We don’t know which stage we are in, but once we accelerate our testing, we will come to know. We have been writing to the Centre since March 21 that we need more testing kits, PPEs, ventilators, masks, thermal scanners etc. We asked for 300 thermal scanners, but got only 100—that too, only three days ago. We must have scanners in police stations, government offices and at least one in every panchayat. We demanded 75,000 PPEs and got 5,000. And very few testing kits. How will we do more testing when we don’t have enough kits? We have only 8 PPR machines, of which just four are operational now. The rest await ICMR approval. We also seek ICMR approval to operate private labs. If we don’t act now, we will face the consequences in the coming months. A poor state like us will have to pay a huge price if we are not medically prepared. We have about 6-7 lakh migrants working in other states. If the Centre lifts the lockdown, a huge number will return and we are not prepared for it. It will also cause financial distress.

What have you done to control the pandemic?

We are following the protocol of tracing and quarantine. We have so far traced two lakh people, and stamped 170. We have formed village committees to identify those who are working outside the state. When they come back, they will be quarantined or isolated.

Is the Centre providing adequate financial assistance?

The Centre owes us Rs 450 crore in GST dues. Our MNREGA dues run into Rs 600 crore. We just got the first instalment of Rs 100 crore. As part of the State Disaster Risk Management Fund, we got Rs 284 crore. The government shouldn’t indulge in politics at this time.



NEW DELHI

42% OF COVID-19—CASES IN INDIA ARE IN THE AGE BETWEEN 21 TO 40 YEARS

masks and PCR machines. We don't have enough thermal scanners too. We asked for 300, got only 100 three days ago... If we don't act now, we will face the consequences in the coming months. In Mumbai, hospitals were shut after doctors got infected. A poor state like us will have to pay a huge price." What worries Soren more is a possible return of the natives—"about 6-7 lakh migrant labourers"—working in Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Telangana etc once the lockdown is lifted. "We are not prepared...financially also we are going to be in distress."

Affluent states are pushing a screening-and-testing approach. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has made tests the mainstay of his 5-T strategy—quite like the South Korean model of widespread tests to identify carriers. Rapid tests will be carried out in hotspots like Nizamuddin and Dilshad Garden, while lab tests will be done simultaneously across the Capital. Delhi has the highest cases after Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Test—that's one T ticked, the rest are Tracing infected people and their contacts, Treatment, Teamwork, and Tracking and monitoring. Kejriwal is confident of treating 30,000 cases based on severity of symptoms in hospitals, hotels, banquet halls and dharamshalas—which have been drafted in to ease the load on the healthcare infrastructure. It's ad hoc but effective, with a successful track record in the US and Europe.

The government in Maharashtra—a state with more than a thousand cases—is not low on confidence either. Minister

Nawab Malik says: "We began preventive measures even before the PM's announcement (of a lockdown for 21 days from March 25). Our figure is rising because we are doing more tests, compared to states like Bihar and Odisha. We have a special cell headed by the chief minister and every arm of the government is in action. We are monitoring and chalking out plans to stem the pandemic."

Rajasthan is another big state where infections are rising rapidly. It has a "ruthless containment" policy—called unofficially the Bhilwara Model after the entire townsfolk were locked in; food, water and medicines delivered at doorsteps on call. It is modeled on the complete shutdown in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus originated. Rajasthan too is confident of winning the war against the unseen enemy. Deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot says the government is fully prepared and has reserved 95,000 additional beds for COVID-19 patients. "There are hotspots like Ramganj near Jaipur, but we are containing it," he says.

In West Bengal, CM Mamata Banerjee read the signs early. She took a proactive, "people-first" approach, and set up a Rs-200 crore emergency fund, making Bengal the first state to devise and adopt such an initiative. Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien says: "We ordered 400,000 masks, 400,000 CPU machines and 300 ventilators. We also ordered new ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machines, crucial when a patient's heart and lungs begin to fail."

Fighting a contagion that has frustrated the world's best is no mean task—even Italy's healthcare system, one of the finest on the planet, struggled amidst mounting bodybags. But lessons learnt from previous epidemics and calamities come in handy. When COVID-19 exploded on China, it drew heavily from its experience gained during the 2002 SARS outbreak. South Korea had data from the 2015 MERS attack to fall back on. The two previous viruses belong to the corona



KERALA

family, whose newborn is the monster currently on the loose. In India, Kerala battled a secretive killer hardly two years ago—the Nipah virus. The state, which takes pride in its robust public healthcare, knew the drill when the new coronavirus landed. The tested protocols—social distancing, isolation et al (new to most countrymen outside the state)—were quickly activated. The result: heartwarming stories like that of Thomas, 93, and wife Mariamma, 88. The couple fully recovered at Kottayam Medical College and went home, winning the battle against a virus striking hard at the elderly.

It wasn't a virus that taught Odisha disaster-management skills, but a cyclone—a super on all scales—that flattened the coastal state in 1999. Drawing from that experience, the administration is mobilising its COVID-19 defences quickly and (so far) efficiently. Like shutting down completely bustling areas in Bhubaneswar, where cases were reported. The government has been proactive despite reports of factionalism at the top tier of the administration. Its case count has been static at 42 for a while, yet areas beyond the state capital have been declared containment zones for surveillance and contact tracing. Besides, there's food and lodging in 1,948 camps for 65,000 “guest workers”—the state's non-native workforce.


SHOW US THE MONEY

The country is at war, only the theatre is different, as are the soldiers and artillery. But everyone needs money to run the tanks into battle. To buy the war machines—more hospital beds, test kits, ventilators, thermal scanners, N95 masks and coveralls. And to feed the poor and jobless who have either fled the cities or are stuck in shelters. Several states complain that they are left to fend for themselves. Central assistance is hard to come by or is just a trickle. The penny-pinching will

40,000—INDIA HAS THAT MANY VENTILATORS FOR TREATMENT OF COVID-19 CASES. PRODUCTION HAS BEEN RAMPED UP

FIGURE ON APRIL 7, 2020

hurt Jharkhand, CM Soren portends. He got Rs 284 crore for the State Disaster Risk-Management Fund but his request for “our MNRGEA dues of Rs 600 crore” stays ignored. Maharashtra has made a similar request to the Centre to release Rs 14,000 crore of arrears. West Bengal wants the withdrawal limit for states under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act to be raised from 3 per cent of GDP to 5 per cent. Rajasthan is pooling from its tradition of charity. NGOs and Marwari businessmen are funding the war, deputy CM Pilot says.

And until the war is won, if there is one place that can lighten the mood it's where the fiercest battle of World War II was fought on Indian soil. Imphal. Fun-loving Manipur fights the new enemy with gigs and giggles at its quarantine centres. The art and culture department has ‘enlisted’ prominent singers and artistes, such as comedians of the Nokphade group, to entertain those sequestered from the herd for mandatory isolation till the virus leaves them alone. The performances are from a safe distance, though. A quarantined woman has recovered. A healthy dose of humour is the best medicine, they say—even for a disease that has no cure. That gives hope: the fans will return to Sarusajai, NorthEast United will win the trophy. Party awaited.  —with inputs by Rituparna Kakoty

V.V. BIJU



BOOSTER SHOT FOR BHILWARA

GETTY IMAGES

How the Rajasthan district went from worst-affected to a model for tackling coronavirus

Bhavna Vij-Aurora

RUTHLESS containment' has become a buzzword ever since the 'Bhilwara model' darted into the limelight. Bhilwara, 240 km from Jaipur and famous for its textiles, went from being the worst-affected district in Rajasthan to a paradigm in managing COVID-19.


As cases spike elsewhere in the country, nobody in Bhilwara has tested positive since March 30. On March 19, when six doctors and a medical staffer tested positive for coronavirus, the single-minded determination of district magistrate Rajendra Bhatt led to the imposition of an immediate, complete clampdown. He had the situation under control in just over 10 days.

"The chief minister (Ashok Gehlot) gave me a free hand. The first thing I did was isolate Bhilwara by sealing its borders with other districts," Bhatt tells *Outlook*. Explaining the model, he says, "It comprises six basic but crucial steps— isolate the district, map hotspots, door-to-door screening, aggressive contact tracing, ramp up quarantine and isolation wards, and put in place a monitoring mechanism for rural areas."

Within Bhilwara, the epicentre's containment and buffer zone were turned into 'no-movement' sectors. The administration stopped all traffic

and ensured daily disinfection. Screening and testing were prioritised for Brijesh Banger Memorial Hospital, the epicentre of the outbreak. Social distancing was also strictly enforced. "No one was allowed to venture out of their house. The administration had taken upon itself to deliver essentials, including food items, rations and medicines to everyone's doorstep. If people broke the social distancing rule, they were deprived of their rations for the day," says Bhatt, adding another dimension to 'ruthless'.

In the 1,910 villages in the district, panchayats, panchayat samitis and local SDMs and BDOs were involved in the task. 'Corona captains' were appointed from among SDMs and BDOs, who in turn identified four-five people among the panchayat members, teachers and ASHA workers to be 'corona fighters'. Their task was to go door-to-door, monitor and spread awareness. As many as 3,000 teams were formed to reach out to 32 lakh people of the district and 6,000 people were quarantined in an effort to vanquish the virus.

Bhatt is aware that the Centre is studying his model as an example for others to emulate. Sources in the government say that cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba has been advocating the Bhilwara model and it has also been approved by the prime minister's advisor Amarjeet Sinha. 



Rajendra Bhatt's measures contained COVID-19

STATE OF AFFAIRS

Tamil Nadu

- **Micro** plan for each district to identify the elderly, pregnant women, infants and people with chronic diseases
- **Mobile** health teams
- **Massive** awareness campaign on social distancing
- **Expansion** of testing facilities
- **Special** relief package of Rs 3,850 crore
- **Tracked** down 1.5 lakh pregnant mothers in the state
- **Special** ambulances for 10,000 women in advanced stages of pregnancy

Telangana

- **Incentives** for medical and police personnel
- **Dedicated** portal to fact-check fake news (factcheck.telangana.gov.in)
- **Mobile app** for health workers to keep a tab on people in home quarantine
- **India's first** automated COVID-19 system app to identify, track, monitor and provide real-time analytics

Maharashtra

- **First state** to follow the 3T formula—trace, test and treat
- **From one** testing centre when the first case was reported, it now has 28
- **Banned crowding** at religious places as early as March 16
- **Quarantined** Asia's largest slum Dharavi, which houses 8.5 lakh people, in a cluster containment plan

Kerala

- **First state** to use rapid tests to detect COVID-19 infections in two-and-a-half hours
- **Early** surveillance and public health awareness campaigns
- **Contact** tracing and publishing route maps tracing the travel history of patients
- **Extensive** testing of symptomatic cases
- **Rs 20,000-crore** aid package
- **Hand-washing** campaign 'Break The Chain'
- **Home delivery** of mid-day meals
- **Tracking** tourists
- **Coronavirus** mobile app

Delhi

- **Announced** 5T plan of test, trace, treatment, teamwork and track to tackle COVID-19
- **About** 30,000 beds exclusively for patients with coronavirus
- **Plans** to follow South Korea model of widespread testing to prevent virus from spreading
- **Locked down** Nizamuddin after the Tablighi Jamaat event

Rajasthan

- **Pioneered** the 'Bhilwara model' of ruthless containment after cases spiked in the district
- **Involved** NGOs, the state's business community and private sector in a big way
- **Arranged** 95,000 additional isolation beds of its target of one lakh
- **Among** the first to set-up a CM relief fund for COVID-19 to receive aid from the public

Assam

- **Ramped** up preparations after NDMA released 'worst-case scenario' protocol on March 18
- **Six medical** colleges and civil hospitals reserved for COVID-19 patients; people getting treatment for other ailments shifted to private hospitals. Plan afoot to set up five pre-fab hospitals.
- **Indira Gandhi** Athletic Stadium in Guwahati converted into a 1,000-bed quarantine centre
- **5,000 beds** with ventilators, PPE kit stockpile of 9,000, nearly 37,000 N95 masks and 700,000 triple-layer masks
- **Five laboratories** to test samples. People are screened for symptoms and advised 14-day home quarantine.
- **One-time** relief of \$2,000 to students and travellers from Assam stranded abroad
- **Rs 50 lakh** insurance cover for frontline health workers, including ambulance drivers
- **Doctors** under mandatory 14-day quarantine after a week's pandemic duty kept at Taj Vivanta hotel in Guwahati
- **Free rice** to 58 lakh families under the National Food Security Act
- **Entry permits** likely to regulate the inflow of people into the state after the lockdown. Transit passes for people from other northeastern states passing through Assam.
- **Migrant** labourers who entered the state through Srirampur gate along the Assam-West Bengal border sent to quarantine facilities
- **Start-up** ParkingRhino has developed mobile app STAY HOME to track people under home quarantine
- **IIT Guwahati** develops low-cost (Rs 1,000) machine to disinfect hospitals, buses and trains



....IN BATTLEZONE CORONA

Odisha

- Sealed inter-state borders the day after migrant exodus at Delhi-UP border
- Sealed Suryanagar and Bomikhal, bustling areas within Bhubaneswar, after cases reported
- Set up two specialised 1,000-bed COVID-19 public-private partnership hospitals in record time
- Among the first to put protocols in place, it stocked up on medicines for the next seven months in January itself
- First state to declare COVID-19 a state disaster, even before the Centre

West Bengal

- Rs 200-crore emergency fund
- Ordered 400,000 masks, 400,000 CPU machines, 300 ventilators and new ECMO machines
- Distributed 110,000 PPE kits, 50,000 N95 masks, 18,000 litres of hand sanitiser and 3,000 thermal guns across the state
- Rs 10 lakh health insurance cover for healthcare, ASHA, ICDS, sanitation workers and police personnel

Punjab

- Health insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh for police personnel and sanitation workers
- A thousand PPEs for each government hospital
- Three-month extension for retiring health department staff
- Uninterrupted 24x7 supply to all healthcare institutions
- Two thousand volunteers to assist police and civil administration
- Comprehensive security plan for smooth procurement of wheat

Madhya Pradesh

- Acquired private hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients
- Over 10,000 students from the National Service Scheme (NSS) to join in the fight against the virus

Uttar Pradesh

- Ten testing labs for coronavirus
- To set up UP COVID-19 care fund
- Fifteen districts in the state to be sealed till April 15

Bihar

- Constituted Corona Eradication Fund
- Launched Bihar Corona Sahayata app
- Government to provide Rs 1,000 to workers who enter from other states or are stuck outside the state under the Bihar Aapda Prabandhan

Karnataka

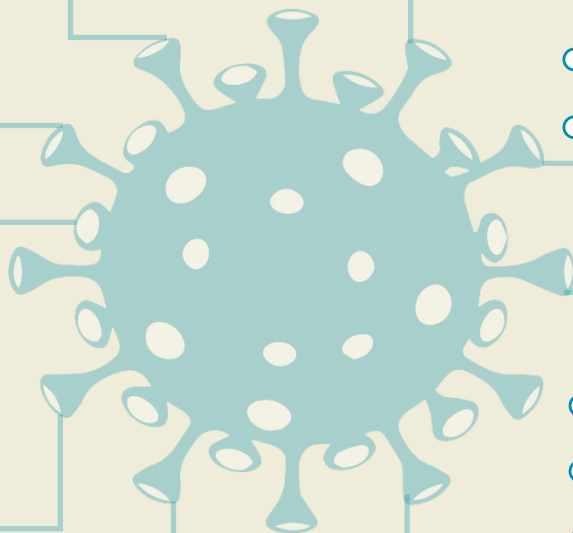
- Sanctioned Rs 200 crore to fight the outbreak
- State-run Indira canteens to provide free food packets
- About 21 lakh construction workers will be paid Rs 1,000 per head
- High-tech war rooms to keep a tab on the spread of coronavirus
- Corona Watch mobile application to monitor the quarantined

Gujarat

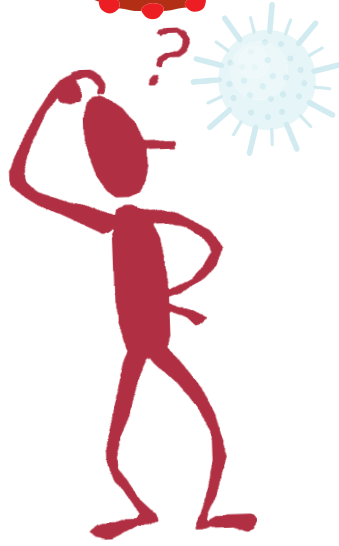
- Conducted door-to-door survey of over 3.5 crore people through the Integrated Disease Surveillance Platform (IDSP) to detect the infection
- Set up a 1,200-bed hospital in Ahmedabad dedicated to treat COVID-19 patients
- Set up testing labs

Jammu and Kashmir

- Lockdown enforced a week ahead of national shutdown
- All three-star hotels booked to serve as isolation/quarantine centres. Eleven hospitals dedicated for COVID-19 patients.
- The state has 223 ventilators and has ordered 400 more
- Almost everyone who came from abroad put into quarantine. Out of 1,847 travellers from overseas, 1,500 have been discharged.
- Use of drones for decontamination. First-ever disinfectant tunnel developed at CD Hospital, Srinagar.



COVER
COVID-19
STORY



THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF 2020

Ajay Sukumaran in Bangalore

There's no escaping that noise, it's always there, in or around your head, like low radio chatter, or a mosquito. It's the background sound of a pandemic...it's not unlike a silence, or a headache on the horizon that you try to forget but can't. It presses in between the work con-calls in the mornings and the Zoom meetings with friends.

It's on the mind all through a bare-essentials shopping expedition. Take a break to do the dishes and your social media chat-log has meanwhile piled up. People are seeking conversation like never before...madly, insistently. Often the content doesn't seem to matter—information, misinformation, all of it wears the same grey cloak, striking the same nervous barter with the future. Everything we do suddenly seethes with a slow manic heat.... You don't want to ask the question, but it pings you again and again. Are we alright?

But then, what is alright in the world? Death, pestilence and sudden onsets of distress are what people prayed to gods to save them from. And just look at the world and the unseen hand of...fate? No, the sheer law of averages.

Mocking our insurance policies, our diet plans, our gated communities, our medicines, all the instruments we use to secure our lives. And so this ghostly corona of fear already rings us: not the virus itself but the cloud of mental demons it flies in with. It infects all of us to varying degrees—this species of anxiety, this nervousness of the age. It's like a crash test on the psychological health of a world that has not seen a moment of collective trauma like this in generations. "Everybody has some sort of anxiety," says P.K. Dalal, president of the Indian Psychiatric Society. "It's a pandemic none of us have seen before. The last one happened in 1918."

And yet we have to fight this—an avalanche of bad news—with each of us alone. We have isolation for breakfast and dinner; normal society is in the freezer. The stuff of dystopian fiction? No, mordant reality. No wonder, signs of trauma and depression abound, and that there have been suicides, and a spike in cases of domestic violence, besides those related to addiction and withdrawal symptoms. The darkest bit of news from inside India's homes? There were almost one lakh distress calls for help related to child abuse in just 10 days of the lockdown. Let's get this clear. This is not just about science and the virus, or being able to buy vegetables. India is not normal. Maybe it never fully was, but each point of stress is creating new victims as we speak.

Call it the Psy-Ops part of the COVID-19 war, and it's no less of a pandemic. It's like one gigantic challenge to our collective sanity....

Or rather, an additional one on the already fragile fault-lines of our mind. For, all of us come to this with pre-existing sources of stress, now exacerbated. No one was socio-economically (or psychologically) perfect anyway: the farmer and the middle-class retiree on either side of a disrupted food chain, the delivery boy on the street and the sharp-suits in glass buildings, the politician in his bubble,

the teenager in her cyworld, even those virologists in their cutting-edge labs. We may ask: can't godmen, gurus and cult leaders be psychologically disturbed too? No vaccine will immunise us except our own equanimity and resilience.

But how do we map this pandemic, how do we trace its footfalls, and how do we cope? Helplines, newly set up across the country, are buzzing. "A majority of districts in most states are being covered," says Dalal. All across this new frontline, counsellors are tackling numerous COVID-19-related queries everyday: those are the "normal", surface manifestations of anxiety. And deep manifestation? Take a handful of suicides? An elderly couple in Amritsar had left behind a note, leading police to suspect they feared infection. A patient in Delhi awaiting a test result leaped out of the hospital's third floor, but luckily only broke a leg. Or

take the almost-lakh figure of children who actually got to the point of calling a helpline. Imagine them trapped with known predators. So it's there, and it's real.

Health workers, paradoxically, can't escape that fog of fear. Rather, they bear the brunt of it—a recent survey of 1,257 health workers across hospitals in China found any number of them had symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia and distress. The Indian Psychiatric Society too has started an online survey for health workers this week. At the King George's Medical University in Lucknow, where Dalal works, staff teams are given training sessions before they

head to the COVID-19 ward. "We give a 30-minute capsule to the team on how to deal with this because they will be on duty at the ward for seven days, followed by a 14-day quarantine." The Indian Medical Association too is launching a tele-counselling service for doctors and health professionals this week.

And how exactly do we cope? Dalal sticks to matter-of-fact, doable targets. "For corona-related problems, basically people need counselling. We are also telling them not to get bogged down by an information overload." Samir Parikh, director of the department of mental health at Fortis Healthcare, Delhi, also breaks it down to concrete aspects. The first anxiety that typically assails most people is "what if something happens to me or my family?" he says. "Post that, the second scenario, which is adjusting to this whole new way of living. The third is anxiety of the aftermath... will my job be there, my finances, when will life come to normal? All of these questions are as normal as it gets."

Yes, perhaps normal questions, but with an abnormal, millenarian aura. Those who live in disaster-prone areas—where earthquakes abound, or tsunamis—they at least expect that nasty twist of fortune, and hedge against it. But what's washing over our world, one that we built on optimism, is a tidal wave of shock and pessimism as the stability and predictability we seek lies shattered all around. That's why we are, collectively, in a blue psycho-

Unlike Robinson Crusoe, we are all rafts floating in the sea, while being in cities full of people.

somatic funk—responding to everything with a psychic edginess, actually realising our fears. Look at those congregations the priests called, or the son et lumiere shows on the balcony conjured by the king, or the webs of digital words we weave madly around our sudden islandhood.... Yes, we are all home: safe, but adrift. Robinson Crusoe was alone on an island, here we are all rafts floating in the sea, while being in cities full of people.

But we emit our digital signals to each other. This is where a lot of coping...and also a lot of unravelling is happening. Imagine all those thumbs whizzing on touchscreens. Many bring forth monsoons of emoticons. Many just can't resist the forward button—as if it's the ritual of a new religion, as if by plastering a banner of hope all over our virtual streets, we can forestall gloom or bring forth the good. Many fall back on that old ally: jokes. April Fool's day came and went with the world in no mood to suffer pranks—even if the joker was a K-pop star. But we weren't entirely washing our hands of jokes. There's an overdose of them on WhatsApp and Twitter: a safety valve in these stressed times, or sheer boredom? Either way, it's a tell.

The golden rule, says Dr Nimesh G. Desai, director of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences, Delhi, is that one has to accept the uncertainty. "The second rule is to treat the lockdown as a social responsibility," he says—that actually helps us break out of our silos, and restores community. Of course, the demands of coping in the present moment will be as varied as there are people—

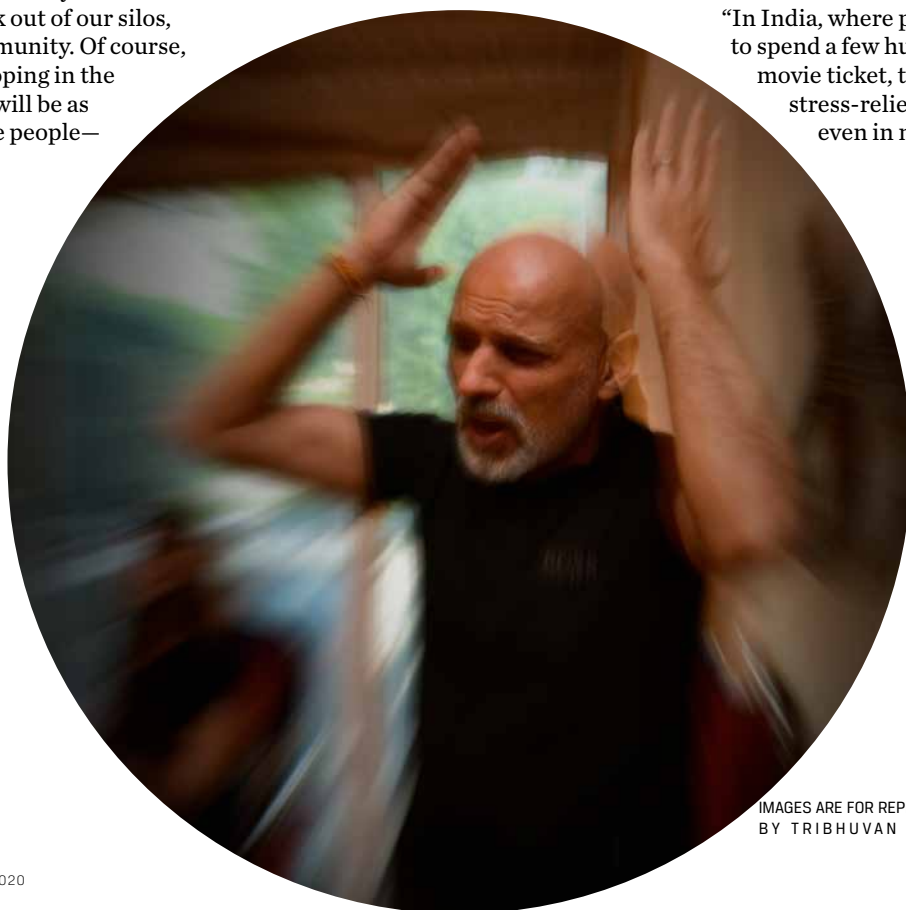
some anyway live alone, some are stuck far from home, all situations differ. "So the coping will differ," says Desai. "And we have to take class differences into account." The barometers of depression are one thing for a divorcee alone in a new apartment, another for the migrant labourer who was among those who built it.

But on its ubiquity, there's no doubt. Desai is seeing a spurt in cases of alcohol dependency and depression. "Depression cases are always the highest in numbers, but we are seeing more now," he tells *Outlook*. Frustration could bring on behavioural changes, even spur domestic violence, he says. There's another side to being shut-in: some reports, citing anecdotal evidence, say condom sales have risen. So are people having more sex? This is not facetious speculation. It's a well-attested human response to

moments of disaster: our genetic survival trigger. But can sex even be thought of in pristine ways at a time when the body itself becomes the site of dread?

There's probably a class divide to this anyway, reckons sexologist Prakash Kothari. "The frequency of sex may increase among the affluent," he says. "The poor who have problems of space, their sex lives can only deteriorate because, forget anxiety, they don't have the privacy." So the speculation about whether the world will see a baby boom post-corona is one thing. Kothari has more prosaic answers. "In India, where people can't afford to spend a few hundreds for a movie ticket, this is the only stress-reliever people have even in normal times."

There were almost a lakh distress calls for help for child abuse in just 10 lockdown days.



IMAGES ARE FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY
BY TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

If normalcy is abolished from this zone, things get really psychotic. Childline 1098—a toll-free helpline for children in distress that an NGO runs for the government—saw a 50 per cent spike in the number of calls from across India after March 24, when Prime Minister Naendra Modi announced the lockdown. More disturbingly, over 92,000 of calls monitored in just 11 days were SOS calls seeking protection from abuse and violence. Or 30 per cent “of the 3.07 lakh calls received...between March 20-31, covering the first week of the lockdown,” says Harleen Walia, deputy director of Childline India.

Alcohol-related issues seem tamer by comparison. Yet, alcohol withdrawal has been a visible facet of the lockdown—and it can kill. Last month itself,

the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre put out a note advising health services across India to be prepared for this. Kerala even decided to allow those with withdrawal symptoms access to liquor on a doctor’s prescription—till the high court stayed the move last week. The state government cited the suicides (as many as six in the first week), even if many experts argued that liquor-by-prescription was no answer. Meghalaya too has approved home delivery of liquor on health grounds—again, on a medical prescription.

Johnson J. Edayaranmula of Alcohol & Drug Information Centre-India, an NGO that opposed the Kerala liquor prescriptions, admits he was apprehensive about the sudden closure—it was, after all, the first time since 1967 that Kerala saw total prohibition, albeit indirectly, he points out. But consumption levels had been coming down (even if revenue is up) since the state’s 2014 liquor policy, he says. “That gave me confidence. Also, the health machinery was prepped up much earlier through training protocols.” Over 400 people with severe withdrawal symptoms were admitted to various hospitals in Kerala in the past two weeks, says Johnson.

Kerala’s District Mental Health Programme has counselled over one lakh people over the last month, including those in quarantine. Most helpline calls in the first 3-4 days following the closure of Kerala’s beverage outlets were related to alcohol withdrawal symptoms, says Thiruvananthapuram-based psychiatrist Arun B. Nair. The uncomplicated cases are referred to nearby primary health centres or, if needed, to the excise department’s Vimukti deaddiction centres in every district. Beyond that, if people go into seizures or delirium, they are referred to medical colleges for expert care. “The acute withdrawal phase is usually three-five days and that period is now covered. Now the alcohol-related calls are coming down,” says Nair, who also handles at least 30 messages for advice on WhatsApp

every day. Some infected people are troubled by guilt for having passed on the disease to others. Other recurring phrases: domestic stress and sleep disturbances, the latter partly owing to a digital addiction, another phenomenon that straddles disease and cure.


A Bangalore psychiatrist explains how deep the fear has struck with an example of a patient recently referred to her for a consultation: a well-adjusted family person, with no pre-existing anxiety condition, but who couldn’t shake off the obsessive urge to wash her hands. She had come to the hospital with a sore throat, worried that she had a COVID-19 infection. “She felt much better after the brief counselling session,” says the psychiatrist. “The bottomline is: it’s important to tell people it’s OK to feel anxious. It doesn’t mean you’re mentally ill. It’s OK not to sleep an occasional night. But it should not be overwhelming,” she advises.

Patients with existing disorders are a bigger concern, as their treatment/consultation routines stand disrupted. “One major problem we are facing is access to medicines for existing patients,” says Dr Nand Kumar, professor of psychiatry at AIIMS, Delhi. Some drugs fall under Schedule X, which require doctor’s prescriptions. “Our OPDs are closed and patients are unable to visit doctors, so they’re unable to get a prescription. I’m hearing of

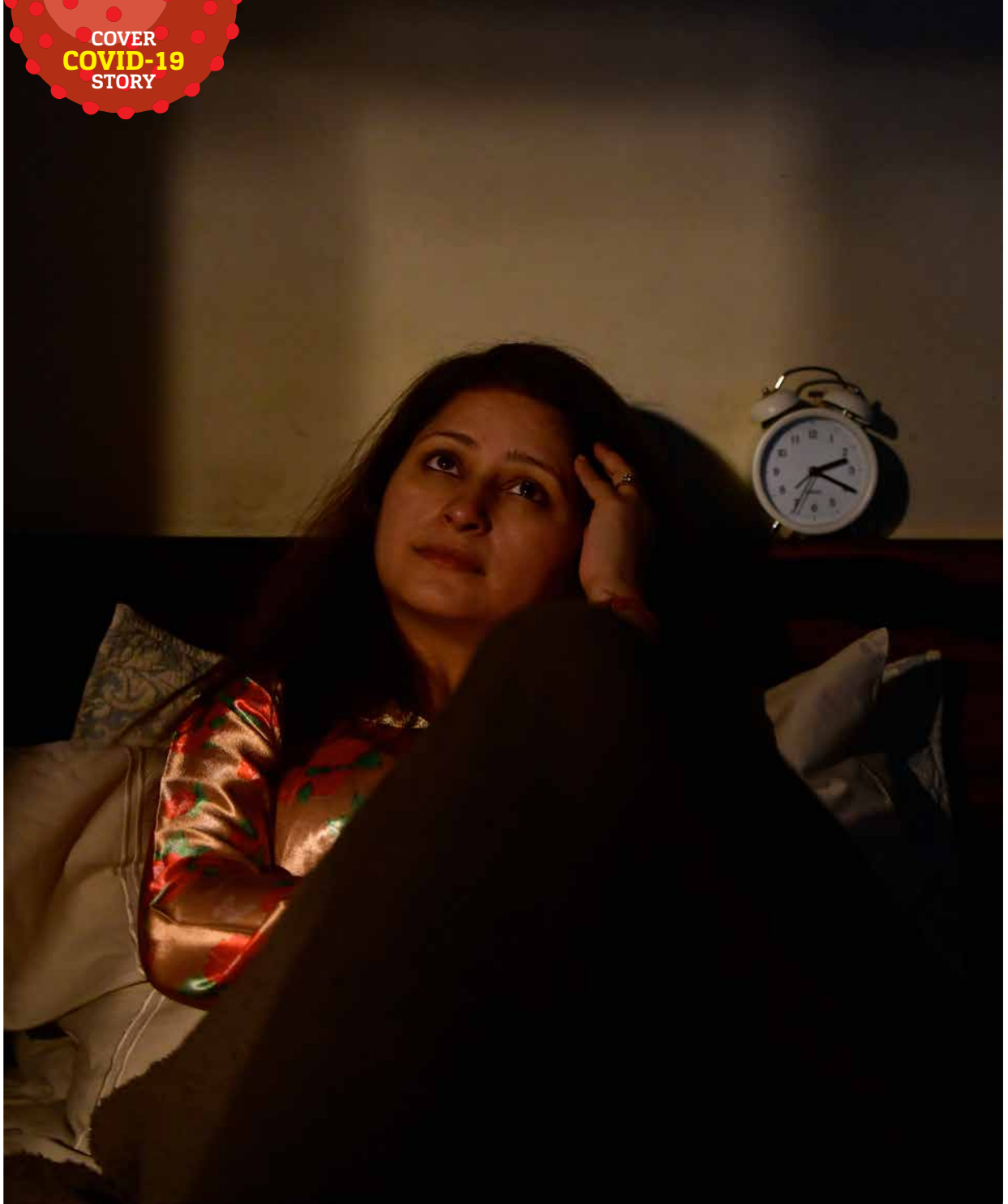
cases relapsing...it’s dangerous for patients and the people taking care of them.” If the lockdown continues, adds Nand Kumar, governments must learn to put mental health front and centre of its policies and priorities. “It’s a major casualty of any pandemic.”

Other casualties? Even core concepts like ‘trust’ and ‘reliability’ could take on shakier meanings, reckons writer Vivek Shanbhag—among the things this will impact will be the written word, he says. “The whole premises of literature, things it takes for granted, are getting affected. Everything, the way we live, travel and work, is going to change,” he tells *Outlook*. Things

that seemed important until now may seem inconsequential. “Even the way we appreciate art or a book is going to change.” Essentially, one thing we have to cope with is that the change could be here to stay. “Even to come back to the normalcy of the pre-corona days is going to take a long time,” he says.

Again, the sweeping impact of the 1918 Spanish flu hoves into view. Look only at what Mahatma Gandhi had to say when he was stricken by the flu that killed millions. Gandhi, writer Laura Spinney recounts in *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*, had finally yielded to the doctor’s plea to change his notions about food, particularly milk, which he had avoided until then. “This protracted and first long illness in my life thus afforded me a unique opportunity to examine my principles and to test them.” Many, many millions are offered a similar chance to adapt and ruminant. 

If the lockdown continues, says a psychiatrist, governments must prioritise mental health.



IMAGES ARE FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY
BY TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

{ Dreams from a Dark Continent

DAMINI Gaur, 32, reached her hometown Jaipur from Delhi just before the three-week lockdown was put in place. On the second day of the lockdown, she was on a TV news watching spree. Later that night, she found it difficult to sleep by her usual bedtime around midnight. She tried reading, writing something, watching a movie and finally dozed off at 2:30 am.

She woke up an hour later, soaked in sweat from a nightmare. “The streets were all grey. There was smoke and fumes everywhere. It looked like a scene from a science fiction movie,” recalls Gaur. “Everyone I knew was dead, except my mother. I was running through the streets. Other people were running too.” Sleep—dull, heavy and exhausting—came only in the morning. Her sleep cycle has been disturbed ever since. Nightmares have sunk their teeth in others’ nights too. For Saloni Dhawan, 24, a designer based in Bangalore, a recurring theme is getting a phone call informing her that one of her family members in Delhi has tested positive. She would wake up anxious and guilty—for not being with her family. She flew back home on March 10 and the nightmares stopped.

Shifa Haq, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist who teaches at Ambedkar University, Delhi, suggests that these dreams point towards a psychological flashpoint in the dreamer or the collective, each trying to articulate a sense of danger, uncontrollable primitive anxiety or painful loss—primed by COVID-19.

Sample this dream Kundan KD, a 36-year old translator, had: he is coming out of a hospital and a blind old lady puts her hand on his shoulders. It suddenly occurs to him that the lady could be infected with coronavirus and he pulls away. “I know that she is blind, but I am unsure. I go back and look at her again and again to find out if she is actually blind.” Haq finds this sequence particularly interesting—there’s both a sense of danger and a willingness to escape from it, she reckons. Haq adds that dreams help us understand that there is a lot to be digested by our psyche, and that perhaps we are beginning to cope. “To the extent we are able to dream, make our anxieties thinkable, imaginable, we are committing to staying open and alive to powerful feelings. In these times, staying with feelings is akin to storing food to survive.”

— Salik Ahmad

daily. But with no work in the last fortnight, he’s gone to bed hungry most days. The uncertainty and helplessness is now driving him into despair. A psychiatrist is a foreign term to him; he reads the Quran when things reach a breaking point.

Ansari’s family of nine, including his elderly parents, lives in Bihar and he is worried about how to feed them. Contrary emotions tear at him from opposite directions: he wants to be with them, yet knows that his village has nothing to offer. The Delhi government has announced some piecemeal measures which is not helping labourers much, he says. Though some government agencies and NGOs are distributing food, Ansari says the serpentine queues, or the unruly jostle to grab the meagre meals, dissuades him from joining them.

Nimesh G. Desai, director, Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) Delhi, says that his team has already started reaching out to migrants stranded in the city. He says though life for them is uncertain, progressive policies should help the community. “Migrant labourers do not worry about larger issues. If their basic needs such as food and shelter are fulfilled, they feel assured. Our team finds that they are mostly amenable,” says Desai.

— Preetha Nair

Incomes Locked Up



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAAHIL

RAJEEV Kumar, 45, anxiously awaits payment of his dues from the sugar mill where he has sold almost half his harvest of sugarcane worth Rs1.5 lakh. “This year has been tough. My sugarcane crop is not as good as expected and unseasonal heavy rains destroyed the mustard crop on my two-bigha land.” Kumar has been waiting for the last 10 days to get his dues so that he can clear his debts. It has been a tough season for most farmers in Shamli, Uttar Pradesh, says Kumar, who has had to harvest his crop with the help of his wife, two teenage daughters and a school-going son, as the wages demanded by the few available farm workers since the lockdown—what with the restriction on movement of people and vehicles—is way beyond his means. He stresses that farmers like him have to be careful with their money, given that everything has become expensive—labour cost, hiring of harvesters, seeds, fertilisers, food and other domestic essentials. While farm input costs have risen 10-15 per cent, vegetables prices have shot up threefold, says the farmer, who also grows wheat. As the season has been cooler, wheat harvest in parts of north India is expected to begin after April 10.

Open to the Elements



FOR over two weeks, Sahadat Ansari has been spending sleepless nights. When he drifts into sleep, the image of his three-year-old daughter’s wailing face jolts him awake. Ansari is consumed by guilt as he imagines that his daughter is crying from hunger. Till dawn breaks, the 36-year-old daily wagger paces up and down the cramped room he shares with four others. The future looks grim for Ansari, who came to Delhi 16 years ago looking for a job. He has been working as a mason and earned Rs 500

Farmers are hoping that after April 15, more mandis will start operating, or else a glut of produce deluging the market will drive down prices. R.V. Giri, president, Consortium of Indian Farmers Associations, says farmers are anxious as most regulated markets are yet start operations despite government directives. "With no sale of grains, lack of godowns in villages and no proper drying yards, the situation is worrying, as almost 30-40 per cent people in villages are farmers," says Giri. The delay in sale and lack of proper storage facility could damage foodgrains and the sugarcane already harvested, which would impact farmers' income, points out Giri. □

—Lola Nayar

dishes to be washed, children to be managed. With no hired help, tuitions or classes in these curfew times, everything becomes our sole responsibility. As the bank balance depletes, with our month's pay still not released, we briefly ponder how, without our modest government salary, to manage our household expenditure.

Between talk about Hydroxychloroquine or reports of the BCG immunity being protective, we cling to a glimmer of unproven hope in an otherwise bleak scenario.

As we, the faceless 'women and men in white', face disease and death daily, it's the support of our own colleagues and staff that keeps us going. Our WhatsApp group, besides its grim data of positive tests and deaths, has daily buck-up messages from our SMO; a peppy number sung by our resident medical bard; de-stressing tips from our hospital psychiatrist and 'medical-humour-in-COVID-times' messages—they all ease our all-consuming anxiety.

As a frontline warrior, I remember my medical college moto: *Per ardua ad astra*—'through adversity to the Stars'. We get ready for each day with prayers and resolve to face the worst odds with determination and with the unflinching faith that all this will end soon, and end well...for all. □

—The writer, Dr Dimple Dhaliwal Srivastava, is a pediatrician, District Hospital, Mohali.

{ Per Ardua Ad Astra



As a government doctor in a district hospital, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a time of constant anxiety and fear as well as about building hope and drawing on our reserves of resilience to carry on one day at a time.

As positive cases and suspects pour in, our supply of PPE, masks, gloves, sanitisers dwindle. The one looming thought—for how longer are we are safe? As the onslaught of routine OPD cases continues, we barely have time to wonder if the feverish child or adult coughing next to us could be a corona carrier. And how protected are we in our rationed surgical or cloth mask, washed and reused daily? As our rapid response teams return from mohallas with positive cases, slum clusters, deras and posh colonies after tedious hours of contact tracing, and sample testing the home quarantined, they are soaked to their skin in sweat in their protective layers and at the end of their tether, with no food, water or washroom use allowed while they are in PPEs. And they pray fervently so that they wake up the next day without any symptoms themselves.

As a slew of notifications and unverified information go viral on the internet, we ourselves are at times left professionally unsure about the right approach. Why cannot IAP/IMA/ICMR/government release standardised, regularly updated e-guidelines—a common collated strategy for the battlefield?

We return home to almost an hour's scrupulous self-sanitising before meeting our spouse, children and old parents, with the constant worry gnawing at us—are we ourselves the biggest risk to the health and lives of our loved ones?

And there is endless housework waiting—food to be made,

{ A Monster At Home

NOT just for a virus rampaging through planet earth, this is fecund times for 21st century blues too—a farrago of maladies and their ugly manifestations all of us know only too well, in some form or other. Sunanda Desai (name changed), a working woman from an upper-middle-class family in Mumbai, is ploughing through a rough patch since the lockdown began. "There is stress at my workplace and at home. I am expected to do things perfectly by my husband and in-laws. Else, I am shouted at by everybody, including my kids. In ten years of marriage, I have never experienced such acrimonious fights and violence in this house," she says. Her husband, a businessman, copes with a different level of stress, she says, because he's unsure if he will ever be able to open his bookshop.


The National Commission for Women (NCW), which receives complaints of domestic violence from across the country, recorded a more than twofold rise in gender-based violence during the initial lockdown period. The total complaints from women rose from 116 in the first week of



March (March 2-8), to 257 in the final week (March 23-April 1). NCW chief Rekha Sharma says the main reason for the rise of domestic violence is that men, confined to home, are taking out their frustration on women, while refusing to help out in domestic work.

Age-old stereotypes, like the virus, are tenaciously resilient, says Mumbai-based clinical psychologist Varkha Chulani. “It’s the woman’s job to cook, clean, wash. It’s the

man’s job to earn. So even though we seem to have progressed in paying lip service to being ‘liberal’, the true test is in the living. And this confinement is throwing up the ‘real’ mindsets of partners.” Domestic abuse is worse in the poorer section of the society. Psychologist Padma Rewari cites the example of her domestic help whose alcoholic husband, deprived of his daily bottle, has got more violent. “She has been calling me every other day to find out if she

can come back to work in spite of my assuring her that I shall pay her the salary and she need not worry." Women facing domestic abuse should approach free counselling and use helplines for reporting the crime, says Rewari. "Victims of physical abuse may find it helpful to have a safety plan in case the violence escalates. This includes having a neighbour, friend or relative or shelter to go to in the event they need to leave the house immediately for safety," she adds. 


— Lachmi Deb Roy

Jobs on a String



IT'S something professional 'headhunter' Kamal Karanth wasn't prepared for. Interestingly, in the last three weeks, he has noticed that the number of technology folk exploring new jobs has increased. "Ninety per cent of people who are getting calls from recruiters today are engaging in an exploration conversation," says Karanth, co-founder, Xpheno. In the past, only about half of those who got a call would be interested. He's not sure why but reckons it's a mix of two scenarios—either that some people are bored, confined to homes, and so wouldn't say no to a conversation, or that some are anxious about job losses and pay-cuts and want to explore options. Of course, the job market is just a fraction of what it normally is, given the economic situation worldwide.

Some companies, he says, are using this time to build a pipeline. A Bangalore-based IT executive who says his firm has been on-boarding people 'virtually', even if some will only start work much later, concurs. But he also gets anxious calls from those who haven't got an offer yet.

Kerala-based psychiatrist Arun B. Nair says he has received a few calls on a helpline from people with job insecurities. "Many people are trying to make their positions safe by exploring other options, by having a Plan B. The same goes for people with small businesses," he says. Typically, the counselling approach he has taken is to give them a wider perspective of what's happening globally. Even students of professional courses, especially medicine, have called on the helplines, worried about their education loans, he says. "Considering the nature of the pandemic, they fear that it would go on for a long period," says Nair. "We give them information regarding the moratorium (on loan EMIs) and financial package the government has announced. Typically, with factual information, they understand that it's not an isolated problem affecting them alone." 

— Ajay Sukumaran

HOW TO STAY SANE DURING THE PANDEMIC



Practice Mindfulness

Bring all your attention to the "now" and "present". Be aware of each passing thought without feeling or judgement. Evidence shows that practising mindfulness can significantly increase our capacity to cope with traumatic events, improve control over our emotional states and reduce anxiety and stress-related symptoms.



Learn Breathing Exercises

Whenever under stress, take a long and deep breath. An important pathway for mindful breathing is "decentering"—realising where we learn to view negative thoughts in our mind without judging, thus delinking the self from depressive emotions.



Try Meditation

Meditation is simple, free and only takes a few minutes. It can promote relaxation, decrease negative emotions, build skills to manage stress and increase tolerance.



Limit News Consumption to Trusted Sources

It is important to obtain accurate and timely public health information from trusted sources such as the CDC, WHO and health ministry. Balance the time spent on news with other activities such as reading, listening to music, talking etc.



Mindful Use of Social Media

Think twice before posting or sharing on social media. Ask yourself if the content is truthful, helpful, inspiring necessary or kind.



Be Generous and Kind to Others

While it is important to stock up on food and other essentials, please think of others who may need these items too. Generosity can help us develop a sense of community and ensure that everyone has equal access to resources.



Practise Empathy and Don't Stigmatise

Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we. Stigma can have negative consequences for the mental health of affected individuals and also discourage them from reporting or testing for the disease.

Source: Harvard School of Public Health-India Research Center and Viswanath Lab

Trauma in the Age of the Virus

Disrupting the rhythm of our everyday life, the pandemic inflicts invisible wounds that will take longer to heal than any disease



A trauma is a physic wound that goes beyond the physical to damage the soul. It carries shades of stigma. It is usually confined to the backstage of most disasters and is constructed as an afterthought. The trauma of the coronavirus pandemic faces a similar fate.

As India sees itself as a middle-class society, it defines itself in middle-class terms. The whole idea of the lockdown was seen as a disciplinary exercise, an attempt to redefine life as a timetable. The middle class lives by timetables. It is a mindset and a way of life. When timetables are frozen, the middle class goes into confinement and its certainties are destroyed. With the lockdown, the upper middle class discovers boredom, isolation, anxiety, leisure and, of course, work from home. Yet the middle-class mentality displayed a complete indifference to the marginal, the migrant, the nomad—and the trauma induced by the coronavirus begins with these very categories.

The trauma of the informal society accelerated at the very moment the national lockdown was announced, when the worker faced the very temporariness of its citizenship and being. The migrant discovered he was marginal, suspect and jobless. Haunted by vulnerabilities, he had to face hunger and humiliation. He was treated as a mass organism and was sprayed with chemicals at the borders. The middle-class tourist also discovered this underside of life as he rushed borders that had been shut down, confronting the police that had fused the migrant and the tourist in his mind. Suddenly, the ordinary Indian faced fear, anxiety and aloneness as he found there was no sense of homecoming. The migrant as an ambiguous creature was trapped in a liminality that bureaucracy refused to understand. The Bihari workers who



Homebound
Migrants fleeing big cities on a lorry

PTI

The migrant's anxiety and fear found no narrative. The mental woes went backstage.

had left their ration cards home found themselves confronting a hunger that left them helpless. Sadly, their anxiety and fear found no narrative, and the mental woes went backstage. Added to the indignity of treatment, they also found the absence of their place in the emerging narratives. They were the black holes and black boxes of the corona chronicles. The migrant discovered that some disasters are more equal than others. For example,

cyclones and floods have rituals of response and narratives, but the coronavirus had a few explanatory myths to make life easier.

The slum, usually throbbing with life and activity, had completely emptied out. With the lockdown began the police crackdown on all the little shops and dhabas. The daily-wage worker found he had no employment. He had to wait day after day to watch the scene unfold. Joblessness, hunger and uncertainty haunt the informal economy. As a woman in a Chennai slum told me, "A few woman as domestic workers hold on to their jobs, but what about our men who hang around and wait?" Waiting is the trauma that the rich do not understand. Waiting empties identity, breaks confidence and questions competence. Waiting is greeted in silence because it is cloaked in anonymity. The slums fester in a trauma of waiting and uncertainty, yet the media had little place for them. It celebrates 'work from home' for corporate executives.

One has to face the stark uncertainty of what is called civic life today. A lockdown creates a Hobbesian policy, a set of authoritarian territories patrolled by cops and clerks. The police handle all such challenges by reducing it to a law-and-order problem, where everyone is by definition

TRIBHUVAN TIWARI



← CP, Delhi's most happening place—now sequestered and lonely

suspect. They lathicharge people thoughtlessly, including even those returning from official responsibilities. The terrifying indifference of cops is complemented by landlords creating a web of stigma around patients, doctors and social workers. The landlord is convinced that all of them are infectious and wants to extern them. This places doctors and social workers in an ironic situation. The sadness is that both the trauma and the authoritarianism of the city go unreported.

To be fair, while trauma, unstated and unreported, haunts the informal economy, it is beginning to haunt the middle-class as well. Here time is a major factor because the certainty of timetables is what defines middle-class identity and stability. A housewife complains that people had little place for her fears; she told me she suffered from the guilt that she might infect someone innocently. She also complained she gets haunted by fears that are further exaggerated by the rumours and reports from the street. One of them mentioned the story of a mob attacking a man merely because he coughed obsessively. The ordinary cough, once a mark of everyday presence, now becomes sinister. She also added that old

Our society has few narratives or myths to make sense of the trauma of mass death.

Yet, what includes all citizens is that the coronavirus has created an ecology of death, mass death, around the Indian city. An individual death is understandable, but mass death creates fear and trembling of a different kind. It has an apocalyptic inevitability that puts a stop to ordinary life. This everydayness of mass death is measured with the banality of weather reports as newspapers announce body counts for the day. The word exponential has a magical quality of fatalism. People feel helpless and sense that the virus could claim one and all. Mass death creates a deep sense of trauma and our society has few narratives or myths to make sense of it.

Vulnerability, violence, non-being, an ecology of indifference and uncertainty, create wounds that are not visible but real, and whose force corrodes the human being by making him feel less than human. India needs to take mental trauma seriously and systematically. We have to consider trauma medically and psychologically as part of the violence of our lives, and respond to it professionally and ethically.

Trauma is more than loneliness and isolation. It is a festering wound that needs society to help it heal. Care, community and communication are the basis of cure. Our society must learn to listen to suffering again. The tragedy is, trauma is still an embarrassment, a taboo word. One hopes the virus brings all these narratives into the open. Democracy needs to look systematically at the travails of the worker, the homemaker and the patient as it does for the voter and the consumer. ■

(Views are personal)

SAGE Endeavour To Teach Amidst CORONA LOCKDOWN



ER. SANJEEV AGRAWAL
CMD SAGE GROUP,
The Chancellor of SAGE University

Even as the world is grappling with the novel corona virus causing distress to governments, institutions and people alike, millions of students are in a limbo because schools, colleges and universities have shut temporarily to ward of the malignant virus from attacking the youth with disastrous consequences.

The SAGE Group have exploited the advantages of the digital platform like Facebook live, Video lectures, Skipe, sending WhatsApp notes, and posting different information about the worldwide health calamity. Professors of SAGE University, Indore, SIRT Indore, SIRT, SIRT, SIRTE Engineering, Pharmacy and Management, Diploma colleges of Bhopal have logged online to teach 12000 students, similar to regular classes.

Stating that SAGE Group is committed towards the nation's efforts in the battle against the global corona pandemic, Er. Sanjeev Agrawal, CMD SAGE GROUP and the Chancellor SAGE University informed, "We can protect ourselves and are not afraid of the prevailing adverse situations. We are taking care of our students, also, our faculty members are regularly in contact with them and their parents to address their various problems and queries."

He informed that parents are lauding the efforts of SAGE Group by sending their commendation stating that they are happy that their children are part of such a premier institute which is not only taking care of the academics of their wards, but has also created healthy bonding amongst all.

Everyday students are logging in their attendance, receiving notes, solving tutorial questions, completing assignments as well as reporting to their professors, online. The faculty is regularly assessing the assignments and awarding points accordingly to the students, while maintaining 90% attendance like classroom teaching.

The CMD has congratulated the entire fraternity of teachers for their remarkable contribution in handling the situation where students did not have to suffer in the testing times of lockdown against corona virus.



DR PRASHANT BHALLA
President, Manav Rachna Educational Institutions

MANAV RACHNA: Corona Opens Up New Teaching Paradigms

These are definitely unprecedented times for the world impacting even the massive Indian education sector.

What is heartening to note is that students and institutions alike are responding positively to the evolving situation by taking this situation in their stride by working towards adapting to newer models of learning amidst such challenging times. Virtual Learning is now a reality. To ensure continuity of studies, most Universities and Institutes are supporting students through online classes and virtual extension programs.

I would advise students not to be perturbed by the situation. For the government and institutions, it is the interest of the student community which is of prime importance. While all exams and entrances have been delayed, students must take this as an opportunity to further enhance their skills through available online resources. Self-discipline and optimum utilization of time is advocated.

Once the situation improves, we can expect a complete change in academic calendars. However, collective efforts of the government and educational institutions with the support of media houses like Outlook would enable students to prepare for the future.





DR. DAVISH JAIN
Vice Chairman,
Prestige Education Foundation,
Indore

CORONA IMPACT: Future Education to become Digital and Virtual Classrooms

The brunt of the lockdown is being faced by all sectors, including educational institutions post COVID-19 pandemic. However, I foresee a bright future for the education sector where in all probability, e-learning and virtual classrooms may be the order of the future of education when choosing a course, a college or a teacher.

Even as precautionary measure against Corona has shut down the world, we at Prestige, known to think ahead of time, made arrangements accordingly to educate our students through e-classes and remote lectures conducted by our distinguished faculties using zoom technologies and platforms like Microsoft, Google hangout tools etc.

As per the available statistics, the number of students enrolled for various online courses is expected to touch about 9.6 Million by the end of 2021. The Prestige Group of Educational Institutions with a strength of 13,000 students studying in its nine institutions spread over in cities like Indore, Dewas and Gwalior, have already grabbed this golden opportunity from this academic session onward.

Having said that, I do feel the charm of brick and mortar universities will always remain. The Prestige Group will soon be coming with a state-of-the-art Prestige University in Indore. Spread over 35 acres, this university has been designed to impart teaching to 9,000 students in multiple areas of education both at undergraduate and post graduate level as well as Research and Ph.D.



Higher Education: Challenges and Perspectives Amid Corona Crisis



SACHIN GUPTA
Chancellor
Sanskriti University, Mathura

The global outbreak of the pandemic of COVID 19 (Corona) has left a catastrophic impact on various economies of the world and India is no exception. The various sectors of the Indian economy are impacted due to a 21-day nationwide lockdown and curfew in response to the advisory issued by the Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

The primary, secondary, higher, technical, professional, adult, continuing, and distance education in the country witnessed a phenomenal impact because of the corona conundrum. Sanskriti University is successfully continuing its education through online mode to an incredible extent focusing on continuing the process of academic delivery.

The challenge before the universities is to evolve and sustain the culture of online education among the students and faculty members and to win the confidence of the parents about the sanctity, validity, efficiency and effectiveness of the online academic delivery process.

The next big challenge is to provide experiential learning exposure to the students in the online mode which is being sincerely attempted by the simulation model and techniques. Some challenges are higher in the health sciences which has now evolved AI based 3D Models which can be dissected by the digital mode.

Future emphasis by universities will be to target online education and LMS (Learning Management Systems) like Moodle, Claroline, Sakai, Blackboard, Docebo etc., while ensuring focus on familiarization and orientation of faculty and staff members and the students during the initial phases about Online Education.

Only organizations which are able to envision the changing times and reorient their strategic and operational plans would be able to withstand the pressure of the changing tides and pressures of the various calamities and their fallout.

Alternative Options Of E-Educational Has Enabled Uninterrupted Teaching Even During The Corona Lockdown.

During a global health outbreak and lockdown following covid-19 pandemic, the foremost concern as an academician is the safety and well-being of the students. So, we dismissed on-campus classes as a first step, upon the indication from the authorities and moved forward with a positive mind-set that a crisis is also a great opportunity to learn and develop new forms of learning.



Prof. Dr. UDAY SALUNKHE
Group Director, WeSchool

WeSchool has adopted this mind-set, while adjusting to a first-time public health challenge of this magnitude. We decided to take up the challenge to ensure academic continuity and put in place technology enabled interactive platforms, to engage with students. We have extended our online infrastructure making it accessible through internet from mobile smart phones, computers and laptops / desktops too. This has also enabled teaching faculty to assimilate new ways of making an impact. With latest technologies like Cisco Webex and Zoom, and Easymeeting, professors are now able to conduct regular online lectures and student group mentoring for projects.

Institutions and organizations will now have to adopt new methods to connect with stakeholders. Digital platforms will be a big catalyst and provide us an opportunity to learn and move digitally forward. For many institutions, digital learning has opened new avenues for students, apart from regular course work to learning of newer concepts. Digital platforms allow inter-student meetings and interactions which is an essential part of B-School pedagogy. At WeSchool itself, in the past three weeks nearly 200 lectures have been delivered through virtual platforms thereby ensuring that learning and teaching are not interrupted due to the lockdown during the Corona virus outbreak.



PDM UNIVERSITY: In The Forefront Against Covid-19 Crisis

PDM UNIVERSITY, Bahadurgarh in the state of Haryana has come forward to support the district administration in tackling the crisis of fighting against Covid 19 pandemic that has taken the world in its vicious grip.

The University has setup 50 isolation beds dedicated to covid-19 suspects, 30 beds for covid-19 confirmed cases and 8 ICU beds for emergency cases in its 100 bedded PDM general hospital with the support and directions of district health authorities.

Stating that more wards can be made available in the hospital, if the need arises, Chitresh Lather, the CEO of the university has assured giving adequate facilities and full cooperation to the district administration in this grave situation. A medical team headed by the Principal, Dr. Mandeep Singh and Medical Superintendent Dr. K.L. Kathuria has been constituted to coordinate with the health officials of the district administration.

"PDM University and related institutions have always been in the forefront to support social welfare and humanitarian causes, and deeply understanding its responsibility towards the society as a whole," Mr Lather, added. The Director of the University Dr. Rajesh Sood said, "It is the duty of every countryman to follow the directions of the Government and Health authorities in maintaining social distancing and following health precautions in this critical situation."





Home, not alone

Work from home comes with its own set of rules

G.C. Shekhar in Chennai

WHEN life demands a reset from its routine it takes time to adjust. The morning alarm, the muffled protestations of drowsy children, harried mothers, the swear-heavy and sweaty commute to work, the post work hangouts at pubs and malls late into the night. All need to pause before change imposes itself upon us.

Coronavirus, our much reviled, unwelcome guest, prompted a few welcome changes, as work from home (WFH) became the new normal. Children and parents under the same roof for the entire days altogether knitted families closer. 'Quality family time' materialised in abundance; the few unexpected, and expected, fissures are, of course, subject to patient smoothening.

For school-going children, this was a bonanza—an early onset of summer holidays that otherwise had to be earned by running the gauntlet of exams. With promotion guaranteed, this would be a year of magical reality. For their working parents, the bonus took a different form—more time to sleep in lieu of hours of commute, a freedom from formal-wear and meetings over conference calls masking barely stifled scowls at bosses' impossible targets and inane witticisms.


Initially, home-maker moms loved the new arrangement—everyone under her watchful eye, sitting

everyone down on time for meals at the dining table. This cozy arrangement starts fraying under unforeseen pressure points—the WFH man, so tied to the coffee machine, demanding an endless supply of beverages, children scrounging for pre-lunch snacks and, in the absence of eating out and Swiggy deliveries being a casualty of COVID-19, the necessity of cooking several courses for dinner.

To top it all, the lady of the house wonders about her vanished 'me-time'—those hours of listening to music, watching TV, chatting up with friends. A virtual house arrest means children sans playgrounds—and mothers have to fill in when video games turn boring and father is working (from home). If the crisis has claimed the presence of the household too, the home-maker finds herself burdened with an ever-increasing load of household chores. Now add a working mom (WHF, naturally) to the mix, and the stress is potentially combustible.

WFH is like the usual Bollywood romance—it holds up well until the interval; after that it needs fixing. Unless some ground rules are in place, WFH can be a strain over a long period of time, warn psychologists. A reasonable timetable one devotes at office has to be adhered to. A lack of discipline could trigger chaos. Like the temptation to grab a post-lunch nap or lounge on the sofa watching a movie at 4 pm.


A journalist who worked as a foreign correspondent in Colombo cautions that complacency can set in easily in a home office set up. To overcome this, she would diligently finish breakfast, dress up in office wear and step into her office room in her house before 11 am. Barring a 30-minute break for lunch, she would use only her office room for phone calls, watch news on TV and type her story. "Unless I had to step outside to meet someone, I made sure that I remained in that office space for the day," she recalls. WHF is not an extended holiday, she cautions.

Here we take a look at how celebrities and regular office goers are handling the corona confinement that forced them to work from home. 



DAD'S HOME

R. Ashwin
cricketer, Chennai

PLACE of work: the cricket ground. Many deskbound screen-oglers would consider that a boon but, to put it gently, being in top shape as a cricketer is a hard, often bitter, slog. Around this time, Ravichandran Ashwin should have been sweating it out at the pre-IPL training camp for Delhi Capitals. Instead, he is goofing off with his two daughters—Athira and Akhira. He loves every moment of it. "This has been an unfortunate interruption to our daily lives. Probably it is nature's payback for the way we humans have been treating Earth and her resources. When you are not socially responsible nature has a way of teaching you a lesson," Ashwin philosophises. Being away from training and the gym, Ashwin nevertheless has to stay fit. "I have a small gym at home and work out there. I regularly jog and am careful about what I eat since being cooped up inside the house leads to frequent detours to the fridge." He is confident that the world would be back on its feet soon and is hopeful that IPL and the games would resume. "I had been waiting for the Olympics but it won't happen this year," he says. 

—G.C. Shekhar



Rasika Dugal
Actress, Mumbai


PASTA AND PEACE

SOME might blissfully cut themselves off from a monolithic, steadily darkening stream of news, but Rasika Dugal constantly updates herself. "It's important to read everything, so we can all behave responsibly in the given situation. But it's also important not to panic or to give in to a sense of gloom and it keeps the mind occupied," she says.

Rasika was to join the sets of *Lord Curzon Ki Haveli* in mid-March in the UK. But the project has been put on hold after the coronavirus outbreak. Suddenly, a pool of spare time bobbed invitingly before Rasika. She promptly signed up for an online course on 'Religion, Conflict and Peace', hoping to get an academic insight into polarisation and religious conflict, through examples in history. "With all that's been happening in our country these past few months, I have felt a sense of hopelessness like never before. So, that keeps me engaged most of the time."

A quiet beaver if ever there was one, spending time has never been a problem for Rasika. "I can spend an entire day on one task. Most of my time goes in cleaning, cooking, reading, watching, exercising, clearing the backlog on some

scripts to read, taking care of my plants, having long conversations with family and friends, especially people who live alone. Then there was the serendipitous rediscovery of cooking skills. "I have made only pasta in the past few months, but can't remember the last time I boiled rice," says the actress normally rushed off her feet, who now sharpens her culinary skills by watching cooking videos.

Rasika is also keeping herself fit with a couple of home work-out videos that require minimum equipment. "So, I can do with a yoga mat, one kettle bell weight and the furniture in the house. Till a fortnight ago, I was also stepping out for a short run." And yes, there's television. She loved the critically acclaimed animation movie *I Lost My Body*. "It is one of the most beautiful films I have watched recently. Beautifully scripted and brilliantly visualised. And the background score is a precious bonus." She has also finished watching *Unbelievable*, a limited series. "It's moving, disturbing but also gives hope...something we badly need now," she says. 

—Lachmi Debroy






WINGS OF TIME

Waheeda Rehman

Actress, wildlife photographer

HER images are burnt into our memory: Has seductively vivacious as a village belle as few has been before or since, animating her rustic garb with an ineffable charm; or dancing, in an elegant white saree, atop the ruins of Mewar, stepping perilously close to the edges but not minding really. With that side glance gracing that smile, she might have danced at the edges of time. Then, well into retirement, Waheeda Rehman took up a camera and found herself a wildlife photographer at 81. Does the lockdown's enforced inactivity

bother her? "No, I am the kind of person who never gets bored. So, what if I can't go out for photography, life is beautiful. I am making the best use of my time by clicking pictures of birds, plants and flowers in my garden," says the actress. Waheeda believes in finding happiness in small things. "My daughter, Kashvi and I are doing a lot of yoga and meditation." There are the perennial activities of the nimble of mind: "I am reading, writing and growing vegetables. Time just flies." Though the morning paper is missed, Waheeda is on to something new, for she believes there is no age for learning. "I have downloaded some apps and trying to learn acupressure."

She notes the positives of the stricture. "The air is so fresh, there is no pollution and people are disciplined—hygiene is taken seriously, spitting on roads has stopped," she says. It also leads her to wonder at the bustle of modern life. The need of 'slow living', she feels, was never more apparent. "Why do youngsters need to work every day in a week? Are we not managing with limited resources? Are we not working from home now? Why can't this be the norm?" she asks. "Officegoers should work from home at least for a few days a week. We can save on many resources and go easy on nature." 


—Lachmi Debroy

SHE'S PLAYING

Aahana Kumra

Actress, Mumbai

THE advent of web series has made Aahana Kumra one of the busiest actors around. She was propelled into fame with a television show, *Yudh* (2014), co-starring Amitabh Bachchan, but it was her power-packed performance in *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2017) that made film-makers queue up for her time. From *Inside Edge* (2017) and *Rangbaaz* (2018) to *Bombers* (2019) and *Marzi* (2020), back-to-back web series streaming on over-the-top (OTP) platforms have kept her tremendously busy. Now, coronavirus has offered her a breather, with all her shooting schedules having come to a grinding halt. "I am, at present, staying at my sister's place since everything has been shut down." Aahana tells *Outlook*. "Thankfully, the place has

beautiful premises, where I go once in a while for a walk after taking all necessary precautions." Since there is hardly anything she can do as an actor as far as working from home is concerned, Aahana says she is making the most of her break by watching the best of programmes on television as also by keeping tab on the performances of fellow actors. "I like to consume all kinds of programmes but shows based on sports are my all-time favourites," she says. "I like to see the struggles of sports people onscreen, how teams come up together to fight against the odds. I can watch just about anything on sports." Aahana is currently watching *Drive to Survive*, a show on Formula 1 streaming on Netflix while *The Test*, a series on the Australian cricket team (Amazon) is next on her watchlist. "In fact, I am such a sports buff that I would have been a sportswoman had I not been an actress," she says. This forced sabbatical, Aahana says, has allowed her to keep track of what is happening in the rest of the world. "In a sense, I am happy that I have got some time to watch shows and appreciate my co-actors and others in the film industry," she says. "At times, you really need to sit back and notice how people are pushing the envelope in their fields and what you are not doing. It is time to realise all of that." 

—Girdhar Jha

SUSEGAD WITH MRS AND A PUP

Rajeev Khandelwal


Actor, Mumbai

LOOKING for a much-needed break after his hectic promotionals for his latest web series, *Marzi*, now steaming on Voot, Bollywood actor Rajeev Khandelwal recently headed for Goa along with his wife and dog to spend time at his picturesque house by the sea. He hoped to return to Mumbai in a week and resume shooting of his forthcoming projects. Then, the lockdown intervened, confining Rajeev and his loved ones home, extending his staycation indefinitely. "I came to Goa with my wife and our dog, thinking it would be a short trip. But things have since taken a turn for the worse," Khandelwal says.

The 44-year-old actor, who made an impressive debut with *Aamir* (2008) and went on to act in other movies as well as popular television shows like *Sach Ka Saamna* (2009),

wants to make the most of the isolation. "We have a nice house in Goa," he says. "I am utilising this break by doing many things that I had not been able to do for want of time. I am reading, playing, trying out new recipes of food, working out and binge-watching shows."

Khandelwal—preparing for director Kunal Kohli's next, a web series called *Naxal*, where he plays a cop (he considers it the most challenging role of his career)—says he is doing ayurvedic detox during the forced vacation. "We have a spa at home."

Praised for his acting in films like *Shaitan* (2011) and *Table No. 21* (2013) and the web series *Cold Lassi* and *Chicken Lassi* (2019), admits to the scary, unseen threat of the coronavirus, but is hopeful that something positive will emerge once the situation improves. "I understand that it is a very, very difficult situation but once we overcome it, something positive in terms of pollution and environment will come out of it. At least, people will be more aware of such things. It will also prove to be a phase of learning for us." 

—Girdhar Jha



VICKY KAUSHAL



Actor Vicky Kaushal cleans a fan and jokes in between—"Jiska ladka lamba uska bhi bada kaam hai, pankhe saaf karwa lo, stool ka kya kaam hai."

SHIKHAR DHAWAN



Shikhar Dhawan, wife Ayesha are seen dancing on the Bollywood number *Dhal gaya din, ho gayi sham* from *Hamjoli*. Dhawan wore a classic white, aka Jitendra. Ayesha matches the black suit of Leena Chandavarkar in the movie.

PREITY ZINTA



Preity Zinta, devoting her time to household chores, shows how a snug-fit biker's goggles help during the teary process of chopping onions.

KRITI SANON



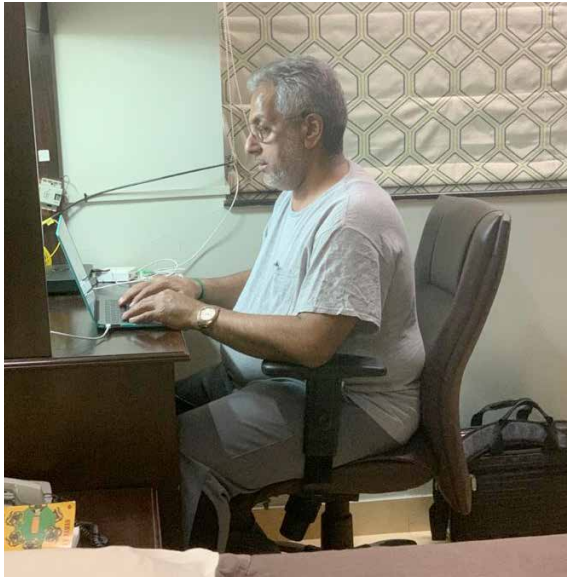
Actress Kriti Sanon is utilising the lockdown to de-clutter her wardrobe. She posted on Instagram a photograph of her doing that, although puppy Phoebe won't give up playing with her clothes.

KATRINA KAIF



Self-isolation brings out the real human in us, stars included. Proof: Katrina Kaif doing her dishes in the sink, and picking up the broom to keep her home spic and span.





SIMBA'S MASTER

Kris Srinath

Founder and CEO, S4Carlisle
Publishing Service, Chennai

IT'S the time for sartorial abbreviation. "If you are not wearing shorts, what is the fun in working from home?" laughs Kris Srinath, who manages an e-publishing business out of a modern office complex, but has become the latest addition to the WFH force. Srinath has just returned from office after despatching his staff—all 140 of them—to their homes with office laptops so they could all WFH to keep up with the company's tight schedule. He quickly changes into a tracksuit and T-shirt—his WFH dress code—before plonking before his laptop. The workflow needs managing. "The urgency that the office atmosphere generates will be lost when you WFH. The time-lag, because you cannot get a job done by poring over someone's shoulders, is missed. But since most of our work is stored in the 'cloud', we can still monitor the workflow. One needs to be constantly on the phone with the COO and the team leaders, though," explains Srinath, 57. To make sure that employee productivity does not suffer he has laid out strict deadlines with only the immediate 'printer files' on top of the queue. "The employee may work four hours a day or even less but his completed file has to land in time. True, there will be distractions at home, but it is their problem. I stick to a strict work schedule even when I have to WFH. The only concession I give myself is to let my dog Simba curl up next to me," says Srinath. The other, not insignificant pluses are hot homemade lunch and filter coffee. ☑

—G.C. Shekhar

CALLING KRITIS

Sandeep Narayan

Carnatic singer, Chennai

THE 70-year-old mridangam vidwan phoned carnatic singer Sandeep Narayan just a few hours before their scheduled recording at All India Radio. He was not comfortable being cooped in a small air-conditioned cubicle for two hours during the coronavirus scare. "Can we have it after this whole thing is behind us?" he had asked Sandeep. The singer readily agreed and passed on the request to the AIR programme head. Sandeep, who had just returned from a motorbiking trip in the Nilgiris, found that two of his concerts in Coimbatore and Mysore had been cancelled. "The organisers and we performers were left with only two hard choices—sing before an audience of 200 and help the virus to spread or sing before an empty hall, which serves no purpose. So cancelling the concerts was the only sensible thing to do," he laughs. Similarly, his concert at the Cleveland festival, slated for April, also got pushed to August.

Sandeep and wife Radhe, a Bharatanatyam dancer, who are otherwise constantly on the move for their performances, are using this spell of home confinement to sharpen their skills. "I had planned to learn a few new kritis, so this break has come in handy. Without the pressure of concerts, learning becomes easier," he explains. Radhe, meanwhile, plans to continue her dancing lessons with her teacher Leela Samson. "She lives nearby, so not much travel is required," Radhe says. Contemplating a hiatus without concerts, Sandeep says he still needs to maintain concert fitness by collaborating with his accompanists online. "For a city used to year-round concerts, Chennai's music scene has not encountered such a void," he rues. ☑

—G.C. Shekhar




LIFE WITH DENNIS

Sohini Mitra

Entrepreneur, Mumbai

THE pet dog barks intermittently, a baby coos and gargles beckoningly, and a nine-year-old haltingly plays the piano—these background scores punctuate a Google hangout with team members. For extra effect, add chimes of the doorbell and the metallic clang of utensils. Through this avant garde mixing of Mozart with Philip Glass and Steve Reich, 34-year-old Sohini Mitra, an entrepreneur and mother of two in Mumbai, tries to finish her work within a deadline.

Hers is the farthest end of the spectrum of work from home. Sohini narrates a representative incident: "I was on a video call, accessing the team viewer to change some vendor details with a client and had to share an invoice hard copy. 'Look behind,' says the amused client. There it was—the same invoice being torn to pieces by my 10-month-old son."

Skipping an age group further upwards, the board games 'business' or 'monopoly' take centrestage. Sohini's nine-year-old, seized with the seriousness of the transaction at hand, extracted his mother's cheque book from her bag. "I was working on my keynote presentation when a client called up for my IFSC code. I went to my room to see my son and his friend playing with my current account cheque book, signing of cheques with flourish. I couldn't scream, but had to make them understand that you can't keep wasting cheques," says a determinedly resilient Sohini. "It's like working from home amidst a live telecast of *Dennis the Menace* in the house," she shrugs. But she is happy so long as the kids are safe and she is nearby. As we all wait for sanity to return to our adult world, revel in the exhilarating lunacy—a children's domain. 


—Lachmi Debroy



SECURE WITH MOM

Subhashini

Project manager, TCS, Bengaluru

"WHERE have you kept the rice powder? I am looking everywhere," her mother pipes loudly from the kitchen. In the middle of a conference call with her team, Subhashini grits her teeth; she can hear suppressed giggles. The project manager at TCS has been WFH since March 16 after it was mandated by the state government. Karnataka's second corona-positive patient worked in the same complex that housed Subhashini's office, requiring total evacuation of the building. "Since schools were closed I hoped WFH would help keep a tab on my 11-year-old son; I enlisted my parents to help out," Subhashini, 38, says. With a clarity of purpose unique only to mothers, Subhashini's mater hoped to utilise the time spent together to catch up on family gossip. Only to have her daughter cut her off mid-sentence to attend calls. As this kept repeating, her mom complained: "You willn't have time to speak to me, but you will talk to some foreign chaps." "In an office environment pressure is greater and you concentrate. The occasional joke might relieve tension but at the end of the day you've the feeling of completing some work. When you WFH there is a tendency to take it easy. A post-lunch nap creeps over you as your bed or sofa lie invitingly. You add curd rice to the mix and you will be asleep in no time," she says. Subhashini saw the work of her team suffer in the early days of the scare. Everyone had to be given secure laptops and VPNs. Patchy internet in some areas made things worse. There is one real positive though—with no tiring commute she is fresh enough to whip up a tasty dinner for son Pranav and her husband, an admin manager who still has to work from office. When her fitness freak hubby kept complaining about the closed gyms, she devised a new fitness routine for him: wash utensils before going to bed. 

—G.C. Shekhar




COAXING A CORONA SMILE

Alexander Babu

Stand-up comedian, Chennai

AFTER the global success of his solo stand-up show *Alex in Wonderland*, Alexander was all set to launch his Tamil play, with seven shows lined up for March—only to see the lockdown obliterate his schedule. His plans to take *Wonderland* to newer venues like Sri Lanka also fell through. With little to do, Alex, 44, who packs in an hour of yoga early in the morning followed by meditation, decided to plot his next concept. "Zoning into that creative area can be tough, especially when you have suffered a financial loss due to cancelled shows. Thankfully, yoga and meditation have been a cushion, along with my family," says Alex, who left Amazon in 2014 to be a full-time stand-up comic. While thanking providence for keeping him safe, he commiserates with those who cannot afford to save up for a hard time like this.

Asked if the coronavirus would be part of his next show, Alex answers with a glint in his eyes: "It is already part of our lives. So I need to give it the due respect in my next outing on stage." The biggest challenge is to concoct something funny in these days of memes and Twitter humour, so Alex is also reading scholarly articles on the virus in the hope they will provide a humorous ingress into an arcane subject. Since he is also a trained singer and his shows are packed with film songs across the ages, Alex is utilising the forced break to brush up his singing by Skyping regularly with his guru Raghavan Manian. The biggest bonus has been spending time with his two sons, who otherwise would have had to catch up with appa on Facetime. 


—G.C. Shekhar

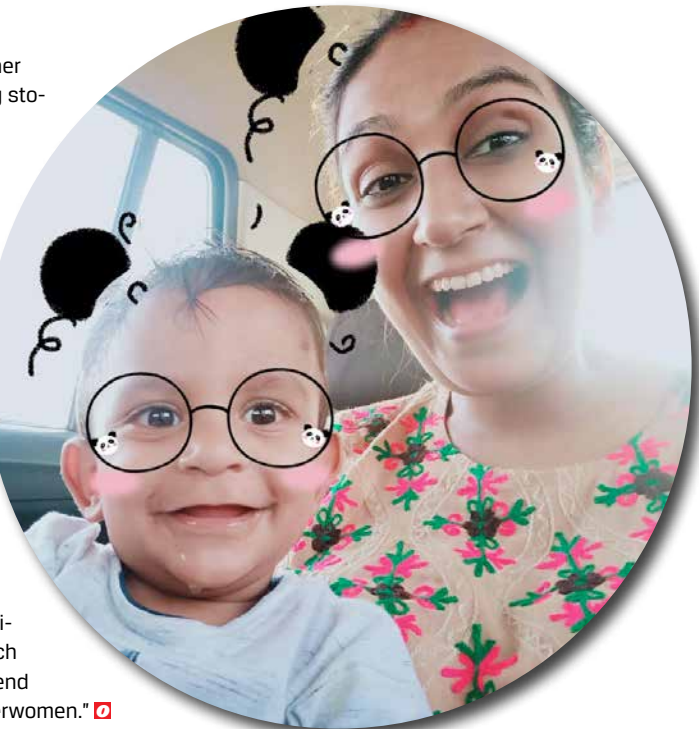


DEVI NEXT DOOR

Nivedita Sharma

Journalist, Noida

REPORTERS need to be around and about, and for Nivedita Sharma, her 13-month-old son dominated her mind even while she was chasing stories and stiff deadlines. This is why she probably wanted to work from home. So, when COVID-19 enforced social distancing, then a lockdown dug in its heels, Nivedita let out a suppressed 'yaay'. "This might sound illogical and insensitive to many, but this allowed me to spend time with my son," she confesses. She soon realised that catering to needs infantile made WFH a tough ask: "One whimper from him and you have to leave work to entertain him." Running from your work station to the kitchen where a broth is boiling, or take time off to change diapers, or to feed him regularly...why, these shutdown days have made Nivedita a shining exemplar of multi-tasking. More so since COVID-19 has put a halt on maids and cooks as well. "Well, you all know husbands are fun till the time they don't touch things because once they are in form, you have to manage two kids," laughs Sharma. But has WFH changed her life? "My office work starts at 9 am, but before that I need to prepare morning meals, change the baby's diapers... Then comes the time to open the laptop when comes a panicked shout from hubby: 'He pooped!'" Lunchtime is also when a reporter typically would start writing/framing her stories. At home at 2 pm, and lunch jostles with words for mindspace. Next, it's time for a baby-nap. Day's end finds Nivedita wrung out, yet suffused with satisfaction. "We are superwomen." 



—Lachmi Debroy

G.C. Shekhar in Chennai

“YOU were always late coming into the office. Now you are late even from home? How do you manage it?” asks the furious manager. “I overslept sir, like always,” replies the executive with brazen effrontery. He had logged in late for the morning video call.

The lockdown has compelled India’s corporate world to rejig not just its business projections and balance sheets but also the work culture of its employees. Suddenly, work from home (WFH) is not an option for a munificent manager to grant to his team members, but a compulsion for bosses to impose to keep the workflow rolling. And the comfort of working from home could easily lead to complacency, unless the managers could keep things under control—remotely.

“Yes it was a totally new concept for us, with offices spread across the country. Suddenly, all of us were working remotely from our homes. Only technicians who had to keep the elevators moving were on the field,” observes Amit Gossain, MD, Kone Elevators India.

Happily, the transition was smoother than Gossain expected, since everyone was digitally connected. Their results, too, have been positive, as he found his managers turning in better reports, with the planning and forecast more robust. Reason? “Their minds were fresh in the absence of hours of commute. They were more focused on the job at hand than rushing to meet clients. Similarly, even video conferences were more leisurely and productive as there was no pressure of keeping up appointments,” he discloses.

Other than being asked to be punctual for video conferences, executives were given flexible working hours with no compulsory logging in at a specified time, adds Gossain. But most firms still had to drill it into executives that WFH was not a holiday, that they had to be “available, accountable

HOME FRONT OFFICE



Companies are adjusting to the WFH culture

and meet deadlines”.

ZOHO, the Chennai-based software company, adopted WFH as the default, precautionary policy for all its offices worldwide from March 4. “Our 8,000-plus employees over ten countries will work from home. They are encouraged to come to offices only when necessary. We will retain this policy until the threat of the coronavirus pandemic has passed, or has reduced substantially,” the company has announced. It also offered the newly launched remote work toolkit—Remotely—for free use till July 1.

According to Dipali Naidu, a management consultant, WFH has required executives to become digitally savvy and get a hang of Microsoft Tools, Skype, Zoom etc. “WFH puts extra pressure on women executives, who have to get household chores organised before office work. Thankfully, some

firms like Capgemini, ICICI Bank, HSBC and a few retail companies have allowed their women executives to log in an hour later than others.”

The IT industry may be the biggest beneficiary of WFH, as most firms have managed to maintain their deliverable schedule. “It has also helped the IT sector to save costs, as they did not have to ferry people in buses and cars and feed them in office canteens. So they would be tempted to use the same model once things become normal. In the process, they may discover that they don’t require such

huge air-conditioned office spaces, barring a few conference halls, where weekly meetings can be held,” observes R. Ganapathi, president of the South Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The downtime is also being used to ramp up training of employees. “There has been a huge demand for many of our management lectures

and training modules. We see employees brush up their skills on spreadsheets and other digital tools. For elderly employees, this has been the ideal time to equip themselves digitally,” points out Vijay Kumar, executive director, Madras Management Association.

The Chennai-headquartered Murgappa Group already had a WFH policy in place for all its companies in various sectors; the number of employees under the WFH category has multiplied now. “So far, it has been smooth but transaction levels are low. Also, the first week was spent in enabling the infrastructure for the large-scale switch,” says Ramesh K.B. Menon, director of HR.

Work from home could become a huge cost-saving incentive for the IT sector since they would be staring at uncertainty in the near future due to the pandemic’s global economic impact. “Only real estate fellows who rent out their huge complexes would have to be really worried if WFH becomes the work model for the future,” notes Ganapathi. ■

Secure Suffrage the blockchain based election system

Microsoft Codefundo is an annual competition conducted by Microsoft to imbibe innovation among engineering students. Every year there is a theme which revolves around challenging problems. This year the theme was "Secure Electronic Voting using Azure Blockchain". 21 premier engineering Institutes of the country compete to come up with a solution.

The Trio Lakshmi V Narke, Chidroop I and B Dhanush from RV College of Engineering have secured the first place at the national finals for their solution Secure Suffrage. The 4th Year students majoring in Computer Science have devised a novel solution to make the election process transparent and secure.



What is a blockchain ?

A blockchain is a decentralized, distributed, and often times public, digital ledger that is used to record transactions across many computers so that any involved record cannot be altered retroactively, without the alteration of all subsequent blocks. So it can lay the foundation to build secure and trustable platforms.

India is a country with a voting population of about **900 million** people. It is the world's largest celebration of democracy. So the team at Secure Suffrage believe that a good democracy needs a strong foundation laid in integrity, trust, transparency and security.

Direct Voting :

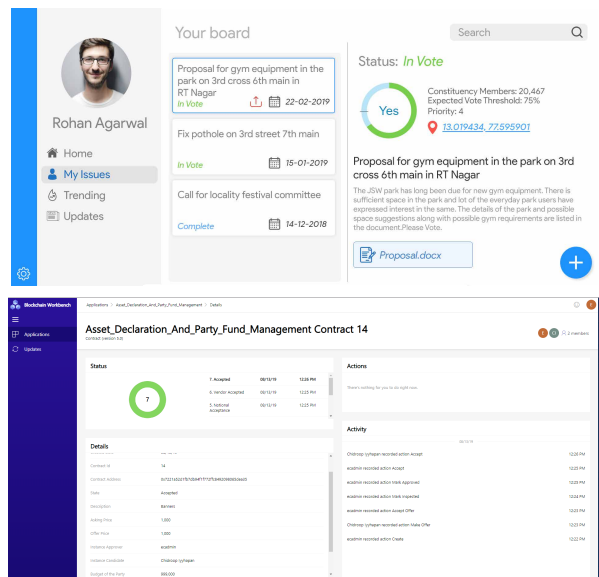
One of the key issues with the current system is that a voter has to be present at her/his constituency on a particular day. This restriction is one of the primary reasons we have a low voter turn out. We plan to address this with a digital voting system powered by the blockchain. So a voter can vote from any booth Officials can be identified using Microsoft Cognitive services to verify face details.

Asset Declaration :

Declaring assets and flow of money through parties has always been a prime concern for the EC, The current system lacks transparency and integrity. With the help of smart contracts we can track each candidate's spending to the last cent.

Micro Democracy :

Democracy is a system where citizens exercise the power by electing representatives, where in people's voice needs to be heard from time to time. So it's time to bring back the power to the people. Secure Suffrage aims to create a platform where we can establish a two-way channel between the citizens and their representatives where major policies or complaints can be raised and the constituency members can vote on it.



Different Times, Different Strokes

India's grounded sportspersons are creatively using their forced leave to lay the grounds for future success

Soumitra Bose

A pandemic casts a veil across all human interaction in flesh and blood—the veil of mortality. As factories, railways and airlines stand stalled, so are fields and stadiums deserted—their pitches destitute of play, their bleachers deathly silent.

With sportspersons staring at an uncertain calendar across the world, top Indian athletes are using the lock-

down to hone their talent and spend time with families. From exchanging their pistols with painting brushes to wielding the spatula and kitchen forceps, sportspersons have found ample time to indulge in their avocations. Some are in earnest communion with their maker, others can't stop admiring the fancy haircut they got from their better-half. 'Work from home', indeed, is a catch-all term.

It's a miraculous gift of time for professional athletes who ply their trade

for at least 40 weeks every year away from their families. For the first time since its existence since 1984, the Sports Authority of India, the central agency that funds and provides infrastructure for athletes' training, faces an extraordinary situation: several teams preparing for this summer's now-postponed Tokyo Olympics were frozen, as it were, in mid-training.

The SAI's Bangalore and Patiala centres house several Tokyo-bound sportspersons. Both centres have over 100



← **Paintball shooting, anyone?** Shooter Manu Bhaker (above) shows her sketch, while air-rifle expert Anjum Moudgil looks a full pro with the brush and canvas. Her mask indicates the time we are in.



GETTY IMAGES



The eagle has landed:

Golfer Anirban is quite a chef—here he rustles up a Bengali prawn curry and shares it with wife Ipsa

athletes and coaches each. While boxing, shooting, archery and wrestling camps have been completely closed, several middle and long-distance athletes remain there. The national women’s hockey team has spent two months in Bangalore; the men’s team, too, are left stranded after the SAI took extraordinary steps to isolate them in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in early March.

“We have given precedence to the health of our athletes over training. We have created quarantine-like training facilities for our javelin throwers who returned from tours in Turkey and South Africa. Such isolated training facilities can be implemented for other major sports,” says SAI director-gen-

eral Sandip Pradhan.

With the Olympics deferred by a year, foreign coaches like Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne, attached to the women’s hockey team, are stuck too. While men’s hockey team coach Graham Reid has his wife Julia for company, Marijne, a father of three kids, who took breaks between camps or tournaments to visit his family in Den Bosch in Holland, is not so lucky. Indian boxing’s high-performance director Santiago Nieva can’t go home to Sweden and was quarantined in Patiala after the team returned from the Asian qualifiers in Jordan mid-March. The only overseas coach able to return home (to the US) was women’s wrestling coach Andrew Cook.

Amidst the crisis, some athletes have reconciled themselves to the strange stasis. According to their age and inclination, their reactions differ too. Shooter Manu Bhaker will be utterly disappointed by the cancellation of the Tokyo Games. A 2018 Commonwealth champion in 10m air pistol, Manu has been in the form of her life in 2019. She won gold medals at successive World Cups and Asian championships, and three medals were expected from her in Tokyo. “I think I have a lot more to show and winning gold at Tokyo will be a dream come true,” says the 18-year-old.

While most shooters have missed training, the best, like Manu, air-rifle expert Anjum Moudgil and junior



Indian boxers and javelin throwers are in quarantined training facilities at SAI centres.

world record holder in skeet Angad Bajwa have found various ways to maintain composure and focus—essential in a sport notorious for having no margin of error. Manu and Anjum have explored painting. While Manu is relatively new to it, Anjum, 26, has been painting for almost seven-eight years. “It has been three years that I have started seriously again. It is relaxing and keeps me focused, an essential part of our sport,” says Anjum.

With ammunition in short supply, most shooters have resorted to ‘dry’ training—the practice of mounting the gun without actually shooting. Angad, who was another favourite for Tokyo, says dry training helps in “building muscle memory and improves smoothness in movement”. Besides a lot of weight training at the gym, Angad has been reading a book on golf. Why golf? “Like golfers, we have a similar mind-set. The work ethic and the pre-shot routine are similar,” explains Angad, who politely refused to reveal the name of the book. “It has been suggested by my Norwegian coach Tore Brovold and I would like to keep it confidential.” A world champion, Brovold won the skeet silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Married sportspersons with young children have a different dish to serve. India’s top golfer Anirban Lahiri, who keeps crisscrossing the world’s most difficult circuits—Asian and PGA Tours—is currently spending the longest holiday since he left home at 17 to become a pro. “It’s a lot like going back to school...like a summer vacation of sorts,” says the affable 33-year-old who now lives in Florida with wife Ipsa and their one-year-old daughter, Tisya.

Lahiri came to play in the Indian Open and got stuck when the tournament got cancelled. He is now visiting his parents in Hyderabad and has launched an Instagram series on cooking. “Tisya is the boss now and grabbing all the attention. The



Learning curve: Kaif says his son Kabir is teaching him many things; shooter Angad is reading a golf book and gyming to keep himself focussed



→
A cut above the rest: Wife Anushka gives Virat a haircut; Sehwag lends a hand in tending to his cows



grandparents could not be happier,” says Lahiri. A foodie like most Bengalis, Lahiri’s cooking series started with anda-bhujia (scrambled eggs fried with onions). “We have cooked a Bengali delicacy, Malai Chingri (prawns cooked in coconut cream) and then tried mutter-mushroom (green pea/mushroom curry). I have lived by myself for long and am relatively a proficient cook. We are doing the dishes for our friends in the US and that gives us a lot of satisfaction,” he says.

Former Indian cricket star Mohammed Kaif is also learning a lot from eight-year-old son Kabir. While helping out wife Pooja with household chores and watering the plants, Kaif, who lives in Gurgaon, is having the

best time of his life since he grew up as a kid in Allahabad. “I have so much time to myself and believe me, the interaction with my kids (Kaif has a three-year-old daughter, Eva) has been an eye-opener. In the age of YouTube, Kabir is growing up so fast and seems to know more than me,” he says with a note of pride.

While waiting to know the fate of the

*Dry shooting, says
 Angad, builds
 muscle memory,
 smoothens
 movement.*

Indian Premier League, Kaif, Ricky Ponting’s assistant at Delhi Capitals, says the current situation reminds him of his childhood days when there was no pressure of time and the world was relatively free of stress. “I am playing a lot of board games. My son is keen to know the solar system and it’s nice to see how times have changed. A bit of kite flying also takes me back to those lovely days in Allahabad.”

Lahiri says the current period forced by the global pandemic is like a “different time out”. For a professional sportsperson aiming for excellence, there is never any chutti (holiday). The athlete who intelligently uses this time to keep in touch with the sport will always be able to flatten the curve. In this case, the coronavirus! 📌

500-Bedded Odisha COVID-19 HOSPITAL Becomes Operational in KIMS



A 500-Bedded Odisha COVID-19 Hospital managed and run by Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), Bhubaneswar has become operational from 2nd April 2020. Govt. of Odisha is financing equipment and operational costs through CSR policy of OMC. Odisha COVID-19 Hospital has been set up under a tripartite agreement among Govt. of Odisha, KIMS and OMC. Shri Naveen Patnaik, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha declared the hospital operational in the presence of Dr. Achyuta Samanta, Founder, KIIT & KISS; Dr. Subrat Acharya, Pro-Chancellor, KIIT Deemed to University and Dr. Bishnu Prasad Panigrahi, CEO, KIMS today.

The Odisha COVID Hospital has 500-bed infrastructure,

including 50 critical care beds. It is well-equipped with latest instruments and other facilities. The Odisha COVID Hospital is functioning from a dedicated block of KIMS having a dedicated and exclusive team of doctors, nurses, paramedics and housekeeping staff. COVID suspects as well COVID patients will have a separate entrance and exit to KIMS campus and not intermingle with non COVID patients. The Hospital has no linkage with other departments of KIMS and is led by Dr. Bishnu Prasad Panigrahi under the guidance of Dr. Subrat Acharya.

“The Hospital adheres to the standard best practices and follows WHO and ICMR guidelines. It will be functional round the clock”, informed Dr. A. Samanta.





WORLD TOUR



AUSTRIA As the debate on whether the use of masks can stem COVID-19's spread continues, wearing them in supermarkets and other food and drug stores has been made compulsory in Austria. The idea is gaining support among its neighbours too—in Slovakia, Czech Republic and parts of Germany, wearing face masks has been made compulsory.



BRAZIL Amazon's indigenous communities are in danger of being "wiped out" by the coronavirus, warn health experts. Brazil had over 11,000 infections and 486 deaths from the disease. Respiratory illnesses from influenza are the main cause of death for native communities. Initially, it concentrated around São Paulo. Now, it has covered the entire country—including the Amazon basin.



UNITED STATES Senator Bernie Sanders dropped out of the presidential campaign, clearing the way for Joe Biden's nomination as the Democratic Party candidate against Donald Trump in the elections due in November. "I have concluded that this battle for the Democratic nomination will not be successful," he said announcing the suspension of his campaign.



FOREIGN HAND

THE debate whether hydroxychloroquine, a malaria medicine, is a possible cure for COVID-19 was given a new twist on April 6, and India was placed right in the middle of it. Reports said during their recent conversation Donald Trump asked Narendra Modi to supply the drug to the US, the new epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. Trump calls hydroxychloroquine a "game changer" in the fight against COVID-19, noting that India has a large stockpile of it. PM Modi had banned the export of the drug some days ago.

Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine are drugs used to treat malaria, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved its use to treat novel coronavirus patients under the Emergency Use Authorisation—something that should be done only under a doctor's strict supervision. Thus far, scientists and physicians have been cautious about using it for the purpose. Drug companies Sandoz, a division of Novartis, has decided to donate 30 million doses of hydroxychloroquine and Bayer a million doses of chloroquine to the existing stockpile of the US.

But at a recent press conference Trump seemed less sure. "Let's see how it works," he said, adding, "It may, it may not." Despite the positive data in 40 coronavirus patients, the French health ministry has warned against its use for COVID-19.

Trump's keenness for the drug was criticised by detractors, who called it a "brazen willingness to distort" and "outright defying of expert opinion and scientific evidence". Standing alongside two top public health officials who declined to endorse his call for widely administering the drug, Trump was reported by the *NYT* as saying, "What do I know? I am not a doctor," But he added, "If it does work, it would be a shame we did not do it early."

However, with a spike in active cases of infection and with over 100 deaths, India banned the export of the drug "without any exception" last weekend. After Trump's request, India might have to reconsider the ban. Sources said a decision would be made after assessing India's own stockpile. A representative of the Indian Drug Manufacturer's Association, Ashok Kumar Madan, told the *BBC*, "India definitely has the capacity to cater to both global and local markets. Of course, domestic considerations must come first, but we have the capacity."

Conceding to the request strengthens India's humanitarian track record, while deepening the bond between Trump and Modi. [Q](#)

COVER STORY
COVID-19
EXODUS

THE OUTDOORSY LONGING

Slow-withering from the rose of day
Red petals drop away
Evening leans on the window-sill
Quiet-eyed and still.
Behind her in gold-bannered skies
Lone Hesperus will rise.

—*Sunset* by Ella Young

LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI

APOORVA SALKADE



CONNAUGHT PLACE, DELHI

SURESH K. PANDEY

GATEWAY OF INDIA, MUMBAI

APOORVA SALKADE

Grey as the building whose cornices they lined, they seemed to become a part of that building's crustaceans, the afterdream of some mining baron

who had come to see too close a relationship between flesh and feather, talon and stone, or whose extravagant architect had forgotten them.

— *The Pigeon Entablature*
by Albert Stainton



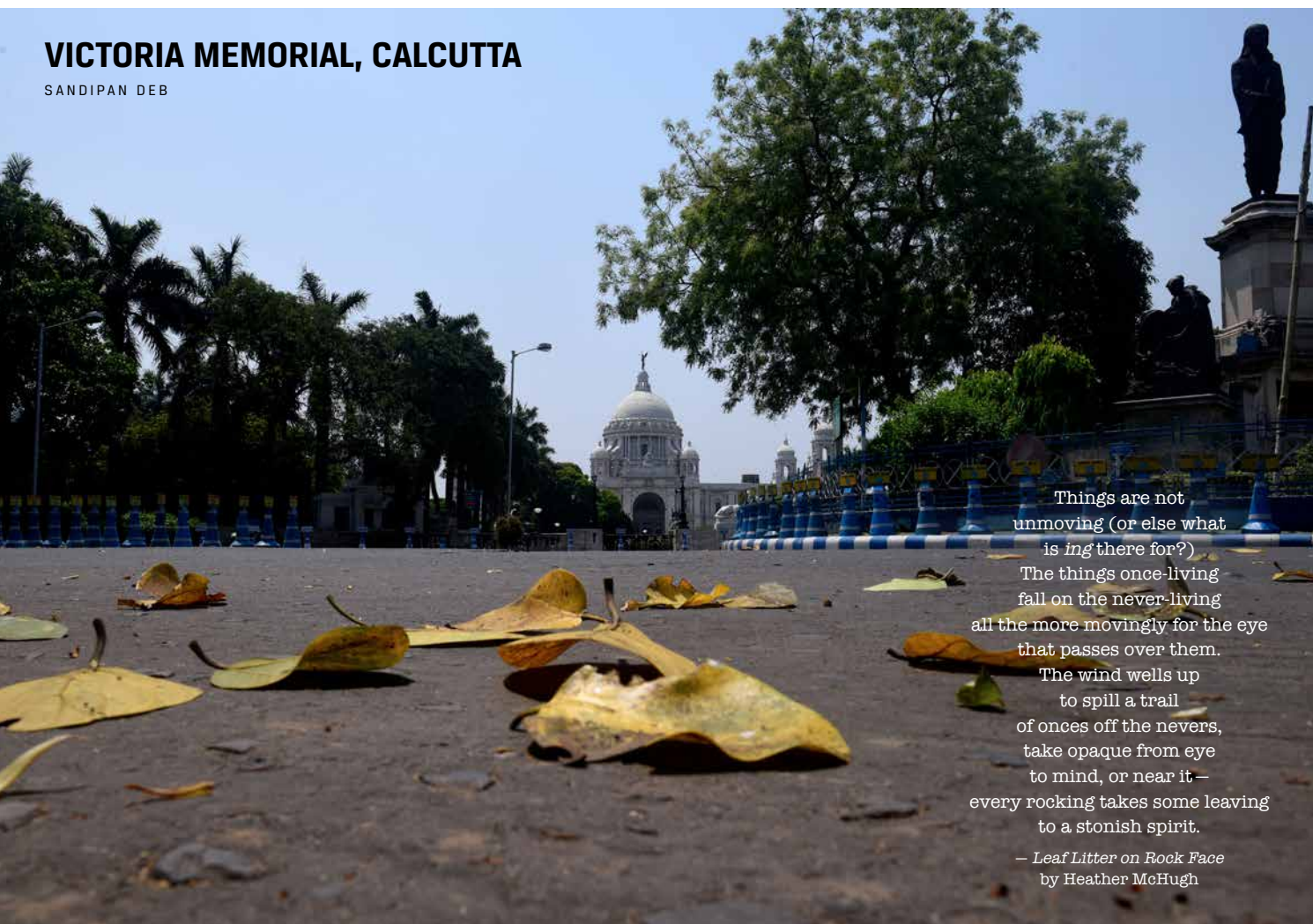


RAJPATH, DELHI

JITENDER GUPTA

VICTORIA MEMORIAL, CALCUTTA

SANDIPAN DEB



Things are not
unmoving (or else what
is *ing* there for?)
The things once-living
fall on the never-living
all the more movingly for the eye
that passes over them.
The wind wells up
to spill a trail
of onces off the nevers,
take opaque from eye
to mind, or near it—
every rocking takes some leaving
to a stonish spirit.

— *Leaf Litter on Rock Face*
by Heather McHugh



YAMUNA, DELHI

PTI

A loon dives in the swollen river.
It followed the river first.
The town lies between it and canals
Diverted from the river.
The beak of the loon is orange,
Its wingspan broader than a duck's.



SURESH K. PANDEY

My father's legs were swollen.
His once thin ankles barely fit his shoes.
His heart no longer fed his body.
Toxins and liquids began to drown him.
His silly doctors didn't see
He couldn't breathe.

— *River* by Greg Miller

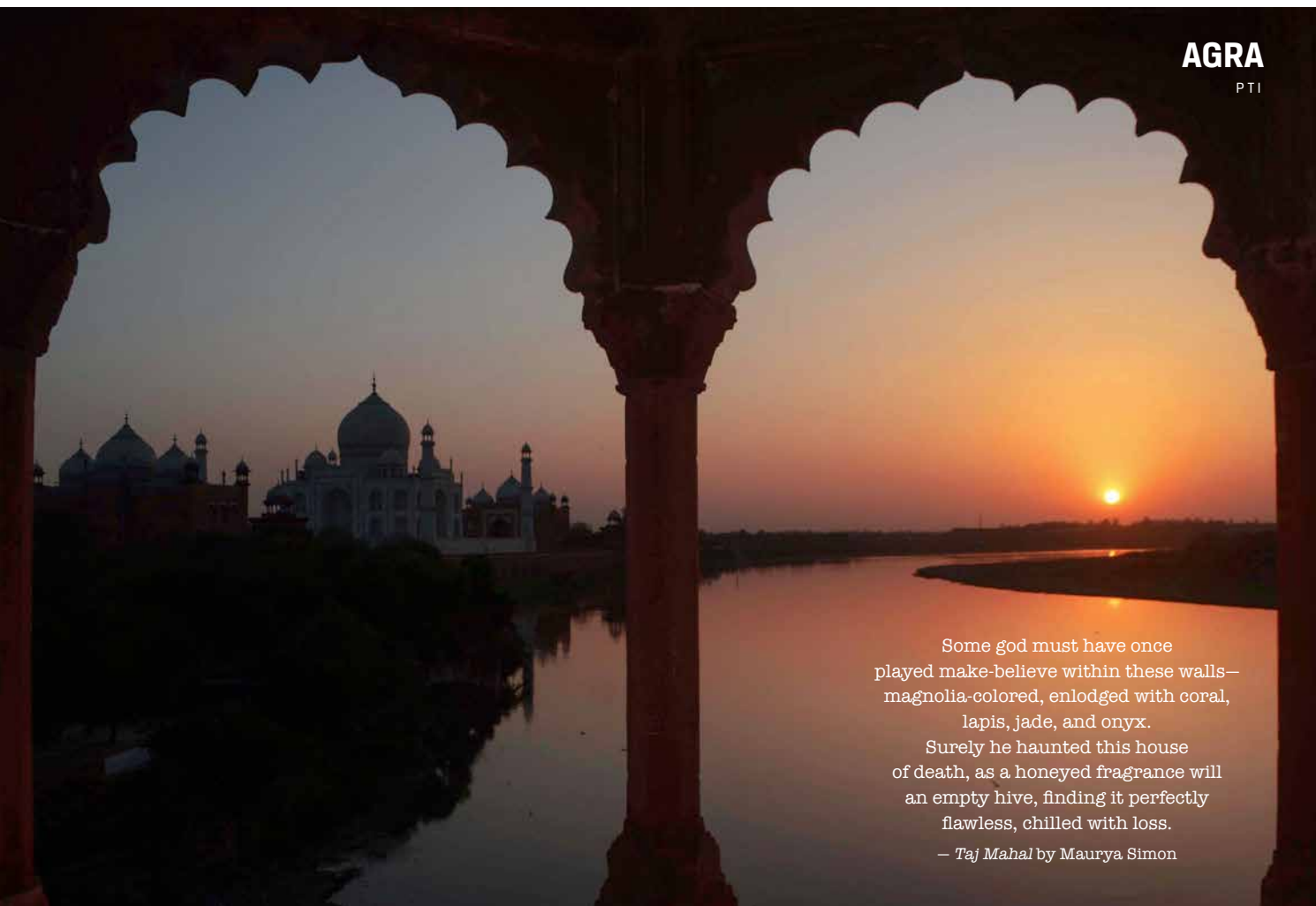


SURESH K. PANDEY



JAIPUR

PTI



AGRA

PTI

Some god must have once
played make-believe within these walls—
magnolia-colored, enloded with coral,
lapis, jade, and onyx.

Surely he haunted this house
of death, as a honeyed fragrance will
an empty hive, finding it perfectly
flawless, chilled with loss.

— *Taj Mahal* by Maurya Simon

The World In Your Palm

You can't go to a concert—the concert must come to you. And it has. Not just music, but also book readings, plays and entire museum exhibitions. As theatre venues, literature festivals and museums remain shut during the lockdown, they are moving their offerings to the digital realm. The best part? It's all free or on a pay-what-you-want basis. So the next time you get bored of binge-watching yet another TV series, do not despair: an artistic or literary adventure is just a click away.

LIVE FROM HQ COMEDY EDITION

Watch these top comedians bring home the much-needed comic relief.

LIVE ON 



Stand-up Comedy

Live From HQ

Exercise your facial muscles with comedy sketches by Anubhav Singh Bassi, Aishwarya Mohanraj, Samay Raina, Rahul Dua and Gaurav Kapoor among others. The shows are 20 minutes long and are being aired on Instagram live at 10 pm till April 13. For the schedule and Instagram handles of the comedians, refer to bookmyshow.com.



Literary Talks

Jaipur Literature Festival

'The greatest literary show on earth' is now hosting some great dialogues in its digital literary series called Brave New World. Listen to Shashi Tharoor and policy researcher Samir Saran talk about the crisis the world is going through and journalist Pragma Tiwari and advocate Abhinav Chandrachud discuss the repercussions of the Bombay plague epidemic of 1896. It is being hosted biweekly—Saturday and Wednesday. You can watch the first few sessions on the social media pages of the festival and eventually on its website (jflitfest.org).



Performance Arts and Music

National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA)

Jazz music, contemporary dance, Western classical music, Indian classical dances...no matter what art form speaks to your soul, you can find it on NCPA's YouTube channel. India's premier cultural institution is showcasing the best of events from its extensive archive. Regarding the initiative, K.N. Suntook, the organisation's founder, says, "NCPA is a repository of great artistic treasures. Our genre heads and the NCPA team have worked hard to put this together. As a cultural organisation, we felt this treasure must be shared in these difficult times in the safest way possible."

Live Concerts

JioSaavn Live Anywhere

Throughout April, indie music fans can tune into high-definition live performances by Ankur Tewari, Taba Chake, Palash Sen, Tejas Menon, Nikhita Gandhi and Dhruv Visvanath among others. Performances have been confirmed till April 11. Additional dates and artistes will be announced in the coming weeks.

Streaming on [facebook/jiosaavn](https://www.facebook.com/jiosaavn)

LIVE anywhere

 Tejas 3RD APRIL, 7 PM	 Ankur Tewari 4TH APRIL, 7 PM	 Palash Sen 5TH APRIL, 7 PM
 Nikhita Gandhi	 Dhruv Visvanath	 Taba Chake

They will serenade from their virtual stage in sets of 20-30 minutes on JioSaavn's Facebook page. After the live performances, you can also stream the recordings on the JioSaavn app. While the live streams are free, there is also a pay-what-you-want option. JioSaavn claims the entire revenue will go directly to the musicians and help support independent artistes.

Museums and Galleries***Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta***

The science museum has recorded more than 500 viewers since the unveiling of its virtual gallery (bitm.gov.in) on March 31. Among the exhibits you can preview are a 1926 Rolls Royce Car, the Fiat Tipo used by the eminent scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, a 16 mm movie projector, a diorama of a coal mine and the machine in which Rabindranath Tagore recorded a song.

***Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai***

Its website (csmvs.in) offers four digital exhibitions: 'Hamsafar—The Companion', which presents the unfolding of Indian textiles through sculptures, paintings from the Ajanta caves, photos of clothes and manuscripts; 'Five Variations on the Sari: India's Iconic Drape'; 'Animals in Indian Art'; and a natural history collection featuring specimens gathered by ornithologist Salim Ali and naturalist Stanley Henry Prater.

***Indian Museum, Calcutta***

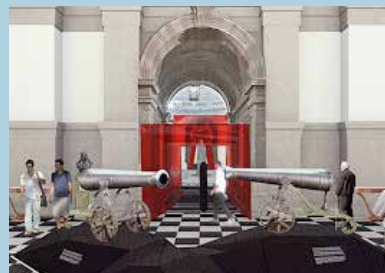
Although its online gallery was created two years ago, it has registered a spike in digital footprints since the lockdown. While the virtual gallery (indianmuseumkolkata.org) showcases only 10 per cent of the more than 14,000 exhibits in the museum's collection, it is still a remarkable tour de force. You can see a bow ring studded with an emerald of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, coins of Jahangir and Samudragupta, an 18th-century crown of an idol of goddess Lakshmi studded with jewels, and Buddhist relics.

***National Museum, Delhi***

Catch its latest exhibition 'The Great Steppe: Time. Space. Culture' organised in collaboration with the Embassy of Kazakhstan and National Museum, Kazakhstan, online (nationalmuseumindia.gov.in). It features archaeological discoveries from various parts of the central Asian nation. You can also preview the exhibitions 'Art of Calligraphy' featuring Arabic and Persian inscriptions; 'Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan'; and 'Pottery from Ancient Peru'.

***National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi***

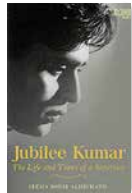
Take a virtual tour (ngmaindia.gov.in) of its permanent collection to see landmarks of Indian art history—works by Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy, Gaganendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore as well as Mysore, Tanjore and Kalighat paintings.

***Victoria Memorial, Calcutta***

Its Facebook page (facebook.com/victoriameorialhall) features photos of exhibits, which have lately been getting a lot of traction. Scroll through images of a hand-drawn plan made by Alexander Cunningham of the first ASI site museum at Sarnath, Tipu Sultan's sword and the Bharatmata painting of Abanindranath Tagore.

ON THE RACKS

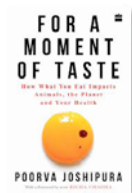
Jubilee Kumar | Hachette
Seema Sonik Alimchand



This intimate biography of Bollywood actor Rajendra Kumar features first-person accounts, photos

and anecdotes that make for an engaging narrative. From growing up in an affluent family in present-day Pakistan to hardships after Partition and Kumar's struggles in Bombay before he got a break as an assistant director, the author chronicles his life both on-screen and off it.

For A Moment Of Taste | HarperCollins
Poorva Joshipura



The world now eats seven times the meat it consumed in 1950—about 77 billion land animals and trillions of fish.

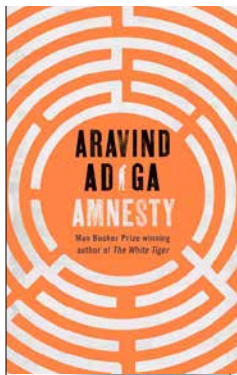
The author, a senior member of PETA, passionately argues against the production and consumption of animal-based products on environmental, health and ethical grounds. Buttressed by extensive endnotes, she makes a comprehensive case for veganism and provides tips on how to make the transition.

Irrationally Passionate | HarperCollins
Jason Kothari



The author, an entrepreneur and 'business turn-around leader', writes about how he transformed Indian firms

in distress such as FreeCharge, Housing.com and Snapdeal, and the lessons he learnt. The book is peppered with self-help fundamentals and pedestrian truisms such as "mistakes can be a gift" and "nothing worthwhile comes easy".



Aravind Adiga
AMNESTY | Picador |
272 pages | Rs 599

ALONG WITH THEMES OF LONELINESS, ALIENATION AND STRESS, THERE IS MURDER TOO. DANNY FINDS A CLIENT KILLED, AND THEN ACCIDENTALLY CALLS HER MURDERER, WHO IN TURN THREATENS TO TURN HIM IN. THUS STARTS A CAT AND MOUSE GAME.

Plaintive Notes In Danny Boy

Adiga takes his beleaguered immigrant to Australia and casts a gimlet eye on all forms of injustice

Devapriya Sanyal

ARAVIND Adiga's latest novel, *Amnesty*, is about Dhananjaya Rajaratnam, aka Danny, "an illegal" seeking asylum in Australia. Through Danny, Adiga seems to be posing the question: what if the promised land is not as golden as it looks?

Amnesty is marvelously inventive (some memorable lines stay long with the reader), hilarious at times but nevertheless tinged with sadness. The hero has been set up by a former classmate, Abe, and could actually have done much better than cleaning houses had he decided to stick it out in the college and perhaps even have attained the legal status he so desperately craves.

Danny courses through the novel beset by loneliness, alienation, stress and addiction. Adiga also goes on to turn *Amnesty* into a murder mystery when Danny discovers that one of his clients, Radha Thomas, has been found murdered in a creek in Erskineville. Thus begins the cat and mouse game when Danny accidentally calls the murderer, Radha's lover Prakash, who threatens to turn Danny in if he spills the beans. For a greater part of the novel it is Prakash that Danny is physically trying to escape from as he walks all over Sydney. But his past catches up with him right then and flashes of his life in Dubai, in Sri Lanka and in Australia as a student float up through the pages.

Adiga's language is heartwarming and humorous, but he never loses sight of the serious intent with which he had begun the novel. It becomes a chilling tale of the organisation of society along the lines of class, colour, money etc. Danny is Everyman overcome by a desire to strike it right in Australia with Sonja, his Vietnamese vegan girlfriend who loves him. He is ready to compromise with Prakash by not revealing his name to the crime branch, but in the end his inner goodness takes over and he reports the crime to police.

However, for all of Adiga's efforts, Prakash doesn't come across as a particularly thrilling villain. Perhaps that is because he has not been adequately fleshed out. Adiga pokes fun at White Australians, but then he lashes out at Indians, Nepalis, the Chinese—in other words, everyone.

The last half of the novel becomes a little tedious as Danny rushes about from place to place and the narration descends into inanities and becomes mundane, even boring. *Amnesty's* main plot revolves around the dilemmas of the immigrant, illegal to be specific, and as such offers a bird's eye view of the migrant as he/she tries to make sense of their new world. The book begins with promise, but doesn't end quite as magically for either Danny or the reader. In the end, the conscientious, "honest" and "intelligent Danny" (the two epithets he insists on using for himself throughout the novel) awaits deportation and one begins to sense that perhaps Adiga wants to say that nice people do not always get the better end of the bargain and that hope, although strengthening, is perhaps illusory.



All Fired Up

We have, in the past, been at variance with Sonam Kapoor over different matters. But we stand with her angry tweet when, during our empty sentimental 'lights out' on the night of April 5, educated 'overdoers' and mobs of yobs burst firecrackers and banged thalis, adding din to darkness and frightening pets and birds no end, just when they were getting used to a little peace. That, and the evolution of Sonam's style, as exemplified here, and with which we find no fault after close inspection—jacket, blouse, skirt, shades...and the décolletage, a counterpoint to it all.

Letting Her Locks Down

There are simple domestic gestures that, unchanged through time, signify warmth, trust and a certain eternal stability. Close female relatives 'doing' each others' hair (picture the scene, as the soft light of a spring afternoon creeps away across the courtyard) is one that easily qualifies. Congratulations to Kangana Ranaut then for dodging the lockdown and schlepping off stealthily to Manali, as the rest of her colleagues strive to make the best out of washing dishes and sweeping floors. For Manali is where home is, where her mom Asha is, where bliss lies in wait for her softly and silently.



In The Khanate

'Bhai' to menfolk who have made him into a folk hero, Chulbul Pandey to new fans, the handsomest young actor to take his shirt off for millennials and a likeable, headstrong, but fallible, screen romantic to the rest of us greying hairs, Salman Khan has been a silent, strong-jawed presence loath to speak on matters other than films. Until now, when coronavirus stalks the globe. Posting a photo where he's with nephew Nirvaan, Salman admits to being 'terrified', and expresses concern for his father, who is staying alone. He should do this more—it humanises the strongman.

Sunnily Comforting

In many ways, Sunny Leone is an exemplar—doting wife, loving mother, enthusiastic, but proud, dispenser of cheesiness in films, one who as easily slips into swimsuits and bikinis as she got out of them in her colourful past. A wholesome, over-the-board cleanness that we appreciate. These days, when she's so cruelly confined, Sunny is busy with her 'live dance face-offs' on social media with sundry guests called, enticingly, *Locked up with Sunny*. A two-minute tour of Thailand—with shots from a poolside shoot—was also offered to insatiable fans. Same reason we are compelled to carry the accompanying image—people like to be comforted during trying times.



CORNELL Diary



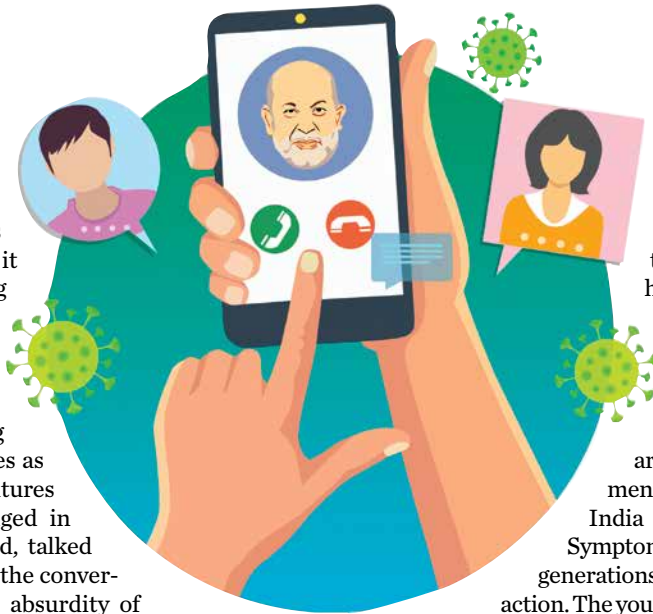
Ujjainee Sharma
is doing her PhD at
Cornell University,
New York

Zoom on the Absurd

As a graduate student in America, a Friday night typically involves meeting friends and colleagues at the local bar. This week, it amounted to interacting with a matrix of faces on a computer screen. Under quarantine, we were in our houses, logged onto Zoom and trying to continue our social lives as usual, even though our futures had fundamentally changed in the past month. We joked, talked about TV shows and kept the conversation light-hearted. The absurdity of the situation was not lost on us. We live a few minutes away from each other's house. Technology makes distances shorter. But only being able to talk to your neighbours through a computer had somehow widened them.

Our Scattered Lives

Some colleagues who were in the field had to decide whether to stay or leave in the middle of their projects. Some were able to reach home. Others are stuck in foreign countries for the foreseeable future and don't know when they'll be able to leave. Advanced PhD students who were supposed to complete their dissertations face a precarious job market because of a hiring freeze imposed by many universities and colleges in the face of economic uncertainty. Some have been separated from their partners and families who live in different countries, unsure when they will be able to see them next. Like many foreign students, I had to make the complicated decision about staying in America or returning home. Many of us fear going back home and putting our parents or grandparents at risk of exposure. There are worries about the closing of borders and whether one would be allowed to return to the US once they leave. However, there is the



recognition that people in our position are still lucky. Our jobs can be done remotely, and our universities offer us medical insurance. Like India, in the US too, it is the working class that has been hit hardest by the coronavirus crisis.

Beautiful and Haunted

In recent years, young people have shown tremendous maturity and leadership in social movements around the world. The anti-gun movement in the US, the anti-CAA protests in India or the worldwide climate strikes. Symptomatic of a generational rift, the younger generations have blamed older ones for not taking action. The young, in turn, have been accused of being too radical and wanting change too fast. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted yet another generational divide. As the pandemic spread, some young people showed callousness, refusing to practise social distancing in the mistaken belief they are immune to the disease. They congregate in large groups, throw parties, travel for spring break and go into public places. Other students, meanwhile, are struck with severe anxiety and depression, as the crisis has thrown their lives into chaos. For a generation that face pressures from student debts and climate change uncertainties, this global pandemic has made their lives even more precarious.

Hope Stalks The Tribe

My grandmother recently turned 87. She has lived through wars, famines and riots. Through all these calamities and crises, she has seen people help each other by opening their home to strangers, providing food and support. She finds the real tragedy of this pandemic in its core: people must stay away from each other to stay safe. But in the midst of the crisis, stories of hope have also emerged. In the American town where I live, people have organised groups through social media, sewing protective masks at home for first responders, delivering groceries to the elderly, organising food drives, collecting money for people in service jobs who rely on tips. Local businesses are giving out free food to those in need and groups are organising to put pressure on local politicians to act in the community's best interests. These are mirrored by inspiring stories from all over the world. Communities have come together to show leadership and bravery even as governments are often failing in that regard.

A Pending Object Lesson

It's hard to look for something positive in the middle of a global pandemic. It has, however, forced us all to slow down and given us the opportunity to ring up friends and loved ones we don't get time to call. I've been spending a lot of time video-calling my parents back in India, even though they are yet to understand how to operate the front camera on their phones. That will be a lesson I will save for the next time I'm able to see them. □